Trinity Episcopal Church  
St. Louis, Missouri  
St. Louis City

In January 2020, Trinity Episcopal Church, 600 North Euclid Ave, St. Louis, MO 63108, became the first site in Missouri to be named to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its significance in LGBTQIA+ history. It is the first and only such site in Missouri and the only Episcopal parish in the country so honored.

Trinity is recognized in particular for the years 1969 to 1993, which include its early support of gay rights, its embrace of LGBT parishioners and community members, and its compassionate response to the first AIDS patients in the 1980s. The recognition of Trinity is part of an effort by the U.S. Department of the Interior to document a more complete story of the gay rights movement, a project announced in May 2014 by Secretary Sally Jewell.

The NRHP is the U.S. federal government’s official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects deemed significant to American history and worthy of preservation. Currently there are 93,500 sites across the country, with LGBTQIA+ sites numbering less than 20. “Trinity, as a progressive Episcopal church, continues today as an energetic supporter of LGBTQIA+ worshippers,” said the Rev. Jon Stratton, rector of the church in a January 2020 press release. “We are honored by the NRHP recognition and wear this designation proudly.”

Research from the St. Louis LGBT History Project has helped identify that Trinity’s longtime support for the LGBTQIA+ community dates back to its serving as the meeting space of St. Louis’ first gay rights organization – The Mandrake Society in 1969.

The NRHP designation came after a concentrated period of reflection, recollection and research by members of the church and those involved in the preservation of St. Louis’ early gay and lesbian history. Aiding the application process were longtime Trinity parishioners who are keepers of parish records and institutional memory for the years cited in the NRHP designation – Ellie Chapman, wife of the late Trinity rector Rev. William Chapman; Etta Taylor, church archivist; and Jym Andris, community historian.

Their work was supplemented by Ian Darnell, curatorial assistant for the LGBTQIA+ Collection at the Missouri Historical Society, and Steven Brawley.

University of Kansas professor Katie Batza wrote the application as an extension of a current book project and as part of her ongoing work with the National Park Service LGBT Heritage Initiative. She said that as the application took shape, Trinity Church’s ties to the LGBTQIA+ community were inspirational.
“It was encouraging to see how committed Trinity was to the rights of all of its gay and lesbian parishioners at a time when these rights largely were unknown to the mainstream,” she said in a January 2020 press release. “The first Mandrake Society meeting at Trinity was one of a handful of local, national and global political actions and protests in 1969 – including the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village – that marked the start of a new civil rights movement.”

Trinity is located in the Central West End (CWE) neighborhood, west of downtown and adjacent to Forest Park and Washington University Medical Center. The CWE is known as one of St. Louis’ earliest identified “gayborhoods.” From the 1960s through 1980s, the LGBTQIA+ community was instrumental in the area’s redevelopment. In the 1980s, gentrification took hold forcing many people to relocate due to rising costs of real estate and business operations.

Trinity Episcopal Church, founded in 1855, has stood at the corner of Euclid and Washington Avenues since 1935. Trinity is urban, socially progressive and Anglo-Catholic in its worship. Its rector is Jon Stratton, a social justice activist involved with the Clean Missouri campaign and a member of the leadership team with Missouri Jobs with Justice.

According to Trinity, its parishioners are young and old, black and white, gay and straight, some with many material resources and some with few, some new to the Episcopal Church and some long steeped in its traditions. Families of all kinds are part of the Trinity community. Children are a valued part of Trinity and are always welcome. Trinity has weekly Sunday school activities and, once a month, offers an alternative, lively and informal “Messy Church” service for children and families. Trinity is a member of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri.
Bibliography:

- St. Louis LGBT History Project, see www.stlouislgbthistory.com (accessed January 2021)
- Trinity Episcopal Church, see www.trinity.org (accessed February 2021) and press release by Michael Shepley (January 2020)
Figure 1 - Cover artwork for April 1971 Mandrake Society newsletter courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.
TRINITY
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH

13444 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd
Saint Louis, Missouri 63140

ALL PEOPLE....INCLUDING EACH OF YOU....ARE INVITED TO ATTEND ALL SERVICES
IN THIS HISTORIC ANGLICO-CATHOLIC PARISH CHURCH WHOSE SPECIAL MISSION IS TO
SERVE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. YOU ARE INVITED TO HELP IN THIS MISSION.

SUNDAYS
7:45 a.m. MORNING PRAYER & LOW MASS
(No Choir or Sermon at this service. Light breakfast in Parish House following service).

10:00 a.m. SOLEMN HIGH MASS
(With Choir & Sermon. Church School for the children during service. Coffee Hour in Parish House following service).

WEEKDAYS
Monday: 6:45 a.m. Morning Prayer & Low Mass
Tuesday: 5:15 p.m. Evening Prayer & Low Mass
Wednesday: 9:45 a.m. Morning Prayer & Low Mass
Masses on Holy Days: As Announced

Confessions: 1st Saturday & By Appointment

CHURCH IS OPEN DAILY FOR PRIVATE PRAYER, MEDITATION AND VIEWS BEFORE THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT. ENTER. REST. PRAY.

PRESBYTERI TRINITY PARISH
The Reverend William D. Chapman
The Reverend Richard E. Tombaugh

Both Father Chapman and Father Tombaugh are available for private counseling.
by appointment. Telephone: 361-6655.

Figure 2 - Trinity Episcopal Church advertisement in April 1971 Mandrake Society newsletter courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.
Figure 3 - Memorial Gardens exterior of Trinity Episcopal Church photo by Steven Louis Brawley.
Figure 4 - Exterior of Trinity Episcopal Church photo by Steven Louis Brawley.