

St. Joseph Catholic Church, Pekin, Illinois

A Photo Essay

November 2024



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St. Joseph History

History of Catholicism in Pekin

The Catholic faith has been present in Tazewell County since the arrival of French explorer Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle and his men in January of 1680. Successful attempts at missionary work included the rites of the church celebrated at pioneer firesides. Occasionally a travelling Jesuit priest would gather the faithful together and celebrate Mass in a log cabin.

St. Stephen Chapel

As the westward expansion into Illinois continued, many Irish and German Catholics settled in the area, forming the first Catholic Community. In October of 1839 missionary Reverend John B. Raho, C.M. recorded that the people of Pekin resolved to build a church.

Soon after, Reverend Thomas Shaw noted that a chapel – believed to have been a log cabin – had been built in Pekin and dedicated to St. Stephen Protomartyr. At that time Pekin was an out mission of the Vincentian Priests from LaSalle, Illinois. Other priests from Peoria also served Pekin Catholics, celebrating Mass and other sacraments several times a year.

Around 1850, the Catholic community relocated to Flint's Hall, on lower Court Street. It was here that the first regular Catholic Masses were celebrated in Pekin by Reverend John C. Brady of Kickapoo, who visited Pekin every few weeks and then with increasing frequency. He came down from Peoria on horseback or by boat. Pekin was formally an out-mission of Peoria's Catholic community from 1845 to 1867.

In the late 1850s a one-story frame building was erected on the west side of Fifth Street between Court and Margaret Streets. Holy Mass was celebrated there and the building was also used as a school house. While records are not definitive, this may have been the St. Lawrence Chapel mentioned in some of Pekin's early history books.

The first authentic record of Catholicism in Pekin was the November 11, 1860 baptism of Henry Bulison, son of John and Josephine Bulison. It was performed by Father Ward at the church on Fifth Street.

St. Joseph Church (1863)

Soon after this the German Catholics wished to be served by a German-speaking priest who could understand them and could preach Mass homilies in their native language. The German population in Pekin was so large the German language was spoken in the stores and banks, and newspapers were published in German.

The Germans continued to worship in the Fifth Street building, while the Irish worshippers, who desired an English-speaking priest, purchased a building on the corner of Susannah and South Second Streets in 1861.



This detail from an 1877 aerial view map of Pekin shows the original St. Joseph Catholic Church, a wood frame structure at the corner of Second Street and Susannah.

At a cost of \$800, that building was remodeled into St. Joseph Church. Father Jerome Abram Ryan presided at the laying of the cornerstone. The church was dedicated on November 9, 1863. It is from this event that the St. Joseph Parish originated.

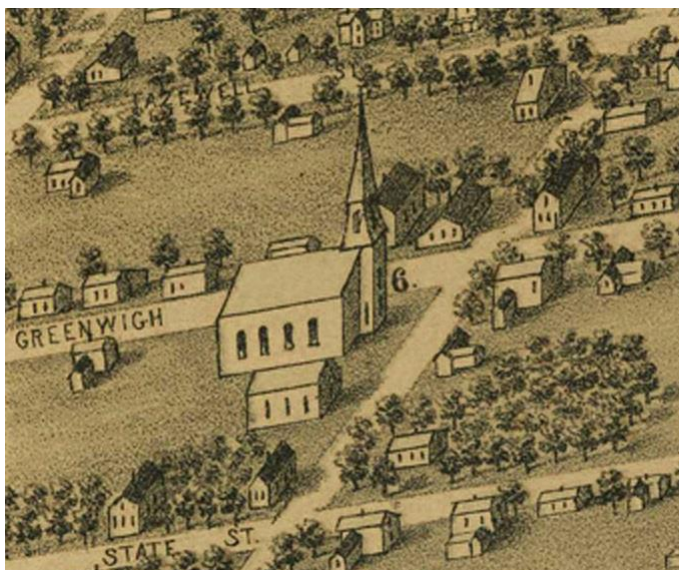
The parish continued as an out-mission of Peoria until 1867, when Reverend John A. Kennedy was appointed resident pastor with an out-mission at Delavan. Unfortunately a fire at the St. Joseph rectory in the late 1800s destroyed nearly all of the early church records.

Sacred Heart Church

The German population in Pekin continued to grow and the German Catholics needed a larger building. They built a church on the corner of Ninth and Catherine Streets. The first Mass was celebrated at Sacred Heart Church on August 8, 1872. The frame building was built on a brick foundation, with a basement large enough to hold a hot air furnace. The parish at that time owned four lots each measuring 60' x 120'.

In addition to a German-speaking church, the Sacred Heart Parish included a German parochial school. The school house was the former building on Fifth Street, which had been moved to the lot just north of the new church. The construction of the rectory was begun in August of 1916. The rectory still stands today (2024) at 905 Catherine Street, though it is in a state of disrepair.

Rev. William Schamoni was the first pastor of the Sacred Heart Parish. He was followed by two other priests. Then in June of 1878, the Capuchin Fathers took charge and served the parish until January 1893 when they were



This detail from an 1877 aerial view map of Pekin shows the Sacred Heart Catholic Church at the corner of Greenwich and Campbell streets (now Catherine and North Ninth). The small-building adjacent to the church was originally located on the west side of Fifth Street between Court and Margaret, and prior to relocation had been Pekin's only Catholic Church. It was being used as a German Catholic School in this picture.

succeeded by The Franciscan Fathers. The latter remained in charge until October 1909 when Reverend Alfonse M. Grussi became pastor. Though Sacred Heart began as an ethnic parish for Pekin's German Catholics, Italian immigrants were also parishioners.

On Sunday morning, March 23, 1930, Sacred Heart Church was destroyed by fire. Fortunately, all of the sacred vestments and vessels, as well as altar linens and some other items saved.



