



St. Augustine

Catholic Church

222 YEARS OF FAITH IN ACTION

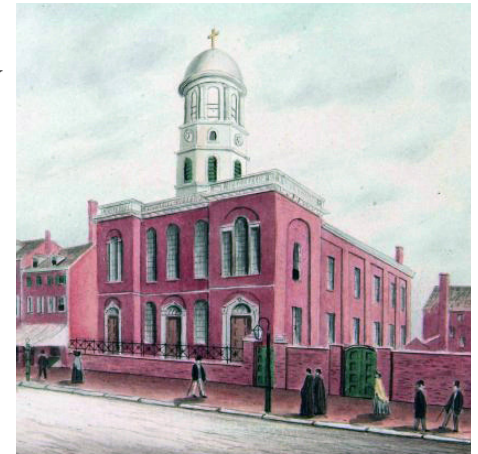
Celebrating the Past, Cultivating the Future

Saint Augustine Roman Catholic Church, located at 4th and Vine Streets in Philadelphia's Old City neighborhood, is a spiritual, historical, and cultural treasure. It provides a vibrant and openhearted spiritual home for people residing nearby, as well as many others who travel across town, across counties, and even across state lines to share in joyful worship and community service. It has a rich history as the city's fourth-oldest Catholic church, with deep roots in the Philadelphia community.

We are now embarking on a campaign to both preserve this glorious historic landmark and build an enduring future for our Augustinian friars, parishioners, and neighbors throughout Philadelphia. Saint Augustine Parish's fascinating history, beautiful architecture and artwork, commitment to musical excellence, and culture of community service make us who we are, and our parish is dedicated to the wider community. As noted in the church's entryway: **we gather to worship, we leave to serve.**

History

St. Augustine is proud to be counted among Philadelphia's four oldest Roman Catholic churches. Our story begins in 1796, when Father Matthew Carr of the Order of Saint Augustine arrived from Ireland to minister to an immigrant population of primarily Irish and German Catholics. The original church, the first foundation of the Augustinian community in the USA, was built over five years, receiving financial support from notable citizens such as President George Washington; Commodore John Barry, father of the American Navy; Thomas Fitzsimmons, congressman and signer of the Constitution; and prominent merchant and financier, Stephen Girard. It was the largest Philadelphia church at the time.



The building was burned to the ground in the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Nativist uprising of 1844, save for one portion of a wall bearing the words "The Lord Seeth." Those same words were incorporated into the sanctuary of the new church, which was rebuilt mainly with the proceeds of a successful lawsuit against the City of Philadelphia for its lack of protection during the riots. James Buchanan, the only president from Pennsylvania, also donated funds for rebuilding. On Christmas Day, 1847, the first Mass in the new church was celebrated, and the parish worships in the very same church to this day, welcoming members and friends from all walks of life.



With the passage of time, the church persevered through new challenges. The construction of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge in 1922 resulted in the destruction of much of the neighborhood, but the parish nonetheless survived, lowering its entrance to match the new street level. Further disruptions to the neighborhood occurred with the construction of the US Mint in 1969 and the Vine Street Expressway in 1991. But new life came to the church through the Filipino community in 1992, when Saint Augustine became the National Shrine of the Santo Niño de Cebú, the patron saint of the Philippines. Filipinos from the tri-state region now comprise an active, vibrant part of the parish community.

The parish was further bolstered in the new millennium by the influx of a sizeable number of young adults. Today, the white steeple of the church, rebuilt after a winter storm blew it onto the Ben Franklin Bridge in 1992, stands as a welcoming beacon to all. Our very special Augustinian community joyfully embraces all who are searching for a spiritual home. We welcome people of all faiths, all races and all ages; people of diverse cultures; families with children; divorced or separated persons; the LGBTQ community; homeless persons; loving relationships, married couples, singles, widows and widowers; those in recovery; visitors and travelers from near and far—in other words, all who feel the call.

St. Augustine Parish Today

The parish presently has 620 registered families, 1160 registered parishioners, and is growing. In the past three years alone we have registered 247 new members. Our church is open to the Catholic community, including non-parishioners, for weddings, with 60 to 70 celebrations annually. We are an important anchor in the community, and provide space and support for a number of groups and services, including:

- Women of Hope – an assisted living facility for women in need
- Veterans Multi-Service Center for Women Programs
- Augustinian Volunteers
- Two 12-step programs hosting weekly meetings
- Neighborhood community meetings
- The Healing Garden, a beautiful space sponsored by the Augustinian Defenders of the Rights of the Poor
- Mutya Filipino Dance Company
- Other service and project groups, including Villanova University, Princeton University, University of Vermont, and Malvern Preparatory High School for Boys

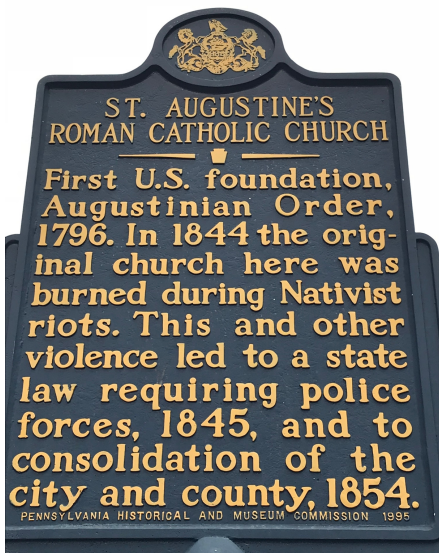
St. Thomas of Villanova Chapel,
on the Villanova University campus

Impact on Education

Education has always been a vital part of the St. Augustine community. In 1811, Saint Augustine Academy was built on Crown Street (now Lawrence Street) to serve the growing number of children in the surrounding area. This early educational endeavor would go on to produce outsized results, evolving into the present-day Villanova University, with which the church maintains strong Augustinian ties. Prior to the devastating fire of 1844, Saint Augustine Church owned a library of nearly 3,000 theological works that were lent throughout the colonies. Even though this remarkable collection—enormous for its time—was totally lost in the flames, the parish's commitment to education lived on.

