Founded by St. Benedict in the 5th century, the Benedictine order of monks believe that when visitors knocked at the monastery door they should be responded to “with a prompt answer and the warmth of love.”

The Priory Hotel continues that tradition to this day.
Growing parallel with the City of Pittsburgh was Allegheny City, a separate municipality on the north side of the Allegheny River. (Allegheny City was merged into Pittsburgh in 1906). The portion of Allegheny City where the Priory Hotel and Grand Hall are located had, in the early to mid-1840’s, attracted a large number of German-speaking immigrants. A bustling German-themed society developed, as oompah bands played outside of taverns and shops were busy selling German delicacies. A large number of breweries appeared, and German-language singing societies thrived. The neighborhood was deemed “Deutschtown,” a name which continues to this day.

In 1848, the Roman Catholic residents of Deutschtown banded together to form St. Mary’s Parish. The parishioners began construction of a church structure in 1852, and completed the project in 1854 (it now serves as our Grand Hall event facility). St. Mary’s is an excellent example of Italianate classical architecture, and is also the oldest extant Catholic church in Pittsburgh.

The anti-Immigrant/anti-Catholic Know-Nothing party was active (and actually elected a Mayor in Pittsburgh) in the 1850’s, and thus, for protection, the church was built without windows. The stained glass windows were installed in 1912, and are priceless examples of the “Munich School of Art Glass.” They were crafted by the Tyrolean Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, Austria. The magnificent pipe organ (which is no longer operational) was also installed around that time.

In 1888, the parish added a “Priory”-or monastery-as a home for Benedictine priests and brothers who ministered to the congregation. It also served as a temporary haven for monks traveling to the St. Vincent’s Archabbey in Latrobe, the seat for the Benedictine order in the United States. The St. Mary’s Priory now serves as our Priory Hotel.

In 1981, St. Mary’s Church and Priory were acquired by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to be razed to make way for a highway project. At the last minute, however, a community group seeking to save a different landmark church forced PennDOT to re-route the highway, thus saving the historic St. Mary’s structures as well.

PennDOT placed the St. Mary’s buildings for sale in 1984. Priory co-founder Edward Graf thought they might make interesting office space. Although the office space plan did not work out, Ed and his wife, co-founder Mary Ann Graf, decided to bid on the buildings themselves. After purchasing the buildings at auction, Ed discovered that his grandfather had been married in St. Mary’s Church after he had emigrated from Winterthur, Switzerland.

Ed and Mary Ann restored the original Priory building, and in 1986 opened the Priory Hotel to great fanfare. In 1995, along with son John and his wife Suzanne, the Grafs completed the restoration of the church into the Grand Hall ballroom. In 2011, the Grafs built a new wing to the hotel, adding 17 guestrooms as well as meeting space. Both the Priory Hotel and Grand Hall have received numerous accolades over the years, both for the restorations and for operations.

For more details on the history of The Priory and the Grand Hall, please visit thepriory.com and pittsburghsgrandhall.com