An interior view of Sacred Heart Church showing the sanctuary decorated for Easter.

Thanks to the efforts of Father Grussi, Omaha Mutual quickly settled the insurance claim in the amount of \$5,000. With hopes of raising additional funds and rebuilding Sacred Heart, the community temporarily relocated to the upper hall of Sacred Heart school. But in 1938 Archbishop Schlarman condemned the use of the hall for celebrating Mass. Soon thereafter, Father Grussi retired to Precious Blood Home in Dayton, Ohio. The Sacred Heart Parish was then absorbed into the St Joseph Parish.

St. Joseph Church (1904)

In 1900 Father Daniel J. Sullivan was sent to Pekin. It was under Fr. Sullivan's direction that land on the corner of Seventh and Broadway Streets was purchased for the erection of a new brick St. Joseph Church. Built in the Gothic Revival style, construction began in 1903 and the new church was dedicated on October 17, 1904. The construction cost of the new church was \$15,000. Father Sullivan also built a modern rectory, and instituted the use of altar servers at Mass.



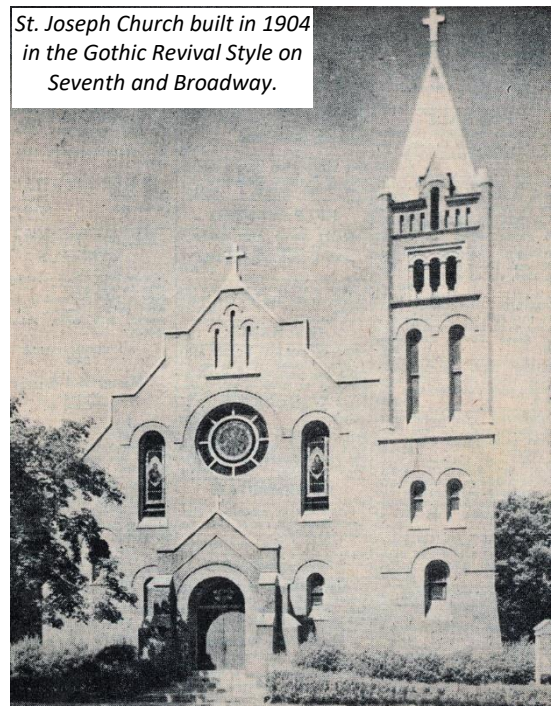
The interior of St. Joseph Church built in 1904.

Father Sullivan was transferred to Ottawa, Illinois in 1921. He was replaced by Rev. William F. Healy, who served the parish for 10 years. Father Healy bought additional land near the church and planned for the construction of a school, but ill health prevented him from finishing his plans. Rev. Michael A. Coffey came to Pekin in 1948, and served St Joseph Parish until his death in 1969.



A proud father ready to walk his daughter down the aisle at St. Joseph Church on Seventh and Broadway.

St. Joseph Church built in 1904 in the Gothic Revival Style on Seventh and Broadway.





The old St. Joseph Church dedicated in 1904 and located on the corner of Seventh and Broadway.

St. Joseph School

Father Coffey was instrumental in the construction of St Joseph School. The foundation was finished in 1950 and the building was partially used for classes in 1951. The building was dedicated in October of 1953 and the first graduation ceremony was held in 1955.

The brick school has a large gymnasium and stage, a full kitchen and cafeteria, a library and enough classrooms for eight grades and a kindergarten. The Franciscan Sisters were the first teachers, with Sister Cornella Kippfer serving as the first principal. The architect was Arthur F. Moratz from Bloomington.



Pekin's St. Joseph Catholic School on the corner of Sixth and Broadway.

Convent / Parish Center

The parish building program continued, and in 1962 a new convent was dedicated. The convent housed the nuns who taught at the school. Designed by Arthur F. Moratz, the convent included a chapel, kitchen, dining room, offices and 14 bedrooms on two levels. In 1986 the convent was converted for use as a parish hall and parish offices.



The convent built by the St. Joseph Parish in 1962, and used as a parish center since 1986, is on St. Joseph Place, south of the church and school.



The convent chapel, now used as a gathering space for parish ministries, committees, events and retreats.



The convent dining room, currently used as a gathering space for parish ministries, committees, events and retreats.



One of two hallways for the 14 bedrooms in the convent. The bedrooms are currently used as offices, conference rooms, meeting space and storage.



In 1986 the Benedictine Sisters, who had served the parish since 1983, moved from the convent to this Haines Street home adjacent to parish property. The convent was then converted into a parish center with offices and meeting areas.



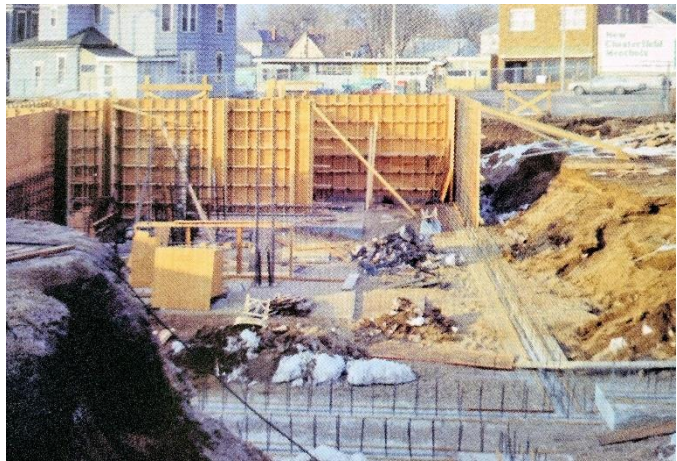
The Rosary Garden in the courtyard on the south side of the former convent. It will be relocated to a suitable location in 2025 when the construction of the new parish center is completed.

