**THE PARISH**

The parish of St. Mary Magdalen and the town of Abbeville were founded by Pere Antoine Desire Megret, a French priest who, on July 25, 1843, purchased 160 arpents of property on the Vermilion River from Joseph Leblanc. Pere Megret wrote his Bishop in New Orleans: “I am having right now a spacious house (Leblanc’s) converted into a church. I reserved amply in the way land necessary for a rectory, cemetery, and so forth. I will distribute the rest of land which I will sell. Deign, Monsieur, to let me know if these are not your intentions. Deign also to send me for Father Martin the permission to bless this little church.”

Permission was granted, the church was blessed, and the land was distributed. Pieces were donated by Pere Megret for a town square and court house, laid out, according to local tradition, on the plan of Megret’s native town, Abbeville, France.

**THE CHURCH**

Four churches, all under the patronage of St. Mary Magdalen, have stood on the present site. The renovated home of Joseph Leblanc served until 1856 when it was destroyed by the Ile Derniere hurricane. A second frame house served until 1884, when a third and larger church was needed. This church was gutted by fire on March 20, 1910. The Pastor, Pere Laforest, wanted to call the present structure, but the land was distributed. Pieces were donated by Pere Megret in 1915. The structure was electrified in 1951 by the T. Verdun Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.

**THE ARCHITECTURE**

The red brick church was built in the Romanesque Revival style by George Honold, a New Orleans architect, whose father was French Consul to Louisiana. Contractors were Eugene Guillon and Charles Thibodeaux of New Iberia. The facade features three romaneseque arches and, in the ecdotic manner of the period, the sloped roof is surrounded by a soaring French Gothic spire. The ongles on either side of the plaza, originally on the ecdotic of the main altar, were mounted on pedestals and reededicated in 1974.

**THE DELLS**

An outstanding feature of the church is the fine peal of bells housed in the tower. The bells have a six-note range and the largest bell, a C, weighs 20 tons. The original three bells (D-F-A) were donated by Father Laforest in 1915. The system was electrified in 1982, by a set of Mayland chimes. The 27-tone bell has two manuals and pedal board with provisions for later additions.

**THE WINDOWS**

The amber-hued stained glass windows in the church are symbols of Jesus and the saints. The sunflower, which depicts saints of the church and scenes from the life of Christ, have unifying features: burning braziers which symbolize the Divine Presence, and double pillars which signify time and eternity. Each window is surmounted by a shell and within the shell containins a mandala, the universal symbol of the Oneness of God. Each mandala contains a traditional symbol of the Church. Of local interest are the misspellings of “ANNOUNCEMENT” and “GARDUN.”

**THE ORGAN**

The pipe organ was constructed in 1972 by Otto Hoffman, of Jesus and the church. The organ windows, which depict saints of the church and scenes from the life of Christ, have unifying features: burning braziers which symbolize the Divine Presence, and double pillars which signify time and eternity. Each window is surmounted by a shell and within the shell contains a mandala, the universal symbol of the Oneness of God. Each mandala contains a traditional symbol of the Church. Of local interest are the misspellings of “ANNOUNCEMENT” and “GARDUN.”

**THE INTERIOR**

The church is cruciform in shape. Three aisles traverse the nave which is intersected by a transept. Eighteen columns with composite gold-leaved capitals (Johnt and Corinthian) support arched which continue the romaneseque theme. The sanctuary is contained within a semicircular apse and contains a marble altar and a more modern tabernacle with a white marble tabernacle. The high altar is canopied by an oak chimbrum which bears on its facade the figures of Christ and the twelve apostles. On the lower right, Judas, clutching his money bag, turns away. To the left of the sanctuary is the baptistry, containing a marble baptismal font and an oak-carved statue of Christ rising from the tomb. To the right of the sanctuary is the shrine of the Holy Family. Reconciliation rooms are placed in the east and west transepts. Oak-carved statues on the left room image St. Therese of Lisieux, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and St. Teresa of Avila; statues on the right room represent St. Paul, the Infant Child of Prague, and St. Anthony of Padua. Two small side altars are designated for the east and west transepts. Oak-carved statues on the left room image St. Therese of Lisieux, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and St. Teresa of Avila; statues on the right room represent St. Paul, the Infant Child of Prague, and St. Anthony of Padua.

**THE MOSAICS**

In the dome over the high altar a mosaic of variegated blue represents heaven streaked with rays of gold-leaf. In the apse wall of the apse wall is a mosaic of the Assumption of St. Mary Magdalen. The sunflower, which always faces the sun, symbolizes her turning toward God; the discarded thistle her rejection of sin.

