



HISTORY OF UGANDA MARTYRS PARISH

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Physical Building of the Current Church

In 1906 the Creek Nation divided its territory by allotments among the people of the Creek Indian Tribe. W.P. Martin, a prominent leader and businessman was deeded the land at Third and Choctaw Streets where Uganda Martyrs Church and school now stands. In June 1925, Mr. Martin deeded the land to Father de Hasque, the pastor of St. Anthony Church. In September of 1925, Father de Hasque deeded the land to Bishop Kelly. Bishop Kelly subsequently deeded the land to the Holy Ghost Fathers to start a church for the black Catholics of Okmulgee.

September 12, 1925 was a very important date in the lives of the Colored Catholics of Okmulgee and the outlying districts in every direction. On that day, the first Colored Catholic Church was opened in the town of Okmulgee and appropriately dedicated to the Martyrs of Uganda. It is believed that this is the first church in North America so dedicated to these Martyrs.

Prior to this date, the Catholics who had the gift of faith strong enough within them, attended services in a few reserved pews in the rear of St. Anthony's Church. A number of others had drifted away because they had none to guide them. There is no doubt that the good fervent Catholics had offered their prayers and sacrifices to God that someday they would have a Church which they could call their own—a Church where they could see their children receive the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation, and where their young people could receive the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Now their prayers were answered, and in such a way that any hardships they had previously endured in the practice of their religion were entirely forgotten or considered well worth suffering. God had rewarded them by giving them a Church exclusively for their own use and a good, zealous Pastor to minister to their spiritual and very often to their physical needs.



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However, the organization of the new Parish was not a very easy task. There were a number of difficulties to be overcome and much hard work entailed in the project. The man chosen as first Pastor of Uganda Martyrs Church was not one to shy away from difficulties, or one to shun hard work. He was the Rev. Daniel Patrick Bradley, C.S.Sp., full of enthusiasm and zeal for souls.

His first major task was to provide a suitable church. In this he was aided by the good priests and parishioners of St. Anthony's Parish. At this particular time, Okmulgee was enjoying the results of an oil boom. The people of St. Anthony's found themselves in a position to build a new stone church, so the Pastor very generously turned over to Father Bradley their "overflow building." With this went the altars, altar-railing, statues, Stations of the Cross, and vestments. This building was not an architectural gem by any means but, such as it was, it was a God-send to the new Parish struggling for existence in the East side of town.

By this time, the Parish also boasted of a rectory, a small, box-like frame building. Now it was imperative to start clearing the lot, which was formerly a dumping ground, of its heavy growth of weeds and grass for the erection of a school. In a short time, a red-brick combination school and convent was built in the vacant lot. Practically all the work on the building was performed by unskilled laborers, members of the Parish, directed by the Pastor with the advice and aid of some men who had at least a fair knowledge of the rudiments of architecture.

In the meantime, Father Bradley had applied to the Superioress General of the Sister Servants of the Holy Ghost... San Antonio, Texas, for Sisters to staff the school. The pioneers, five in number, arrived unexpectedly in September 1927 before the building was ready for occupancy. There were no steps to get into the first floor of the building, so the Sisters had to climb up on a ladder. The dormitory was in an unfinished condition, having neither windows nor doors. To meet this situation, the Pastor had to take up his abode with the priests of St. Anthony's Rectory and turn his quarters over to the Sisters.

This temporary arrangement lasted only a few days, as the workers hurriedly put the finishing touches to the sleeping quarters in the Convent and the Sisters moved in. The windows were still unscreened and the doors could not be locked, so the occupants spent many uneasy nights between fear of intruders from outside and the humming of mosquitos on the inside. However, they were all delighted with their new appointment, as it carried with it great novelty and many surprises. As time went on, the Sisters became acquainted with a number of good people in the town. These benefactors helped them furnish their convent so that it was at least reasonably comfortable.



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For years these kind friends were at the beck and call of the Parish when any emergency arose, and they gave unstintingly of their goods and money to help out the cause. Were it not for their kindness and charity, the Sisters would often have lacked the bare necessities of life.

In the early years, the school enrollment amounted to 180 pupils. This number was made up not only of the children from Okmulgee and vicinity but from Grayson, Oklahoma, as well. With the aid of Mr. Callaghan, a prominent oil man of the city, Father Bradley was able to run a school bus to Grayson to bring in the Catholic children of that area. But with the onset of the depression and the resulting hard times, the school bus service was discontinued in 1931.

During the autumn of 1930, Father Bradley was succeeded in the Pastorate by Rev. William L. Lavin, C.S.Sp. Father Lavin came to the Parish at a time when the whole country was beginning to feel keenly the onslaught of the economic depression. The members of the Parish, being mostly farmers, naturally felt the full force of the crisis. Low prices for crops and livestock were followed by long droughts and "dust storms," so that every effort on the part of the farmers to rise above the unfortunate circumstances was doomed to disappointment.