St. Joseph Church (1968)

With the old 1904 church building in a state of disrepair, and the parish in need of a larger church, the decision was made to replace it with a modern facility. In 1966 the old church building was razed to make room for the new church on the same site. While the new church was under construction, liturgies were celebrated in the school gymnasium.

When the time capsule was removed from the 1904 cornerstone it was found to be a box made of wood and badly decomposed. There was very little in the box: a 1901 quarter, a 1900 dime and a copy of the Pekin Daily Times.

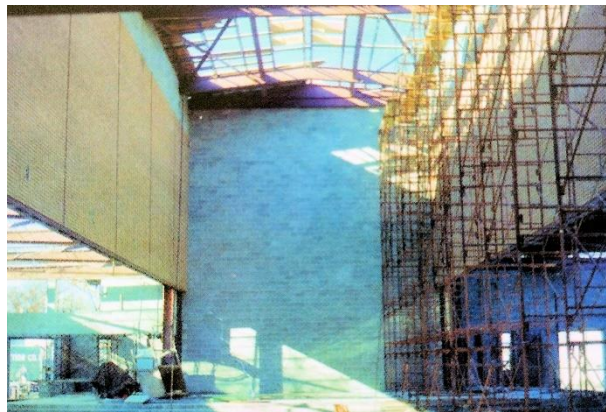
Unfortunately the paper on which that day's Times was printed was so fragile that not one story could be read.



Looking north towards Broadway and Court Streets in 1967, the excavation has been completed, the footings poured and the foundation forms are going up on the new St. Joseph Church.



A view from Seventh Street looking through the front doors.



Looking towards the front of the church. The skylights frames above the sanctuary are in place.



Looking southeast from Broadway Street.



The new church and rectory were completed in 1968 with a contractual cost of \$716,735. An additional \$100,000 was spent on furnishings and fixtures.



The dedication Mass was celebrated on Sunday, September 15, 1968.

The church was designed in a Modernist/Contemporary style by A.F. and Arthur Stauder from St. Louis, Missouri. (See more information on the Stauders in Section Two.) It was built with a capacity of 1,200 people, but that has been reduced due to recent modifications. The general contractor was O. Frank Heinz of Peoria. The plumbing was installed by E. F. Schepler and Sons of Pekin, and the electrical contractor was Schwartz Electric of Pekin.



Bedford stone, brick, and concrete were blended into an imposing structure. The exterior is white Bedford stone (limestone from Southern Indiana, also known as Indiana Limestone or Salem Limestone) with polished greenstone trim from Virginia.

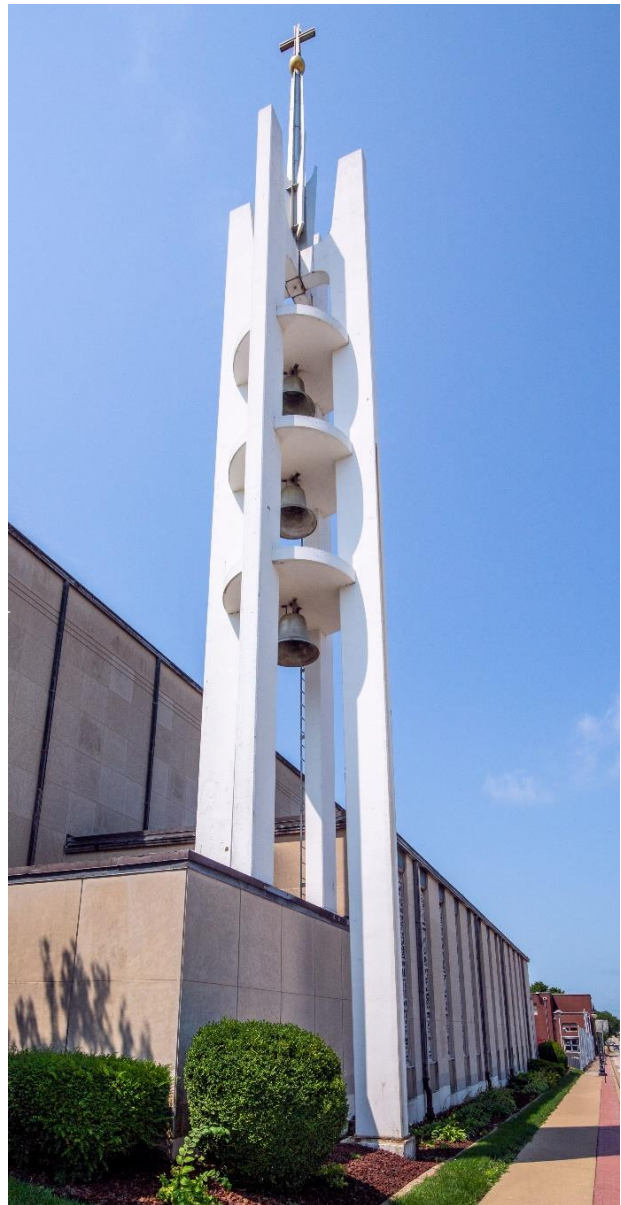


The dominant feature of the church is the faceted glass window over the main entrance on Seventh Street. It depicts the "Flight into Egypt." Notice the church building is silhouetted in the lower part of the glass panel next to St. Joseph's right shoulder.

The original plans called for the installation of the 1904 church bell in the 70-foot precast concrete bell tower. Instead, simulated bells in the tower are backed by the sounds of real bells via an electronic bell system.



Tying the new church to the past, the 1904 bell was prominently displayed near the main church entrance. The 1904 bell will be relocated to an appropriate location after the 2025 completion of the parish center addition.



The bell tower dominates the Broadway Street / Court Street intersection. The chimes can be heard throughout the neighborhood and downtown Pekin.

With 25 rows of pews divided into four sections, the church was built with a capacity of 1,200 people. In 2013 the last three rows of pews in the two middle sections were removed to make room for a new stairway and lift to the choir loft.

