



# The Church of the Gesù

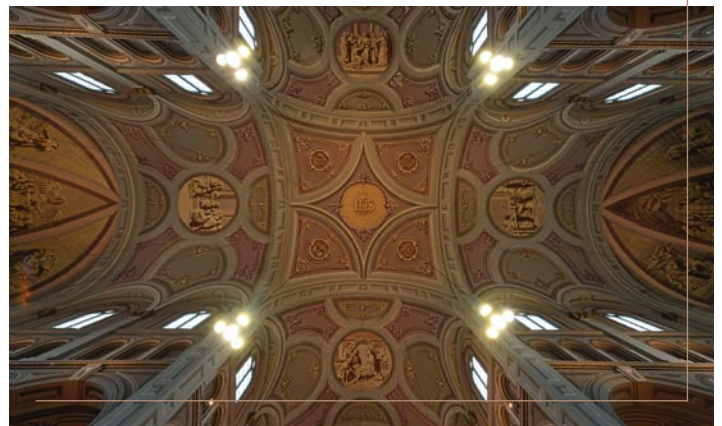
## Spiritual and artistic space in Montreal's downtown

Though considered one of the ten most beautiful churches of Montreal, the Gesù (Jesus in Italian) is not a parish. It was and still is a public chapel, just as are many of the places the Jesuits serve in several large cities throughout the world. It is foremost a sacred space, open to all people, no matter their age, their origin, or their religious family. Many non-believers come to a concert, to visit this unique heritage or simply to get immersed in the exceptional meditative atmosphere that one finds there.

The Church of the Gesù (a reference to a Jesuit church with the same name, in Rome) celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015. The goal was to highlight its existence in its constantly renewed presence. The site has been and still is a space for life in the downtown Montreal area, a place that has responded to the needs of the times by reaching out to a larger audience. Generations of students have passed through its walls. Believers from both "solitudes", Francophones and Anglophones, have found guides there. Artists have come to share their love for beauty and truth.

In fact, over the last twenty years, artists have come forth in order to fulfill the call of this sacred place. They find inspiration there and also a context that allows them to be creative. Thus, new generations of people flow through the church, many anonymously, in the relaxing silence of this space. Why have so many different people felt and still feel good here? Maybe it is simply because this hallowed space opens their hearts. You are all welcome to the Gesù.

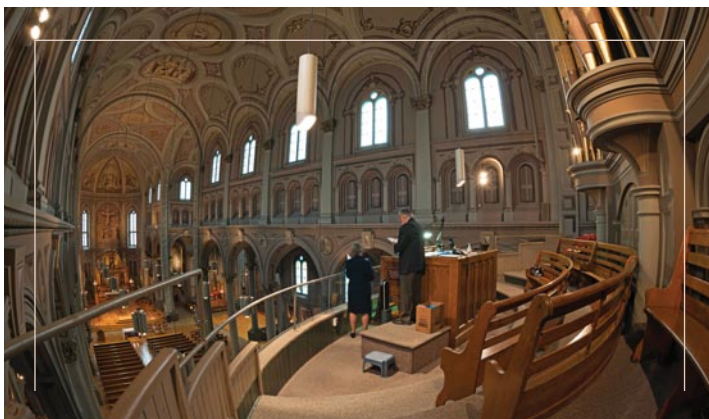
Daniel LeBlond, S.J.  
Prefect of the Gesù church ❖



