National Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor

(Ursuline Academy Chapel)

2635 State Street

The history of the Ursuline sisters in Louisiana began in 1727, when they came to the territory to teach and nurse the sick. During the period of Spanish rule, Spanish sisters also helped the colony, but they fled to Cuba when Spain transferred Louisiana back to France.

In 1810, a very determined Mother St. Michel Gensoul received permission from the Popeafter the intercession of the Virgin Maryto go to the New World to replace the Spaniards. In gratitude, she carried with her a statue of Mary as Our Lady of Prompt Succor. Notre Dame de Bon Secours is credited with saving the city of New Orleans during the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. She is prominently displayed above the altar in the Votive Shrine, wearing a crown decorated with jewels contributed by New Orleans women of all faiths.

The elegant statue is often credited with saving the French Quarter from a fire that threatened the Ursuline Convent at the end of the eighteenth century, but the conflagrations preceded her arrival in New Orleans. Rather, Sweetheart, a small French doll brought from France in 1786 by Sr. Ste-Fecicite, was placed in a window facing the flames. With the help of prayers from the nuns, Sweetheart miraculously stopped the fire and the British advancing army. She is now displayed in a small prayer room in the chapel

The Ursulines have had several residences in New Orleans, beginning with several in the French Quarter. After nearly a century in the French Quarter (1727-1823), they moved to a new location far down on Dauphine Street, where the Industrial Canal is now located. Once construction on the canal was to begin, in 1912, the sisters (along with the remains of deceased sisters) moved uptown in veiled vehicles to their present location. Construction of the National Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor began in 1922 and was completed in 1928.

During Hurricane Katrina, the entire campus, including the mortuary, flooded. The sisters in residence sheltered neighbors, but everyone eventually was forced to evacuate.

Solid wooden carvings and beams, along with the cypress ceiling, lend a feeling of strength to the interiorand possibly mellow the acoustics. The main altar is of Alabama marble and granite. Angels hold the Tower of Ivory, a symbol of Mary, and, on the right, the Scroll of Wisdom. Above the altar stands the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor that Mother St. Michel Gensoul brought to New Orleans.

The church was designed in an L shape, as the sisters were still a cloistered order and worshiped apart from the community. Separated from the main sanctuary by a wooden screen, they heard Mass in their own chapel while the lay community worshiped in the main chapel. Fortunately, the sisters are no longer cloistered, and the inside (cloistered) chapel is open so everyone may admire all the windows.

Records from the F. X. Zettler Royal Bavarian Glass Company of Munich confirm that they created stained glass windows for the Dauphine Street convent in 1892 and 1907. These were moved Uptown for the new chapel. In 2002 Stephen Frei, then president of the studio, wrote, The three windows behind the Reredos came from the intermediate convent on Dauphine Street and are unknown as to their maker. It could be Mayer, Frei, Zettler, or even someone else. We now know that Zettler was that maker.

The beautiful windows in both the main sanctuary and the nuns chapel, created by the Emil Frei Company of St. Louis, were installed as part of the construction. Msgr. Francis Racine, priest at the convent, selected windows that reminded him of those at the Cathedral of Chartres, particularly in the accent on reds and blues. The antique-style glass, with a stippled texture and intentional lack of uniformity, also produces a medieval appearance.

The windows in the main sanctuary and the inside chapel relate Marys story from Gods Old Testament promise of the Immaculate Conception through the coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven. They follow the life of Mary in chronological order, alternating from right to left, from the altar side of the nuns chapel moving away from the altar and then from the altar toward State Street. The inside chapel focuses on Marys life up to the time of the birth of Jesus, and those in the nave tell the story of her life as the mother of Jesus. Above each window is a symbol that reinforces the message of the window.

Although the Frei studio rarely signs its windows, the powerful depiction over the main entrance of Our Lady of Prompt Succor is signed Emil Frei Art Glass Co. St. Louis MO Munich Germany. Mr. Frei explained that whether work was carried out in St. Louis or Munich often depended simply on which shop was less busy at the time.

These beautiful windows inspire both students and the religious sisters, as well as conveying favorite Bible stories.

**Windows of Inside (Cloistered) Chapel**

Altar

Nativity Presentation of Jesus

in the Temple

Annunciation Visit of Mary and Elizabeth

Presentation of Mary

Birth of Mary in the Temple

Promise of the Immaculate

Conception to Adam and Eve

**Windows of the Outside (Extern) Chapel**

Altar

Finding Jesus in the Temple St. Joseph and the Christ Child

Marriage Feast at Cana Mary Receiving Holy Communion from St. John

The Pietà Assumption of Mary

Crowning of Mary

Front Entrance

Our Lady of Prompt Succor in Glory

with coats of arms of those who helped spread her devotion

*Visited*

*April 5, 1992*

*September 24, 1995*

*March 30, 2008*

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