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 acres of property on the Vermilion River from Joseph Leblanc. Pere Megret was the Bishop in New Orleans: "I am having right now a spacious house (Leblanc's) converted into a church. I reserved in the way of land necessary for a rectory, cemetery, and so forth. I will distribute the rest of land which I will sell. Deign, Monsigere, 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, and 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 structure served until 1884, when a third and larger church was needed. This church was gutted by fire on March 20, 1907.

The cornerstone of the present structure was laid in 1910. The Pastor, Pere Laforette, wanted to call the church "St. Anne's," but the Bishop denied permission to change the name 'St. Mary's' and the cornerstone in the southwest corner reads "Sub Invocatione Sanctae Annae." Apparently, the Bishop denied permission to change the name, which had been given to the church sixty-six years earlier, and the parish remained under the patronage of La Madeleine, corner stone's original intention.

The present church was put into service in 1911 with only the exterior completed. The church was decorated in the mid-20's and again in the early 1960's. Fire once swept through a church of St. Mary Magdalen on August 25, 1921. The high altar was destroyed by an oak ciborium 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 baptistery, 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. Theodore of Syracuse, St. John the Baptist, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis of Assisi, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Rose of Lima. Oak-carved statues in the right room image St. Teresa 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. Along both walls of the nave are Stations of the Cross depicting events on the road to Calvary. Sanctuary furniture was made from the old communion railing which was removed in 1973.

The Mosiacs

In the dome over the high altar a mosaic of variegated blue represents heaven streaked with rays of gold leaf. In the side wall of the church is a mosaic of St. Mary Magdalen. The sunflower, which always faces the sun, symbolizes her turning toward God; the discarded thistle her rejection of sin. With the baptistry on the left is a mosaic of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The Christ Child clings to his Mother as he looks over his shoulder at an angel holding the cross.

The Organ

The pipe organ was constructed in 1972 by Otto Hoffmann. It is of German classic design and was embellished in 1982 by a set of Mayland chimes. The 27-rank organ has two manuals and pedal board with provisions for later additions.

The Windows

The amber-hued stained glass windows in the church are reminiscent of those in the Old Church of Prague. There are six 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 lamb, patron of Mary. The dedicatory medallion containing 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 "AUDIENCE."

Windows on the Left Side (Back to Front)

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 PLENA!" "Hail Mary full of grace!" The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. "Blessed are you among women" is the anthem of 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.

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

Saint Theodore of Amasea, an early Christian martyr, is a Roman soldier who refused to join his comrades in pagan worship. He burned a temple of the goddess Cybele and was punished by being tortured and thrown into a lake on August 25, 391. The story is depicted on the cross and contains a traditional symbol of the Church. Of local interest are the misspellings of "ANNOUNCEMENT" and "AUDIENCE."

Quatrefoil Window: The anchor is a symbol of hope in the Church. When set down, an anchor gives a ship stability. The anchor is a traditional symbol of the Church, reminding the Church of our Jewish identity, an element of the grace we receive as the Redeemed People of God.

Saint George, another popular soldier-martyr of the East, was martyred at Lydda about the time of Constantine. The story most closely associated with the saint is the slaying of the dragon which was persecuting the city of Lyseen. Later associated with the knights of chivalry, St. George is the patron saint of England.

Quatrefoil Window: "IN HOC SIGNO VINCES"—"By this sign you shall conquer" is the motto seen by the Emperor Constantine in a vision of the cross. He converted to Christianity and hailed the persecution of Christ in the Roman Empire.

Baptism of Christ. Christ stands in the River Jordan as he is baptized by John the Baptist who wears the skin of an animal and carries his staff. The cross is kneled by the words "ECCE AGNUS DEI!" "Behold, the Lamb of God."

Quatrefoil Window: The pelican is, in Christian tradition, a symbol of Christ, for she is said to feed her young with blood drawn from her own breast.

Windows in the Transept

The windows in the left and right transepts picture the beginning and end of Christ's life on earth. On the left is a Nativity, showing the birth of Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem; on the right is the Ascension of the glorified host on high. On the left is a large mandala which pictures the Holy Spirit descending in the form of an animal and carrying his standard, the reed cross, banded with the words "ECCE AGNUS DEI!" To the right, in the Greek word "Christ," and the letters IHS, the first three letters in the name "Jesus" in Greek. The name "Jesus" or "Yeshua" in Hebrew means "Yahveh is our Salvation." In Greens means "The Angel," in German means the "Messiah." Together they express the Holy Name of the Lord.

Over the Ascension, the quatrefoil windows carry the story of the Church. These are mandalas, generated from the alphabet, the beginning and the end, expressing the eternity and infinity of God.

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

Windows in the Choir 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.
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**: Again the pelican is depicted nesting with her young.

**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.

**Quatrefoil Window**: The crown and cross are significant of the triumph of Christendom.

**SAINT JOHN VIANNEY**, the Cure d’Ars, is the patron saint of parish priests. The Cure, by his holiness and zeal, converted the entire village of Ars and was known throughout France as a confessor. He is identified in the window as “Blessed”, as he was not canonized until 1925.

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

**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 Jeanmarie 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