

The American Church in Paris



Self-guided tour

*In Christ there is not east or west, in him no south or north;
But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.
- poet John Oxenham*

Welcome to the American Church in Paris, the pioneer of American churches overseas. We are an inter-denominational, Protestant congregation with roots dating back to **1814**. The first church building was erected in **1857** for a cost of \$46,000 at 21, rue de Berri, just off the Champs-Élysées. The construction of the sanctuary on Quai d'Orsay was begun 1st March 1926, and was dedicated 6 September **1931**. *The congregation worshipped for a while at the Eglise de l'Oratoire, placed at the disposal of the Protestant church in 1811 by Napoleon.*



When first built, the church served mainly Americans living abroad in Paris. Today our startlingly international congregation is made up of people from over **40 nations**, representing more than **35 different denominational traditions**.

The **sanctuary** is divided into three parts: the **narthex** (entryway), the **nave** (with the pews) and the **chancel** (the front of the church). The design of the sanctuary is based on a 15th century Gothic plan, including the central aisle flanked by two cloister side aisles. The main level of the sanctuary can accommodate approximately **400 people**, with additional seating for 100 in the balcony above the narthex. The ceiling of the nave and chancel is ribbed and finished with Belgian brick. The three large iron chandeliers in the central aisle and additional smaller ones in the cloisters are hand-wrought in Gothic design. *How do you think we clean the chandeliers?*

Start the tour with the **chancel**. The wood is hand-carved Hungarian oak, except for the church's **organ** which is relatively new. It was handcrafted at the Beckerath factory in Hamburg, Germany and was dedicated, with a series of concerts, the weekend of 7-9 October **1988**. The ornately designed **organ case** was the creation of master craftsman Gunther Hamann, who spent over 900 hours carving the ornaments. The case contains 4 organs, each played from its own keyboard, either simultaneously or alone. There are a total of **3,328 working pipes** in the organ, all except 4 of which were dismantled and laboriously cleaned for the first time the summer of 2008, in time for the organ's 20th anniversary. The metal pipes are made of an alloy of tin and lead, and the wooden pipes are crafted from mahogany and oak. The organ weighs approximately **18 tons** and is secured to the wall with metal bolts.

*Note: The creation of the original organ (above, left) was partially supervised by M. Marcel Dupré, the great Parisian master of the organ, who also presided at its inauguration in September 1931. Edmund Pendleton was the music director during the War years and at one point had to hide from the Germans behind the original organ. He subsequently fled to the south where he worked for the Red Cross. Mr. Pendleton worked for 20 years as music critic for the Herald Tribune. He wrote a solo entitled "Bid Adieu" with the collaboration of **James Joyce**, published in 1949. He set to music the words of American poets Edwin A. Robinson and Edgar Allan Poe (*The Bells*). He was friends with **Picasso** and **Hemingway**.*

The **altar**, made from various kinds of Italian marble, used to serve as the communion table. The top, one solid piece, required over a year to find. The grape-and-vine motif on the table is supported by statues of the four apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, sculpted by the same Parisian sculptor who created the plaque on the left wall dedicated to Kirk. The marble flooring of the chancel matches the marble of the table. *Why are there cracks in the floor near the altar?*

Looking to the right, the **pulpit** is decorated with **six carvings** by Richard Wessel, a former member of the church, dedicated in June 1984. Handcrafted from basswood, the figures represent six great preachers and reformers. From left to right: Pope John XXIII, John Wesley, St. Paul, Martin Luther, John Calvin and Martin Luther King, Jr. *Dr. King preached from this pulpit 24 October 1965, the year after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. He was invited by the French Protestant Federation, to speak at the Maison de la Mutualité, on "L'Eglise dans un monde en revolution". His civil rights colleague Jesse Jackson has also preached here.*

A small **chapel**, named after Edmund Pendleton (*see plaque with notes from his Christmas cantata*), is located to the right of the chancel. It is used for meditation, prayer services, extra seating on Sundays, and other devotional activities. At the front of the chapel is a large painting called "Christ Looking Over Jerusalem", by Canadian expat artist Frank M. Armington. This painting originally hung over the altar but was moved to its present location when the new organ

was installed. The stained glass window in the chapel was presented to the church in **1957** as part of the 100th anniversary celebrations, given in memory of Louis V. Twyeffort, whose family's ties date back to the rue de Berri days. They depict scenes from the birth and early life of Jesus.

