

City of St. Jude Historic District

2048 West Fairview Avenue

Montgomery

The City of St. Jude Historic District pioneered nondiscriminatory health services, education, and social services to African Americans during a time when racial segregation was mandated by law. Founded by Father Howard Purcell in 1934, the City of St. Jude includes a church, a school, a hospital, a social center, and residential buildings for teaching and nursing staffs, as well as an administration building and a gymnasium. Father Purcell hired African American craftsmen and laborers to construct the buildings, one of whom, Otis Smith, became construction supervisor for the St. Jude School.

Father Purcell's most ambitious undertaking was St. Jude's Catholic Hospital, which opened in early 1951 as the first fully integrated hospital in the Southeast. The hospital received publicity for treating Viola Liuzzo, who had been shot while transporting participants in the voting rights march between Selma and Montgomery.

In the 1950s St. Jude's Church served as a meeting place for two groups of United Church Women, one black and one white, who formed an integrated prayer group. By the 1960s St. Jude's Church had become such a powerful symbol of racial desegregation that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 2,000 participants of the Selma-to-Montgomery march, and supporters of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 used it as a meeting place.

In March 1990 St. Jude served as the site of the 25th anniversary celebration of the Selma-to-Montgomery march. Today St. Jude continues a vital program of social and spiritual service to the black community. [CA 6/18/90, 90000916]