

Heritage Foundation tour highlights Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Church's architecture

By Christine Young
Intermountain Catholic

SALT LAKE CITY — Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Church was one of six churches highlighted during a Utah Heritage Foundation tour Oct. 10.

The Let There Be Light Tour also included Our Savior Lutheran Church, Christ United Methodist Church, LDS Olympus Stake Center, Community of Christ and Holladay United Church of Christ. Each building was constructed between 1955 and 1975 and exhibits mid-century design features that were the focus of the tour, organized by a Utah Heritage Foundation committee, Salt Lake Modern, dedicated to preserving and promoting the region's mid-century modern architecture and design, said Alison Flanders, Utah Heritage public outreach director.

The tour was an opportunity to promote religious structures during National Modernism Tour Day, Oct. 10, sponsored by the International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement, a non-profit organization initiated in 1988 to act as a watchdog when important modern movement buildings anywhere are under threat of being demolished.

A historic building is one that is 50 years or older; the churches highlighted on the tour "are on the verge of becoming historic, and we would like to get them on the national register and landmarked locally to provide protection for them in the future," Flanders said.

Typically, religious structures are examples of the architectural style that was popular during the years they were built, and "congregations are good stewards of that architecture because they are proud of their church as a

congregation," Flanders said.

The property for St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church on 1300 East 5000 South was purchased in 1962. In 1963, ground was broken for the parish school, a convent and a hall. On June 28, 1964, Mass was celebrated in the hall for the first time.

Ground was broken in 1975 for the new church and rectory. The architect, Cecil Holland, was also a member of the parish. The first Mass was celebrated in the newly constructed church in 1977.

The Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965 decreed changes within the Catholic Church that affected church design. Following Vatican II, the altar screen was removed and the priest turned to face the congregation. St. Vincent de Paul Church and other churches designed after that time were meant to encourage full, conscious and active participation from the congregation. These designs incorporate more open sanctuary spaces and greater access and visibility to the altar, as well as shorter distances from the pew to the altar.

After Vatican II, baptismal fonts were to be integrated into the worship space. The sense of a less formal presentation was further encouraged as modernist design principles emerged in the 1960s.

St. Vincent de Paul Church was featured on the tour because its architectural design related to the tour theme "Let There Be Light," said Anne Mooney, architect at Sparano and Mooney Architecture and a Salt Lake Modern Committee member. Mooney is also a member of St. Catherine of Siena Newman Center.

The wooden Stations of the Cross in the church were carved in Italy, as was the baptismal font and the ambo; the altar was made out of Carrera marble in Italy. The



The St. Vincent de Paul Church's altar is made from Carrera marble.

IC photo/Christine Young

stained glass windows, from Scandinavia, are made from thick pieces of colored glass held together with concrete.

The most unique feature in St. Vincent's chapel "is the way the natural daylight comes in over the altar and illuminates it to bring a focus to the space," said Mooney. "The rest of the lighting is more restrained and is ambient lighting coming in through the stained glass windows," a favorite for those who toured the church.

The St. Vincent adoration chapel was added onto the church building in 1995.