St. Raymond and St. Leo the Great Catholic Church

2916 Paris Avenue

The Gentilly neighborhood developed early in the twentieth century, as massive projects of draining the swamps and building up the terrain allowed the expansion of housing beyond Gentilly Ridge (U.S. Route 90). With population growth came the need for a church, and Father Vincent Prats, barely out of divinity training, was assigned to establish a parish.

For the first several months, services were held in a railroad chapel car that had belonged to the Redemptorists, but by November of that year a frame church was built, followed by a school and a convent. Within ten years, the need for more space was obvious, and the old church was sinking. Funds were raised, and Paul Charbonnet was selected as the architect, Gervais Favrot as the builder.

Dedicated in 1930, St. Leo the Great is an impressive example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, which was popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Other local Catholic churches in this style are St. Anthony of Padua (1923), St. Josephs in Gretna (1927), Hope Haven (1925), and St. Charles Borromeo in Destrehan (1920s). Elaborate carvings surround the entrances to buildings. The church takes the form of a Greek cross.

Initially the windows were plain, but the debt was paid off in 1935, and stained glass was installed in 19411942. This may be the only New Orleansarea church with California glass. It comes from the Cummings Studio of San Francisco and was signed by R. W. Jung. (The company has since moved to North Adams, Massachusetts.)

The windows are distinctive and handsome. At ground level they depict the twelve Apostles, each with an appropriate symbol, as well as the eight Doctors of the Church. Representatives of the Eastern Church are on the right, or Epistle, side; those of the Western Church are on the left, or Gospel, side. Two large windows facing each other on the second level illustrate the Crucifixion and the Nativity. The four Evangelists occupy the corners while symbolic representations of the Twelve Tribes of Israel occupy the remaining walls on the second floor. Pearlized glass surrounds the central figures.

Interior furnishings include the handsome marble altar, designed for the silver jubilee of the church in 1945, and the organ in the rear loft. The latter was begun for this congregation by New Orleanian Henry Dreuding (1895-1962) in 1959. Because of Dreudings failing health, Art Schonberg finished the project in 1960. The 13 ranks of pipes stand on older chests converted by Dreuding to electric action. Some of these pipes may have come from the earlier organ at St. Leo the Great while others may have been acquired from an organ parts clearinghouse. Probably the original organ was purchased second-hand as a provisional instrument.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, St. Leo the Great Parish welcomed members of St. Frances Cabrini and St. Raymond parishes, which had closed, and the name was expanded to St. Raymond and St. Leo the Great Church.

**Windows**

*(Information in parentheses refers to associated symbol)*

Altar

St. Peter (key) St. Matthias (broad sword)

St. Andrew (anchor) St. Simon (saw)

St. James Major (scallop shell) St. Jude (axe)

St. John [the Evangelist] (viper) St. James Minor (fullers club)

St. Philip (spear) St. Thomas (carpenters square)

St. Bartholomew (flaying knife?) St. Matthew (? tax gatherers bag)

St. Jerome (book translated into Latin) St. Athanasius

St. Augustine (book) St. John Chrysostom (chalice)

St. Ambrose (beehive, whip) St. Gregory Nazanius

St. Gregory (book, popes hat) St. Basil (model of a church)

Second Floor

St. John the Apostle St. Matthew

Nativity Crucifixion

St. Mark St. Luke

Twelve Tribes of Israel (individual windows)

*Based on art notes by Susan Levy*

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