

St. Michael's Church

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Founded in 1872 to serve French-Indian and pioneer white families, St. Michael's stands as the mother church for an area which embraced what is now Grand Forks, Walsh, Traill, Nelson and Steele counties in North Dakota; and also Polk and Red Lake counties in Minnesota.



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This structure, built in 1909, is the fifth building to serve as St. Michael's parish home. Renovated in 1985, and repainted in 2001, its present décor resembles, in many ways, that of the original.

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In 1988, the U.S. Department of Interior officially enrolled St. Michael's Church in the National Register of Historic Places.

Information is taken from Theodore Pedeliski's "A Guided Tour: 2001" This document was revised to fit current times and locations of items described.

A Tour of St. Michael's Church

By: Theodore Pedeliski

Introduction

Entering St. Michael's Church, the mother church of the region, the visitor is struck with a sense of splendor, a scene that transcends the routine of daily life. St. Michael's is a structure of grand proportions and noble design; it evokes a special sense of the sacred, a recognition that is a House of God. This is a feeling people of many generations would recognize; it takes us back to the days of the temple in Jerusalem. It takes us back to the time of the early church. Indeed, early liturgies called the church building "terribilis locis" (awesome place). It was the aula Dei (the court of God) and the porta caeli or gateway to heaven.

When Prince Vladimir of the Ukraine in the 10th Century was investigating various religions which might be suitable for his subjects, he sent envoys to Constantinople to meet with members of the Eastern Church. These envoys were awed by the solemnity and spiritual atmosphere of the Christian churches there. "We do not know if we were on earth or in heaven – describe it, we cannot – we know only that it is there that God dwells among men."

God is present everywhere in His creation, but the special surroundings – the images, the symbols, and visual history of the life of the church since its foundation by Christ make God's presence an even more vivid reality. As will be seen, at St. Michael's, some images are pictorial representations from events covered in Scripture; other images communicate our most deeply held beliefs and ideals. The church becomes a "catechism in wood and stone." These images not only instruct but also invite the viewer to prayer and adoration. But the adoration is not to the objects of glass or stone or wood. As St. Gregory noted, "it is one thing to adore a picture, and another by means of an image to learn what should be adored."

In this booklet we will take you on a tour of St. Michael's describing its various features. Some elements of the structure date back to the first centuries (The Alpha and the Omega, the altar, the baptismal font). Some dated back to the 4th and 5th centuries (incense, the Easter candle, the pulpit or ambo). Other elements can be traced to the time of Charlemagne (holy water fonts, organs, altar steps). Several elements like the unmoveable pews date only to the 19th and 20th centuries. The church, as House of God, therefore presents an unfolding of salvation history rich in meaning and sacred in purpose.