

Celebrating 225 Years

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of Augustinian Heritage

Over the parish's history of two and a quarter centuries the church steeple and bells have been a sign of our significant presence, as a beacon, and of our contributions to the larger community

St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church in Philadelphia is celebrating its 225th anniversary! Its rich Augustinian roots run deep and wide, but the countless number of people whose relationship with God has grown within the parish community during the past 225 years is the most central part of St. Augustine's history. Countless milestones have been celebrated. From baptisms to first holy communions to weddings and ordinations, to anniversaries and funeral masses. Most current parishioners, some of whom recently have chosen to become Catholic, are young adults and Filipinos who live outside the geographical boundaries of the parish. They choose the parish because it is known to be a welcoming community and because of the richness of the liturgical music as well as its beauty, historical relevance in Philadelphia and its connection to Villanova University. Yearly, sixty to seventy couples celebrate the sacrament of marriage in this beautiful church.

St. Augustine Parish was the first foundation of the Augustinian Order in the United States. It was founded in 1796 by Fr. Matthew Carr, O.S.A. when he came to Philadelphia from Ireland. Fr. Carr developed the parish to serve the increasing number of German and Irish immigrants who settled in the northern sections of the city. Nicholas Fitzmaurice Fagan, a notable architect, designed the church which, when completed in 1801, was the largest church in Philadelphia. In 1811, Fr. Carr established St. Augustine Academy which later became Villanova College, in 1842, and is now Villanova University. St. Augustine parish is also the home for several Augustinian Volunteers each year. It is here that the first commencement ceremony for the Augustinian Volunteers took place 21 years ago.

St. Augustine Parish is known for its footing of new life. In 1844, nativist riots destroyed the church building and as a result of the failure to protect the church property, the Philadelphia Police Department was incorporated. The church was rebuilt in 1847. Frescos were painted on the ceiling by artist Nicola Monachesi. These are believed to be the oldest frescos in any religious building in the United States. A parishioner, Henry Thunder, Jr., organized the Choral Society of Philadelphia and its accompanists which developed into the Philadelphia Orchestra. The first Philadelphia performance of Handel's *Messiah* was at St. Augustine. In 1992, an image of Santo Niño, (the Holy Child Jesus), was installed at



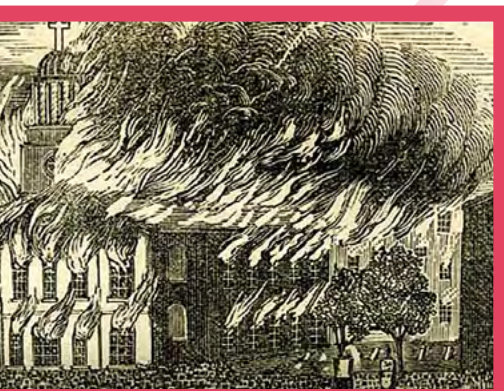


Ceiling fresco by Nicola Monachesi

St. Augustine Church. The parish was designated as the National Shrine for devotion to Santo Niño in North America. Since then, in Philadelphia, every third Sunday in August, the Filipino community in the parish celebrates

a Sinulog Festival which honors the Señor Santo Niño de Cebú which is honored and celebrated in the Philippines earlier in the year.

The interior of the church is abundantly surrounded by eight paintings depicting the life of Augustine. They were created in 1898 and 1899, in Italy, by artist, Tito Troja. The paintings reflect Augustine's conversion in the garden, his baptism, Monica, his mother and himself, Monica's death, Augustine giving the *Rule* (the way of living) to the friars, Augustine talking to a young person about the Holy Trinity, Augustine Speaking at the Council of Carthage and his death. These hang beautifully throughout the church and are valued treasures that are currently in need of restoration to mend the cracks in the paint and to re-stretch the canvases. Each restoration will cost about \$75,000. ✠



1844, nativist riots destroyed the church building

In conjunction with, and in celebration of St. Augustine's 225th Anniversary:

- Archbishop Nelson J. Perez will celebrate the Sinulog on August 15th
- On October 10th a special liturgy will take place with the Philadelphia Police Department recognizing its origins at the parish
- As a fundraiser the parish is asking parishioners and friends for a birthday gift of \$22.50 or \$225.00, \$2250.00 or \$22,500.00
- Depending on the state of the pandemic, other possible social celebrations will be posted on the parish website

Did you know?

- Scenes from three Hollywood movies were filmed at St. Augustine Church; *Sixth Sense* (1999), *The Shooter* (2007) and *21 Bridges* (2019) because of the beauty and significance of the church



Bruce Willis meets Haley Joel Osment inside St. Augustine in The Sixth Sense

- George Washington contributed \$50.00 to what would be equivalent to \$1000.00 dollars today to the building of the first church
- The Sister Bell of the Liberty Bell was housed at St. Augustine Parish for many years

Contact Us!

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