St. Angela Merici Catholic Church

901 Beverly Garden Drive, Metairie

The design of this church reflects the close ties between education and religion for the families that founded this parish in 1964 in a quiet residential neighborhood: the sanctuary is nestled beneath the elementary school. St. Angela Merici Elementary School was enrolling children in a brand-new school only fifteen months after the parish had been established.

Each Mass day for sixteen months, parishioners rearranged the furniture at the nearby Leoss Restaurant for services. The new downstairs church, designed by Curtis and Davis, organized seating in the shape of three arms of the cross, with the altar in the center. Thus, it followed the guidelines of the 1962-1965 Vatican II Council, even before the council ended. The first Mass was said in October 1965 in an unfinished church.

The new worship space was functional but confining, as it included only two windowsin exterior hallways. About 1988, the congregation selected New Orleans artist Ruth Goliwas to add light and warmth to the church through art. Mrs. Goliwas has also created the windows in St. Charles Borromeo Church near Thibodaux, Holy Family Church in Luling, Immaculate Conception in Marrero, and St. Francis Xavier in Metairie, as well as in other churches in South Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

Mrs. Goliwas also designed the Stations of the Cross, which her mother and aunt embroidered on beige linen. Her bright enamel-on-copper paintings portray five events in the life of St. Angela Merici, founder of the Ursuline Order of nuns. (The Ursulines were among the first teachers in the school upstairs.) Lining the outside walkway are paintings of important figures in church history, including three who were active in New Orleans: St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, St. Katharine Drexel, and the Venerable Henriette Delille.

The stained glass, however, had the greatest impact on the renovated church. Mrs. Goliwas replaced six pairs of wooden exterior doors with stained-glass panels, each portraying one of the twelve apostles and one of the twelve tribes of Israel. These incorporate carefully selected sections of textured glass. While the overall impression is stylized, the faces of the apostles are strikingly realistic. Some portray acquaintances of the artist and the father of the priest at the time of the renovation..

To the side of the shrine of Mary is a backlit stained-glass wall that depicts fifteen familiar events in the lives of Mary and Jesus. Located in sunny corners of the back of the church are the baptismal and Blessed Sacrament chapels.

The woven metal railing surrounding the ambo (raised lectern) was created by Enrique Alférez, a Mexican artist who had made New Orleans home. (His sculpture is still visible in City Park and on the face of Holy Name of Mary Church in Algiers.) Here, the dramatic copper symbols of the Evangelists in the railing are mirrored in the hand-embroidered panels in the exterior halls. In addition, he designed the abstract windows in the niches.

**Windows of St. Angela Merici Church**

5 6

4 7

3 8

1, 2 9, 10

Altar

14, 13 12, 11

15

1. Peter; Zebulon

2. Andrew; Judah

3. Baptismal chapel

4. James the Great; Joseph

5. John; Levi

6. Jude; Naphtali

7. Simon; Gad

8. Blessed Sacrament Chapel

9. James the Less; Asher

10. Philip; Issachar

11. Matthias; Simeon

12. Thomas; Benjamin

13. Bartholomew; Dan

14. Matthew; Reuben

15. Mary Altar

*Note: Where two elements are separated by a semi-colon, the first is*

*an apostle and the second is a tribe of Israel.*

*Toured April 14, 2002*

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