



ST. JOHN

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Americans and erected a school for black children.

In 1954, Father Gerard Pelletier conducted a church census, revealing 164 white Catholic families with 685 persons; and 306 black Catholic families with 1,367 people. He developed a “modus vivendi” – an agreement allowing parties in conflict to peacefully coexist – in which St. John the Baptist had a second congregation called St. Peter Claver to accommodate black parishioners.

“We still have a Mass on the feast day of St. Peter Claver,” Caire said.

In 1962, Coadjutor Archbishop John Cody declared having two congregations in one parish was not acceptable, and St. John the Baptist was again united. Caire said the records show that the Ushers’ Society of the parish held its first integrated meeting a week later. By 1965, Father James Caillouet, pastor, said the church was totally integrated.

Father Pelletier catalogued and microfilmed church records in 1952-54. Father Dudley Darbonne redesigned the church sanctuary after Vatican II, and parishioner Louis Tassin built a wood altar still in use today.

Tragic murders

The 1975 murders of three people – Father J. Alcide Clement, Sister Mary Patrick Harrington and housekeeper Leah LeJeune – shocked the parish and Edgard community. Church sexton Leopold St. Pierre was pistol-whipped inside



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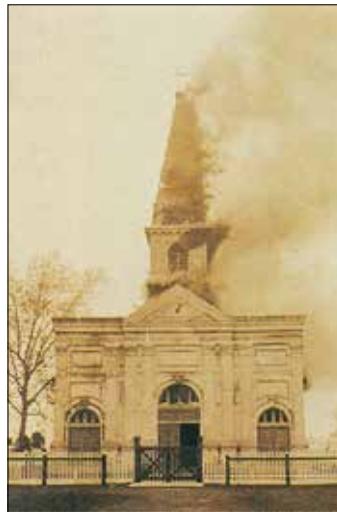
The gilded cast iron statue of Christ the King was first installed in 1927 at St. John the Baptist. It was refurbished in 1995 by artist Ruth Goliwas, who removed the rust, and parishioner Louis Tassin, who rebuilt the wooden interior frame.

the church but recovered.

Archbishop Philip Hannan celebrated a Funeral Mass for Father Clement and Sister Mary Patrick on May 9, 1975, and LeJeune’s funeral was celebrated in Kenner. A memorial plaque is inside the church, and money was donated for burses to educate priests and nuns.

Today, the parish has about 425 families, an active Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver, a Ladies’ Altar Society and a strong catechism program up to 11th grade. Religious education coordinator and synod representative Veronica Alexander said religious education has always been a parish priority, with approximately 100 students annually in its catechetical program led by volunteer catechists with five to 25 years or more of experience, many whose parents were catechists.

“The influence of religion is so deeply rooted in the lives of our parishioners because of the richness of faith and the values passed down from generation to



A 1918 fire destroyed the St. John the Baptist Church in Edgard.

generation,” Alexander said. “Many who serve in the church ministries today share experiences and stories of times shared with elders. They encourage today’s youth to stay involved, so they’ll have their own stories of faith and evangelization to pass along.”

Caire also mentioned the community-oriented nature of St. John the Baptist and its long-standing tradition of parish suppers for needy

families, with the best cooks participating.

“It’s a special place in the archdiocese,” Caire said. “Msgr. (Winus) Roeten talked about it as having a special charism where the faith is alive and strong. Even when times are difficult – like the yellow

fever, priest’s killing and integration – the faith was there and strong, and it was passed on through strong family life. You see that at church – mothers, fathers and families together.”

Christine Bordelon can be reached at cbordelon@clarionherald.org.

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