

A WALKING TOUR OF

ST. JOHN BREBEUF CHURCH

1707 John Brebeuf Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba

St. John Brebeuf (1593-1649), known as the apostle to the Hurons, spent 16 years trying to bring Christianity to the people in the Georgian Bay area. Brebeuf and his companions were tortured and martyred by warring Iroquois. We celebrate his feast in Canada September 26.

The circular form of the exterior of our church was conceived to reflect the curved front of the apartment building on Lanark Street.

The baptistry and main altar are constructed of tyndal stone, quarried in Garson, Manitoba. The step down into the baptistry is symbolic of Christ going down into the Jordan river at his baptism.

The large picture behind the baptistry is a copy of a Murillo painting in Rome. It depicts Abraham and Isaac, the first recorded biblical sacrifice and points to the sacrifice of Jesus which is celebrated at the main altar.

The statues of St. Joseph and Mary were created by Viggo Rambusch of New York City. In the 1960's, Rambusch and Company were considered the best church interior designers and artists in North America.

Along the west wall, the Stations of the Cross are the work of Mr. John Daniel of the University of Manitoba School of Art. Professor Daniel, a Baptist, took 13 months to complete his assignment. The medium used was sculptured plaster of paris, which was painted to achieve an antique appearance. Some of the stations are fractured and come in two pieces. This was Professor Daniel's way of interpreting the great stress on Christ as He made His way to Calvary.

Above the choir pews is a tryptch (3 pieces) of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Designed by Robert Rambusch, it recalls one of the twelve promises given to St. Margaret Mary Alogue (1647-1690) to increase devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, "I will bless every place where a picture of my heart shall be set up and honored".

The chapel of the Blessed Sacrament to the right of the altar behind the wrought iron grill contains a very special tabernacle and mosaic. The tabernacle, where we receive the consecrated bread, the body and blood of Jesus, and mosaic were crafted in the studios of Franz Mayer and Company in Munich, Germany. The tabernacle is modeled after a ship in full sail. The ship is one of the earliest Christian symbols of the church. In medieval times, tabernacles were often made in the form of ships, hung from the ceiling. Cardinal Flahiff, the Archbishop of Winnipeg at the time

and a former professor of medieval history, suggested the design, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, guiding, leading, urging on the church, taking it on its journey to God.

The mosaic behind the tabernacle contains Venetian glass and several kinds of stone and marble from all over the world. The concept behind the mosaic is the story in the Book of Revelations of the four angels (Rev. 7:1;8). Father Joseph Driscoll, S.J., pastor at the time, substituted the faces of the four archbishops of Winnipeg. Clockwise, they are Gerald Murray, CSSR, George Cardinal Flahiff, Alfred A. Sinnott and Philip Francis Pocock.

To the right of the tabernacle are the relics of St. John Brebeuf and two of his companions. They are contained in the top of a monstrance from the former church of St. John the Evangelist in New York City.

In the archway just outside the chapel is a cast iron icon of the Last Supper. This was fabricated by Michael Cunningham of St. Catharine's, Ontario. The mold was composed of sand and molten iron was poured into it.

In the northwest corridor, a sketch of Mary, and another of the crowning of thorns by Caesri, a well known French artist, was presented to the parish by his wife after he died.

Further along the corridor, Father Driscoll, S.J. designed and created the hooked tapestry of Our Lady of the Wayside. The original painting was in a little shrine in a small church in Rome. St. Ignatius loved this simple picture and prayed often in that church. The Gesu Church of Rome now stands on the site of the original church.

In the construction of the church, a unique system was used for building the walls. Instead of using special forms to pour the concrete walls and then facing these with brick inside and out, a system was devised whereby the bricks were laid up to a given height on both sides of a wall, then concrete, along with reinforcing steel, was placed between the bricks. This method saved both time and expense.

The architects were Libling, Michner and Associates. The church construction was completed in October, 1965.