

## Entering St. Michael's

The visitor to the City of Grand Forks is first made aware of St. Michael's through the tall bronze topped bell towers which are visible from a considerable distance and which



direct people to come to the church. The structure is basically Romanesque in design although it incorporates other styles. The Romanesque style is carried in the rounded arches of the windows and doors and the barrel vaults of the nave. The bell towers do not rise in spires but are topped with bronze plated saucer cupolas associated with a style called German Renaissance. The cupolas are asymmetric octagons with slimmer corner sections. These cupolas are characteristic of bell towers common to the Alpine regions of Europe. (Churches with a similar façade, twin bell towers and similarly rounded cupolas are the Abbey in Einsiedeln Switzerland, the Abbey at St. Gallens in Switzerland, and the Cathedral Church in Salzburg Austria.) The bells have been in the towers since 1912. The four bells were donated by Mr. and Mrs. M.F. Murphy and family. As was customary in early times, the

church bells were blessed and given names and assigned certain tasks. The bells at St. Michael's are inscribed with their names and purposes:

### **Michael**

I praise the true God  
I call the people  
I convene the clergy

### **Mary**

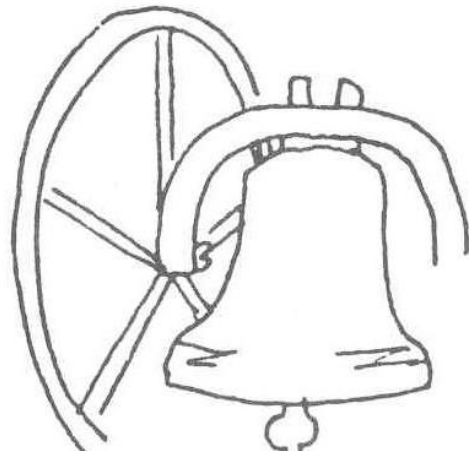
I bewail the dead  
I dispel pestilence  
I grace the festival

### **Margaret**

I arouse the slothful  
I scatter the winds  
I appease the revengeful

### **Louis**

I bemoan the burial  
I abate the lightening  
I announce the Sabbath



St. Michael's main entrance is at the east. Christ, the Light of the World has often been described as coming with the Eternal Dawn and that the sunrise will first be seen in the east. The tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon had their entrance from the east. The large wheel window on St. Michael's eastern wall is so situated that the early morning sun directs its warm rays to the altar when mass is celebrated. When Christ finally comes, His Light will stream through the great window and through the doors, enlightening all who dwell within.



Approaching from the east, the person of faith mounts the main steps. Twelve steps bring one to the threshold of the church. The twelve stone steps are like the twelve stones that Joshua set near the Jordan as a reminder of the passage of the twelve tribes of Israel and the Ark of the Covenant into the promised land (Joshua 4: 2-5). One mounts the main steps as one would ascend a mountain. Historically, most sacred events happen on elevated places; the local church is God's holy mountain. Leaving behind the profane, the pilgrim proceeds, therefore, through several stages of ascent and pilgrimage.

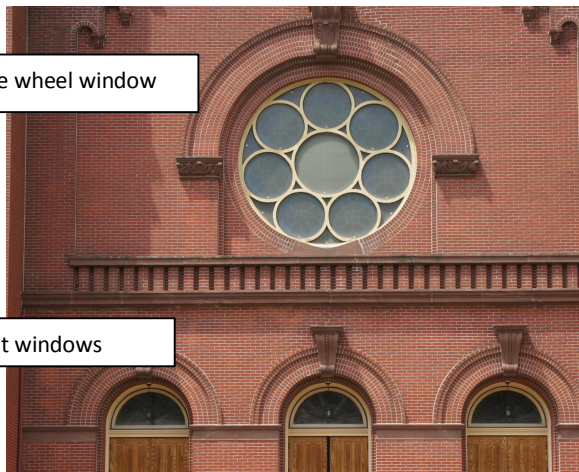


The worshiper passed through one of three main doors. Each door is surmounted by a fanlight window (a semi-circular window with radiating glazing bars suggesting the shape of an open fan). And surmounting each door are corbels which may have been planned as pedestals for statuary. Passing through the door is a sign of an initiation and a consecration. It means to leave behind the past and enter a new life. This action also reflects a symbolic acceptance of Christ. "I am the door and anyone who enters through me will find salvation." (John 10:9). In 1999, the step foundations were rebuilt and a new set of oak doors were installed, retaining the materials and style of the original doors. St. Michael's could thus comply with the requirements of its designation as a National Historic Landmark (Designation in 1988). The left

door was unsealed on Christmas Eve of 1999 to open the Jubilee Year of 2000.

Passing through St. Michael's large exterior doors, the worshiper enters the narthex or entryway which was the place in early Christian churches where the catechumens or candidates for baptism stood during the service. The entryway or in the early history of the church was, in fact, the location of the parish baptismal font. This "womb of the church" gave birth to new members and they were able to move thereafter into the church nave and join their fellow Christians in receiving the Eucharist.

Since church members were often baptized at the church entrance, a miniature baptismal font containing holy water and modeled on the eight sided baptismal font in the church is located at each of the entrances to the church. By putting water on one's forehead and praying "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," a Catholic is reminded of their own baptism and reaffirms the commitments that come with baptism.



Large wheel window

Fanlight windows