During the summer of 1933, the high school department was forced to close its doors. The all-round lack of financial means made this step necessary, as the Vicar of Missions found it impossible to obtain the funds necessary to support the full number of Sisters.

By the Spring of 1934, the farmers felt sure that they would have a bumper crop that year and recover prosperity, but by the month of July the crops were beyond saving through lack of rain. By this time, the government put Federal Aid at the disposal of those hard hit by economic difficulties and financial losses. The aid came in the shape of several projects in which the people gladly took part.

From then on, the future of Uganda Martyrs began to look brighter. Father Lavin, all this time, worked long and tirelessly in an effort to aid his flock in every way possible. Every part of his heart and soul, every spark of the grand zeal for souls that was his, was directed, during these difficult days, to the spiritual and material welfare of his flock.

The parish was aided by the Redemptorist Fathers who, very often, gave their time gratis to conduct missions and novena services for the parishioners of Uganda Martyrs. Even though the finances of the Parish were scarce during those years, spiritual results were very gratifying, and the members of the Parish were accorded every possible benefit in this regard.



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Father Lavin was succeeded by Rev. William Strahan, C.S.Sp., in 1936. During his time at Uganda Martyrs Parish, Father Strahan accomplished a good deal. The high school department was again opened and the school enrollment reached its maximum peak during its history. This latter fact was due to Father Strahan's initiative in procuring two school buses which transported the children from the Grayson and Beggs districts to Uganda Martyrs School. The buses were in operation until the outbreak of World War II, when the gasoline shortage put a stop to all school transportation as far as Uganda Martyrs was concerned. The year 1942 found Father Strahan taking up other duties in the form of Chaplain in the U.S. Army Air Force. His position was filled by the Rev. Maxim J. Therou, C.S.Sp., who had been Assistant Pastor under Father Strahan.

Father Therou endeared himself to the members of his Parish and to many others who were not members of his flock. His untiring zeal and ceaseless activity made his term one of the most progressive in the history of Uganda Martyrs. He undertook and carried to completion a project which, by this time, had become an absolute necessity—namely, the building of a new church. The building had been planned by Father Strahan, but he had to leave before his plan could be brought to maturity.

To accomplish this scheme, Father Therou had to obtain a good deal of financial aid from friends all over the country. He was constantly and very efficiently aided in obtaining this outside assistance by the Rev. John J. Fitzpatrick, C.S.Sp., who, because of failing health, could not take a very active part in Parish work but nevertheless fulfilled a very vital need by spending his time contacting benefactors whose contributions supplemented the donations made by the members of the Parish and the funds raised in Parish activities. The announcement of Father Fitzpatrick's death on Sept. 5, 1945, created quite a pall in the Parish and the city of Okmulgee because he was a well-loved and highly esteemed Priest, during his short term at Uganda Martyrs, by each and every one who came in contact with him. May God rest his lovely soul!

Erecting a building during wartime is no easy task. Father Therou encountered numerous difficulties getting needed materials, and obtaining skilled laborers was out of the question at that time. However, with constant plugging and the support of his Assistant, Rev. Ambrose Leech, C.S.Sp., Father Therou—mostly with the aid of men of the Parish and with professional assistance when absolutely necessary—finally saw "his dream come true," in record time, considering all the difficulties involved.

The present Church, which is generally considered comparable in beauty to any of its type, was dedicated in April 1945 and has been a source of great pride and joy to the members of the community ever since. It is a fire-proof brick structure, semi-Romanesque in style. It actually cost \$17,000 but has been appraised at a much higher figure. People often forget



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that a greater part of the work was done gratis by the priests and offered in love. To the dismay of his parishioners and friends, Father Therou was transferred in August 1946. He was succeeded by Rev. Joseph Murphy, C.S.Sp., who, after only about a month, had to leave Oklahoma for a more salubrious climate due to a health condition.

After Father Murphy's departure, the Rev. Ambrose Leech became Pastor and was ably assisted by the Rev. Edward G. Marley, C.S.Sp. Both these good priests carried on the tradition of Uganda Martyrs and augmented it with the large experience, fervent zeal, and selfless interest which was personally theirs.

In December 1947, the rigors of obedience called for yet another change in the administration of Uganda Martyrs Parish. Father Leech was changed that month and his place was taken by the Rev. T. Charles Dooley, C.S.Sp., the present Pastor. Since assuming his duties as Pastor, Father Dooley has succeeded in completing the purchase of the remaining piece of property in the southeast corner of the block on which the entire plant is located.

