



CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN

You can find this point of interest in Menaggio - Path 1 - Stage 2

INFORMATION

Location: the provostal church of St. Stephen is at an angle with via IV Novembre. There is no churchyard.

Paving: via IV Novembre is asphalted.

Architectural barriers: to access the church from the 3 doors on the front one must climb 5 low stone steps. In correspondence with the two protruding pilaster strips next to the main portal, and due to their protrusion, the steps are reduced to 2. There are two handrails on the wall next to the two secondary entrances.

Access: the side entrances are usually open.

Services: parking available in the area, automated teller machine.

Leisure and food: hotels, cafes and restaurants nearby.

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

The collegiate church of St. Stephen is of very ancient origin; according to tradition, pope Urban II, while travelling to Clermont Ferrand in France, where he launched the First Crusade, granted privileges to the church and personally appointed Menegaldo Castelli as Archpriest. It is likely that the original church, smaller than the existing one, was orientated in the opposite direction, towards the lake. At the beginning of the 17th century a new larger church was needed, the construction whereof lasted more than a century, with a truly magnificent outcome. The animated baroque façade hosts a niche at the centre with a statue of the patron Saint.

The interior, with a nave and two aisles, was painted between 1836 and 1863 by the Sueglias and in 1899 by Luigi Tagliaferri from Pagnona; it has four chapels at the sides and two at the end of the aisles. On the right hand-side, starting from the entrance, one finds the chapels of Our Lady of Sorrow and St. Michael the Archangel (to whom a small oratory in Menaggio, now demolished, was dedicated), with a beautiful 17th century altarpiece with *Saint Michael between saint Roch and Saint Sebastian*. The chapel at the end of the right aisle and dedicated to the Sacred Heart, is embellished by stuccos attributed to the same group of painters who worked on the ones of the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary.

The presbytery is dominated by a bichrome marble altar, surmounted by a shrine; two large canvases with *Eucharistic miracles* hang on the walls, which are attributed to painter Castelli from Menaggio. The apsidal vault hosts a fresco with the *Martyrdom of St. Stephen*, by Luigi Tagliaferri.

The two chapels on the left-hand side are dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua and St. Joseph, respectively. The splendid chapel at the end of the left aisle is dedicated to Our lady of the Rosary and is embellished by a rich stucco decoration and by frescoes depicting themes connected to the devotion to Mary. The niche with the statue of the Virgin is surrounded by fifteen 18th century oil painted copper medallions with the *Mysteries of the Rosary*. Under the niche, a photograph of the painting of the *Madonna and Child with an angel* (17th century) by Bernadino Luini is exposed. In the words of Maria Cristina Terzaghi in *Guide della Provincia di Como – Alpi Lepontine Meridionali (Guides of the Province of Como – Southern Lepontine Alps)* under the heading Menaggio: «The painting portrays the Virgin holding a book and an Iris flower; the Baby Jesus tries to climb on her lap, with the help of an angel; the background shows a magnificent landscape; the iconography represents a foreshadowing of the Passion, clearly symbolized by the flower, too». The original painting adorned the chapel of the Calvi family in the previous collegiate church; when the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary was created in the new building, the people of Menaggio obtained by the Calvi the authorization to move the painting to its new location. At the end of the 17th century the work was sold to Count Carlo Firmian, against the transfer of the Magistrate's Court from Tremezzo to Menaggio. At the Count's death the painting was purchased at an auction by Marquis Arconati Visconti of Milan; in 1914 Maria Arconati Visconti donated it to the Louvre, where it still lies today.