The Grand Pulpit, carved from white Italian marble, contains the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd and the four evangelists: St. Matthew (man), St. Mark (lion), St. Luke (ox), and St. John (eagle). The statues between the images, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Our Lady of Częstochowa, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Our Lady of Fatima, and St. Stanislaus Kostka, are reliefs of (L to R) Archbishop Katzer, Pope John Paul II, and Cardinal Martinelli, the latter in the center. The large window is the Coat of Arms of the Basilica, which contains the image of the Redeemer, the keys of St. Peter to signify our affiliation as a minor basilica with the See of Rome, and the coat of arms of the state of Wisconsin.) On the right is the wounded heart of St. John the Baptist, with the keys of St. Peter to signify our affiliation as a minor basilica with the See of Rome. The division of the shield signifies the privilege of a basilica.

The painting above the east exo depicts one of the great figures of Polish history, Rev. Peter Skarga, a 17th-century Jesuit, preaching before the Polish royal court.

On the east confessional are bronze bas-reliefs of The Need for Forgiveness (Septuaginta septies; Seventy-seven verses) and The Lost Sheep (Salvare quod perierat; Saving what had been lost.)

Above the doors is a painted image of Our Lady of Częstochowa (eagle). The statues between the images, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Anthony of Padua, are reliefs of (L to R) Archbishop Katzer, Pope John Paul II, and Cardinal Martinelli, the latter in the center. The large window is the Coat of Arms of the Basilica, which contains the image of the Redeemer, the keys of St. Peter to signify our affiliation as a minor basilica with the See of Rome, and the coat of arms of the state of Wisconsin.) On the right is the wounded heart of St. John the Baptist, with the keys of St. Peter to signify our affiliation as a minor basilica with the See of Rome. The division of the shield signifies the privilege of a basilica.

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What is a basilica?

In ancient Rome, basilica was an architectural description of the public hall that formed a gathering point in every Roman city for the purpose of transacting business. It was usually a large rectangular hall with a central nave supported internally with double colonnades and a semicircular 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.

The present church is not what the Post Office and Custom House looked like. Architect Erhard Brielmaier changed his plans to include the salvaged materials, but his design remained the 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 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 to stockpile in a vacant lot across the street.

The Conventual Franciscans

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.

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.

Ground was broken in 1896 and the church was finished in 1901. At the time of completion, the only building in the country with a larger dome was the United States Capitol. Cost overruns put the parish in major debt. The Archdiocese searched for an order of priests that would take over the administration and debt of the parish. In 1910, the Conventual Franciscans took over administration of the parish and the debt was retired in 1925.

With the debt gone, plans were made to finish the interior. The church wasn’t exactly an empty shell when it opened. The stained-glass windows were in, imported from Innsbruck, Austria. The main altar was here. But most of the building was a blank canvas, painted alabaster white. The parish hired a Roman artist, Gonippo Raggi, in 1926. His crew spent two years working on the interior. They painted the oil murals, finished the ornamental plasterwork, and painted the columns to resemble marble. In 1929, after the interior work was finished, the Franciscans petitioned Pope Pius XI to declare St. Josaphat a basilica.

In the Catholic Church, basilica status is reserved for the largest, most beautiful, and most historically important churches. In 1925, St. Josaphat Church was named the third basilica in the United States. Today there are seventy-nine in this country. The Basilica of St. Josaphat is the largest church in Milwaukee, with a seating capacity of over 1,000 on the main floor, hundreds more can be accommodated in the galleries.

The present church is not what the Post Office and Custom House looked like. Architect Brielmaier changed his plans to include the salvaged materials, but his design remained faithful to the original model—the Vatican Basilica of St. Peter.

A Ministry of the Conventual Franciscans

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St. Josaphat Basilica Foundation

In 1993, due to decades of wear, tear and neglect, the Basilica building was in danger of shuttering 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.

Weekends: Saturdays: Following morning Mass, Vespers and Benediction at 5:30pm

Weekdays: Monday—Friday at 7:00am

Eucharistic Adoration

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Weekdays: Following morning Mass

Saturdays: 3:00pm

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Weekdays: Following morning Mass

Saturdays: 3:00pm

For more information, 414.902.3523 or TheBasilica.org

Welcome to the Basilica of St. Josaphat

A Ministry of the Conventual Franciscans

St. Josaphat Basilica Foundation

620 West Lincoln Avenue

Milwaukee, WI 53215

414.902.3524

info@thebasilicafoundation.org

www.thebasilicafoundation.org

The Basilica.org

TheBasilica.org

Visitor Guide and Tour

Visitors Center open Monday through Saturday, 9:00am–4:00pm

For more information, 414.902.3523 or TheBasilica.org

The Basilica of St. Josaphat

Corner of 6th St. and Lincoln Ave.

Office

2333 South 6th Street

Milwaukee, WI 53215

414.645.5623

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www.TheBasilica.org

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