Originally, the church organ was located in the first few rows of the middle-left section of pews, with amplified sound coming from both the grills in the balcony and speakers over the sanctuary and nave. In the 1980s the balcony was remodeled into a choir loft and the organ was relocated there. The shorter pews, which created space for the organ in the front of the left middle section, were switched with the pews in the front of far left section to create an accessible seating area.

Faux pipes were installed on the back wall of the sanctuary to hide speakers for the organ. Faux pipes were also installed in the choir loft to hide speakers.



Fr. Michael A. Coffey, Pastor of St. Joseph Church since 1948, stands in the balcony overlooking the new church shortly before the 1968 dedication. Note the organ located in the front of the middle left section of pews.



The design of the sanctuary used modern adaptations based on the liturgical changes made by the Second Vatican Council. The altar, with a 2-ton travertine Italian marble top, faces the people.



The large sanctuary is open and without communion railings. The original red wool carpet imported from Italy covered the raised sanctuary and blended easily into the aisles of the church. The carpet beautifully withstood over 50 years of use before it needed to be replaced. Note the faux organ pipes on the sanctuary wall that were added in the mid-1980s. Photo taken in 2016.



The crucifix hanging above the sedilia in 1968.

Facing the altar of sacrifice from the nave, liturgy attendees see a large oak crucifix with a Corpus of linden wood carved in Italy. Originally, there was a sedilia under the crucifix centered behind the altar. A sedilia is an ornate bench used during Mass for the officiating priest and his assistants.

By 1972 the sedilia had been replaced with a single presider's chair. Two smaller chairs to the right and left of the presider's chair were for the altar servers. Two additional bench type chairs were on either side of the server's chairs.

The current sanctuary furniture, including the Ambo, Cantor's podium, presider and deacon chairs and the credence tables, were all designed and built by parishioner Mark Smith

when Father Timothy Nolan was pastor.



Lector's bench and credence table.



Presider and deacon chairs.

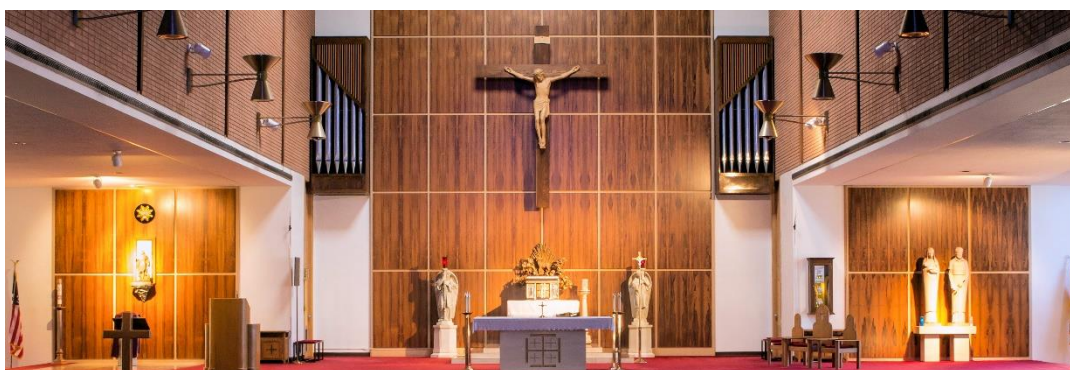
In 1968 the Altar of Reposition for the Blessed Sacrament was located on the left side of the sanctuary. In the late 1990s it was moved to the center of the sanctuary under the large crucifix. The presider and deacon chairs were moved to the right side of the sanctuary and the baptismal font was moved to the left side of the sanctuary.

The lamb sculpture behind and above the tabernacle was a gift from the Augustinians who served the parish from 1977 through the late 1980s.

The large facing wall of the sanctuary is covered in Brazilian rosewood paneling. Gold acoustical tile in the towering ceiling conceals a 5-ft catwalk.



The tabernacle sits on the altar of Reposition for the Blessed Sacrament.



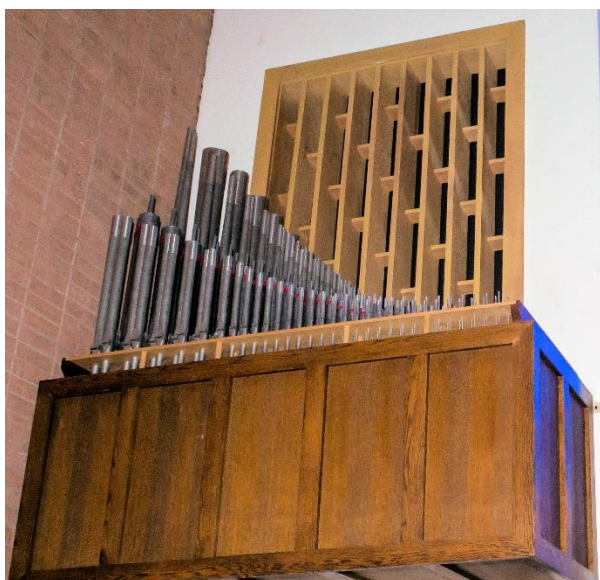
The baptismal font, which now stands on the left side of the sanctuary, was originally in the circular alcove in the main vestibule of the church. The marble font honors a former assistant, Father Sylvester Nogai.



On the right side of the sanctuary are the marble statues of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph.



