St. James Major Catholic Church

3736 Gentilly Boulevard

During the early years of Gentilly, Catholic residents were included under the umbrellas of four churches: Holy Trinity, St. Maurice, Holy Rosary, and Our Lady Star of the Sea. In 1920, however, as the population of Gentilly grew, St. James Major Parish was formally established (as was St. Leo the Great, also in Gentilly). Services were held first in a lumber storage building, followed by a two-story frame structure on St. Roch Avenue and then in Holy Name Hall and other buildings. 1953 saw the dedication of todays building, as well as expanded school facilities, a new rectory, and a convent for the Mount Carmel nuns who taught at the school.

This was the first church in New Orleans without interior columns. Its architect was William R. Burk, while James Lamantia designed the spartan interior Lin Emery, the statuary.

The wall behind the altar was remodeled in 19561957. Robert Frei, grandson of the founder of the Emil Frei Studio of St. Louis, spent about four months adding a mosaic that stretches across the width of the sanctuary around 1962. According to Stephen Frei, his son, he designed and made on site the mosaics behind the Altar, concentrating on the theme of All things praise the Lord in their beauty and creations.

The dramaticand controversialwindows were installed in the early 1960s. The Frei studio, a familiar name to connoisseurs of stained glass in this area, manufactured them. A 2002 letter from Stephen Frei, then president of the studio, says that Robert Harmon was the window designer. The Henry J. Lips glass company of New Orleans was the subcontractor for installation.

The organ, like that at the nearby Gentilly Presbyterian Church, was constructed by the M. P. Möller Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. Dating to 1953 and bearing the number 8422, it includes 24 ranks of pipes available in 55 stops on the white oak draw-knob console. As was typical in that period, the pipes are located in a separate room, or chamber; here, the chamber is at the east side of the choir loft. Because the pipes speak through a grille cloth, the listener lacks a visual point of origin for the sound.

Located on Gentilly Ridge, the church did not flood after Hurricane Katrina, even though it was surrounded by water.

*The Covid-19 epidemic of 2020 precluded a visit to the church to confirm the window identifications.*

**Windows**

Altar

The Creation Descent of the Holy Spirit

The Fall Crucifixion

The Flood First Miracle: Feast at Cana

Joseph of Egypt Teaching window: Parable

of Christ Sowing the Seed

Moses Holy Family

The Prophets Flight into Egypt

David Nativity

St. John the Baptist Annunciation

*Visited March 24, 1996*

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