

1011 S Central Avenue
Architectural Style: Gothic Revival
Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Built in 1932 by Minnesota architect Benjamin J. Knowles, this church exhibits a stone-detailed bell tower in the northwest corner next to the main entry. Windows & doors are typically detailed with decorative stone surrounds. Upper story windows have tracery & pointed arches. The main entry façade has a stone detailed stain glass window with tracery above & decorated triple doors below. Shallow transepts, with brick buttresses capped with stone, intersect the nave just before the sanctuary. The attached gabled building at the east end, with low additions on either side, was designed as the rectory.



On February 15, 1916, twenty-six year old father Hubert Stehling, called to order the organizational meeting of the members of Saint John's Parish who would make up Marshfield's second parish. The name Sacred Heart of Jesus was chosen.

It was decided to build what is now the school for use as a church, convent, school and auditorium with the rectory being a separate building. The cornerstone was laid August 27, 1916. The first Mass was held on Christmas Eve, 1916 in what is now the gymnasium. Construction costs were about \$48,000.00 on a lot bought for \$1,500.00. The congregation listed 150 families. This grew to 229 families during 1917. The school opened in September 1917.

Following the death of Father Stehling, Father Henry Toeller was named pastor on January 18, 1923. He immediately went forward with father Stehling's plan to build a new convent. This was urgent due to enrollment of 240 students. The house immediately south of the school was bought for \$4,200.00. The nuns lived in it for one year. By September, 1924, a new convent had been built and furnished at a cost of \$35,000.00.

By January 1927 the parish was debt free. In ten years, this young parish had paid off approximately \$90,000.00, in addition to its current operating costs, an amazing accomplishment for that period.

In 1927, Father Toeller spoke of the need for a new church in the coming years to replace the auditorium/church which was becoming too small to accommodate the growing congregation. The school, with 310 students for the 1930-31 school year was crowded as well. In March 1931 the congregation voted to build a new church. However, due to the economic conditions at the time, the needed funds could not be raised, so the project was postponed.

The crowded conditions continued. Contributions to a church building fund continued, reaching \$14,000.00. The architect assured the group a suitable church and 4 room addition to the school could be built for no more than \$65,000.00. Parishioners were asked to voluntarily raise sufficient funds to start the projects. Within one week \$24,000.00 was pledged. All pledge cards were returned signed. Many were unemployed but returned their cards promising to help when they found work.

The bid for the construction was \$53,000.00 excluding plumbing, heating, and lighting. Due to the Depression, prices were at an all time low. It was believed the project would have cost \$100,000.00 in ordinary economic times.

The cornerstone was laid on June 19, 1932. During construction, less than half a work day was lost due to rain or bad weather. The dedication of the beautiful Tudor Gothic style church by Bishop Alexander

McGavick took place November 11, 1932. It wasn't until 1941 that the installation of stained glass windows was begun. In September, 1932, school enrollment was 346.

Father Toeller, a Monsignor since 1937, was reassigned in March 1942. He was followed by capable, dedicated, hardworking, holy and faithful priests in the following order; Father Edmund Cramer, March 13, 1942 to July 9, 1952; Father Edwin Knauf, July 9, 1952 to November 17, 1954; Father Lavern Timmerman, November 17, 1954 to June 17, 1967; and Father Peter Leketas, June 18, 1967 to July 1, 1995, who celebrated both his silver and golden anniversary of ordination at Sacred Heart. The present pastor, Father Robert Schaller, began his duties on July 18, 1995, fresh from a 3-year stint as a Navy Chaplain.

Though all the necessary buildings were in place when Monsignor Toeller left, his successors have had to face the challenge of preserving them. They have all worked diligently to "maintain, repair, replace, update, rearrange, renovate, remodel and redecorate." In 1987 due to prohibitive maintenance costs the convent was razed.

From 150 families in 1916, the parish grew to 1750 members in 480 families in 1950. Currently there are 1600 members in 600 families.

During W.W.I, 86 members of Sacred Heart served their country of which 5 made the supreme sacrifice. In W.W.II, 11 parishioners died, also 1 in Korea and 1 in Vietnam.

The organ for the new church was bought in 1932 for about \$6,000.00. Helen Martin became the organist in 1933. Now Helen Brinkman, she is still Sacred Heart's organist 63 years later. Father Toeller organized and directed the first adult choir. For the past 31 years, Mrs. Rita (Armin) Walsh has been director.

Sacred Heart School opened September 4, 1917 with 152 students. This number grew to 240 in 1923, 310 in 1930 and 400 by 1938. Following W.W.II enrollment dropped to 260 by 1951 but climbed steadily to 404 in 1958. Between 1958 and 1967 the count exceeded 400 each year with the peak of 488 in 1962. Enrollment has declined steadily since 1968 and there are presently 53 students in grades K through 6.

The school has always been staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Only one remains, the principal, Sister Carol Schnitzler. She is a graduate of Sacred Heart and has been principal since 1982. Another graduate, Ruth Stadler Shookman has taught at Sacred Heart for 24 years.

Sacred Heart Parish has produced 11 vocations to the priesthood and 32 women religious.

Submitted by Charles H. Louis

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For additional information on this building at the Wisconsin Historical Society:
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Property/HI138439>