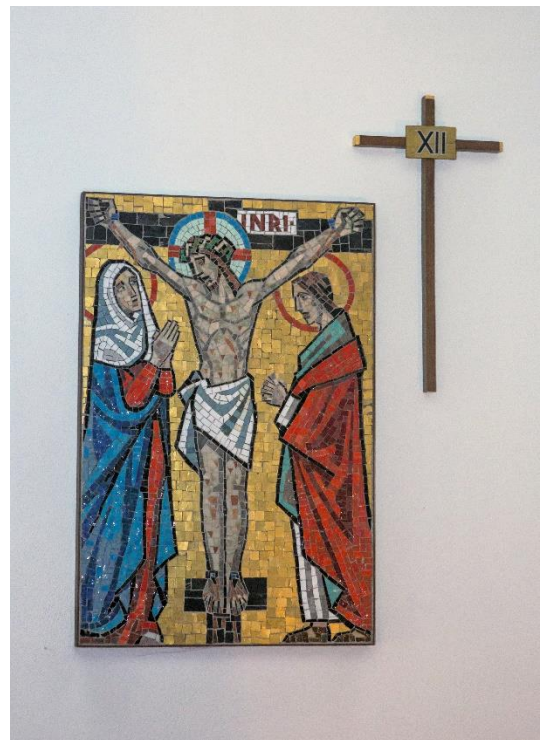
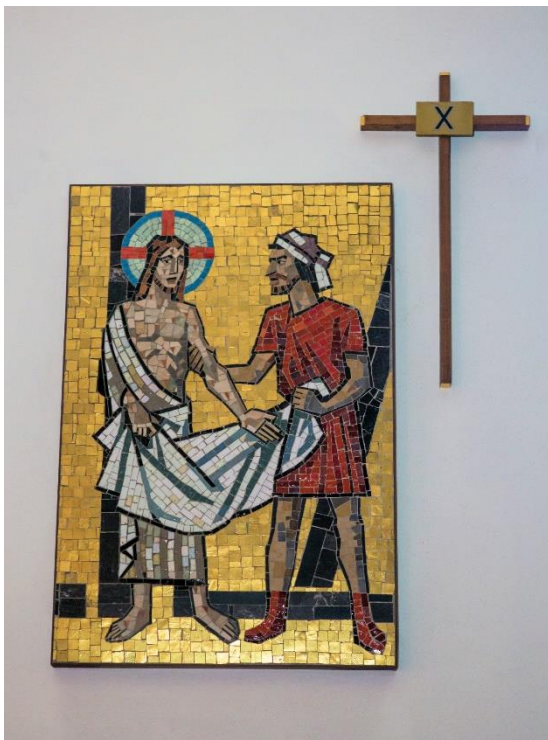
The holy water fonts are made of light-veined marble, matching the marble used in the sanctuary lamp.



A set of faux organ pipes hang on the choir loft back wall.



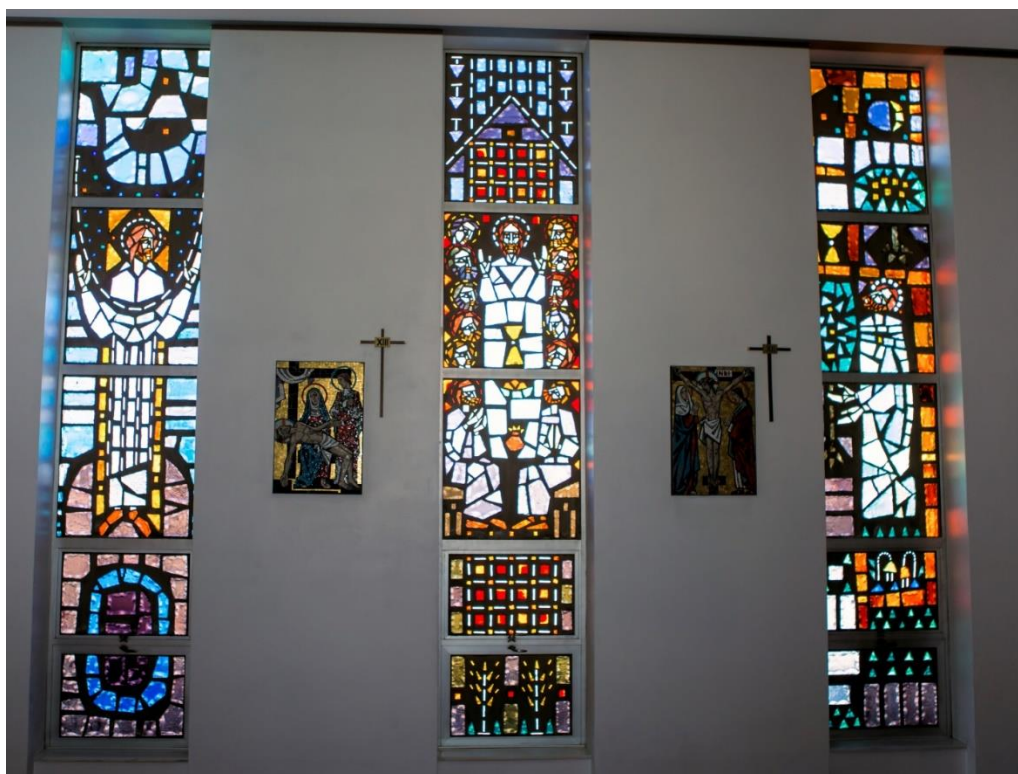
Along the south wall is an entrance to the attached rectory and three confessionals. The church pews are constructed of one-piece dark oak. Poured plastic floors are under the pews and in the west entrances.



Along the north wall are the 24-carat gold mosaic Stations of the Cross from Germany.



The north wall also contains thirteen narrow windows of imported facet glass from France and Germany. The scenes depicted in these windows are: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation, and events in the life of Our Lord – workshop scene with St. Joseph, Baptism in the Jordan, Jesus as a fisherman, Jesus as sower, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, entry into Jerusalem, Agony in the garden, the Last Supper and the Resurrection.



Careful observers will note the Agony in the Garden and the Last Supper were not installed in the correct chronological order.



The hourglass shaped sconces on the upper brick walls of the nave are both lights (upper) and loudspeakers (lower).

