

## PROPOSED ST. JOSAPHAT R.C. CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT

### FINAL REPORT

The proposed St. Josaphat R.C. Church Historic District consists of the church, built in 1901, at 715 East Canfield, a sister's residence built in 1907, a rectory built in 1901, and a boiler house. It is located approximately two miles from downtown Detroit in what was formerly a residential Polish community now supplanted by an urban renewal area known as Medical Center Redevelopment Area. The Chrysler Freeway is directly to the east of the proposed district; new low-rise multi-unit housing surrounds the proposed district on its other three sides. A dramatic view of St. Josaphat's Church is seen while driving south on the Chrysler Freeway towards downtown Detroit.

**BOUNDARIES:** The boundaries of the proposed district are as shown on the attached map and are as follows:

*On the east, the Chrysler Service Drive;*

*On the south, the centerline of Canfield;*

*On the north, the centerline of St. Josaphat Alley (vacated);  
and*

*On the west, the west line of Lot 7 of C. Moran's Sub of C. Moran Farm (L3/P73).*

**HISTORY:** Polish immigrants from the Prussian dominated sectors of Poland began to migrate to Detroit in the 1850's, many of them settling on the east side. By 1870 there was a need for a Polish-speaking parish. St. Albertus Church, located on St. Aubin south of Canfield, was established in 1871 to address the spiritual needs of a growing Polish community. Two years later St. Casimir was founded on the west side. There is little known concerning the establishment in 1889 of St. Josaphat's Polish parish. This is accounted for by the fact that St. Josaphat, in its 91 year history, was a complete stranger to the type of turmoil which raged at St. Albertus from 1885-1888, and transferred to the Sweetest Heart of Mary congregation. Consequently, there was no bad news to report and no reason for reporters to visit the parish.

Unlike Sweetest Heart of Mary, St. Josaphat was not the child of discord but rather the result of a natural increase and shift in the population of Detroit; St. Josaphat was organized when St. Albertus could no longer absorb the steady influx of Polish immigrant families into its parish fold. When the Canfield-Hastings (I-75) area was sufficiently populated to maintain a parish of its own, the intersection of these two streets was chosen as the site for St. Josaphat Church.

It is more than speculation to put forward the idea that perhaps there was an ulterior motive for the founding of St. Josaphat west of the Grand Trunk Railroad Tracks, which run parallel and adjacent to Dequindre Avenue. There was only the schismatic Polish parish, Sacred (Sweetest) Heart of Mary. For want of another nearby house of worship, some of the Polish Roman Catholics in this neighborhood were laying aside whatever reservations they may have had about Sweetest Heart and joining its independent congregation. It was certainly to the advantage of the Detroit diocese to check this expansion in a westerly direction and siphon off prospective new parishioners.

Fr. Francis Dolot, present pastor of St. Josaphat, has pointed out that St. Josaphat is one of the original three Polish parishes of Detroit and that those three parishes tended to be organized around the areas of partitioned Poland from which their members came. The first Polish immigrants tended to be from Prussian Poland, and founded St. Albertus. Sweetest Heart of Mary, founded later, tended to be made up of immigrants from Austrian Poland. St. Josaphat, finally, had a congregation which emphasized roots in the sector of Poland ruled by Russia. This division of the geographic origins of parishioners explains, in part, the existence of three large Polish churches in near proximity along Canfield Avenue. All of their members were Polish, but groupings based on the sectors of partitioned Poland likely made it easier for strangers in a new land to share remembrances of home and regional ethnic traditions.

St. Josaphat parish was started in June of 1889. St. Josaphat (1580-1623), archbishop of Polotsk, was born in Vladimir. In 1604, he became a monk and was later ordained as a priest. In 1617 he became archbishop of Polotsk and began working toward the unification of the Byzantine Church with Rome. St. Josaphat was martyred in 1623 and canonized in 1867.

Bishop John Foley asked the Rev. Casimir Rochowski to organize a new parish in the area of Dequindre on Detroit's east side. Joseph Nowakowski, a member of the new parish, owned a sizable acreage of land on Fremont (now Canfield Street) and Hastings Streets and he charitably offered to donate 12 lots on Fremont for the new building.

