

Historic St. Stephen Church

Cleveland, Ohio



"Let my prayer be like
incense offered before
you, and my uplifted
hands like the evening
sacrifice."

Psalms 141:2

History

Although St. Stephen's is not the oldest, numerically it is the strongest of Cleveland's German churches. It is a daughter of St. Mary of the Assumption on Jersey Street (W. 30th), from which its parishioners were released in 1869 with the approval of Bishop Rappé. It received the territory west of Harbor Street (W. 44th), and as the west section of town developed, this new parish blossomed rapidly with it. After St. Stephen's was founded, Father Stephan Falk, spiritual leader of St. Mary of the Assumption Church, caused a two-story brick building to be constructed about in the middle of the property on which St. Stephen's now stands, on Courtland (W. 54th), across from Duke Street. The original parish church and school building were combined from 1869 to 1876. Classrooms were constructed on its lower level while the upper floor was used as a church.

In April 1870, Caspar Reichlin was ordained in the priesthood. Seven weeks later he received a call to serve as the priest of the young parish. Its rapid growth made the young priest realize the necessity to acquire more space for the church and the school. Consequently, he began to collect donations for the church project. On September 7, 1873, its cornerstone was laid in a celebration arranged by Bishop Gilmour. Tragically, less than two weeks later on September 18th the U.S. entered the international Financial Panic of 1873. This depression that lasted for almost ten years devastated many of the businesses of the country, and each undertaking that required funding was brought almost to a standstill. As a result of this calamity, work on the church was slowed to a crawl, and any progress that was made was due to funding that was borrowed with the help of parishioners who mortgaged their own homes.

Since they could find no more room in the schoolhouse to congregate, the parishioners removed on July 2, 1876, to the church, even though its interior was unfinished, and on that same day, the first services were held. Not until five years later was the inside plaster work undertaken and the inspiring walls and Gothic Revival vaulted ceiling executed by "the artistic hand" of Wilhelm Hoffstedt of Detroit. The joyous day finally came on Sunday, November 20, 1881, when Bishop Gilmour festively dedicated the church in the presence of a great number of people and many clergy. In the afternoon, Bishop Gilmour also blessed the huge



Wood Carvings

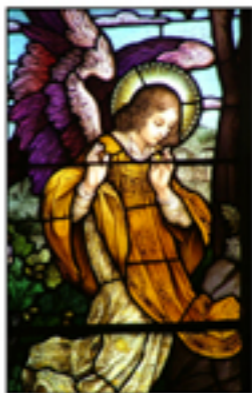


The oak pews harmonize with the wood carvings which dominate the high altar, side altars, and pulpit.



Windows

The present stained glass windows were installed in 1907, made by the Mayer Stained Glass Company of Munich, Germany. One of the more visually appealing improvements to the church occurred in 1993. The 1953 tornado destroyed three stained glass windows behind the high altar. Installed in 1893, they predated by 14 years the majority of the present windows. Three windows were chosen from St. Joseph Church and slightly modified to fit the window openings in the sanctuary.



Artifacts



Many artifacts throughout the church display the complete attention to detail that the original artisans utilized.



Faces



Within the statues of St. Stephen Church, we find the soft, serene beauty of faces who continually gaze upon God and His majesty. In their gentleness and quietness, we see the love of the craftsmen for God that they put into every detail of their work. May this love inspire us to also be reflections of God's love and mercy in our lives.