

**HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES ROMAN
CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE PARISH OF AVOYELLES, LOUISIANA**

The Church is located at 1315 Egg Bend Road, approximately eight miles North of Marksville, LA, in the rural community of Fifth Ward, also known as Egg Bend. Back in the 1840's, the steamboat, "Valley Queen", made monthly runs from New Orleans, LA to various "Landings" along the Red River, bringing supplies to the pioneer farmers along the route.

The people would gather on the banks at the bend of the river, which was approximately three miles down stream of the Avoyelles and Rapides Parish line. They would bring pails, baskets, and boxes of eggs, along with locally grown produce, to for trading for sugar, coffee, and calico.

The crew of the "Valley Queen" began to call the landing and subsequently the settlement – **"EGG BEND."** To this date the name remains on the U. S. Corp of Engineer's, The U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, and Louisiana Department of Transportation Traffic and Planning Division's maps for the Parish of Avoyelles.

Property Donations:

On May 7, 1925, Mrs. Alice Beauclair, wife of Mr. Christopher Kelone, but from whom she is separated and divorced, declares that for the purpose of erecting a Catholic Chapel in the vicinity of Egg Bend, donated one acre of land unto The Right Reverend Cornelius Van de Ven, Bishop of the Diocese of Alexandria, LA and his successors in office, for the use of the Catholic Congregation of Egg Bend.

Also on May 7, 1925, Mr. and Mrs. Jacque Guillot and Azelina Guillot, and their children, i.e.; Armas, Julie, Denux, Emeric, Amenith, Oliva, Toliver and Predeau; donate one acre of land unto The Right Reverend Cornelius Van de Ven, Bishop of the Diocese of Alexandria, LA and his successors in office, for the use of the Catholic Congregation of Egg Bend.

On August 4, 1925, Mr. Leonidas O. Kelone, married to Ida Ferry, donated 1.38 acres (+)(-) unto The Right Reverend Cornelius Van de Ven, Bishop of the Diocese of Alexandria, LA and his successors in office, for the use of the Catholic Congregation of Egg Bend.

History:

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish of Egg Bend, Avoyelles Parish, LA was a mission parish of St Frances de Sales Catholic Church in Echo, Rapides Parish, Louisiana for many years. In 1925 Father Joseph Jacquet', a missionary priest from France, who was stationed in Echo, Rapides Parish, LA, built the first church, with the help of five men, Christopher Kelone, Maurice Neck, Ulyssess Lemoine, Cicero Bonnette and Jacques Guillot. Before completion of the church, Father Jacquet' died. He requested that he be buried next to his little church.

The Church was named in honor of **Our Lady of Lourdes** where the **Blessed Virgin Mary** appeared 18 times, in 1858, to Bernadette Soubirous, a young peasant girl, now known as **ST. Bernadette**, revealing herself as the **Immaculate Conception**. Asking that a chapel be built on the site of the vision, she told the girl to drink from a fountain in the grotto. No fountain was to be seen, but when Bernadette dug at the spot designated by the apparition, a spring began to flow. The water from the still flowing spring has shown remarkable healing power.



On December 1, 1941, the **“CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE PARISH OF AVOYELLES, LOUISIANA”** was chartered as a corporation, domiciled at Marksville, RFD, in the Parish of Avoyelles, State of Louisiana. The short name for the church is **“Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church”**.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church continued as a mission of St. Francis De Sales Catholic Church under the pastorship of Father Isadore Deculear and Father Herman Couvillion. The priests would travel by horse and buggy from Echo to the Church in Egg Bend to conduct church services.

In 1948, Bishop Charles P. Greco consented to make the Egg Bend area a **“Church Parish.”** He purchased an old building from Camp Claiborne after World War II, for conversion as a rectory for the church.

Two Belgian priests, Father John Jansen and Father Henry Beckers were the first resident priests to live in the rectory. Father Jansen remained in the Church Parish for many years, while Father Beckers stayed a short while. Mrs. Sue Boucher, of Shreveport, Louisiana, was hired as the housekeeper. Miss "Sue", as she was affectionally known, served in that capacity for twenty eight years.

During this time, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, in Moncla, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, became a mission church of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and so remains to this date. Father Passchyn who remained a short while later replaced Father Jansen. Father Charles Dekeukalere was next appointed as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and St John the Baptist Churches, in 1955. He remained in that position until his departure in May of 1982.

On March 16, 1959 The Most Reverend Charles P. Greco, Bishop of Alexandria, transferred the three tracts of land that were donated to The Right Reverend Cornelius Van de Ven, Bishop of Alexandria, and his Successors in Office, for the use by the Catholic Congregation of Egg Bend; along with all building and improvements thereof, to the **"CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE PARISH OF AVOYELLES, LOUISIANA CORPORATION"**.

In 1969, Father Charles Dekeukalere oversaw the building of a new church with the old church being converted to a church hall. The old church remained in service until it was sold in 1970 to Reverend Bonnette of Simmesport, Louisiana, to be again used as a church. A new church hall was built in 1971.



Father Jules Claes was appointed pastor in May 1982. He initiated several needed projects to include the paving of the church parking lot.

In 1986, Father Angelo Messina, also known as Father “Snoopy”, because of his Snoopy doll collection, became the new Pastor, bringing about a new development and participation in the church. Father Messina was the first diocesan priest assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church by the Diocese of Alexandria.

In June 1990, Father Kenneth Roy, a native of Avoyelles Parish was appointed by the Diocese of Alexandria to serve as the Parish Priest where he served until June 1993.

