St. Cecilia Catholic Church

1015 France Street

St. Cecilia Parish was created from St. Vincent de Paul Parish in 1897, responding to the continuing growth of the city downstream. Its members were predominantly German (notice the dedications at the base of the windows). The infamous Hurricane of 1915, however, was especially fond of churches and completely destroyed the frame church and school. Although plans to rebuild were delayed because of World War I, Father John Rieter, the first priest of the church, dedicated the new building at the Christmas midnight Mass in 1923. Reputedly patterned after a church in Holland, this brick structure is of Tudor-Gothic style.

According to legend, Father Rieter named the church in honor of St. Cecilia because of a misadventure in the Roman catacombs. Lost and finding himself before the tomb of St. Cecilia, he vowed to build a church in her honor if she directed him to the nearest exit.

The beautiful stained glass windows are the focal point of the church. The workmanship is excellent, and they follow the Munich style, with decoration covering most of the surface of each window. We know little about their dates or maker(s), and stylistic differences hint that the transept windows were installed at a different time from the nave windows. We do know the origin of the triple window in the organ loft: these were installed in 1941 by the Rambusch Decorating Company of New York.

The five tall windows above the altar tell the story of St. Cecilia. She was a third-century Christian of noble rank, betrothed to a young Roman pagan, Valerian. On their wedding night Cecilia informed Valerian that she had consecrated her virginity of God. She convinced him to respect her vow, and he converted to Christianity, being baptized by Pope Urban I. Valerians brother Tiburtius also became a Christian, and the two were put to death, along with their jailer Maximus (who had also converted), for being obstinate Christians. Cecilia was arrested and refused to commit an act of idolatry. She was sentenced to suffocation in a hot bath but escaped unharmed. A soldier was sent to behead her, but three blows with the sword failed to kill her. Left half-dead, Cecilia lingered long enough to ask Pope Urban to accept her house as a church.

Since the sixteenth century, St. Cecilia has been considered the patron saint of musicians. She is usually depicted carrying a musical instrument, although in the organ loft window here, she carries a piece of sheet music.

Usually, symbols included with a saint refer to his attributes, but the window featuring St. Raymond is an exception. He was an important canonical scholar, yet the small windows at the bottomwith crossed swords and a snake pierced by a sword--relate to someone of a military bent. Did the designers plan to include a different saint?

*St. Cecilia Church closed in 2001 and was renovated to serve as a health clinic and day care center for senior citizens. The center was first operated by the Daughters of Charity and then as a PACE center of the Catholic Charities of the New Orleans Archdiocese.*

**Windows**

St. Cecilia

Pope Urban St. Valerius

St. Maximus St. Tiburtius

Altar

(items in parentheses below are symbols beneath the saint.)

Pentecost, with Holy Ghost above Crucifixion, including Ss. Mary,

and Apostles surrounding Mary John, and Mary Magdalene

Sacred Heart of Mary (seven arrows: Sacred Heart of Jesus

Seven Sorrows of Mary) (crown of thorns, 3 nails from Crucifixion)

St. Francis of Assisi (stigmata) Holy Family (*Ora et Labora*: pray & work)

Elisabeth [of Hungary] (roses) St. Martha (cooking pan, spindle) \*

St. Anna (book) St. Raymond (crossed swords,

snake pierced by arrow)

Choir Loft

Angel with violin St. Cecilia Angel with bells

\* Because Martha was busy preparing the house when Christ visited, she is considered the patron of domestics, housewives, etc.

*Visited*

*September 1992*

*March 25, 2001*

When citing information from this document,

please acknowledge the

Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.