

## History

The story of St. Ignatius Loyola Parish begins with Sacred Heart Parish, the first Jesuit parish in Denver. Sacred Heart was founded by Rev. John Baptiste Guida, S.J. in 1879. The present church was completed and dedicated on April 25, 1880. Sacred Heart grew so rapidly that in ten years the church was too small for the congregation. In 1890, lots were purchased at East 26th Avenue and Ogden, and Loyola Chapel was built there in 1909.

Almost from the beginning, Loyola Chapel was unable to handle the overflow crowds from Sacred Heart, and so plans were begun to build a second large church, to be named after the founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius Loyola.

In 1921, Fr. Charles McDonnell, S.J., pastor of Sacred Heart and Loyola Chapel, bought the block of land at York Street and 23rd Avenue and in 1922 began building the monumental church that is the focal point of Loyola Parish. As soon as the basement was completed, in 1923, masses were held there. The church was finished and dedicated on Columbus Day, October 12, 1924.

In 1939, the basement of the church was divided into classrooms, and an elementary school, staffed by the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, was started. Plans to build a school were delayed by the Great Depression. The school building was completed in two stages in 1950 and 1954.

In 1944, the Jesuits bought the house at 2309 Gaylord Street, across the street from the back of the church, to serve as the rectory, and St. Ignatius Loyola became fully separated from Sacred Heart Parish.

St. Ignatius Loyola has played an extraordinary role in bringing about racial integration in the Denver Catholic Church. By the end of World War II, many African Americans were moving into the area just west of Loyola Church. Jesuit father, William Markoe, working at both Sacred Heart and Loyola, insisted that African Americans should not be segregated, but should be allowed to attend the church of their choice, and that they should be allowed to attend Loyola if that was closer to where they lived. He also insisted that African American children should be allowed to attend school at Loyola.

It may be hard for us to realize, but this was not the common view of many church leaders at the time. The work of Fr. William Markoe, and that of his Jesuit brother, John, was strongly opposed for years, and several times they were ordered not to work with African Americans. But both Jesuits remained faithful to the higher call they heard from the Lord, and continued to work for racial integration and social justice.

Fr. William Markoe laid the groundwork for the efforts of Fr. Edward Murphy, S.J., pastor of Loyola from 1950 to 1970. He worked hard to keep Loyola and the neighborhood integrated. In 1965, Fr. Murphy received two significant national awards. The Reward of Merit was conferred on him by the George Washington Carver Memorial Institute, Washington, D.C., for "outstanding contributions to the betterment of race relations and human welfare." Later he was named "Man of the Year" by the National Negro Voters Educational Council for notable efforts in the field of race relations.

Other recipients of this award include: President John F. Kennedy, Walt Disney, Nat "King" Cole, and Duke Ellington.

Through the efforts of many, St. Ignatius Loyola remains a truly integrated parish, reflecting the core belief of Jesus' teaching that we are all sisters and brothers in the one great family of God.

In 1996, through the efforts of many of the parishioners, Loyola's beautiful, Gothic-style church, was placed on both the National and Colorado State Registers of Historic Places. With generous matching grants from the State Historical Society, Loyola has been able to do some much-needed work on the structure of the building.

At present, we are raising funds to continue to restore and renovate the church, and we are looking at ways of insuring the viability of our elementary school.