

*History of St Gerard Catholic Church
Aiken, South Carolina*

In 1942, during years of segregation, Bishop Emmet Walsh of Charleston visited the Provincial Superior of the Redemptorist Fathers in Brooklyn, NY and expressed a need for a priest to work for the Black Community in Aiken SC. Father Eugene Helldorfer was assigned to the Redemptorist Community in Orangeburg with a special mission to engage in the Black apostolate in Aiken SC. A two-story abandoned theater across from the First Baptist Church on York Street was purchased by the Redemptorist Fathers as the site of their new mission endeavor for black Catholics who had been meeting in homes without a Pastor. The mission was named after the holy, miracle-working Redemptorist lay brother, St. Gerard Majella, who, because of a healing he worked during a difficult delivery, is invoked as the patron saint of expectant mothers.

In March of 1946, Fr. Joseph Gredler was appointed to the care of St. Gerard's and in time, purchased a house for a rectory on York St. and Barnwell Ave., the site presently occupied by the Social Security Building.

In September of 1949, three Oblate Sisters of Providence, (the nation's first order of black nuns), opened St. Gerard's school for black children from any denomination on the first floor, and a second floor was added for the Sanctuary.



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By the late 1950's there were 156 students. On August 28, 1959, the Redemptorist Fathers left Aiken, entrusting their congregation to the care of the Fathers at St Mary's, only two blocks away. The Oblate Sisters of Providence (Baltimore, MD) continued to run the school.



In 1960, Bishop Hallinan visited St. Gerard and ordered a building project to begin when he saw the dire conditions that the Sisters had to endure. The new school, convent and church were built in 1962.

In 1972, the school was closed because integration allowed its students to attend St. Mary's School two blocks away, and the parish built the present church on Edrie Street.

St. Gerard's was elevated to an independent territorial parish in 1979.

Presently, St. Gerard Catholic Church is a multi-racial parish of about 100 families. We are fortunate to still have many of the founding families and their descendants as active parishioners. St. Gerard's is proud of our tradition of fellowship and visitors are always welcome.