

Above the confessionals are the first statues removed in the 1960s. The eight rectangular paintings in the center of the dome, represent eight privileged marks of a basilica.

The eight angel paintings surrounding the Eastern European crystal window in the center of the dome, represent eight of the nine divisions of the angels. The ninth, the archangels are painted on the ceiling above the Sanctuary. The eight roundels depict Prophets from the Old Testament who foretold the coming of the Messiah. The eight lunettes contain paintings of Evangelists, Apostles and Doctors of the Church. The eight rectangular paintings in the drum of the dome depict the seven Sacraments and the Adoration of the Magi. Between these paintings are the Madonna windows depicting Eastern European shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The inscription at the base of the dome in Old Polish, is from 1 Kings 9:3 “I consecrate this house you have built; I place my name here forever, my eyes and my heart will be here for all time.”

The painting above the west exit is General Thaddeus Kosciuszko leading Polish peasants into battle against Russian invaders.

The Inner Dome

The seven altarpieces surrounding the Baroque canopy crystal window in the center of the church, represent eight of the nine divisions of the angels. The ninth, the archangels are painted on the ceiling above the Sanctuary. The eight roundels depict Prophets from the Old Testament who foretold the coming of the Messiah. The eight lunettes contain paintings of Evangelists, Apostles and Doctors of the Church. The eight rectangular paintings in the drum of the dome depict the seven Sacraments and the Adoration of the Magi. Between these paintings are the Madonna windows depicting Eastern European shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The inscription at the base of the dome in Old Polish, is from 1 Kings 9:3 “I consecrate this house you have built; I place my name here forever, my eyes and my heart will be here for all time.”

The St. Francis Paintings in the four corners just below the dome, are eight lunette paintings portraying the mystical life of St. Francis of Assisi.

The Organ utilizes a compilation of pipes from the original Basilica. The organ area and numerous others. It has 46 ranks of pipes ranging from the size of a pencil to over 16 feet long.

The Rose Window above the Organ Gallery, surrounding the “ever-watchful eye of God”. The windows are of the four Evangelists: (clockwise from top) St. John (eagle), St. Matthew (man), St. Mark (lion), and St. Luke (ox).

The Annunciation Altar holds a painted image of Our Lady of Częstochowa. The mural above is St. Dominus and St. Catherine with the Blessed Virgin. To the left of the altar is a statue of St. Anthony of Padua. The ambrelline (umbrella), evocative of those carried over imperial and papal authorities, is one of the privileged marks of a basilica.

The St. Joseph Altar survived the fire of the church. The statue of St. Joseph is flanked by St. Peter (right) and St. Paul. The death of St. Joseph is depicted in the mural above the altar.

The Need for Forgiveness

The Papal Chair at the top is the ombrellino (umbrella) in red and gold. The motto, “Ut omnes unum sint” (that all might be one). The division of the Atrium spoils the bishop’s aisle. In the top center is the papal insignia of the tiara and crossed keys of St. Peter to signify our affiliation as a minor basilica with the See of Peter. The curvaturata represents the prosperity of the New World (taken from the Last Supper) at the date of Wisconsin. On the right is the crowned heart of young St. Joseph. The crosses on the bottom are derived from the coat of arms of the Franciscan Order.
A Landmark is Born

Welcome to the Basilica of St. Josaphat. This church and parish are named for St. Josaphat, an Archbishop in the Kingdom of Poland in the early 1600s. The parish was founded in 1886, and its first home was a modest building that burned to the ground in 1889. The parish built a second church but it was too small for the growing congregation of 12,000 parishioners.

Father Wilhelm Grutza, the pastor, hired a German-born architect named Erhard Brielmaier to design what is, in essence, a smaller version of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Both churches have a cross-shaped floor plan with a huge central dome.

When the plans were nearly complete, Fr. Grutza learned that the U.S. Post Office and Custom House in Chicago was being razed and he purchased it for $20,000. The building was dismantled and the salvaged materials were loaded on 500 railroad flatcars and brought to Milwaukee. They were stockpiled in a vacant lot across the street.

Conventual Franciscans took over administration of the parish and the debt was retired in 1910, due to decades of wear, tear and neglect, the Basilica building was in danger of shutting its doors forever. A small group of local business leaders responded to this threat with urgent determination, rallying around the Basilica in an effort to restore it to its original glory. The St. Josaphat Basilica Foundation was born. Since that time, the Foundation has achieved tremendous results, investing more than $18,000,000 in its mission to restore and preserve the Basilica for the community. The Foundation builds awareness of the Basilica as an architectural landmark, center for arts and culture, home to a rich history, center of spirituality and an international visitor destination.

The St. Josaphat Basilica Foundation is a chartered non-profit, non-sectarian Wisconsin organization. Gifts to the Foundation ensure the Basilica continues to inspire everyone with its history, beauty and tranquility for years to come.

What is a basilica?

In ancient Rome, a basilica was an architectural description of a public hall that formed a gathering point in every Roman city for the purpose of transacting business. It was usually a large rectangle hall with a central nave supported internally with double colonnades and a semi-circular apse at one end. Light came from the clerestory, the row of windows above the colonnades.

After the Roman Empire became officially Christian, the buildings were used as the first churches, and the term came to specifically refer to a large and important church that has been given special ceremonial status by the Pope.

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The Basilica of St. Josaphat has been owned and administered by the Conventual Franciscans since 1910. The Basilica is home to numerous Franciscan Ministries including a parish and school, a weekly food pantry, and other ministries of outreach. Through the years, the Franciscans have maintained an active presence and a spiritual home for numerous members of the local community and beyond.

The Conventual Franciscans

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Mass and Reconciliation Schedule

Celebration of Eucharist

Weekends: Saturday at 4:30pm
Sunday at 8:00am, 10:00am, and 12:00pm

Weekdays: Monday—Friday at 7:00am
Wednesday at 12:00pm
Saturday at 8:00am

Eucharistic Adoration

Wednesdays: Following the 12:00pm Mass

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Weekdays: Following morning Mass

St. Josaphat Basilica Foundation

Corner of 6th St. and Lincoln Ave.

Visit: Mon – Fri & Sat
Visitors Center open Monday through Saturday, 9:00am–4:00pm

For more information, 414.902.3523 or TheBasilica.org

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