The main vestibule of the church has seen significant changes since 1968. As designed, the space immediately to the right of the main entrance was planned for the women's bathroom, the mother's chapel, and a small vestibule for an entrance off Broadway Street. The original plans also called for a large balcony with a cast bronze rail topped with mahogany. But the plan did not provide access to the balcony. The balcony was not intended for seating, but rather, to allow an unobstructed view of the *Flight into Egypt* faceted glass window.



The right side of the main vestibule now includes a spiral staircase, mother's chapel and women's bathroom.

The plans were changed early during the construction project. The Broadway entrance was eliminated and the small vestibule provided the space for the women's bathroom. A spiral staircase was then installed in the space formerly designated for the women's bathroom. Those changes added \$3,402 to the original construction costs.



From left to right, the mother's chapel behind the glass, the door to the spiral staircase, and the main vestibule.



To the left of the main entrance is the Sacred Heart Shrine. It is in the area where the baptismal font originally stood.

Originally the alcove to the left of the main entrance was the baptistery, with its marble font illuminated from above by a skylight. Teak wood panels line the curved walls of the space. The font was moved to the left side of the sanctuary in the late 1990s.

The circular alcove in the main vestibule is now the Sacred Heart Shrine. The Sacred Heart statue originally stood near the entrance to the mother's chapel where the Divine Mercy painting is now located. The statue serves as a connection with the parishioners of Sacred Heart Church, which was destroyed by fire in 1930. Sacred Heart Parish merged with St. Joseph Parish in 1938.



The Sacred Heart statue

The adjoining rectory was built along the south side of the church. It includes offices, a conference room, kitchen, dining room, bedrooms for two guests and suites for three priests and a housekeeper.

The rectory basement, with two rooms separated by a divider, is equipped with a small kitchen area and could be used for meetings or events. The utility room is in the basement under the sacristy.



New Parish Center

The St. Joseph Parish began talking about replacing the existing parish center in 2004. A conceptual drawing was made, but the project sat idle for years. In 2015 Fr. Michael Andrejek, Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, appointed a committee to evaluate the need for a new parish center and the associated costs. The committee concluded the existing parish center, built in 1962, no longer met the needs of the parish, was not energy efficient, and was cost-prohibitive to remodel or upgrade.

The committee identified several potential sites for the new parish center. After numerous meetings with the City of Pekin City Council, Zoning Board of Appeals, city staff, neighbors and parishioners, the committee recommended building the addition in the cul-de-sac in front of the church.

The new parish center will be nearly 10,000 square feet and include offices, a gathering space that seats 160, a commercial kitchen, and a large foyer that will serve as the entrance to the church. After the new building is completed, the existing building will be razed and replaced with parking and green space.

After a successful fundraising campaign, construction began on the nearly \$4.5 million project on September 23, 2024. The building was designed by Borkholder Buildings and Supply from Indiana. CAD Construction, Inc. from Tremont is the general contractor.



A conceptual drawing of the St. Joseph parish center addition. The view is from the intersection of Seventh and St. Joseph Place.



A conceptual drawing of the St. Joseph parish center addition. The view is looking southwest from Broadway Street.

Architecture

A.F. and Arthur Stauder

In 1968, a new St. Joseph Church was dedicated in Pekin, replacing the 1904 Gothic Revival church on the corner of Seventh and Broadway Streets. The new church was designed in Mid-Century Modern style by architects A.F. and Arthur Stauder. Since 1890 the Stauder family has provided architectural services in St. Louis and surrounding communities.

Over the years, the Stauders were recognized for their excellent institutional design work, especially for the Roman Catholic Church. The Stauders were devout Catholics. A priest, a brother and a nun were among the descendants of Joseph Stauder, the patriarch of the architectural family.

Their most productive period was between 1921 and 1967. Adolph F. Stauder (Joseph's son) and Arthur (Adolph's son) were the creative force during this time. Church design, especially Catholic Church design, became the Stauder specialty.

During that 46 year span the Stauders created plans for seven major churches in the city of St. Louis, six churches in St. Louis County, and 10 churches in Illinois and Missouri, including St. Joseph Church in Pekin.

A typical Stauder-designed church exhibited an uneven or gabled roof, an attached or free-standing bell tower, narrow or large vertical windows, a contrast of low and tall volumes, a prominent main entrance area and a vaulted ceiling.

The 1968 St. Joseph Church includes many features and design elements found in other Stauder church projects.

St. Gabriel the Archangel Church 4711 Tamm Avenue, St. Louis, MO

At first glance, St. Gabriel the Archangel's art deco design seems to have no similarities to St. Joseph Church in Pekin. Built in 1950, St. Gabriel has angular masses of cut limestone and a towering bell tower.

However, within the church one of the Stauder design elements is obvious. The seating layout places two sections of pews under a lower ceiling on either side of the much higher central nave. Also, the sanctuary rises higher than the pews on a series of terraced platforms.



St. Gabriel the Archangel Church.



Interior of St. Gabriel the Archangel Church.

