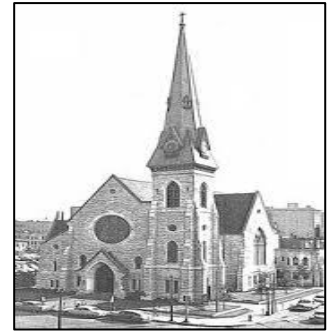


Saint Olaf Catholic Church

1876, 1889, 1955

Since 1876, a church has occupied the corner of Eighth Street and Second Avenue South in downtown Minneapolis. Both of the two earlier churches at this location were devastated by fire and rebuilt as new structures.

The first place of worship constructed on the site was the Church of the Redeemer built by the First Universalist Society. In its early days, the church was the spiritual home to many prominent Minneapolis residents, including William Washburn, John Crosby, and Thomas Lowry. The original structure was constructed in the English Gothic style of sturdy Platteville limestone. The church building was renowned for having an elegant spire rising 212 feet and housing a four-sided clock.



Church of the Redeemer



Saint Olaf Catholic Church: Fire 1953

A fire erupted during the bitter cold of January 1888, destroying most of the original building, leaving only the stone walls and tower. The gutted interior was rebuilt under the direction of the architectural firm of Long and Kees, which had also designed Minneapolis City Hall.

The Church of the Redeemer experienced declining membership during the twentieth century, and in 1941, the Universalist Society sold its historic stone church for \$112,500 to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The Archdiocese remodeled the structure and rededicated it as Saint Olaf Catholic Church. The name Saint Olaf, commemorating an eleventh century warrior-saint, was chosen because of the city's large Scandinavian population.

Twelve years later, history repeated itself, and the church building was again destroyed by fire, this time on February 18, 1953. Ironically, that date happened to be on Ash Wednesday. The blaze caused irreparable damage, resulting in complete demolition of the structure.

Saint Olaf was rebuilt, and the new church opened on February 23, 1955, which was also on Ash Wednesday. The new structure, designed by the local firm of Thorshov and Cerny, is an example of the "Modern" architectural style of the twentieth century. The façade is clad in Mankato-Kasota stone, and the dark interior is decorated with stunning stained-glass windows. The only remnants of the former building are nine bells salvaged from the old



Saint Olaf Stained-Glass Interior

church that are now housed in the new church tower and two carved walnut choirboy friezes which are part of the original church's organ screen and now are installed on either end of the church vestibule.



Saint Olaf Altar and Organ

Additions have been made to the church complex over the years including the Forliti Gathering Room, Fleming Banquet Hall, parish offices and meeting areas, and the chapel of Sts. John and Paul. In 1996, Saint Olaf purchased property on the corner of Ninth Street and Second Avenue that became the Assisi Peace Garden, a park providing rest and beauty for those who work or live downtown. The church sanctuary was extensively renovated in 2000, and became home to the church's music ministry, including the Lively-Fulcher pipe organ installed in 2001.

The downtown location of Saint Olaf provides convenient access for thousands of people of the Catholic faith and of its church ministry. The sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated seventeen times each week.

Saint Olaf also maintains an extensive social outreach program that serves the needs of the poor in the area. In 1995, for example, Saint Olaf purchased the Exodus Hotel to the south of the main church building and utilized it as a transitional housing residence for those in need. In the future, this building will become supportive housing for area residents.



Saint Olaf Catholic Church Building