The Parish now boasts ownership of an entire city block, which provides ample facilities for playgrounds and additional building space when the need for such arises. Father Dooley made some much-needed improvements around the school, painted the classrooms, and extended the insurance to cover everything in the plant—inside and out.

Since the building of the new Church, the priests of the Parish have been hoping and planning to bring about another much-needed project: the construction of a Convent for the use of the Sisters teaching in the school. In 1949, Father Dooley took the first step toward making this dream a reality. He purchased from the War Assets Administration an Officers' Quarters located at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. He had the building dismantled and removed to the grounds at Uganda Martyrs. With the very able and practical assistance of the Rev. Martin J. Haydon, C.S.Sp., who succeeded Father Marley in January 1949, this task was completed in record time. Most of the men of the Parish—and others not members—volunteered their services and means of transportation for the expeditious fulfillment of this very difficult chore. All offered their time and labor, willingly and gladly, so that they might have on hand materials to erect a home for the Sisters.

During this twenty-five-year period, the missions attached to Uganda Martyrs made progress in line with the Mother Mission. The small community of Colored Catholics in Beggs had been hearing Mass in a poor, badly-kept public schoolhouse which was very difficult to reach in the rainy season. When Father Strahan became Pastor of Uganda Martyrs, he succeeded in constructing a very beautiful modern chapel adjacent to the highway for the convenience of the Catholics in the Beggs district.



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The Catholics of Grayson likewise attended Divine Services in an old, dilapidated church off a mud road which, after heavy rains, was impassable for any type of vehicle. In 1949, Father Dooley negotiated an exchange of property and secured a site on U.S. Highway 266, one of the main thoroughfares between the East and West. Here, in the Spring of 1949, was started a concrete structure of modern design. Besides being a boon to the Catholic families scattered throughout the surrounding sections, the gold leaf Cross on this little chapel marks another beacon light to the Faith in this non-Catholic area of the Southwest.

History of the People and Organizations

May Sister Mary Gerard rest in peace! She was our Sister Superior at Uganda Martyrs.

School enrollment amounted to 180 pupils, more or less. The number was made up not only of the children from Okmulgee vicinity but from Grayson, Oklahoma as well. Fr. Bradley got a bus donated by L. R. Moran, and with the aid of Mr. Callaghan (another rich man), was able to run a school bus to Grayson to bring in the Catholic children.

Due to the Depression and hard times, the bus service was discontinued in 1931. Tuition was \$1.00 per month.

The first five graduates from Uganda Martyrs High School were:

- Agnes Alexander
- Leanne Guillory Armstead
- Lorene Forbes
- Leonarda Prigne
- Pearl Vance Douglas

During the autumn of 1930, Father William L. Lavin, C.S.Sp., came to Okmulgee—at a time when the whole country was in the midst of a depression. Most of the members of the Parish were farmers, and it was only natural that they should feel the full force of the crisis. Low prices for crops and livestock were followed by droughts. During the summer of 1933, the High School Department was closed.



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In 1928, the Knights of St. Peter Claver—Uganda Martyrs Council #55—was organized.

In 1930, the National Convention of K.P.C. convened in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Alfaretta R. Aubry Court #55 was organized on August 30, 1930, and the Junior Daughters of K.P.C. had their beginning here.

The young girls belonged to the Sodality of Mary—"The Children of Mary"—and were first under the guidance of Ms. Loulla Haygood, a wonderful teacher. We learned our catechism, embroidery, etc.—and had fun too! Pure fun. Making candy, taffy pulls, etc.

Father Lavin, all during the Depression, worked tirelessly in an effort to aid his flock in every possible way. Every part of his heart and soul, every spark of the grand zeal for souls that was his, was directed during these difficult days to the spiritual and material welfare of his flock. In this, the Redemptorist Fathers who had come to St. Anthony's aided him. They often gave their time gratis to conduct missions and novena services for the parishioners of Uganda Martyrs. Even though the finances of the Parish were scarce during those years, the spiritual results were very gratifying.

Father Lavin was a very pious man.

Father William Strahan, C.S.Sp., succeeded Father Lavin in 1936. During his tenure at Uganda Martyrs Parish, the High School Department was reopened and the school enrollment reached its peak. Father Strahan procured two school buses, which transported the children from Grayson and Beggs districts to Uganda Martyrs School. The buses were in operation until the outbreak of World War II when the gasoline shortage put a stop to all transportation as far as Uganda Martyrs School was concerned.

In 1942, Father Strahan went into the U.S. Army Air Force as a chaplain, and Father Maxim J. Therou, C.S.Sp., who had been assistant under Father Strahan, filled his position. His untiring zeal and ceaseless activity made his term one of the most progressive in the history of Uganda Martyrs. He undertook and carried to completion the building of the new church, assisted by Father John J. Fitzpatrick, who was in ill health but filled a vital role by spending his time contacting benefactors whose contributions supplemented the donations made by members of the Parish and the funds raised in Parish activities.

