Congregation Gates of Prayer

4000 West Esplanade Avenue, Metairie

Much of the history of this Reform congregation, which traces its history to 1850, is recorded in the cornerstones set in massive angular columns at the front of the synagogue. These document the migration from center city, where the earliest synagogue was in a house at St. Mary and Fulton streets purchased in 1855, to the suburbs.

Whereas the founders of other Jewish congregations were from Eastern Europe, the original members of Gates of Prayer tended to be German, from the Alsace-Lorraine region. Although first an orthodox congregation, by 1908 it affiliated with Reform Judaism.

Dedicated in 1975, on land purchased from the Archdiocese of New Orleans, this is the fourth home of Congregation Gates of Prayer. Like the columns, the exterior of the synagogue is powerful and angular. Beige stucco, rather than the brick of its predecessors, covers the building.

The octagonal sanctuary imparts a feeling of tranquility with its pastel colors, carpeted floor, and comfortable upholstered seats. The worshipers eye is drawn to the Holy Ark, which is flanked on the side walls by tall, narrow, abstract windows that provide a panorama of Jewish history.

Of vibrant colors and rich in symbols, these windows are entitled Creation, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, Moses, Kings and Prophets, Golden Moments, and Modernity and Hope. Since the Scripture proscribes images of people, the Moses window shows a burning bush as well as parting waves surmounted by a bridge rather than the physical attributes of a man. The windows, installed as a set during the 2000 renovation, were the work of New Jersey stained glass artist David Ascalon, who was born in Tel Aviv. Mr. Ascalon and Rabbi Robert H. Loewy worked together closely to select the theme and topics (Creation, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, Moses, Kings and Prophets, Golden Moments, Modernity and Hope) for the Gates of Prayer windows.

Two opalescent windows (in the vestibule and the library) as well as the beautiful red glass Eternal Light (1875) were brought from the previous synagogue on Jackson Avenue at Chippewa Street and emphasize the congregations continuity. In combination with the new windows, they reflect the philosophy of the synagogue: Honor our tradition. Build for the future.

*Visited*

*April 2002*

*March 2017*

When citing information from this document, please acknowledge the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.