

St. Louis Cathedral
is located in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Three Catholic churches have stood on the site since 1718, when the city was founded. The first was a crude wooden structure in the early days of the French colony.

As the French were Catholic, their church was prominently located on the town square. Construction of a larger brick and timber church was begun in 1725 and was completed in 1727.

Along with numerous other buildings, the church was destroyed in the Great New Orleans Fire on Good Friday, March 21, 1788. The cornerstone of a new church was laid in 1789 and the building was completed in 1794 in the Spanish Louisiana period.

In 1793 Saint Louis Church was elevated to cathedral rank as the See of the Diocese of New Orleans, making it one of the oldest cathedrals in the United States.

In 1819, a central tower with a clock and bell were added. The bell was embossed with the name "Victoire" in commemoration of the Battle of New Orleans victory in 1815.

Enlarging the building to meet the needs of the growing congregation had been pondered since 1834. The Mortuary Chapel on North Rampart had been dedicated in 1827 as a chapel, and St. Vincent de Paul was established in a little frame church in 1838 but not dedicated. On March 12, 1849, the diocese contracted to enlarge and restore the cathedral.

They specified that everything be demolished except the lateral walls and the lower portions of the existing towers on the front facade. During the reconstruction, it was determined that the sidewalls would have to be demolished also. During construction in 1850, the central tower collapsed. As a consequence of these problems and

reconstruction, very little of the Spanish Colonial structure survived.

The present structure dates primarily to 1850. The bell from the 1819 tower was reused in the new building and is still there today. During the renovation, St. Patrick's Church served as the pro-cathedral for the city.

On April 25, 1909, a dynamite bomb was set off in the cathedral, blowing out windows and damaging galleries. The following year a portion of the foundation collapsed, necessitating the building's closure while repairs were made, from Easter 1916 to Easter 1917.

A 1906 church census reported that Mass at the cathedral was offered in both English and French. The language of the sacramental register of the cathedral switched from French to English in 1910. By the early 1920s it was reported 95% of the parishioners understood English, although it is not clear when French-language services were last routinely held.

The cathedral was designated as a minor basilica by Pope Paul VI in 1964. Pope John Paul II visited the cathedral in September 1987.

The high winds of Hurricane Katrina displaced two large oak trees in St. Anthony's Garden behind the cathedral, dislodging 30 feet of the ornamental gate. The nearby marble statue of Jesus Christ was damaged, losing a forefinger and a thumb.

The winds tore a hole in the roof, allowing water to enter the building and severely damage the Holtkamp pipe organ. Shortly after the storm, the organ was sent back to Holtkamp to be rebuilt. An electronic substitute was used until June 2008, when the organ was reinstalled in the cathedral. Originally installed during the cathedral's extensive renovation in 2004, the organ was donated by longtime choirmaster and organist Elise Cambon.

