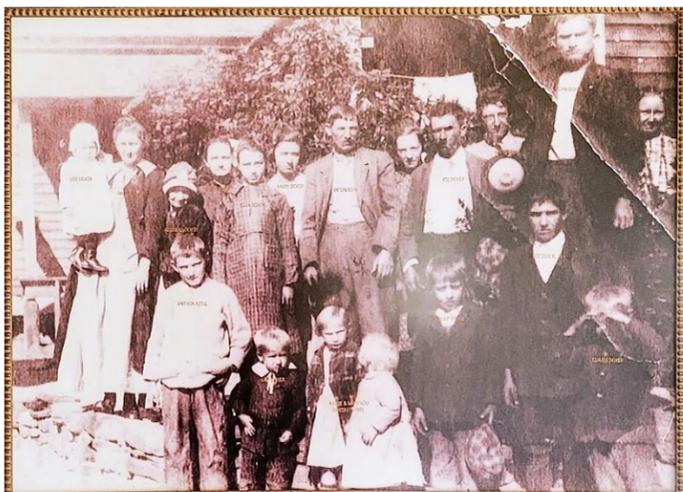


Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church

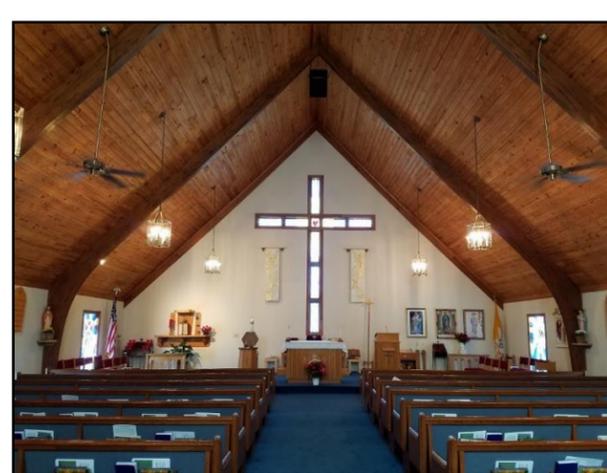
A Brief History

In 1883, Mr. Joseph Doker and his parents immigrated to the United States. In 1891, Mr. Anthon Kotal and his family also arrived here. Both families emigrated from Czechoslovakia. Soon after, the Sokol family moved into Hart County. The three founding families of what would eventually become Sacred Heart Catholic Church had to travel to Anderson, SC by mule and wagon for Mass three or four times per year. Once the automobile was invented a priest would visit the community more frequently.



In the 1940's, Mass was offered by Fr. Walter Donovan from Athens, Georgia in the homes of the Doker and Kotal families. At other times, Mass was offered at the Smith Funeral Home in Hartwell. In 1953, a letter was written to the administrator of the Savannah Diocese asking that a church be established in Hartwell. In 1954 an old farmhouse and 17 acres were purchased. The farmhouse was converted into a church and named Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Catholic community used this church home until a permanent structure was completed in 1976.

From 1954 to 1964 the Verona Fathers from Washington, Georgia staffed the church. Fr. Joseph Drohan, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Toccoa, was placed in charge of the Hartwell church in 1964 and served until 1971, when Fr. Patrick J. Padden succeeded him. Fr. Padden served until 1974 and was succeeded by Fr. Ray Horan until 1977. During Fr. Horan's time, the new church and a parish hall were constructed. In September 1977, Fr. Patrick J. McCormick succeeded him. In October of that year Archbishop of Atlanta Thomas Donnellan dedicated the new church building.



Fr. Pat McCormick was Sacred Heart's first resident pastor, serving from 1977 until 1990. As Sacred Heart met the requirements of 100 families' membership and showing the ability to financially support a full-time pastor, the Sacred Heart Parish Council petitioned Archbishop Donnellan to make their rapidly growing mission a parish. In June of 1982, the Archbishop granted approval to change the status of the church from a mission to a parish. Under Fr. Pat's leadership, the church grew. A new Fellowship Hall was constructed consisting of a kitchen/dining area, offices, and a Religious Education building. Stained Glass windows were added to the sanctuary as a project led by the ladies of the church.

Fr. John Kelly became pastor of Sacred Heart in 1990 and served until his death in 1995. After Fr. John's passing, Fr. Walter Foley was pastor from 1995 until his retirement in 1998. He was succeeded by Fr. Terry Kane, who served as pastor until his retirement in 2010. Fr. Terry established our Memorial Garden in 1999. He also is responsible for integrating the Hispanic community and celebrated the first Spanish speaking Mass in 2002. He also established our Vietnamese community and celebrated their first Holy Mass in 2006.

In February of 2007, Founders Hall was dedicated by Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory. This new facility more than doubled the seating capacity for parish functions and provided a larger, more complete kitchen with industrial size appliances. This facility can also be used to host civic events and private functions within the community. This parish hall was named Founders Hall in honor of the founding families: the Kotal, Dokers and Sokols.

In June of 2010, the basement of Founders Hall was dedicated as a functioning facility of its own. Through the tireless work and dedication of Council #9915 of the Knights of Columbus, this basement was transformed into two classrooms, one large meeting room and two storage areas. This facility was much needed as our enrollment for religious education continues to grow and our parish increases in size.

In August of 2010, Fr. Rafael Castaño became the pastor of Sacred Heart. He was pastor of St. Bernadette in Cedartown, Georgia for over eight years prior to his arrival in Hartwell. Fr. Rafael shepherds a vibrant and diverse parish which is home to many cultures. Under his leadership we have begun an extensive Master Plan which will shape the future of our growing church. He also leads our Mission Church of St. Mary's in Elberton, which Sacred Heart inherited in 2014. From 2013 until 2016, Fr. Dominic Tran was parochial vicar at Sacred Heart. The church is also served by two deacons, Reverend Mr. Jerry Korte who was ordained in 2005 and Reverend Mr. Barry Phillips, ordained in 2012.

Sacred Heart has approximately 600 registered parishioners. The church offers daily mass in addition to four weekend Masses in three different languages. We have approximately 800 people who come through our church doors each week to worship and celebrate the Eucharist. At last count, we have over forty different ministries functioning in some capacity. Among these, our St. Vincent de Paul Society offers support to those in our community who are in need, regardless of creed or denomination. Our Knights of Columbus and their auxiliary Columbiettes support various charities and causes in our area in addition to our church. Our Lady's Circle has been a fixture in our parish for decades and have always supported the church, its functions, and its ministers graciously. Our Respect Life Ministry works with the local pregnancy center and promotes awareness of the culture of life. Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) has been established in our parish church for almost twenty years, assisting its participants foster a deep spiritual journey through annual immersion weekends. We also have a vibrant Charismatic Prayer Group and many other organizations that promote Bible study and other opportunities to encounter Christ in many languages and experiences. We have a thriving Religious Education program for all ages and languages, including RCIA. Our church also promotes unity and diversity with our quarterly potluck dinners in Founders Hall.