St. Peter Claver Church

1020 North Prieur Street

While the parish of St. Peter Claver was founded in 1920 to serve the African- American residents in the area, the building itself had served Catholic whites, free people of color, and slaves since 1852. Originally dedicated to St. Ann, the church designed by T. E. Giraud was built on land donated by the first pastor of the parish, Abbé J. M. LeFranc. The area for the new parish had been carved out of St. Augustine Parish.

By the time the congregation of St Peter Claver was founded, the building had been renovated a number of times due to both structural problems and the need for more space. A hand-written chronicle by one of St. Anns pastors recorded, The church is built of hard brick. . . . Unfortunately, the church was built on low swampy soil and no precautions were taken to prevent dampness from rising in the walls. By 1869, the ground under the church was raised, and the church was enlarged by the additions of a sanctuary, cross aisles and two sacristies. In the 1890s, a new floor was laid, and an iron fence was erected in front of the church and presbytery.

In 1920, according to the history of St. Peter Claver Parish, Old St. Anns Church was renamed St. Peter Claver to honor a 17th-century Jesuit who is the special patron of all Catholic missions and missionaries among those of African heritage. The entire propertyrectory, church and schoolwas taken over on October 3, 1920, by the Josephite Fathers. Rev. J. A. St. Laurent, S.S.J., became the first pastor. Since the old congregation of St. Ann had moved the furnishings to its new location, the members of St. Peter Claver Church could decorate the sanctuary according to their own taste. The history mentions that the altar had to be supplied with candelabra, crucifix and statues. The statue of St. Anthony was donated by George Blanchard. Stained-glass windows were donated by individuals and groups of parishioners. And a beautiful church it is.

After eighty-six years of loving occupation by the St. Peter Claver congregation, the church was almost completely renovated in 2006 because of five feet of water from the Hurricane Katrina levee breaks. This venerable structure now reflects the vibrant, subtle, elegant expression of this congregations faith. The tower has been restored to its pre-Katrina position (the winds tilted it a little), and damaged windows have been repaired.

New Orleans artist Ruth Goliwas designed and executed mosaics combining traditional Christian and West African *adinkra* symbols. Pieces of colored glass make the mosaics lustrous and vibrant. Wood carvings from Nigeria complement Goliwas work

Goliwas also created a window to commemorate Hurricane Katrina. All other windows date to earlier renovations. The blend of the old and the new at St. Peter Claver Church is a reminder to all of us that if we have faith many things are possible.

**Windows of St. Peter Claver Church**

Altar

Eucharist-Altar Eucharist - Altar

New Baptism Window Choir - Angel with Trumpet

Marriage Faith - Censer - Symbol of Prayer

Ordination - Cup & Cross Hope - Anchor & Calvary

Extreme Unction Charity - Heart & Jesus

Penance - Keys & Stole Eucharist - Chalice & Grapes

Old Baptism window Confirmation - Dove & Holy Spirit

Hurricane window Original colored glass

Mosaics:

Baptism (shell & water)

Gye Nyame - Only God

Aya - Endurance

Akoyo Nan (hens feet) - Protectiveness and parental discipline

Wawa Aba (Seeds of the *wawa* tree) - Toughness and perseverance

Sankofa - Wisdom in learning

Jerusalem Cross

Dove on baptism pool

*Visited November 12, 2006*

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