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Ivan damaged St. Joseph Church, killed parishioner

By **Theresa Huntenburg**, Pensacola

Hurricane Ivan decimated much of northwest Florida, including downtown Pensacola. St. Joseph Church lay in a portion of Ivan's vast path, but the lifeblood that runs through that parish remains unharmed by any torrential winds and rains.

For 110 years, St. Joseph Parish has served the Catholic faithful of the city of Pensacola. The parish community, located at the corner of Spring and Government streets in the downtown section of the city, will continue to do so, regardless of natural disasters and federal states of emergency.

St. Joseph Church received extensive interior damage from Hurricane Ivan. The exterior structure of the church is salvageable, but the interior is ruined. The ceiling of the church now lies in pieces strewn about the floor, with other pieces dangling haphazardly by wires. Hurricane Ivan ripped off the front doors of the church and discarded one of them a few streets down. The storm swallowed the steeple and drenched the floor and pews. It will be about two years before the church will be usable again.

The road to recovery for St. Joseph Church appears to be long and arduous. St. Joseph is on the National Register of Historic Places because its exterior structure has remained unchanged for over a century. As a result of this distinction, the parish might receive a grant for exterior repairs. Over the past five years, the parish had improved many of the church's interior items, including the pews.

The storm did not destroy all of the church, however. The 15 stained-glass windows that adorn the church remain intact, thanks to a hurricane-proof covering that protects each one. The



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The top of St. Joseph's bell tower is missing and there is a hole in the roof.

tabernacle and several statues throughout the church also remain unharmed.

In addition to losing the main worship space, the 500-family community of St. Joseph also sustained damage to its religious education building and clinic. The clinic, open for about one year and recently freshly painted, suffered flood damage and leaks. Despite the destruction, the clinic still operates to serve the medical needs of the community.

Aside from the structural damage, there was human loss as well. Dr. Lois Zaragosa-Goode, a member of the parish, drowned after Hurricane Ivan washed away her home. The funeral was held in the parish hall because of storm damage to the church. Bishop John H. Ricard was among the clergy who presided at her funeral.

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