Grace Episcopal Church

3700 Canal Street

Grace Episcopal Church traces its origin to the 1885 move of Christ Episcopal Church from Canal and Dauphine streets to St. Charles Avenue. A small group of members petitioned the bishop to establish a new downtown location as well. By late 1886 Grace Episcopal Church opened its doors on Rampart Street, just off Canal Street. It then moved to an English-style building at 1501 Canal Street but established a mission church, St. Matthias, at the corner of South Telemachus and Canal streets. When the Texaco Oil Company offered to lease the Canal Street lot, the parish moved to 3700 Canal Street and replaced the mission with a large church, adding a new St. Matthias Chapel.

The chief architect of this structure was Andrew Schneider, of the August Perez Sr. firm. Inherent in its design were decorative concepts of the 1950s such as light-colored oak furnishings and unadorned plaster walls. The architects also designed a red marble altar. Schneider wanted a lofty nave--and achieved this effect by proposing a narrow footprint for the building.

The windows are strikingly colorful and complex. Tall and narrow, they were designed and executed by the George Payne Company of Paterson, New Jersey. Planned as a set and installed at the time of construction, the windows combine figurative and semi-abstract images, together with written words that can be read vertically as well as horizontally. The texts refer to specific writings from Episcopalian canticles and litanies. In addition, each window includes symbols identifying sacraments or seasons of the liturgical year.

Large, impressive murals at the front and back of the church were designed by local artist and teacher, John McCrady (19111968), a parishioner here. To reduce glare, McCrady created a paint that combined oil paint and wax. He completed the Communion mural above the altar in 1955, but funding for the Ascension mural became available only in 1973, when Alan Flattman, a pupil of McCradys, followed the latters sketch and completed the painting.

The adjacent St. Matthias Chapel included the altar from the downtown church. Its windows are believed to be the work of the Emil Frei Studio. Mrs. McCrady recalled that Frei designed the windows, but Lucien Haase, associate architect, said that the architects proposed the design.

This church is unusual in New Orleans for having a carillon of 15 tower bells, cast in bronze at the John Taylor foundries in Loughborough, England. Tuned to the musical octave, they are played from a short 1-octave keyboard. Striking a key sends an electric signal to the large solenoids near the bells, and these electromagnets pull clappers in the bells to sound them. The bells are on fixed mountings and do not swing. They range in size from 36" in diameter and weighing a thousand pounds down to 16" in diameter and weighing only a hundred pounds.

Hurricane Katrina was cruel to Grace Episcopal Church, which made the national news because its members worshiped on the front sidewalk for many weeks. By the time of the Stained Glass Art in Sacred Places tour in November 2006, the congregation had moved inside to a sparsely furnished but air-conditioned sanctuary, and the dismantled organ sat on the nave floor. The four-foot water line was still evident and the church complex was under renovation. A large Chartres Cathedralstyle labyrinth had been painted on the concrete floor, and all the interior walls had been repainted in the same palette as the original building.

Despite the valiant efforts of its members, Grace Episcopal could not attract enough members and funding to continue. It closed in January 2012 and was purchased by Bethany Church of Baton Rouge.

**Windows**

Altar

Offerings of the Great Hymns of

Holy Communion the Holy Communion

*Te Deum* *Benedictus*

*Magnificat Nunc Dimittis*

Litany History of the Litany

*Toured*

*March 26, 1995*

*November 12, 2006*

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