Father John J. Fitzpatrick died on September 5, 1945, and this created a pall in the Parish and the City of Okmulgee. He was highly esteemed and loved by everyone who knew him. May God rest his lovely soul.

Father Ambrose Leech, C.S.Sp., came to Okmulgee as Father Therou's assistant. The new church was dedicated in April 1945. Our church actually cost \$17,000 but was appraised at a



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much higher amount—reason being that the greater part of the work was done gratis by the priests and people of the Parish.

To our great dismay, Fr. Therou was transferred from Uganda Martyrs Parish in August 1946. Rev. Joseph Murphy, C.S.Sp., succeeded him, but after only a few months had to leave Oklahoma due to health. Fr. Ambrose Leech became Pastor and was assisted by Fr. Edward G. Marley, C.S.Sp. In December 1947, the rigors of obedience called and Fr. Leech was reassigned. His place was taken by Rev. T. Charles Dooley as Pastor. Fr. Marley was transferred in January 1949.

Class of 1947 graduates included:

- Doris Cazenave
- Gladys Marie Gouthier
- Loletha Kennedy
- Bernard Gerald Ledoux
- Agnes LeBlanc
- Odelia Gina LeBlanc
- Thomas LeBlanc
- Joseph B. Motte

Class Motto — *“With the ropes of past we ring bells of the future.”*

The missions attached to Uganda Martyrs—St. Anthony’s and Okemah—made progress in line with the Mother Mission. At the beginning, the Colored Catholics in the Beggs area attended Mass in the old Tolon School. Fr. Strahan constructed a chapel in the city of Beggs adjacent to the highway, and it was very convenient for Catholics. The chapel was sold after the Holy Ghost Fathers left Uganda Martyrs.

The Catholics of Grayson attended Divine Services in an old church off a mud road, which after heavy rains was impassable for any type of vehicle. In 1949, Fr. Dooley negotiated an



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exchange of property and secured a site on U.S. 266. In spring of 1949, a modern concrete chapel was built—enjoyed by parishioners of the area as well as vacationers to the lake.

Class of 1950 graduates included:

- Osborn Hawkins
- Alfred Ross
- Barbara Jean Montiehl
- Catherine Cazenave
- Dorothy-Ann Crisp
- Helene Nance
- Laurine Brooks

Fr. Edward C. White took Fr. T. Charles Dooley's place in October 1950. This was the year that the Holy Ghost Sisters left Okmulgee. Fr. White was our Pastor at Uganda Martyrs for 17 years, and during these years he was assisted in turn by Fathers:

- Robert Brooks
- James Beagan
- Ward F. Cleary (who died here)
- Roger K. Duffy
- John R. Marx
- Anthony J. Ray
- Thomas M. McGuire

Father Edward C. White retired and returned to his Ireland on June 1, 1967.



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The Redemptorist Fathers took over Uganda Martyrs Parish on June 1, 1967. Rev. Gregory Lahay, C.Ss.R., was pastor, assisted by Frs. Charles Buckley, Robert Gaydos, William Renner, Thomas N. Monaghan, and Louis Kemmer. Fr. Lahay's term was from 1967 to 1972. He visited every parishioner's home at least once a year and provided missions in 1967 and 1971.

In 1967, the church's old altar was dismantled, and with the marble, the present altar and pedestal for the tabernacle were constructed. Altar rails were removed. Two new statues were set on pedestals attached to the wall. The church was completely painted inside.

Also in 1967, the Parish Hall's wooden floor was torn up and replaced with a new concrete floor. The walls were paneled, old plaster ceilings were removed, and sheetrock ceilings installed. New tables and chairs were purchased. The kitchen was remodeled and equipped with a new stove, grill, cabinets, etc.

1969

- New tile installed on the church floor
- Sacred Heart (Grayson): new ceiling and tile on floors

1970

- Uganda Martyrs: new pews
- Air conditioning installed at Sacred Heart
- The St. Theresa Chapel and the rectory at 806 East 3rd Street were sold

1971

- New organ installed at Uganda Martyrs



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- The Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, with a picture and blue velvet drapes, installed at the east side rear of the church
- New roof placed on the school building

1972

- Cementing of the parking lot
- Bishop Quinn (now Archbishop of San Francisco) said his first Mass after his installation as the first Bishop of Eastern Oklahoma at Uganda Martyrs and gave the parish a relic of the Uganda Martyrs
- Fr. Lahay and Fr. Gaydos were transferred to Crowley, Louisiana

1972–1975

- Fr. Julian Grehan, C.Ss.R., was the pastor of St. Anthony's and Uganda Martyrs. He passed away on September 7, 1975. His funeral was held in Okmulgee with interment in Lacombe, Louisiana
- Fr. Elmer J. Toups, C.Ss.R., came to Okmulgee to assist Fr. Grehan in January 1975

The school burned in November 1975. Again, our loyal parishioners put their shoulders to the wheel and rebuilt the second floor under the guidance of Fr. Toups. Two Sisters arrived in August 1972 under Fr. Toups' leadership: Sister Lucia and Sister Prompt Succor.

