St. Joseph Catholic Church

611 Sixth Street, Gretna

Gretna Catholics first worshiped in private homes and other secular buildings. 1857 marked the formal creation of the parish, which extended from the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, and St. Josephs became the first Catholic church on the West Bank of Jefferson Parish. The parish priest traveled, often on foot, to the mission church in Westwego, but priests from nearer locations occasionally presided at the distant Barataria mission church.

The first church on the Gretna site, which was donated by the Destrehan family, was a simple wooden structure, dedicated in 1859. A large brick church replaced that in 1910 but was damaged by the notorious hurricane of 1915 and was condemned about a decade later.

While Father Peter M. H. Wynhoven was the pastor at St. Josephs in the late 1920s, he led the campaign to establish Hope Haven for boys needing a home. In addition, he spearheaded the drive to replace the church building. The architect for both was William Richard Burk, who also designed the Harahan Elementary School on Jefferson Highway, and Hope Haven / Madonna Manner in Marrero in the same style.

Todays striking church dates to 1927 and, with its elaborate Spanish Colonial Revival facade, is a leading landmark in Gretna. The church has been named to the National Register of Historic Places.

Sculptor Luca Arrighini created the lovely Stations of the Cross at St. Josephs from a single block of Carrara marble in the late 1940s.

The stained glass windows portray numerous events in the life of St. Joseph. The windows in the doors date to 1948, and were the work of the Conrad Schmitt Studio of New Berlin, Wisconsin. The same studio created the figurative sanctuary windows in the 1980s. Designed by Bernard O. Gruenke, they share traits with contemporaneous windows we have seen in many other churches: an overall uncluttered look and the restrained use of shading. Whereas traditional windows rely on the lead strips just as materials to merge the pieces of glass and add strength, some modern artists, like Mr. Gruenke, use broader lead strips and treat them as a component of the art.

**Windows**

Holy Spirit

Altar

L1 R1

L2 & L3 R2

L4 R3

L5 R4

L6 R5

L7 R6

L8

L1. St. Joseph & Child, with St. Josephs Altar foods

L2 & L3. In bell tower; not visible

L4. St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church

L5. Jesus & Mary at Josephs deathbed

L6. Holy Family at work

L7. Finding child Jesus in the Temple

L8. Holy Family flees to Egypt

R1. Old Testament Joseph with Pharaoh

R2. Joseph receives the lily-bedecked staff from a Jewish elder, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy

R3.Angel reassures a dreaming Joseph about M arys pregnancy

R4. Marriage of Mary and Joseph

R5. Nativity

R6. Presentation of Jesus in the temple

Choir loft :

Main window: T he Resurrection (top) and the History of St. Joseph parish (below)

Angels with censers frame the center window.

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