*Note: On the other side of the chapel doors is the **church house and community centre**. The very first public service on this site took place 16 May, 1929, in the Assembly Hall, now the theatre. The facility had been planned to meet the needs of young families and students, with two bowling alleys, now a sunken basketball court and gym, and a billiards room. The ACP hosts Bible study classes and a number of community activities in these rooms, including AA meetings, fitness classes and special events.*

The windows

Returning to the nave, facing the back of the church, there are three stained glass windows here on the lower level. The first two are **Tiffany windows**, created at the turn of the century in the New York studios of Louis Comfort Tiffany. They were originally installed in the church on rue de Berri in 1901, donated by Rodman Wanamaker of Philadelphia in memory of his wife. The plans drawn up for the quai d'Orsay church were designed to include these windows. The two windows are classified as **national monuments** by the French government, and are two of the rare Tiffany windows installed in a church outside the US. Note that the surface is raised, and the iridescent paint used, compared to the flat surface and primary colours of traditional windows. The window depicting the angel holding the Bible is called "The Word" and the one with the angel with hands folded is "Contemplation".

The third window here depicts the **seals of the Reformed Churches** of Europe: France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Hungary, Holland, Ireland, Scotland, and England & Wales. The basis of this design was taken from coloured lithographs representing the insignia of each of the Protestant movements. (*Note at the top the Jewish menorah across from the Bible, brought together by the dove or holy spirit.*)

Now stand in the middle of the church. The stained glass windows on the upper levels of the sanctuary were designed in the US by **Charles J. Connick** from Boston with input from Joseph W. Cochran, ACP pastor at the time. The glass in the windows was largely imported from England, and crafted by French artists in ateliers in both Paris and Chartres. They combine Biblical, ecumenical and patriotic themes.

Facing the front of the church, look at the windows along the upper level of the sanctuary; they are in chronological order, starting with the Patriarchs at the back right corner and finishing at the back left window with the French/American alliance of faith, and the Missionary window in the very back of the church.

Window 1: **The Patriarchs**: Enoch, walking with God; Abraham, father of the faithful; Melchizedec, kin of Salem; Moses, leader out of Egypt

Window 2: **The Prophets**: Isaiah, Daniel in the lion's den, Elijah in the chariot of fire; Ezekial

Window 3: **The Gospel, or Christmas** window, with the Annunciation, the Holy Family, the shepherds and the Magi; this window was both designed and constructed in Chartres.

Window 4: **The Apostles' call**, with John the Baptist, Philip, Andrew and Bartholomew

Window 5: **The Parables of Jesus**, with the Good Samaritan represented by St. Francis, the Prodigal Son by St. Augustine, the Sower by Paul, and the Wise Virgins represented by Mary of Bethany

Window 6: **The Works of Christ**, 12 scenes from Christ's ministry, including driving out the money changers; raising of the daughter of Jairus; the pool of Siloam; Christ with Mary and Martha; the miracle at Cana; the healing of the Centurion's son; the Transfiguration; the raising of Lazarus; the call of Zaccheus; the feeding of the five thousand; Peter walking on the sea; the miraculous draught of fishes

Front centre: **The Rose Window**, above the altar, is called "The Redemption" and depicts the crucifixion of Christ, in contrast to Christ's resurrection in the Missionary Window at the rear of the church. The rose window employs Dante's spiritual meanings for colour, with *red* symbolising the colour of divine love; *blue*, divine wisdom; *gold*, achievement; *green*, hope; and *white*, pure faith.