# The Church of the Gesù

## WITNESS TO A LIVING HISTORY

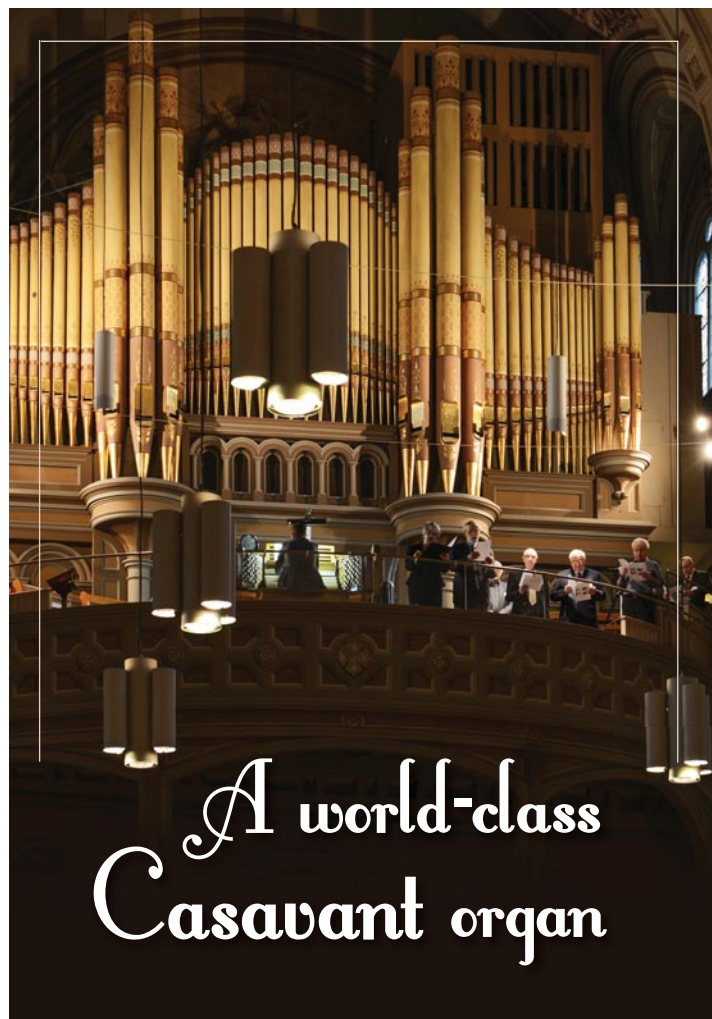
by Jean-Marc Biron, S.J.  
Provincial Superior of the Jesuits



This Church of the Gesù has a symbolic meaning for us Jesuits, because it reminds us of the presence of the Society of Jesus in the heart of Montreal since 1842. In fact, the present Gesù reminds us of the educational mission undertaken by the Jesuits; the church served as a chapel for major religious gatherings while its halls on the first floor were at the heart of the artistic activities of the Collège Sainte-Marie for more than 100 years. The church is a living symbol of the role played by the Society of Jesus in Canada, starting with the arrival of the first missionaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

As Jesuits, we can reclaim our roots in this church since it was in the Collège Sainte-Marie, after our return to Canada in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the members of the Society of Jesus arrived and from where they set off for the missions among the First Nations people in the heart of the country. The Church of the Gesù is also a symbolic place where the Jesuits of both linguistic groups in Canada would converge. In fact, the Jesuits of Canada are organized according to linguistic entities. For both the English-speaking and French-speaking Jesuits, the Gesù has a shared symbolic history: in its beginnings, the college and its chapel served the two linguistic communities that founded Montreal.

But this church does not only refer to the past. It continues to give life and to allow those who pass through its doors to be in contact with beauty, and to have the feeling of being in relationship with something bigger than oneself. ❖



## A world-class Casavant organ

What amazing music has echoed in these old stones over 150 years!

This place of sacred celebrations, of the transmission of knowledge and culture is bathed in the religious, humanist and pedagogical ideals of the Jesuits, with predominance for the arts, especially theatre and music.

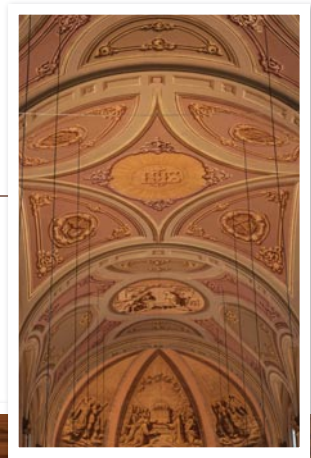
Remembering 150 years of music compels us to refer to an impressive instrument, the major Casavant/Guilbault-Therrien organ that dominates the balcony. With its 66 stops distributed over four keyboards and a pedal set, this instrument allows musical performances in baroque, romantic and modern styles. It gives the organist, performer or improviser, an exultingly full sound range. The exceptional acoustics of the Gesù form a vessel where the organ can vibrate in all its fullness and majesty.