Fr. Clement Monroe succeeded Fr. Toups. Fr. Charles Buckley passed away suddenly from a heart attack on April 15, 1980.

Assistants over the years included:

- Fr. Ray Walters
- Fr. Richard Johnson
- Fr. Robert Gongalas



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- Fr. Carl V. Schwarz
- Fr. Bernard J. Krammer

Fr. Monroe was transferred, and Father Gerald Seabold came for three years.

Fr. James J. Nugent was the last Redemptorist Priest to pastor Uganda Martyrs, as the province of their order decided to have them return to missionary work.

Father Arthur O'Hara, our present pastor, is a Diocesan Priest—a fine, hard worker with no assistant.

Uganda Martyrs is proud to remember it has had at least two young girls who gave up the world and devoted their lives to the service of God. No. 1 was Agnes Alexander who was a candidate in the Holy Family Convent in New Orleans, La. She took sick and was sent home to die. She is buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Grayson. Genevieve Motte, daughter of the late Loran and Bessie Motte - is a professed Sister of Oblate sisters of Providence in Baltimore Maryland. Sr Brenda has been in this order for 45 or more years and we want you — her family to know we the parishioners are proud to call her our very own.

The former parishioners were tireless in the cooperation and generosity in establishing Uganda Martyrs Church and school that produced something that we are proud to call our own. Construction of building is attributed to resident parishioners as well as those from Grayson and Beggs. Among those who assisted: Alexander's, Barrie's, Bazarts, Brooks, Bush, Cazenave, Chaney's, Cozey' , Dean's, Dalcour's, DeJears, Ennette, Fuselier, Goudeau, Gouthier, Guillory's, Crisps, Haygoods, Hills, Holliers, Forbes, Jackson, Jones, King, LeDoux, LeBlanc, Lafleur, Lopez, LaCour, LaTours, LaViolette's, Lyons, LaChapples, Montielhs, Motte's, Mayers, Mann, Mundy, Morquecho's, Nonnell's, Peyton, Penn's, Thigpen, Thornton, Thierry's, Ross, Richardson, Rideaus, Carriers, Sloan's, Wilson, Payne, Williams.

Since Vatican II Uganda Martyrs has been blessed with dedicated people who have worked hard as Parish Council leaders such as Matthew Hilton, Harold Winton, Larnell Williams, Leon Wilson, Catherine Williams, Edward House, Sandy Gouthier and Norma



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Pierce.

Accomplishments when Sandy Gouthier term as President of Parish Council:

Parking Lot, Landscaping, Fenced off property, new roof on church, remodeling of sister convent, remodeling of the interior of church, new intercom system, new organ for church, building of garage for sisters, put flower bed around church.

Accomplishments when Catherine Williams served as council president — 2 years — 1983 and 1984: Fund raising — rodeo stand both years, rent hall out, number of roast beef and chicken dinners, dances. Remodeling included: repainting and painting of windows in church (outside), replace fuse box in church, repaired choir loof and bricked front of church where door was, new gas line from meter to hall, bought sisters washing machine and hot water tank, replaced heating and air system, torn down old bath room and garage in back of church, painted trim on sister convent and fellowship hall.

Lamnell Williams served as Parish Council President for 5 years — 1972 — 1977

Accomplishments included: rebuilt the old school building, remodeled the fellowship hall (1976) served on pastoral board of diocesan for 2 years

Leon Wilson served as president of the Parish Council from 1977 to 1983.

Those who served with him included Julia Richel, Leola Dalcour, Carl Hollier, James Cazenave and Joe Motte. Some of their accomplishments included: bought new tables and chairs for the hall, paid off the \$15,000 debt, moved the nuns from a house into a three bedroom apartment over the hall, changed the entrance of the church from the north side to the east, put two bathrooms in the back of the church. All of this was done with the help of all of the men and women of the parish. This was done while Father Toops, Monroe and Siebold served as pastors.

Catherine Williams served as Parish Council President from 1983 through 1984.

