

Holy Cross African Orthodox Church

Individual Landmark

122 West 129th Street



Holy Cross African Orthodox Church. Photo: Lorraine Colbert

The Holy Cross African Orthodox Pro-Cathedral is located at 122 West 129th Street in Central Harlem in the New York City Borough of Manhattan. Holy Cross is located on West 129th Street between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Malcolm X Boulevard; the block includes late 19th - and early 20th -century row houses, apartment buildings, and a few buildings purpose-built or modified as churches, and it is lined by a wide sidewalk and mature trees.

The Pro-Cathedral occupies nearly its entire lot. A simple black iron fence marks the boundary between the sidewalk and the steps to the church's main and basement entrances. The gate to the basement entrance features decorative, spiral, and curving ironwork and is capped by four white-painted fleurs-de-lis.

The Holy Cross African Orthodox Pro-Cathedral is a three-story, three-bay by five-bay, brownstone building with partial brick cladding over an exposed brick basement; a two-story, two-bay by four-bay brick addition (ca. 1895–1900) extends from the rear. Initially built ca. 1865 as a residence, the building was used as a home or apartments until 1895, when it became the new headquarters of the Lenox Republican Club. By ca. 1900, it was being used as a Jewish synagogue, and from 1916–1927 it housed the Rendall Memorial Presbyterian Church. Archbishop George McGuire purchased the building and dedicated it as the Holy Cross African Orthodox Pro-Cathedral in 1931. The physical fabric of the building illustrates this history of the building's evolution in use over time.

On the façade (north elevation), a thin layer of brick cladding extends up from the basement level to the top of the first floor. At the basement level, stairs extend below grade to a door and one-over-one window with a curved top in the easternmost bays: both feature end brick surrounds and simple, rectangular end-brick hoods. A wide set of stairs runs up from street level to the primary entrance on the first floor. The entrance is marked by a simple Gothic-style pointed arch, stepped end-brick surround, and is filled by a set-back contemporary double door and arched transom filled with square panes and a central cross. The two bays to the east feature arched windows with stepped, end-brick surrounds; the applied brick façade steps in around the base of the windows. A sign reading "Holy Cross African Orthodox Church Pro-Cathedral, Alexander McGuire, organizer" extends across the tops of these windows. The top of the brick projection features a simple stepped brick cornice and is capped by vernacular pointed brick detailing made up of stacked end bricks and stretcher brick arches. Original brownstone Neo-Grec window surrounds remain on the second and third floors. On the second floor, the three one-over-one sash windows have pointed arch frames on the top sash. The third floor is lit by three one-over-one windows. Where the original brownstone façade ends (likely the original location of a cornice), a brick stepped parapet with a shallow, stepped gable extends upward and a sign made up of end-brick with "Holy Cross" and a central cross is located at the center of the stepped brick parapet.

The east and west elevations abut adjacent buildings. On the south elevation, a two-story, two-bay by four-bay brick addition extends from the building. The addition, which houses the sanctuary, features an angled southeast corner with two windows. On its west elevation, it is lit by four sash windows located just under the roofline. The rest of the addition is infenestrated. The third floor of the original building retains three one-over one sash windows.