Father Mathew Michael succeeded Father Roy as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes and St John the Baptist Catholic Churches. In 1996, Father Mathew left to pursue studies in clinical pastoral care, which administers care to the sick in hospitals.

In June 1996, Father Daniel P. O’Conner, a diocesan priest, replaced Father Mathew as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic and St John the Baptist Catholic Churches. Upon his departure from Our Lady of Lourdes, Father O’Conner served as Boy and Girl Scout Chaplain for the Diocese of Alexandria and as director of Vocations and Seminarians. He also became pastor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church in Alexandria, Louisiana.

Father Rusty Rabalias, an Avoyelles Parish native replaced Father O’Conner as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes and St John the Baptist Churches in February 2000. Father Rabalias remained in this position until June 2005. He was reassigned to St Joseph Catholic Church, in Marksville, Louisiana as pastor.

Father Paul Kunumpurarm, M.S.F.S., a native of India, was reassigned from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Vidalia, LA to Our Lady of Lourdes and St John the Baptist Catholic Churches, Egg Bend and Moncla, respectively, Avoyelles Parish, LA, on June 1, 2005. Father Paul has worked diligently to improve church participation and mass attendance. He has overseen the construction of an addition to the rectory, which serves as a conference, CCD class, meeting room.

HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF AVOYELLES PARISH, LOUISIANA

The Church is located at 328 Community Center Road, Marksville, LA 71351. Directions beginning at RJ LA Highway 107/115 and the Old Moncla Highway, go Northwest on the Old Moncla Road for a distance of 0.7 miles, veer left on Community Center Road for a distance of 0.3 mile; arrive at destination, on left side of road.



Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church in Moncla, Avoyelles Parish, LA is a mission of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church.

Property Donations:

On July 31, 1907 Mr. Ernest Moncla, a resident of Avoyelles Parish, State of Louisiana donated, to Bishop Van de Vin, Bishop of Natchitoches and his successors in office, for the promotion and propagation of religion in order to establish a Roman Catholic Church, cemetery, schools and other Roman Catholic Institutions a certain tract or parcel of land situated near the Red River, on the West side of the public Road leading from Marksville to David's Ferry, beginning at the donor's land and that of Frederick Newton, then running North along said road for one arpent, then west for two arpents, then South for one arpent, then East for two arpents, to the point of beginning.

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On March 30, 1989 Violet M Henderson, ET AL donated a certain tract or parcel of land together with all buildings and improvements thereon, being, lying and situated near the Red River in Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, and being taken from a larger 20 acre tract of land. Said tract being located directly behind the property presently belonging to St John the Baptiste Catholic Church of Moncla, LA and having a frontage on the rear line of St John the Baptiste Catholic Church property of approximately 195 feet with a depth between parallel lines of 105 feet, more or less. Said lot being bounded, now or formerly, on the North, East, and West by the remainder of the 20 acre tract own by the donors herein and on the South by the property presently comprising the property of St John the Baptiste Catholic Church of Moncla, Louisiana.

History:

The history of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church dates back to 1907 when Frederic Newton and Ernest Moncla, each donated a parcel of land as described above, to the Bishop of Natchitoches for the establishment of a Catholic Church and cemetery. However, the church was not listed, in the official Catholic Directory as a parish, until 1910 when it was incorporated. At that time, the Reverend B. Regis was rector and served eighty-six families at St. Genevieve in the Brouillette Community of Avoyelles Parish, LA. St. Genevieve Catholic Church was listed as a Mission Church of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Moncla, LA.

Saint John the Baptist Church was named in honor of John the Baptist who, as the God-sent prophet, representative and High Priest of humankind, baptized Jesus in order to pass all the sins of humankind onto Him, the Son of God, who came to save the sinners.

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Apparently, Father Regis was reassigned, because the official Catholic Directory of 1912 does not list a pastor at St. John the Baptist Church in Moncla, LA. Beginning in 1913 and until 1917 St. John the Baptist Church was attended or served by priest from St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marksville, Avoyelles Parish, LA. The Priest would usually come to Moncla on Saturday, stay at the rectory, eat with the families of the community and preside over mass services on Sunday, then return to Marksville. Since there was no full time priest living in the rectory, the church often allowed the house to, be lived, in by others in the community. The church property consisted of the church, cemetery, rectory, and a small barn/ shed. The rectory was located near the site of the present day church hall. There is no record to show when the rectory and the barn/shed were removed from the property.

The present building is not the original church that was constructed when the church was established. The original building was larger than the present day church. It had cathedral ceiling with exposed rafters and beams with a choir loft and organ. The church had stained glass windows as well. Mrs. Virginia Moncla often played the organ for the church services even though she was not of the Catholic Faith. Families usually sat in the same church pews for the services being held. Most of the families purchased or donated the pews they sat in.

The old church building was difficult to heat during the winters due to the high ceilings. Sometime around 1948 -1949 the parishioners decided to demolish the old church building and construct a new, but smaller, church. Jane "Chic" Dausat and others recall having fundraisers on Saturdays, at St. Joseph's in Marksville, to build a new Moncla Church. They sold gumbo, cakes, and have bingos with boxing matches by the local boys, to raise money for the new church building.

Much of the lumber from the old building was reused on the new church. John Smith, Talmage Laborde, and Calvin Bordelon were hired to build the new church, along with many volunteers from the church parishioners. Those volunteers gave a "Coup de Main" to help build the church.

Now stands St. John the Baptist Catholic Church looking to the future, while serving God in the small Moncla Community.

In 1948, and to this day, the church was transferred and made a mission of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Egg Bend, Fifth Ward, and Avoyelles Parish, LA.