The cornerstone was laid on October 6, 1889, and the church was dedicated on February 2, 1890. John Bergrin, building contractor, built a two-story structure with basement to house a church and school. The first floor was designated for a school and living quarters for the sisters, while the second floor became the church proper. The basement contained a steam heat furnace and four classrooms, the latter doubling as a meeting room for church societies.

The first pastor was Father Anthony Leks who lived some distance away from the parish at Canfield and St. Antoine. Financial trouble caused the resignation of Fr. Leks within a year of his appointment, and his replacement, Father Martin Mozejewski, resigned within a few months because of ill health. The parish's next pastor, Father John Razadkowski, oversaw its real growth. Under his pastorate the church grew until it numbered over 1,000 families.

Just two years after the arrival of Fr. Razadkowski, St. Josaphat began to face "growing pains." The church, school, and rectory were too small. Plans were made for the construction of a new church, rectory and janitor's home.

Construction began under the direction of Joseph G. Kastler and William E. N. Hunter, architects; John Koch, mason; and the Marcus and Lang Company, carpentry. The Marcus and Lang firm also contributed to the construction of the main altar. The side altars were built by the Jermowicz Company, which was also responsible for the new pews. From the old church came the side altar of St. Anthony. In all, the new structures totaled some \$100,000 in cost, half of which was subscribed almost immediately. The new church was completed and dedicated on August 5, 1901, and six years later the sister's convent was completed.

As the parish increased, various business enterprises sprouted in the neighborhood until it became known as the "downtown" of the east side. Businesses included Witkowski and Leszczynski, clothing; Myslowiecki, shoes; Merlin and Jermoliwicz, furnitures; Zoltowski, Zientka and Kulwicki, taverns; Balowski, Kopydlowski and Wolanski, groceries; Pasternacki, drugs; Prusinski, baked goods; and Konieczny, tobacco. Included in the professional ranks were Boleslaus Pasternacki and W. K. Kwiesinski, physicians.

After 24 years as pastor, Fr. Razadkowski died on June 28, 1915, and Bishop Foley chose Father Joseph Lempka as pastor. Fr. Lempka was responsible for the construction of St. Josaphat High School, an institution which served the area with distinction until its closing. During World War I, Fr. Lempka was responsible for recruiting for the Polish Army. Fr. Lempka paid off the parish debt, decorated the interior of the church, and constructed an iron fence around the church grounds.

Father Maximillian Gannas became pastor of St. Josaphat in 1926. Fr. Gannas completed the repairs to the parish property and upgraded the educational standards of the high school. He was instrumental in gaining accreditation for the school from the University of Michigan. He also reorganized many of the parish societies.

Frs. Lukasiewicz and Sigismund Osmialowski served as interim pastors before Fr. Alexander Jarzembowski took over the parish in 1940. Fr. Jarzembowski remained at St. Josaphat for the next 20 years. By 1960 the ethnic neighborhood that the church once served had relocated. In June of that year, Fr. Jarzembowski closed the grade and high schools. By the summer of 1961, the empty school building was demolished and replaced with a parking lot and the sisters convent was converted into the parish hall.

In the decade of the sixties, St. Josaphat was faced with three major problems: the parish was dwindling as members transferred to other parishes; the structure was in need of some major repairs; and the survival of St. Josaphat became questionable as the ever-sprawling medical center continued to seek additional land in the area. The parish chose to embark on an extensive rehabilitation program for the church and adjacent buildings.

Today, St. Josaphat remains a symbol and spiritual home to the Poles throughout the metropolitan area, and continues to serve the religious needs of the Polish community.

*ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:* St. Josaphat R.C. Church, an impressive late Victorian Romanesque style structure of 1899, is located on East Canfield Avenue, immediately adjacent to the Chrysler Expressway (I-75), a six-lane, depressed freeway. The church is one of a trio of elaborate Polish Catholic churches erected between 1885 and 1900 within a mile radius to serve the large Polish population of southeastern Detroit. This area has been extensively redeveloped during the last two decades and the church is now surrounded by new housing and the Medical Center complex.

*Exterior:* The church is constructed of red-orange common brick trimmed with Bedford limestone. It is approximately 132 feet by 56 feet and seats almost 1200. The rectory, convent, and boiler house are also located on the property.

