First Grace United Methodist Church

3401 Canal Street

Since Hurricane Katrina, this church has witnessed the strength that can spring from working together. In 2007, First United Methodist Church, which was traditionally white, joined with the African-American Grace United Methodist Church. In addition Latin American participation has grown steadily. The resultant congregation has developed energetic outreach programs, focused especially on health care.

Founded in 1824, First Methodist worshiped in a succession of churches, first on Gravier Street and then, beginning in 1835, at the corner of Carondelet and Poydras streets. In 1851 it built a structure now known as the Scottish Rite Temple on Carondelet Street near Lafayette Square. In 1906 it moved to a Romanesque church designed by Diboll and Owen at 1108 St. Charles Avenue, where it stayed for almost fifty years, until the construction of the Mississippi River Bridge. At that point the church merged with the Canal Street Methodist Church, in the 4100 block of Canal Street, as First United Methodist Church. In 1960, the church at the corner of Canal Street and Jefferson Davis Parkway, designed by Carl L. Olschner, was completed and the united congregation moved into this elegant, colonial-style church.

Grace United Methodist Church also traces its history back to more than one origin. In 1914, families on their way to services at Union Chapel were stopped by police officers, as children were not allowed in Storyville. As a result, the congregation merged with Pleasant Plains Church, but a storm destroyed its new home the next year. A school building and then a stable on Derbigny Street became the next homes for the ill-fated congregation until they found financing to buy the solid stone St. John’s Lutheran church, designed by the Detroit firm of Spier and Rohns at Iberville and North Prieur streets. The ill luck continued, as Hurricane Betsy in 1965 removed the steeple, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 collapsed large parts of the rear sanctuary wall.

The 2007 union of these two congregations was a blessing to both, as well as to the community that receives their outreach services.

The sanctuary of the 1960 Canal Street building is simple, light and airy, with minimal iconography. The sole window depicts Christ and the Little Children and is the work of the Franz Mayer studio of Munich. This came from the previous church and was enlarged by Mayer to fit the new space. The remaining sanctuary windows are clear glass, admitting unfettered light.

The library and the chapel feature additional windows from the 1906 church. The four in the library depict Christ as the Good Shepherd and in other aspects of His ministry. In the chapel, the large window behind the altar, also by Franz Mayer, portrays Christ flanked by Moses on His right and St. Paul on His left, with the message Come unto me. Along the sides are windows with scenes more frequently shown in Protestant than Catholic churches, such as Christ Knocking at the Door and Christ with Mary and Martha. Over the Canal Street door is a Transfiguration scene. These are unsigned, and no record remains of their maker.

*Visited September 1994*

*The Mayer window list includes only the 1960 enlargement.* ***Is the window signed?***

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