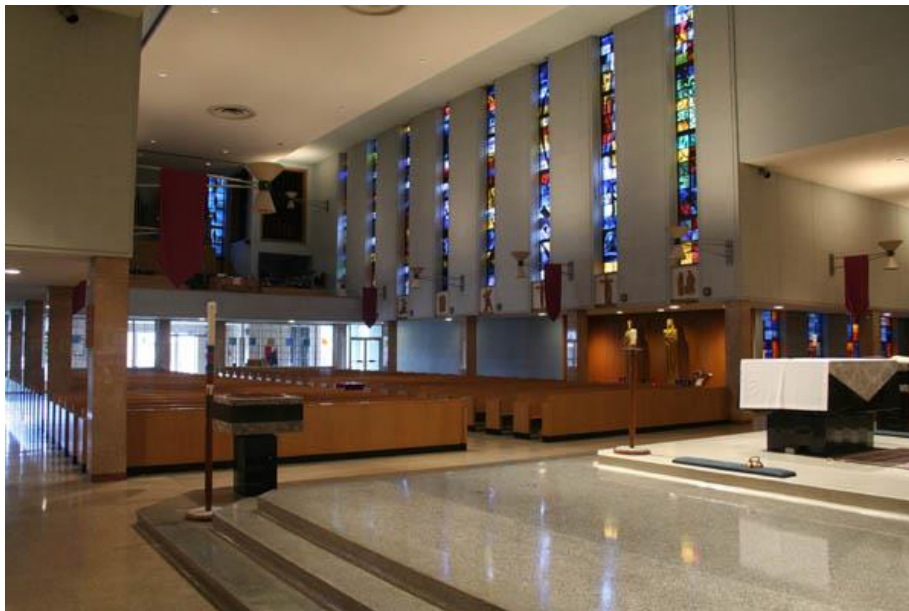
St. Joan of Arc Church, 5800 Oleatha Avenue, St. Louis, MO

Finished in 1958, St. Joan of Arc Church is a Mid-Century Modern design. A low gabled roof covers the church and to the right is a free-standing bell tower topped with a cross.

The interior features a high central nave with wall sconces that are nearly identical to those found at Pekin's St. Joseph Church. Long narrow windows on the church side walls feature modernist stained glass. The altar is positioned at the center of a rising terraced sanctuary.



St. Joan of Arc Church.



Interior of St. Joan of Arc Church.

St. Stephen Protomartyr Church, 3949 Wilmington Ave, St. Louis., MO

Built in 1963, the dramatically descending slate tile roof of St. Stephen Protomartyr Church is very striking. The interior space is equally angular and full of pyramidal shapes.

The exterior and interior share no design elements with St. Joseph Church in Pekin. However, St. Stephen's free-standing, open-framed, concrete bell tower provided the model for future Stauder projects, including St. Joseph Church in Pekin.



Bell tower at St. Stephen Protomartyr Church.

Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, 341 E. Lockwood Avenue, Webster Groves, MO

In 1962, Holy Redeemer Catholic Parish hired the Stauder firm to design a new church. It was the first church in the St. Louis Diocese designed to take advantage of the liturgical changes made by the Second Vatican Council.

Parishioners of St. Joseph and Holy Redeemer will do a double-take if they ever drive past the other church. It's obvious the St. Joseph Church, dedicated in 1968, was designed by A.F and Arthur Stauder with only slight modifications to their Holy Redeemer plans.

The Holy Redeemer Church is a simple box design with a slightly indented front entrance and an exterior covered in limestone and glass. Above the front church entrance is a large six-panel vertical window which extends up to the low gabled roof. The exterior church side walls consist of limestone panels and framed stain glass windows running to the ceiling.

To the right of the church stands an open, unattached bell tower supported by four vertical piers with bells and pulley wheels visible at each of the three levels.

Inside, the space is lit by stained glass on the lower side walls and above the entrance. Double-cone lamp sconces hang from the brick upper walls of the central nave. The back wall of the sanctuary is covered with framed wood panels.



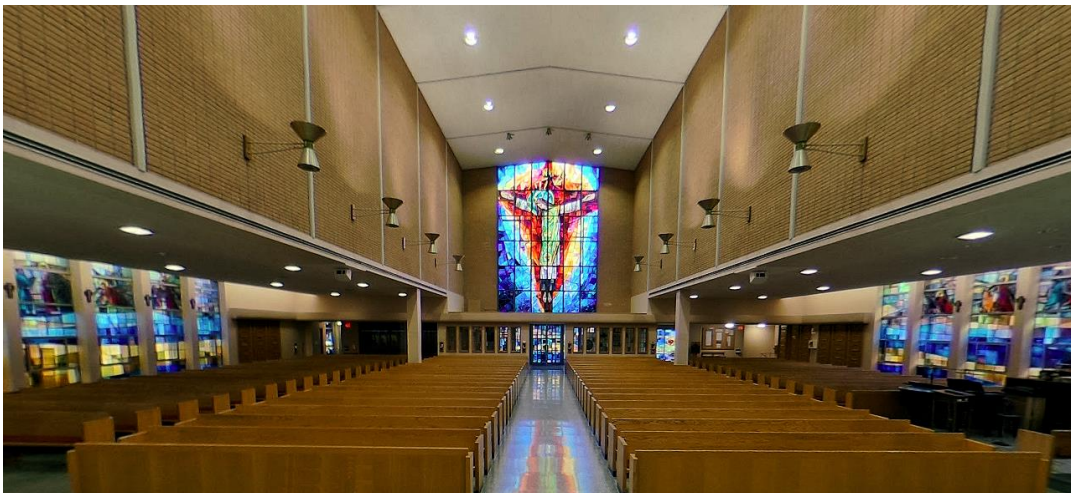
Holy Redeemer Church main entrance is nearly identical to St. Joseph Church.



Holy Redeemer Church signage is identical to St. Joseph Church.



Holy Redeemer bell tower.



Holy Redeemer Church view towards the back of the nave. There is a different stained glass window and a balcony rather than a choir loft. Otherwise, it looks very similar to St. Joseph Church.

Common Features in Stauder Designed Churches

The seating layout places two sections of pews under a lower ceiling on either side of the much higher central nave. The sanctuary rises higher than the pews on a series of terraced platforms. Also notice the double-cone lamp sconces hanging from the brick upper walls of the central nave in three of the churches.