François Zeitouni,  
Organist for the Church of the Gesù ❖

# Quick tour

## WALL DECORATIONS AND FRESCOS

Wall decorations and frescos, done in the “illusion” style, an oft-used technique in baroque art, are the work of painter Daniel Müller and form a remarkable unity that illustrates the history of salvation (upper portion of the church) as well as scenes taken from the lives of saints and of blessed Jesuits (lower portion of the church).



## THE SANCTUARY

A statue of the Sacred Heart stands above the main altar since the church is dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. The wall decorations end with the fresco of the crucifixion presented right above the altar. Notice on each side of the altar, on the walls, two statues representing angels. The sanctuary vigil lights and the chandeliers remind us of the perfect craftsmanship done in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Admire also the great beauty of the marquetry on the floor in the sanctuary area. The two major paintings on each side of the sanctuary represent Saint Stanislaus Kostka (on the right) and Saint Louis Gonzaga (on the left), two young Jesuits who are the patrons saints of youth. These portraits are the work of the Gagliardi brothers in Rome.



## LEFT TRANSEPT

One notices immediately the altar where a statue of Our Lady of Liesse takes center stage. This statue was brought back from France in 1877. It contains the ashes of the original statue which was burnt during the French Revolution. Many votive offerings remind us of favours obtained by praying at the foot of this altar. In the back of the transept there is an altar consecrated to Saint Ignatius Loyola and his companions. On the left, there is a fresco presenting the vision of the Storta in which The Eternal Father asks Jesus to accept Ignatius as a companion in Rome. On the right, Ignatius Loyola is writing the *Spiritual Exercises*. Opposite to Our Lady of Liesse, there is a fresco alluding to the death of Jean de Brébeuf.



## RIGHT TRANSEPT

There are altars of Saint Joseph and of the Holy Canadian Martyrs who were canonized in 1930. Notice the delicate woodwork and the marquetry at the altar of Saint Joseph and, to the right of the altar, the magnificent painting of the Gagliardi brothers: the flight into Egypt.

## SIDE CHAPELS

The side chapels are dedicated to saints or blessed of the Catholic Church, especially those who had an impact on the Church in Canada. One of these chapels, in remembrance of the deceased, receives keys in an artistic context that refers to the resurrection ❖





# A place of welcome and of spiritual encounters

Conceived and established as a place of worship and of teaching, as a space for art and reflection, the Church of the Gesù offers a place of welcome, which was and still is a fundamental dimension of its existence and of its continuity.

The welcoming mission of the Gesù, a temple located right in the heart of the city of Montreal, has almost always been undertaken by the members of the Jesuit order and has embedded the Jesuit involvements in the area. Be it a request for help or support, the doors of this sacred enclosure have revealed themselves, for many persons, as a source of comfort, compassion and listening. It is also a place to be transparent, to open oneself in confidentiality. The office has been the scene of many moments of life's dramas, covering a whole spectrum of human circumstances, on the personal, professional, matrimonial or family levels.

Thanks to many artists and artisans who have come to give it life, this unique place of welcoming in Montreal has allowed many people to benefit from their talents. Artists have sung, danced, played, painted, sculpted, and brought their contribution to the development of the human soul and heart.

As far as the specifically spiritual dimension is concerned, the Gesù is enriched by the patrimony of the founder of the Jesuits, Saint Ignatius Loyola. The *Spiritual Exercises* of this master are made available. Marian devotion also occupies a special place due to the presence of a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Liesse (a 900 year old tradition). Through her presence within these walls, Our Lady constantly grants favours to people who come at her feet in order to ask for her intercession.

Bernard Vadnais, priest  
Pastoral collaborator at the Church of the Gesù ❖



Our thanks to D. Gratton, photographer, Montreal.

## The Church of the Gesù

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Do you wish to talk about human or spiritual questions of concern to you? To share your thoughts in a climate of respect and confidentiality? The Gesù offers a spiritual consultation service in the heart of Montreal.

**Make an appointment using the information above.**



In order to visit the church more fully and to delve more deeply into its history, download for free on your smartphone the podcast *L'église du Gesù: 150 ans d'histoire*. Go to [www.legesu.com/eglise-du-gesu](http://www.legesu.com/eglise-du-gesu) and click on *Portrait sonore (audioguide)* [In French – An English version will be available in the fall of 2016.]