

HERITAGE READING FOR 4th WEEK

SISTERS MADELEINE CHOLLET AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MOTHERHOUSE CHAPEL

The construction of the Chapel of the Incarnate Word or, as it is more commonly known, the Motherhouse Chapel was begun in 1906. The increase in the number of Sisters made it imperative that a larger space be made available for the assembly of the whole community for prayers....**F. B. Gaenslen was selected as architect for the building, and Father Bednarek, who had designed the grotto, supervised every detail of the architectural plan.** August Fuessel was named the contractor, and Theodore Engelhardt...was named building superintendent. Sister Madeleine Chollet was so deeply interested in seeing the chapel come to fruition that she took on the responsibility of overseeing the project herself.

On January 6, 1906, ground was broken for the new building....By June 22, a ceremony was held for placement of the granite cornerstone in the new building. Carved on the stone was the inscription, Hic est Domus Dei, and placed within a zinc box were the following items: holy water; blessed palm; medals; American coins; copies of the San Antonio newspapers; photographs of Bishop Forest, Father Schneider, Father Bednarek, and Sister Madeleine; a catalog of Incarnate Word Academy [from which UIW developed]. **The cornerstone document included the following statement: “In the erection of this chapel, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word have principally in view the honor and glory of the Incarnate Word, in thanksgiving for the innumerable blessings He has bestowed on the Congregation since its humble establishment in San Antonio in 1869 by Sister Madeleine Chollet and Sister Pierre Cinquin. Today it is composed of 452 members, distributed in 14 dioceses and in 50 establishments.”**

Designed in the **Romanesque style of architecture**, the completed chapel was an imposing structure of cathedral-size dimensions. Built of red brick with white stone facings and slate roof, the building soon became an impressive landmark in San Antonio. The towering steeple topped with a gold cross and with figures of trumpeting angels could be seen from all directions in the city. The interior of the chapel featured a vaulted ceiling of embossed metal, scagliola columns, a dome-shaped sanctuary, and an impressive altar of Carrara marble with onyx columns....**The choir stalls...were modeled on those found in the monasteries of medieval Europe.** The stained glass windows were designed by the Emil Frei Art Glass Co. of St. Louis and depicted scenes from the life of Christ.

The chapel was consecrated on May 30, 1907 by Bishop Forest. **The celebration was overcast, however, by the sadness felt by the sisters at the loss of Sister Madeleine who had followed the progress of the construction step by step until her final illness. She died on July 20, 1906. She was the last of the three great founders: Bishop Dubuis, Sister Pierre Cinquin and Sister Madeleine Chollet.**