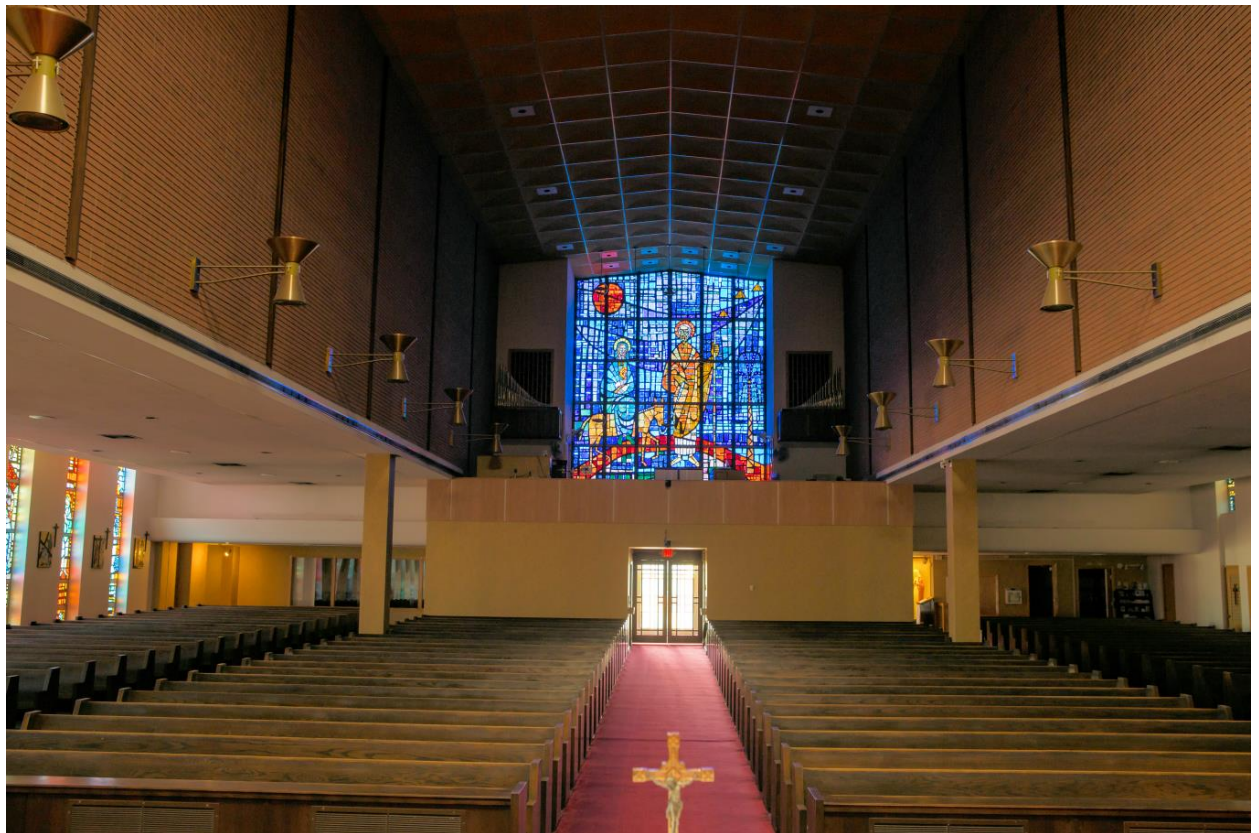
St. Gabriel the Archangel Church.



St. Joan of Arc Church.



Holy Redeemer Church.



St. Joseph Church.

A free-standing bell tower to the right of the church was a common Stauder feature. The Mid-Century Modern designs were a simple box design with an impressive window or art feature extending up to the low gabled roof above the main entrance.



St. Joan of Arc Church.



St. Stephen Protomartyr Church.

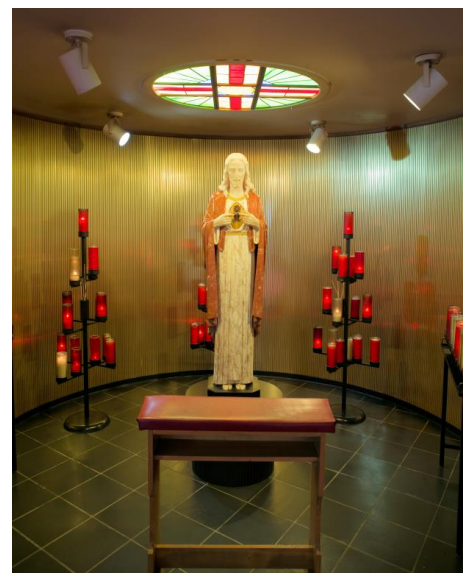
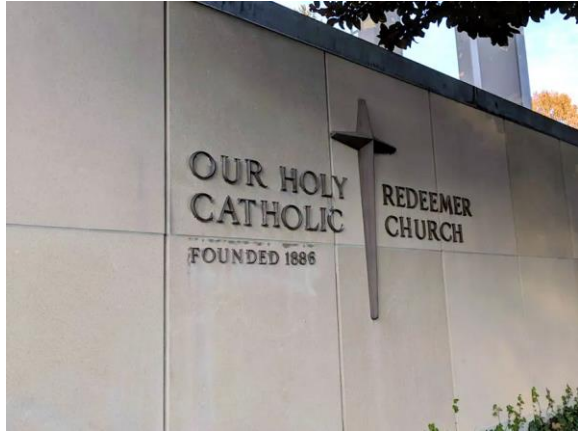


Holy Redeemer Church.



St. Joseph Church.

As St. Joseph Church is the younger sibling of Holy Redeemer, they share many additional strikingly similar features, including the exterior signage to the right of the main entrance, the Baptistry in the vestibule to the left of the main entrance, and the wood paneling behind the altar.



Thanks to: Bill Fleming, Ann Hart, Bill Homel, Jared Olar, Tina Sondag, and Dcn. Mark Wilder for writing, photography, editing, and research assistance.

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