**THE ANNUNCIATION.** The Angel Gabriel appears to a Virgin and tells her she will be the mother of the Messiah. The angel holds a blooming staff bannered with the words “AVE MARIA GRATIA PLEN A”. “Hail Mary full of grace.” The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. “Holy Ghost, the spirit of wisdom, the understanding, the counsel, the power, the knowledge, the Fright, the fear of the Lord.” In the background is the Passion. The open window is another traditional symbol of Mary’s purity: as light passes through a window pane without changing it, so is she Virgin and Mother.

**THE CROSS**

The Cross and the words Faith, Hope, and Charity, the theological virtues.

**SAINT THEODORE OF AMASEA.** an early Christian martyr, was beheaded by a sword. His head is held in his hand by an angel. Above him are the words “ECCE AGNUS DEI” — “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

**SAINT GEORGE.** The patron saint of England, St. George is the patron saint of England, St. George is the patron saint of England. He burned a temple of the goddess Cybele and was punished by being tortured and thrown into a furnace. Dressed in Roman armor, the saint carries his standard, the reed cross, and a sword and the palm of martyrdom. The Greek term can be seen in the background.

**GUARDIAN ANGEL.** Luke 1:38 that ye despise not one of these little ones, neither say unto them: go your way; for their angels behold the face of my father in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10). The face of the child in this window is that of Henry Edwards in whose memory the window was donated.

**THE WINDOWS**

Four cherubs on each side of the altar represent the four evangelists. St. John the Evangelist, the author of the Fourth Gospel.

**WINDOES IN THE TRANSEPT**

Side windows are also located in either transept. In the left transept, St. Mary Magdalen kneels in prayer: in the right transept is St. John the Evangelist, the author of the Fourth Gospel.

**WINDOES IN THE CHOR LOFT**

Also visible from the front of the church, looking back, are windows located in the choir loft on either side of the organ pipes. Both show scenes from the life of St. Mary...
Magdalen. To the left, she anoints the feet of Christ in the home of Simon the Pharisee, and to the right she weeps at the foot of the cross.

**WINDOWS ON THE RIGHT SIDE**

**(Front to Back)**

**SAINT AUGUSTINE**, Bishop of Hippo, was the fourth century saint and Doctor of the Church whose writings were a major influence in the development of Christian thought. Of particular importance were his insights into the nature of grace. Shown with the staff and mitre of the episcopal office, the saint holds a flaming heart, his standard in Christian heraldry, referring to zeal and burning love for Christ.

**Quatrefoil Window**: A golden crown in Christian heraldry signifies sanctity.

**SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE**. “Thou art Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church. I will give unto thee the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 16: 18-19) Peter holds the key and stands before St. Peter’s Basilica, the center of Christendom, the sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

**Quatrefoil Window**: The keys of the kingdom represent the authority of the papacy. “Whatsoever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt 16:19)

**SAINT JEANNE D’ARC**, patron saint of France, was the maid of Orleans who was guided by the voices of angels and saints to lead the French to victory against the English. Deserted by her supporters, she was tried and burned at the stake for witchcraft. She is identified as “Blessed” in the window because she was not canonized until 1920.

**Quatrefoil Window**: In ancient times a wreath of laurel was awarded to conquerors. In Christian tradition it symbolizes the victory of the soul over death and the conquest of heaven.

**SAINT LOUIS IX**, King of France, was a thirteenth century saint who exemplified the ideals of chivalry and Christian sanctity. He assumed the mantle of kingship, but practiced a life of personal penance and piety. St. Louis built the Sainte Chapelle in Paris to house the Crown of Thorns which he carries in this picture.

**CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT**

Located under the sacristy is a chapel where some five hundred members of the parish participate in Perpetual Adoration. The chapel is also used for Christian Life Community masses and other parish liturgies. The chapel may be entered by outside doors on the east and west sides of the church.

**MINISTRIES BUILDING**

To the right of the church behind the rectory, is the St. Mary Magdalen Parish Ministries Building. Completed in 1985, the building houses a large meeting hall, conference rooms, and general offices. A stoa echoes the romanesque style of the church. The building’s facade is ornamented with cararra marble statues of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Peter, and St. John Vianney. A statue of St. Joseph is mounted at the entrance to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

**THE RECTORY**

On a pastoral visit in November, 1921, Bishop Jules Jeanmard wrote in the baptismal registry of St. Mary Magdalen Church: “Father Bollard has recently built and completed the Rectory which is by far the finest in the diocese.” The Neo-Renaissance Italianate rectory still stands and, thanks to the extensive restoration begun in the spring of 1987 by Father Donald Theriot in cooperation with Cobblestone, Inc., (Joe Garteiser, Jr., architect), the second oldest permanent rectory in the diocese is still one of the finest.

**Cover Drawing by:**

SYLVIA PUTNAM