St. Alphonsus Art and Cultural Center

2045 Constance Street

Like the other two churches on Ecclesiastical Square, St. Alphonsus Church developed under the jurisdiction of the Redemptorist Brothers. The language and culture of its members was Irish/English.

Facing a declining number of parishioners in the late 20th century, St. Alphonsus Church was decommissioned in 1979. Although the building had been placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, maintenance was sorely lacking, and many religious artifacts were sold at auction in 1990. The church was saved from continued decay through the energies of the Friends of St. Alphonsus, a group that coalesced after a Stained Glass Art in Sacred Places tour in 1989. Because of their work, St. Alphonsus Church was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1996.

St. Alphonsus Church, now a large and inspiring structure, began as a humble wooden church. According to legend, the music for the dedication of the1850 temporary church was provided by a one-man choir. Five years later, Archbishop Antoine Blanc broke ground for the present church, designed by Louis L. Long of Baltimore in the Italianate style. Parishioners contributed much of the labor, and Redemptorist Father John B. Duffy solicited funds door-to-door among his devoted flock to cover the cost of more than $100,000. The first Mass was celebrated in 1857, and the red Maltese crosses on the columns indicating that the structure is debt-free date to 1858. St. Alphonsus Church was the first in the city to reach this goal. Father Duffy was an outstanding fund raiser!

The interior is large and majestic. A two-ton bell, a large silver monstrance, and statues of Christ and St. Patrick arrived in 1858-1859, adding to the elegance of the new church. The ornate artwork, in combination with the stained glass windows, gives the feel of a European cathedral. Frescoes painted in 1866only a year after the end of the Civil War, a period of widespread poverty in the Southby Domenico Canova at a cost of $15,000 portray the Assumption of Mary, the Ascension of Christ, and the Apotheosis of St. Alphonsus. Over the years additional statues have added to the beauty of the sanctuary.

The high altar, built in Chicago in 1868, features a large painting of St. Alphonsus adoring Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. In 1970, in response to the Vatican II call for priests to face their parishioners during Mass, the altar from the former French church on Ecclesiastical Square, Notre Dame de Bon Secours, was placed just behind the communion rail.

Statues of St. Patrick and St. Alphonsus preside from niches in the apse walls. Famed New Orleans church architect Albert Bendernagel designed the side altars in 1905. The left side altar portrays St. Joseph accompanied by his parents-in-law, St. Ann and St. Joachim. Replacing the traditional Mary Altar on the right side is the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a mosaic presented by the Redemptorist Fathers in 1932.

Although less subtle than most church lights, the bare bulbs outlining architectural features n are historically accurate. The pews and other woodwork are original.

F. X. Zettlers Royal Bavarian Institute of Munich created the impressive nave windows. The clerestory windows date to 1889, and the larger windows began arriving in 1890. According to the Mayer-Zettler order books, the last window was ordered in 1923. These depict major events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. Below them, the American-made opalescent glass windows could be opened to offer fresh air to worshipers.

**Windows of St. Alphonsus Church**

Clerestory

Sacred Heart of Jesus Our Lady of Lourdes

Altar

(upper) Crowning of Ascension of Christ

Mary in Heaven

(lower) Death of St. Joseph Crucifixion

(upper) Birth of Mary Resurrection

(lower) Death of Mary Crowning with Thorns

(upper) Mary Visits Her Agony in the Garden

Cousin Elizabeth of Gethsemane

(lower) Espousal of Mary Finding Jesus in the

and Joseph Temple

(upper) Annunciation Adoration of the Magi

(lower) Presentation of Mary The Nativity

in the Temple

Entrance

Baptism of Jesus

Our Lady of Sorrows Christ the Savior

Symbolic Windows in the Gallery

Phoenix Crown of thorns & Bulrush

Eagle Rooster & Instruments of flagellation

Red rose Monstrance

Ave Maria (superimposed M & A) Tablets bearing Ten Commandments

Lilies Noahs ark, holding a church

Dove & olive branch Hand of God

Irish tower with harp Alpha & Omega

Crown Cross on mountain with waterfalls

*Visited*

*September 17, 1989*

*April 5, 1997*

*April 22, 2007*

*September 20, 2009*

When citing information from this document, please acknowledge the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.