Constructed to serve a Polish congregation, St. Josaphat combines many elements taken from the northern European ecclesiastical tradition. Towered west fronts and triple tower groups were used extensively in the territory between the Schelde and Elbe Rivers between 1000 and 1200 A.D. and are considered one of the most magnificent manifestations of early Romanesque architecture. Clearly derived from this tradition, the facade of St. Josaphat is dominated by a large, central tower of almost 200 feet in height which is flanked by twin buttressed towers containing secondary entrances. The round arch, also characteristic of the Romanesque, is repeated in the enriched arches of the portals and the arcaded fenestration of the towers. The verticality of the facade is emphasized by the development of the square towers into octagonal spires, the transition masked by the use of pinnacles at the corners of the towers. A fleche rises from the roof ridge at the transept crossing. The gables which mark the ends of the transept are punctuated with rose windows. The main body of the church consists of a higher nave flanked by lower aisles; the nave is covered with a steeply pitched roof. The steeply pitched roof, typical of those found in northern European countries which receive heavy snowfall, was once sheathed in slate. Only the spires have retained the original grey slate.

*Interior:* The church's cruciform plan has at the north end of the barrel vaulted, three aisled nave a broad transept which matches the central aisle in height. The apse is preceded by a short antechoir. Marble columns with gilded capitals carry round arches which support the clerestory which is lit by round-headed windows. The narthex, preceding the nave and aisles, is separated from the nave by a wall. Dual stairways lead to the choir loft which is cantilevered out into the nave. The strong eclecticism of the Victorian period is revealed in St. Josaphat by the union of the strongly Romanesque plan with fine Baroque decorative detailing evidenced by the bas relief angels found between the arches of the nave.

The flat plasterwork surfaces are painted ivory and architectural details such as column capitals are gilded. As part of the strong Catholic tradition of utilizing religious iconography as an important element of church decoration, St. Josaphat has extensive ceiling frescos.

Depicted over the main altar is the Holy Trinity. The Blessed Virgin is shown above the western side altar and St. Joseph over the eastern side altar.

Above each of the confessionals are murals representing contrition. At the northeast is a representation of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, at the northwest the Denial of Peter, at the southeast Mary Magdalene, and at the southwest the Prodigal Son. The Birth of Christ and the Last Supper are placed over the communion rail.

Events which are important in the history of Polish Catholicism are shown on the walls which separate the sanctuary from the side altars. On the eastern side is the Pilgrimage to Czestochova. Pilgrims annually travel on foot from Warsaw to Czestochova, the national shrine of Our Lady of Czestochova, the patron saint of Poland. On the west is the Miracle of the Wisla River. This painting was added to the church in the 1920's; it depicts a World War I battle which occurred near the Wisla River where a small band of Polish troops defeated Russian troops through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.

The Resurrection, representing the eternal life of the soul, is shown on the northern portion of the nave ceiling directly above the place where caskets are placed for funeral services.

The four authors of the gospel are shown in the groin vault of the crossing; St. John on the north, St. Matthew on the east, St. Mark on the south, and St. Luke on the west.

Also on the nave ceiling is a medallion with Mary, Queen of Poland surrounded by prominent Polish saints as well as what appears to be Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Longinus, St. Martin of Tours, and the Polish eagle.

Other murals found above the nave are the Holy Family and the Blessing of the Children. Over the choir loft is St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music.

St. Barbara, patroness of a happy death, and St. Alexander are depicted in the eastern arm of the transept. St. Stanislaus, a popular Polish saint, and St. Bernard are shown over the western transept arm.