Window 7: **The Passion of Christ**; In the twelve medallions are the principal events of Holy Week: The house of Simon the Leper; the Triumphal Entry; washing the disciples' feet; the garden

of Gethsemane; the kiss of betrayal; Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus; Christ before Caiaphas; the denial of Peter; Christ before Pilate; Ecce Homo; the Scourging; Simon of Cyrene bearing the Cross

Window 8: **The Resurrection**, and the four people associated; Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, Peter and Thomas

Window 9: **The Evangelists**; Matthew, symbolised by the man; Mark, by the lion; Luke, by the ox; John, by the eagle; the medallions show scenes described exclusively by the respective Evangelists : the flight into Egypt, told only by St. Matthew; the healing of the blind man, told only by St. Mark; Christ in the home of Mary and Martha, told only by St. Luke; Jesus turning water into wine, told only by St. John

Window 10: **The Saints**, four apostles of Christian faith; Francis of Assisi, symbol of self-denial and chastity, and universal faith, preaching to the birds; Genevieve, patron saint of Paris, providing bread, symbol of charity and fortitude; Catherine of Sienna, symbol of sacrificial service to Christ, who advocated reform of the clergy, ministering to a poor man; Christopher, symbol of burden-bearing for Christ's sake and the saint of travelers, leaning on a blossoming staff; this window was both designed and constructed in Paris

Window 11: **The Reformers**: Luther, professor of theology at Wittenberg, posting his thesis on the door; Calvin, preaching in Geneva; Cranmer, Anglican and a martyr; Knox, imprisoned and preaching before Mary, Queen of Scots; inscription: *Post Tenebras Lux*: After darkness, light.

Window 12: **French-American Alliance/War Memorial**: The central figures are those of General George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette. On the right is a French soldier of 1781, and at the left is a US soldier of 1917. In the canopies are their respective coats of arms. In the medallions below are a camouflaged American war ship; the ringing of the liberty bell, July 4, 1776; the fall of the Bastille, July 14, 1789; and a French war vessel of Admiral de Grasse. On the American side above are seen William Penn and Abraham Lincoln; on the French side, the military Saints Martin and Louis. In the apex are Archangels Gabriel and Michael.

*After the **St Bartholomew massacre** in 1572 (Marie Medici), 1,200 bodies washed up on the Isle aux Cygnes, which became a protestant cemetery. It was no longer an island as of 1812. Also, **Jean Nicot**, who introduced tobacco to France in mid-16th C., installed his factories and warehouses here. He was responsible for the very first instance of a strike in France when his workers protested the introduction of machines into the process. The 'medicinal' substance in tobacco was named after him.*

Now, continue into the narthex; the octagonal **baptismal font** is made of native hard stone of France, patterned roughly after a basin for holy water (stoup) in the Cathedral St. Corentin of Quimper, in Brittany. Various Christian symbols cover the font, including the alpha and omega, the lamb and the crown of thorns. *How can you tell it has been adapted for this church? And why is there a ship among its symbols?*

The windows on the back wall represent the **four angels**, in **attitudes of prayer**: Confession, Petition, Adoration and Thanksgiving, reminding all who enter the church that it is a house of prayer for all people.

You may also climb to the **balcony**, where you can view the sanctuary and its windows from a higher vantage point, and take a close look at the Missionary window at the back of the church. Watch for the **angels** on the stairway up.

The Missionary Window depicts some famous missionaries, covering four regions in four of five columns, starting on the left with Asia, then Europe; the centre shows Christ's missionaries; then to the right, Africa and the Americas. *Note: the most light coming through this window is via Christ's face and halo. The placement of this window, with the risen Christ at the back of the church, is no accident.*

Today the American Church in Paris continues as a strong witness to Christ in Paris and throughout the world. To learn more about our weekly schedule of services, concerts and our many outreach programmes, please see our website: www.acparis.org.

The American Church in Paris

65, quai d'Orsay, 75007 Paris Tel: 01.40.26.05.00
Facebook: AmericanChurchParis Twitter: @AmChurchParis

