

Comparing two 1939 “premieres” of note

When MGM Studios’ blockbuster film, *Gone with the Wind*, premiered in Atlanta in December 1939, its opening was in contrast to another “premiere” held in Atlanta 11 months earlier: the dedication of the Co-Cathedral of Christ the King. This landmark event for Atlanta Catholics and the Diocese of Savannah-Atlanta took place on January 18, 1939.

Present for the dedication ceremony was an assortment of ecclesiastical luminaries that came close to outshining the Hollywood stars who arrived later that year for the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*. With Marist cadets forming an honor guard, Cardinal Dennis Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia, three other archbishops, various bishops, abbots, numerous members of the papal household, and numbers of clergy and religious processed into the new building. According to *The Bulletin of the Catholic Laymen’s Association* of January 28, 1939, the gathering “brought to the diocese the most distinguished group of prelates Georgia, and perhaps the southeast, have ever seen.”

Savannah-Atlanta

Christ the King parish was established by Bishop Gerald P. O’Hara on June 15, 1936. Located in Buckhead, north of Atlanta, the property purchased for the new parish included a tract of about four acres on Peachtree Road between Wesley and Peachtree Way. To provide a nice ironic twist, the Durant family’s elegant mansion that still stood on the property had once served as national headquarters of the Catholic-hating Ku Klux Klan.



Rita H. DeLorme

The property carried a modest 1936 price tag of \$35,000. As part of the older Diocese of Savannah, Atlanta was a year away from the designation—at Bishop O’Hara’s request—of the more inclusive title, the “Diocese of Savannah-Atlanta.”

The first pastor of the new parish was Father Joseph E. Moylan, who celebrated the church’s first Mass on the porch of the Durant mansion on August 15, 1936. Later, part of the first floor of the building was converted into a temporary chapel and it was here that subsequent Masses were said. Accommodating just 220 people, the chapel was a snug fit for the 400 adults and 109 children listed on the parish register.

School first

Catholic business icons bearing the respected names of “Spalding,” “Haverty,” “Smith” and “Kane” made up the church’s board of directors, along with Father Moylan. These savvy advisors recommended that Christ the King parish avoid burdensome debt by not taking out a loan, and seconded Bishop O’Hara’s view that a parochial school should come first. In a letter to Father Moylan dated November 20, 1936, O’Hara had written that he had decided to go ahead with the building of a school,

which he considered more urgent than erection of a church. He told Father Moylan: “I say this particularly in view of the fact that you have already provided a beautiful temporary chapel for the other spiritual needs of your parishioners that can serve your purpose for an indefinite period.”

Tentative plans

Tentative plans for future parish construction estimated cost of a new school at \$50,000; of the church at \$75,000, and of a priest’s rectory at \$15,000. Later remodeling of the Durant mansion as a residence for sisters teaching at the school was estimated as costing about \$15,000. A \$25,000 bequest of the Lynch family for the building of a new church was utilized by the diocese for initial funding of the parish buildings. By 1939, the financial managers of Christ the King, working in tandem with Father Moylan, managed to fund and build the kind of church they and Bishop O’Hara thought Atlanta’s Catholics deserved: the \$400,000 Co-Cathedral of Christ the King.

They heard nothing but praise of their Cathedral. The writer of a contemporary story for the *Atlanta Journal* enthused that the church, designed by Philadelphia architects Henry D. Dagin and Sons, was likely to vie with Paris’ Notre



Photo courtesy of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

The Cathedral of Christ the King, Atlanta.

Dame Cathedral in some respects. An article in the *Bulletin* declared that the new church resembled some 13th century cathedrals in form, but was “adapted to the surroundings and the people who will attend it.”

Monsignor Moylan

Father (later Monsignor) was pastor of Christ the King Co-Cathedral from 1936 until 1945. Both church and rectory were built during his pastorate. Afterwards, Monsignor Moylan would move on to other prestigious and demanding posts in the diocese. In April 1946, he was asked by Bishop O’Hara to go to Savannah to serve as vicar general and diocesan chancellor. Bishop O’Hara was appointed papal envoy to Albania in May 1946.

At this time, Monsignor Moylan assumed responsibility for actual administration of the diocese. When Bishop O’Hara was re-assigned to Rumania after Albanian politics quashed his appointment there, Moylan remained responsible for running the diocese. His achievements—to cite a few—included initiation of the first diocesan fund drive, clearance of the diocesan debt, and construction and renovation of numerous churches. He was military vicar for the armed forces in a region that included most of the southern states and many vital military installations.

With Bishop O’Hara still in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, Bishop Francis E. Hyland became auxiliary bishop of the diocese in 1950 and Monsignor Moylan was

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Sister Betty (Charlene) Walsh, RSM, dies

Sister Betty (Charlene) Walsh, RSM, died on May 8 at Mercy Convent, Savannah.

The daughter of Charles V. and Mildred Power Walsh of Savannah, Betty Walsh graduated from Sacred Heart School and Saint Vincent’s Academy. On Sept. 8, 1949, she entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Mercy in Baltimore, Maryland. She received a B.A. in education from Mount Saint Agnes College, Baltimore, an M.Ed. degree in counseling from Loyola College, Baltimore, and an M.A. in theology from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

She taught at Saint Cecilia School, Baltimore, Our Lady of the Assumption School, Atlanta, and Mount Saint Agnes School for Boys, Baltimore. In 1960 she was named the first principal of Our Lady of

Mercy School, Bethesda, Maryland.

In 1964, she became Novice Mistress of the Baltimore Province. In 1968 she was named Coordinator of Religious Education for the Diocese of Savannah. She returned to Saint Vincent’s Academy in 1971 as a teacher and counselor. She was elected a provincial counselor in 1974.

She later served Savannah’s Saint Benedict Parish as a social minister and Saint Vincent’s Academy as Director of Mercy Outreach. She was liaison between Saint Joseph’s / Candler Hospitals and the Sisters of Mercy Housing efforts. Her role in the restoration of the Cuyler-Brownville neighborhood was recognized on April 9, 2006, when the Sister Betty Walsh Learning Center was dedicated at Heritage Place.

Sister Betty is survived by her



Sister Betty (Charlene) Walsh, RSM.

sisters, Sister Mary Jude Walsh, RSM., May Walsh Loncon (Roy), and Patricia Walsh Taylor (Hobe) of Lombard, Illinois, three nephews, five nieces, eight grandnieces and five grandnephews.

Her Funeral Mass was celebrated on May 10 at the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist.

Remembrances may be made to Saint Vincent’s Academy Scholarship Fund, 207 E. Liberty Saint, Savannah, GA 31401.