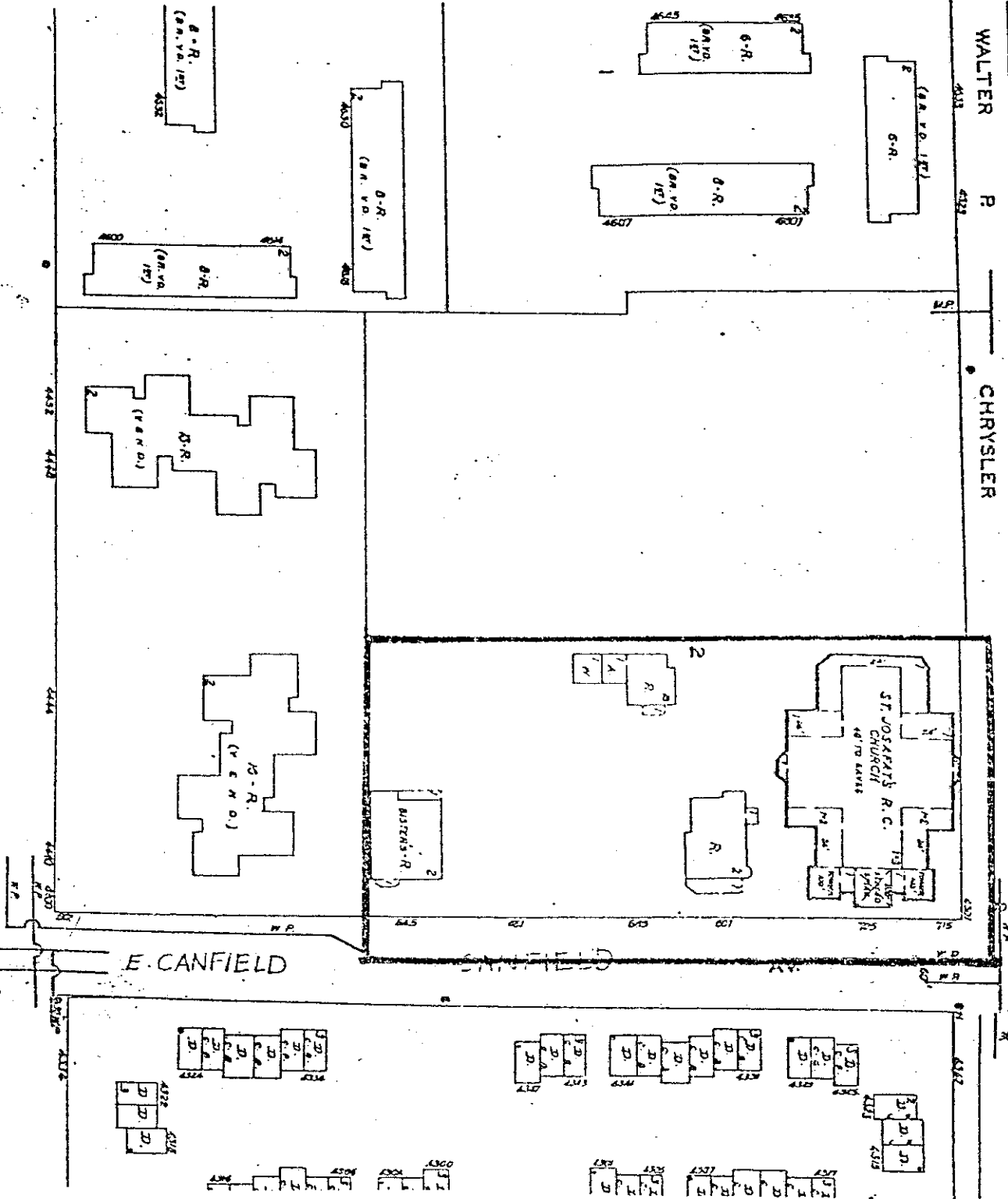
The round headed stained glass windows illustrate the twelve apostles. Beginning at the northeast corner and moving clockwise, the windows depict St. Peter, St. James, St. James the Less, St. Bartholomew, St. Thomas, St. Simon, St. Jude, St. Andrew, St. Matthew, St. Philip, St. John, and St. Paul. The rose window on the eastern transept arm is St. Joseph and the medallion on the western rose window is of Mary, Mother of God. This rose window was wind damaged recently but the original glass was saved with the exception of the central medallion.

The architectonic Baroque high altar is composed of five stages and polychromed in white and gold. Although essentially Baroque in character, the altar borrows its overall proportion and decorative detailing from the Romanesque tradition. It is constructed of wood accented with polished marble. The central panel, which depicts St. Josaphat and Our Lady of Czestochova, is framed by polished marble columns with gilded Corinthian capitals surmounted by an arch enriched by classical mouldings.

The side altar on the east is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the side altar on the west dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

ST. ANTOINE

WALTER R CHRYSLER



PROPOSED ST. JOSAPHAT R.C. CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT  
(Boundaries of district outlined in black)