Lucrative fundraisers during this tenure included parishioners running a concession stand at the annual rodeo, renting out the hall for no profit functions and having a number of roast beef and chicken dinners. Improvements and repairs around the church included repainting and painting of windows inside the church, replacing the fuse box in the church, repaired choir roof and bricked front of the church where the door originally was, having a new gas line from meter to hall, purchasing a washing machine and hot water tank for the sister's



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quarters, replacing the heating and air system in the church, torn down old bathroom and garage located at the back of the church, painted trim on the convent and fellowship hall.

Rudolph “Sandy” Gouthier served as President of the Parish Council from 1985 through 1989. Accomplishments during his tenure include enlarging and resurfacing the parking lot surrounding the church and school, landscaping the church grounds, fencing off the church property, new roof on church, remodeling the sister’s convent, remodeling of the interior of the church, new intercom system, new organ for the church, building of garage for sisters.

Norma Pierce served as Parish Council President from 1989 until 2000.

Accomplishments during this era included paying of debt on the parking lot, re-carpeted the church, central heat and air units were installed in the church hall and convent, new appliances were purchased for the fellowship hall, vinyl siding placed on front and rear of school building, purchased new vestments for Priest through fundraisers, promoted a Black History Program in February 1996, purchased present P.A. System and Lapel Microphone, new roof for church and school building.

Benny Willman assumed the leadership role of what is now called the Finance/Maintenance Council in June 2000.

While Uganda Martyrs has been blessed with many fine leaders, we have been equally blessed with parishioners who have worked diligently side by side with each leader. The above listed accomplishments could not have been completed without the strong support of dedicated parishioners. Former as well as present parishioners have worked tirelessly in the cooperation and generosity of establishing and maintaining Uganda Martyrs Church and School.

Currently, there are 111 families registered at Uganda Martyrs including shut-ins and those confined to the nursing homes. The children and extended families of the original founding families of Uganda Martyrs remain very active in this parish and carry on with the traditions of their founders in maintaining their strong faith, up keep of the church property and their Creole French, African and Spanish ethnicity.

And so, the history of Uganda Martyrs continues into the Millennium.

This is the history that was documented for the 75th Anniversary in September 2000.



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History of Uganda Martyrs Parish 2001 - 2025

Before Father Bryan Brooks left us in 2001, the church rewiring project was initiated during his term.

Father Benjamin Vima was Pastor from July 2001 – September 2010.

During his leadership, the church was rewired, new lighting was installed, and the choir loft was replastered. Marian Academy was located at St. Anthony's Parish, operated during this period but eventually closed. With the school's closure, the nuns left, leading to the convent's closure as well. Parking lot upgrades were completed, the 'Raise the Roof' campaign, which successfully raised funds for re-roofing the church and making other necessary improvements. The wall paneling and flooring in the Fellowship Hall were also replaced. Financial contributions were made to the food pantry, which is housed and distributed at St. Anthony's, and Uganda Martyrs parishioners generously supported this effort. Phases of church renovations included: the Roof, Plastering, Painting & Carpeting. Collection Counters Policy and Procedures were implemented.

Finance Council President: Benny Willman
Pastoral Council President: Evella (Barre) Anderson

Father Khiet Nguyen was Pastor from October 2010 – June 2013

Additional improvements made during this period include the replacement of ceiling tiles in the church and the installation of a new church sign. A new roof was also put in place, and the restrooms in the Fellowship Hall were remodeled. The window project was initiated, a new sound system as well as new outside lighting around the church property and a new air conditioning unit on the west side of the church was installed.

Finance Council President: Benny Willman
Pastoral Council President: Catherine (Cazenave) Williams

Father Joshua Litwack was Pastor from July 2013 – June 2022



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The air conditioning unit in the convent and on the altar were both replaced. Additional lighting was installed in the sanctuary and narthex. The church roof was replaced again. Audio equipment was purchased to enhance the sound system. Tuck and point brick repairs were completed on the church. A Baptismal Font was purchased in memory of Mary Green, funded by a Knights of Peter Claver life insurance policy she donated to the church.

Due to COVID-19, the church closed from March 2020 to May 2021. The "Father's Feature in Faith" weekly bulletin narrative was initiated along with Thursday Daily Mass with Adoration followed by "Food for Thought" in the Uganda Martyrs Parish Hall. Spiritual Enrichment was provided by Life 360 & the Upper Room classes.

The kitchen in the Fellowship Hall was remodeled, along with electrical work as well as soffit repairs. The "Save Our Stove" Fund was created, and we were able to purchase a brand-new commercial stove. We honored our rich history and contributions made with a Black History program reflecting on the heritage of our ancestors and the progress made from their hard work and dedication to our faith community. Our traditions continued with the bi-parish Mardi Gras celebration that embraces the rich contributions of our history while reinforcing the deep connections that keep us rooted in our culture.

Due to water damage the Fellowship Hall was closed for 16 months.

