



SACRED SPACE FOR ALL

a new century on the avenue

St. Charles Ave. BAPTIST CHURCH:

CASE STATEMENT





Image by Marc J. Boswell.

There's *no place like* ST. CHARLES

For more than 100 years, St. Charles Ave. Baptist Church in New Orleans has opened our doors wide for worship and community gatherings. From 1898 to the present, St. Charles has used our distinctive voice and activism to make a difference in thousands of lives.

Now, thanks to a prestigious grant of \$250,000 from The National Fund for Sacred Places and a bold campaign to raise \$500,000 in matching funds for phase one of construction, St. Charles is preserving our 1920s sanctuary building. We aim even higher. We seek to preserve all the buildings on our campus in three phases, estimated to cost nearly \$3 million. This once-in-a-century opportunity will ensure that St. Charles will continue to make a difference for generations to come.

A Congregation Looks Ahead

In 1926, when St. Charles members built our new sanctuary, they stepped out in faith. The congregation was only a few decades old and, while growing, did not have nearly enough members to fill the 1,000 seats.

Yet members embraced a vision of a sacred space for all. They saw the sanctuary as a place for private worship and community gathering. They envisioned church services as well as seminary lectures, graduations and concerts.

And we're still looking ahead to the future! Those dreams have been realized, and today we have an even bigger vision of how to make our beautiful building a place for all! Today, St. Charles still worships in the inspiring sanctuary, and opens our doors to about 20 community partners who call the church campus home. Youth organizations, faith communities, recovery groups, yoga classes, therapists and others fill the halls with energy, healing and activism.

Our vision also has been realized through the St. Charles Center For Faith + Action, an interfaith non-profit, to expand outreach. It serves as an incubator of ideas at the intersection of sacred story and social justice. Community partners bring about 1,500 people through our doors each year. Currently, 89 percent of people using our church buildings during the week don't worship at the church on Sunday.

A Prophetic History

St. Charles was founded in 1898 as a mission of Coliseum Baptist Church to serve the growing Carrollton area of Uptown New Orleans. Twenty-nine charter members worshiped in a donated residence on Cherokee Street. In 1901, the church moved to a building on St. Charles Avenue and Hillary Street. Still growing in 1926, they built the new sanctuary at a prime location, St. Charles and Broadway near Tulane and Loyola Universities.

From the beginning, St. Charles members were leaders in shaping New Orleans. They helped found Southern Baptist Hospital, home of the region's first chaplaincy training program. St. Charles was known for strong preaching and active support of missions. Its music was renowned.

In the 1960s, its pastor, the Rev. Dr. G. Avery Lee, advocated for civil rights. Members were active in sit-ins and helped shape a congregation committed to equity and inclusion. From the early days, women were valued leaders, not just helpers. We were among the first Baptist churches to ordain women as deacons and ministers, and St. Charles was the first in the state to call a woman as senior pastor.

For most of the 20th century, St. Charles enjoyed a robust relationship with New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. When it was time to cut ties with the Southern Baptist Convention over growing fundamentalism, St. Charles helped form new progressive Baptist organizations.



Image courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Preserving Our Historical Buildings

In the mid-1920s, St. Charles chose Favrot and Livaudais, the city's pre-eminent architects, to design the new sanctuary. They had just completed Hibernia Bank, then the state's tallest building. The style was Spanish Eclectic, characterized by a bell tower and ornamental cast concrete and plaster. Their expertise in structural steel brought to life a dramatic cantilevered balcony.

Within the sanctuary, white plaster is bathed in sunlight from wide, arched windows. Ornamentation includes rams heads hiding in the pilaster capitals, cross motifs in wooden doors and inscriptions from the 23rd Psalm. When the sanctuary was constructed, guilds of skilled plaster workers and craftsmen, many immigrants and people of color, were active, and hardwood from local forests was in steady supply.

The church maintained this style when it added a wing of offices and a fellowship hall in 1955, followed by a chapel and classrooms in 1962.



A Century Of Use Takes Its Toll

Like many historic New Orleans buildings, our sanctuary has been battered by storms and floods.

Twice in 2019, the lower floor flooded. This proved that designers were wise to place the worship space on the second floor, but it added urgency to the need for restoration. Cypress Building Conservation, local conservators, have found the sanctuary ripe for restoration. "An astounding amount of character-defining features remain, including tile floors, original light fixtures, original wood pews, wood doors and windows."

Detailed Plans To Restore The Building

The Sacred Space for All campaign will focus on comprehensive repairs rather than piecemeal projects. The process began in 2016 with a thorough analysis and building conservation plan, which set in motion the congregation's partnership with The National Fund for Sacred Places. After St. Charles received the National Fund grant, the congregation retained leading preservation architect Robert Cangelosi of Koch and Wilson. His ecclesiastical projects include St. Patrick's Church downtown. Cangelosi planned the detailed scope of work and helped assemble a team of seasoned tradespeople.

The restoration will peel back and repair long-term water damage in the interior. The work also will include exterior repairs to prevent further damage. Repointing the mortar between bricks, securing and repairing original wooden windows, and replacing missing roof tiles are simple but fundamental.

Phase One Starting Point

\$165,000 February / March 2022

During phase one, fifth-generation master plasterer Jeff Poree will remove water-damaged plaster. Sections of the original plaster have been compromised or collapsed beneath the tower and in stairwells. The damage is less extensive in the sanctuary itself.

Extensive Exterior Preservation

\$580,647 Spring / Summer 2022

Cypress Building Conservation will handle exterior repair and restoration. This will include repointing mortar joints on the Walnut Street facade and elsewhere. Workers will replace rusted metal lintels over doors, reglaze deteriorated windows, secure or replace roof tiles and repair gutters.

A Project Management task force has begun preparing for phases two and three as the church moves toward the sanctuary's centennial. These will not commence until phase one is complete and fully funded. Phase two includes a complete HVAC update for all buildings, complete plaster replacement and elevator repairs. Phase three will address plumbing, bathrooms and ADA compliance. Cost estimates for all three phases are about \$3 million. We have included our community partners in planning, as upgrades support their vital work and impact.

Abounding In Hope

The Sacred Place For All campaign will help ensure the future of St. Charles Ave. Baptist Church as a place of sanctuary and active community center serving New Orleans. We see the campaign as an act of stewardship — preserving what has been given to us for future worship, social justice and service to the community. We want the next century at St. Charles to be as full of joy and love of neighbor as our first. Join us!

To learn more about how to contribute to our efforts, contact office@scabc.org or (504) 861-9514.

