Blessed Francis X. Seelos Catholic Church

 St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church

3053 Dauphine Street

Catholic residents founded the parish of St. Vincent de Paul downriver from the French Quarter in 1838 to serve a congregation that was largely French but included some Germans as well. Located in the Third Municipal District, close to the river, it is the citys third oldest Catholic parish.

The first church structure was a modest frame chapel. Twenty-eight tumultuous years, which included the Civil War, passed before the small chapel was replaced by the splendid brick structure that serves the parish today. Designed by Louis Reynolds, the interior follows a pseudo-basilica style with a barrel vaulted ceiling but no windowed upper story. The steeple, which may have been part of the original plan, was added in 1908.

The parish priest of 1866, feeling the need for a complete church community, founded a school in the old chapel. During the 1870s a new organ was placed in the church, as well as three altars and new stations of the cross. In the next decade English was introduced into the church, with a sermon in English on one Sunday alternating with one in French the next week. A new, larger school replaced the original in the 1890s. In the same decade the parish was divided, one part remaining at St. Vincent de Paul and the other becoming the parish of St. Cecilia.

The parish of St. Vincent de Paul Church entered a new phase in the twenty-first century. On Sunday, March 4, 2001, the parishioners of St. Cecilia, Ss Peter and Paul, Annunciation, and St. Gerard parishes learned that they would be merged into a new parish to be named for Blessed Francis X. Seelos. St. Gerard Parish, devoted to deaf Catholics, was already under the aegis of St. Vincent de Paul Church. Here, Catholics from five parishes found a magnificent home, rich in tradition and in stained glass art.

In 2003 a candle left burning on the altar ignited an altar cloth, and a tragic fire ensued. The glass suffered surprisingly little damage, which has been repaired. Statues and the altar from the Ss. Peter and Paul Church along with the pulpit from St. Cecilia Church replaced those lost in the fire.

In the sanctuary superb murals and frescoes by New Orleans artist Achille Peretti show events in the life of St. Vincent de Paul. Numerous statues and 23 stained glass windows line the walls and provide additional splendor. Arranged in pairs, the windows were installed in two stages. One set of ten, unsigned but reportedly imported from France, represent some of the great saints of the church and were set in place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Twelve more, which date to 1908 and were executed by the Emil Frei Art Glass Company of St. Louis, are interspersed among the original windows. They depict episodes in the life of Mary and Jesus. A small semicircular window in the ceiling above the altar shows Christ as the Lamb of God.

(Some say that all the windows without decorations at the top are by Frei, but the above thematic separation of the two studios makes more sense.)

**Windows**

 Lamb of God

 (Above the Altar)

St. Sophia St. Stephen

St. Charles Borromeo St. Francis Xavier

Nativity \* Annunciation \*

Jesus in the Temple \* Visitation (signed) \*

The Blessed Virgin \* St. Ann \*

St. John the Baptist \* St. Joseph \*

Baptism of Christ \* Presentation in the Temple \*

Resurrection \* Coronation of the Virgin \*

St. Anthony of Padua Our Lady of Prompt Succor

St. Vincent de Paul St. Peter

Ecce Homo Mater Doloroso

\* Emil Frei studio, 1908

*Visited*

*September 1991*

*March 25, 2001*

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