We were honored with Reverend Steven Ditzel's Solemn First Vespers of St. Charles Lwanga and Companions commemorated at Uganda Martyrs.

Finance Council President: Evella (Barre) Anderson until May 2018

Finance Council President: Carolyn (Gouthier) Calip until June 2022

Pastoral Council President: Catherine (Cazenave) Williams until June

Father Kenneth Harder is our current Pastor
July 2022

Father Ken arrived and quickly assessed the facilities and promptly arranged contractors to: renovate the bell tower; doing a complete renovation of the Fellowship Hall-which allowed us to have a rededication ceremony and Christmas brunch to celebrate the occasion in December 2023; and coordinated the installation of the remaining church windows.

Father Ken is actively engaged in the day-to-day operations and activities of the parish, going beyond simply celebrating Mass. His joyful engagement in physical labor is a valuable asset to the parish, embodying the spirit of service and dedication through his active participation and positive attitude.



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Father Ken has a great vision for the future of Uganda Martyrs.

When we celebrated our 75th Anniversary in 2000, there were 111 families registered at Uganda Martyrs – currently there are 37 registered families which include shut-ins and those confined to the nursing homes. The children and extended families of the original founding families of Uganda Martyrs remain very active in this parish and carry on with the traditions of their founders in maintaining their strong faith, up keep of the church property and their Creole French and African Ethnicity.

As of 07 JUNE 2025, we forge ahead as Uganda Martyrs Celebrates its 100 years of faith in God and the blessings he has bestowed on this humble community. Hope, Love and Charity have always been at the core of our existence and it shall reign with us for many years to come.

In honor of this celebration, Uganda Martyrs announced that they will join the world wide web with their first online presence. UMCCOKM.ORG. This presence will seek to broaden our relationship with not only the Black Catholic Church but the Universal Church.

Uganda Martyrs Celebrates Fifty Years By Sister Lucia Carl, S.S.F.

(source: above from previous documents)

Uganda Martyrs Church in Okmulgee will celebrate its fiftieth (50) Anniversary on October 25th, 1975. Bishop Joseph Houze of the Natchez — Jackson Diocese will be the celebrant and homilist at the mass at 3:30 pm. Bishop Ganter and guest priest will join him. A reception will be held after mass.

Okmulgee --- With grateful pride the parishioners recall that September 12, 1925 day which marked the opening and the dedication of Uganda Martyrs Church by Bishop Eugene McGuinness. Amide this oil boom era, it was Father Urbande Hasque, pastor at St. Anthony's, who saw to the purchase of the property on East Third Street where a "solid" frame structure served as the church, possibly a former church or parish hall, — given by St. Anthony's.

The first pastor Father Daniel P. Bradley, C.S.S.P. lived in a small frame rectory building. In 1927 a school and convent were built. Father Bradley immediately applied



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for Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit, a religious community originating in San Antonio. Unexpectedly, five sisters arrived before the building was ready for occupancy. Father readily turned the rectory over to the Sisters until the convent was completed. School enrollment was as high as 180, though the high school rarely had more than 40 students. The children were bussed in from Grayson, this service being discontinued in 1931.

In 1930, Father William L. Lavin succeeded Father Bradley when the country was in the midst of an economic depression. The summer of 1933 saw the termination of the high school and financial strain precluded the support of a full staff of sisters. In 1934, though money was scarce, the parishioners benefited from the spiritual aid given by the Redemptorist Fathers Mission, triduums and novenas,

Under Father William Strahan, the high school re-opened in 1936. Enrollment reached a peak for students who now came from Beggs. This transportation lasting until the Second World War. It was also Father Strahan who was responsible for the Church that once existed in Beggs.

Father Maxim J. Therou, assistant Pastor with the assistant Pastors John J. Fitzpatrick and Ambrose Leech, C.Ss.P. undertook the erection of a new church, a task planned and almost completed by Father Strahan before he was called to serve as Air Force Chaplain. Bishop Francis C. Kelley dedicated the New Semi-Romanesque Church in 1944.

Father Joseph Murphy came in 1946 and after a few months Father Leech, who was assisted by Father Edward G. Marley, replaced him. In December 1947, Father T. Charles Dooley, who during his tenure made many improvements in the school and purchased the rest of the property in case future expansion was required, succeeded Father Leech. He too envisioned the completion of a much-needed convent for the Sisters. This dream materialized in the purchase of a building at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma and the aid of Father Martin J. Hayden, Successor of Father Marley in January 1949. This same year Father Dooley negotiated an exchange of property and secured a site that by spring was to become the locality of a church that was so desired by the Grayson Community.

