St. Dominic Catholic Church

775 Harrison Avenue

St. Dominic Churcha massive structure of brick, marble, and steelexemplifies contemporary architecture, and much of its art is symbolic rather than figurative.

Like St. Anthony of Padua Church, this parish traces its origin to the Mortuary Chapel on Rampart Street (now Our Lady of Guadalupe Church). In 1912 a vigorous Spanish-born Dominican pastor of the chapel, Fr. Tomás Lorente, noted the increasing number of Catholic families living in the Lakeview area and neighboring Bucktown, in Jefferson Parish. An energetic man, he established the Lakeview Mission of St. Anthony of Padua Church as well as a parish that became St. Louis King of France Church in Metairie, celebrating the first Masses for both in a West End dance hall in May. In October of the same year, 1912, the St. Anthony of Padua mission moved into a frame chapel, fondly called the Ave Maria Chapel, on Chapelle Street. The following year it moved to a second chapel on Polk Street.

Both of these, however, were destroyed in 1915, one by fire and the other by the legendary hurricane. A third chapel was built in 1917, and in 1924 the Lakeview *Mission* of St. Anthony of Padua became an independent *Parish* of St. Dominic, with first the Spanish Dominicans and then the American Dominicans presiding. Numerous other temporary sites also served St. Dominics during these years. The parish outgrew the original church at the present location, and in 1944 a brick church was constructed; it now serves as the gym. Todays church and rectory date to 1961. Irvin Kohler of New Orleans was the architect (also at St. Raphael the Archangel, now Transfiguration of the Lord Church & Parish).

Much of the interior decor can be credited to Fr. Angelo Zarlenga, O.P., an Italian-born Dominican who lived and worked in Chicago. He designed and executed most of the statuary and ceramic reliefs, as well as the baptismal font and mosaics. The large mosaic behind the altar depicts St. Dominic in his glory. Lidia Canestrara assisted Fr. Zarlenga in designing the Stations of the Cross.

The windows at St. Dominic church, especially those in the nave, are striking. They were designed and created by the Botz und Miesen Studio of Cologne, Germany (which also created the Apostles Creed windows at St. Genevieve Church in Slidell). The company sent one of its artists to New Orleans to capture local elements, such as Spanish moss, in the designs. The symbol at the center of each cartouche reflects a specific aspect of the Dominican belief, such as the black-and-white Dominican shield, the trumpet of St. Vincent Ferrer, and the crown of thorns of St. Catherine of Siena.

The east and west transept windows were designed by German artist Franz Pauli and executed in Europe. The east window, above the altar of Our Lady, depicts the titles of Mary as given in Her litany, and the west window, above the altar of the Blessed John Vercelli (founder of the Holy Name Society), depicts the symbols of Christs Passion. These windows, too, are abstract and depend on symbolic imagery to convey their messages.

Only in the south window, above the choir loft, are human figures portrayed. It shows the Transfiguration of Jesus as he appears in glory between the Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah. The choice of subject is significant, as St. Dominic died on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6). Designed by the prominent New Orleans artist and historian John Chase, the window was manufactured in Holland. This, the last of the windows at St. Dominic Church, was installed in 1974, the 50th anniversary of the independent parish.

Eight feet of water flooded the church in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, at the end of August 2005, destroying the pews and other furnishings and damaging the organ. In addition, almost all homes of parishioners flooded. St. Dominic Church served as a rallying point for neighbors and people from afar who came to help with the recovery. At the time of the second Stained Glass Art in Sacred Places tour, almost fifteen months after the flood, permanent pews had not been installed, but the parish persevered. Now the statue of St. Dominic welcomes the faithfuland no longer bears the etching from flood waters around his chest.

*Visited*

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