"St. Augustine's has a weighty history and a light modern spirit. Outsiders and sojourners are welcome."

- Duncan Wright, friend of the parish



Another school—which still stands as the parish hall—was built in 1870. A convent would soon follow for the Sisters of Charity, a religious order founded by Elizabeth Ann Seton, a prominent woman from New York who converted to Catholicism and ultimately became the first native-born citizen of the United States to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. The Sisters of Charity operated the school until its closing. The Augustinian tradition of “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity,” inscribed in Latin within our church, continues to guide our pursuit of spiritual knowledge and exploration of faith through various initiatives and activities.



Art and Architecture

Our current church was built in 1847 and designed by architect Napoleon LeBrun, who also helped design two other iconic Philadelphia buildings: the Academy of Music and the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. When 4th Street was lowered by 20 feet in 1924 in connection with the construction of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, the entrance steps were added. Evidence of this is found today in the differently colored bricks added above the main doorway.

The magnificent artwork in the building contributes to its reputation as one of Philadelphia's most beautiful churches. Frescoes painted by Nicola Monachesi in 1848 are believed to be the oldest frescoes in any religious building in the United States. Other works of great beauty include the ceiling nave and portraits of Saint Joseph and Our Mother of Good Counsel by Filippo Costaggini (who also painted two-thirds of the panorama frieze in the U.S. Capitol Building), completed in 1882; portraits of the life of Saint Augustine by Tito Troja, completed in 1897; a portrait of the crucifixion tableau by Hans Hansen, completed in 1926; eight exquisite stained glass windows created by Morgan and Sons of New York in the 1890s; and the Stations of the Cross, c. 1894. Sixteen paintings by Old World Masters, including Tintoretto, Perugino and Carracci, were tragically lost when the church burned in 1844.



Fun Fact

As a distinct Philadelphia landmark, our church has served as a location for two Hollywood movies: M. Night Shyamalan's suspenseful "The Sixth Sense" (1999), and Antoine Fuqua's action thriller, "Shooter" (2007). The church's solemn and extraordinary beauty provided a perfect set for both.



Music

Shortly after Saint Augustine Parish's inception, it became a center of musical activity, a tradition that remains firmly rooted today. Both Handel's Messiah and Haydn's Creation were performed here, and some historians believe that Rossini's Solemn Mass had its world premiere in the church on Christmas Day 1871. Henry Gordon Thunder, Jr., a musical director at Saint Augustine, organized the Choral Society of Philadelphia and its instrumental accompanists – parish musicians who, by 1900, evolved into the legendary Philadelphia Orchestra.



This commitment to music remains strong. Our current music program includes two choirs – a Filipino choir (Sunday's 11 a.m. Mass), and a chamber choir (Sunday's 7 p.m. Mass) – and several wonderful instrumentalists. They join together throughout the year for various events and concerts. Even Philadelphia Orchestra members have been known to participate in our musical events.

Home Cook Heroes

St. Augustine has participated in the "Home Cook Heroes" program since September 2015, serving dinner twice a month to the guests of Gift of Life Family House. Gift of Life is a non-profit organization that works to coordinate life-saving transplants for waiting patients and their families, while supporting the generous organ donors and their families as well. Parishioners plan menus, shop, and prepare and serve the dinners on the third Tuesday and fourth Sunday of every month. A monthly special collection supports this endeavor.





Vision for the Future

Now in our 222nd year of worship and outreach ministries in Old City Philadelphia, Saint Augustine Parish is eager to continue our mission in and for the community, while preserving our magnificent historic buildings. Our red doors are always open.

It is our sincerest hope to keep the welcome mat out for generations to come, and we have embarked on a \$750,000 capital campaign to help make that possible.

Proceeds from the campaign will go toward the following:

- Church building façade work
- Assessment of costs for restoration of art works
- Restoration of the crucifixion tableau painting
- Replacement of church steeple louvers
- Windows for the building used by Women of Hope
- Modernization of restrooms to insure ADA compliance
- Restoration of pews and kneelers
- Creation of a preservation account for future projects
- Conversion from oil to gas heat
- Automatic door openers for the church
- Upgrades to the fire alarm system
- Parish evangelization projects

Please join us in supporting this vital campaign. Your generous assistance will enable us to complete much-needed capital improvements to this unique Philadelphia historic landmark, establish a preservation fund for the future, and provide long-term funding for the pastoral needs of the parish.

To donate, see updates, or learn more about the parish:

Visit our website at www.st-augustinechurch.com or contact our pastor:

Rev. William F. Waters, OSA

Saint Augustine Roman Catholic Church

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