Father Edward White took Father Dooley's place in October 1950. It was this year that the Hold Ghost Sisters left Okmulgee. Father White was here some seventeen years and ~ during those years he was assisted in turn by Father's Liebst, Krammer, Monaghan, and McGuire. Other priest who served here as assistants were: Father James J. Beagan, Robert Brooks, Ward F. Cleary, John R. Marx, Anthony J. Ray, and William Renner



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C.s.s.R.). :

From 1952 to 1955, five Holy Family Sisters taught in the school. Their community is a black religious congregation based in New Orleans. The registration in Grades 1 to 9 was 85 the first year and by the third year the pupils numbered only 65. Again the Sisters left.

From the summer of 1967 when the Redemptorists took over the Parish to 1972, Father Gregory Lahay became pastor of Uganda Martyrs. He was followed by the very recently deceased (September 7, 1975) Father Julian Grehen, who because of ill health resigned this position in January 1975. Before Father Lahay's departure, he helped in arranging for sisters to return to Okmulgee to do Parish visiting and to teach CCD. Two sisters arrived in August 1972 and are presently here under Father Elmer Toups, the present Pastor. His assistants are Fathers Charles Buckley and Louis Kemper.

The former parishioners were tireless in the cooperation and generosity in establishing Uganda Martyrs Church and School — an effort that produced something that the people could call their own. Construction of these buildings is attributed to resident parishioners as well as those from Beggs and Grayson. This included manual labor as well as the initiation of money raising projects for the parish. These families were among those who assisted: Cazenave, Motte, LeDoux, Bazart, Nonnette, Monteilh, LeBlanc, Haygood, Sloan, Goudeau, Peyton, Thierry, Marquecho, Ross, LaTour, Hollier, Fusilier and Guillory. These families as well as the following were the original families in the community: Lariolette, Mayer, LaChanelle, Chaney, Lyons, Bush, McGlorie, Barrie, LaCour, Gouthier, LaFleur, Tiger, Rideau, Demouise, Dejean, Thomson, Mann, Brooks and Stake.

On this occasion a tribute is in order to our oldest Parishioner and her family — 107 year old Mrs. Emma Dalcour. She was born in Rose, Louisiana on December 6, 1867. Her family moved to Oklahoma in 1907. Her mother was Geneva Thomas and her father was Eli Fontenot. Mrs. Dalcour is the mother of six children, three of whom are living. She is still quite alert and upon request, when she is feeling strong enough, she will sing her favorite French song about heaven.

As of now, there are little over 100 families in Uganda Martyrs Parish. In the total CCD program there are enrolled about the same number of students, who come from Sacred Heart in Grayson, St. Anthony's as well as from Uganda.

The martyrs of Uganda are a source of inspiration, especially for the young. The Catholic Encyclopedia states "the martyrs of Uganda were a group of 22 canonized African youths put



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to death in Uganda by the Kabaka (Ruler) of Buganda between 1885 and 1887 (Feast June 3). The Persecution occurred early in the reign of Mwanga, a vicious perverse youth, after his Christian pageboys refused to submit to his sexual demands. Joseph Musaka, the Majordomo of the royal household died first, beheaded (November 15, 1885) for encouraging the pagans to remain chaste and protesting the massacre of the Anglican Bishop James Hanington (1885). He is the promo martyr of Bantu Africa. On May 25, 1886, Mwanga ordered slain the page Dennis Ssebuggwawo for instructing his favorite boy in the Christian faith. During the next few days others were put to death individually: a soldier, Pontian Ngondwe; the Catholic leaders Andrew Kaggwa, Matthias Kalemba and Noe Mwaggali; and Gonzaga Gonza. On June 3, 1886 at Namugongo, thirteen were burned to death: Charles Lwanga, who had charge of the pages Ambrose Kibuka, Anotle Kiriggwaijjo, Achilles Kiwanuka, Mbagu Tuzinde, Muggaga, Mukasa Kiriwawanvu, Adolphus Musaka Ludigo, Gyvira, Kizito — all pages in their teens; Bruno Serunkuma, James Buzabaliawo, and Luke Banabakintu — soldiers and officials.

On January 27, 1887, Jean-Marie Muzeyi, 30 years old, a former page was beheaded. The martyrs of Uganda were beatified June 6, 1920 by Benedict XV and canonized October 18, 1964 by Paul VI. A similar number of Protestants were put to death in the same persecutions.

Truly a landmark occurred on mission Sunday, October 1964, when the canonization of the martyrs took place. In attendance were Catholic Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops who were in Rome for Vatican II. Representatives of the government of Uganda, the Kabaka of Buganda and other countries and also over 200 hundred clergy, religious and lay people from the land of the martyrs were on hand for the occasion. For the first time in the Church's history, the sound of pulsating African drums and other instruments heralded the victory of 22 black Catholics who are now listed among the saints in heaven.
