



# Sacred carvings incorporate local seafood favorite

By Beth Donze  
Clarion Herald

The characteristically humble Landry Dempster becomes even more so when asked about the stunning results of his artistry on display inside St. Gertrude Church in Des Allemands.

About 20 years ago, Dempster, a gifted wood-carver, completed three major pieces of church furniture for St. Gertrude's sanctuary:

- ▶ An oak lectionary embossed with tupelo-wood carvings of the Alpha and the Omega;
- ▶ A 4 1/2-foot-wide oak pulpit;
- ▶ And a cypress stand for



Photo by Frank J. Methe | CLARION HERALD

Landry Dempster reattaches a stray grape to the tabernacle stand he carved and painted for his home church of St. Gertrude in Des Allemands. The stand features a pair of catfish, Des Allemands' most famous export.

St. Gertrude's tabernacle, completed at the request of Father Benedict Joseph Quang, the church's then-

pastor.

On the face of this tabernacle stand – below traditional Christian images of

the cross, grapes, wheat, the chalice and the paten – is a pair of gray-painted catfish Dempster carved out of tupelo wood.

The catfish, a nod to Des Allemands' standing as "The Catfish Capital of the World," were specifically requested by Father Quang. The priest told Dempster that no other type of fish but catfish would suffice for his new tabernacle stand. He would even tell his flock: "Y'all can come look at everything we have in the church, but do not touch my fish!"

Sadly, Father Quang died before he was able to articulate his complete vision for Dempster's final carving assignment: St. Gertrude's

generously proportioned pulpit. The priest left behind only two general instructions: the dimensions of the piece; and a request that the pulpit include carvings of angels.

"The angels," Dempster sighed, pointing to the pulpit's trio of cherubs, each of which required 75 to 100 hours to carve. "That was the hardest (part)."

*Fish are featured prominently in Catholic art and architecture, given their significance in the New Testament. The fish – or ichthys – is one of the most universally recognizable symbols of Jesus.*

*How are fish portrayed in your parish church? Email Beth Donze at [bdonze@clarionherald.org](mailto:bdonze@clarionherald.org).*

## Bishops' staffs have walked through the decades

Nine crosiers carried by bishops and archbishops of New Orleans – including one that is more than 250-years old – are preserved in the archdiocese's flagship parish of St. Louis Cathedral. Here is a peek at some of them.



The central decorative element of Bishop Harold Perry's crosier suggests the meeting of three fish.



Photo above by Frank J. Methe | CLARION HERALD

The oldest crosier dates from 1764 and was carried by Luis Peñalver y Cardenas, first bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas (1793-1801). It is on loan to the ongoing exhibit "The Church in the Crescent: Three Hundred Years of Catholicism in New Orleans" at the Old Ursuline Convent.



Four of the newest crosiers are those that were used by, from left, Archbishop Francis Schulte (bearing the symbol of the Community of Deacons of the Archdiocese of New Orleans); Archbishop Alfred Hughes; Archbishop Gregory Aymond; and Archbishop Philip Hannan.



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This crosier used by Archbishop Joseph Rummel features Our Lady of Prompt Succor inside its crook. Bishop Shelton Fabre, now bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, carried this crosier during his 2007 consecration to the episcopacy as auxiliary bishop of New Orleans.