

The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist

History of the Cathedral

Seven years before Milwaukee's founding as a city in 1846, construction on Milwaukee's first church and Cathedral, St. Peter's, was begun on land donated by Solomon Juneau, on the north-west corner of the present North Jackson and East State streets.

As settlers poured in from the east in increasing numbers, the Catholic population grew from a handful of 20 in 1835 to 6,000 in 1847. The Diocese of Milwaukee, comprising all of Wisconsin, was created in 1843, and John Martin Henni was appointed its first bishop.

To meet the challenge of Milwaukee's rapid growth, Bishop Henni enlarged St. Peter's in 1844 and started the building of Old St. Mary's in 1846. Then, in 1847, he turned his attention to the Cathedral.

Bishop Henni purchased nearly an acre of ground near the courthouse on Juneau Square. Work began in 1847 on a Milwaukee brick structure that combined Roman and Grecian architecture. Later that year, the cornerstone was laid and on July 29, 1853, the new Cathedral was consecrated to the service of the Roman Catholic Church and named for St. John the Evangelist, the patron saint of Milwaukee's first bishop, John Martin Henni.

In 1858, the City Council adopts the tower clock as the official timepiece of the City of Milwaukee. In 1893, a new Renaissance style tower is completed reusing the original three bells that were installed in 1857 and cast in Troy, New York.

In 1935, the Cathedral was gutted by fire. Only the walls and the tower were left standing. The interior was completely destroyed. Reconstruction of the Cathedral begins immediately. In 1942 the original tower clock is restarted, using a new electrical system and a new pipe organ is installed (replacing the Patrick Cudahy Memorial church organ installed in 1923).

The interior was restored in time for the archdiocese's centennial celebration in 1943. The restoration included the addition of columns. In addition, the interior was expanded 65 feet to the east, toward Van Buren Street.

In 1977, prior to the arrival of a new archbishop, the Cathedral was again redecorated with a new color scheme. The entire interior was done - walls, ceilings, columns, woodwork and window trim. In this same year the Cathedral is designated a Milwaukee landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Decorative Painting

In 2001, the cathedral was completely repainted, restoring the original vibrant color palette of terra cotta, gold, ivory and taupe to the interior and creating a much more vibrant beauty than in the past. New lighting throughout the cathedral highlights the beauty of the painting.

Stained Glass Windows and Episcopal Portraits

Facing the nave from the entrance to the apse, the **thirteen large stained-glass windows** may be seen along the cathedral's side walls. They portray the **twelve Apostles** and **Saint Paul**. Designed and crafted by the **T. C. Esser Company of Milwaukee**, these French Medieval-style windows are constructed of **Norman slab glass and German and English antique glass**, hand-cut and then leaded together. Below each central figure is a symbol within a medallion expressing in pictorial form the words of the **Apostles' Creed**. The borders of each window are in **Romanesque style** and feature more ornate inlays and darker colors of glass to frame the central figure.

Above these windows can be seen the portraits of all the archbishops of Milwaukee. With the removal of the lanterns, we are now able to see the portraits of the Archbishops who have served this Archdiocese. From front to back on the north side are Henni, Katzer, Stritch, Meyer, Weakland and from the front to back on the south side are Heiss, Messmer, Kiley, and Cousins.

The Altar

"... the center of the thanksgiving that the Eucharist accomplishes."

Dedication of an Altar, No. 4

The altar is both the table of the paschal sacrifice and of the Eucharistic banquet. As the symbol of Christ second only to the gathered assembly of the baptized, it calls for a prominent and central location. Situated as it is in the midst of the assembly, the cathedral altar is the focus of the action of the Body of Christ gathered around it at God's invitation. It signifies the presence of Christ in the midst of the celebrating community, who comes to be nourished at the Eucharistic celebration.

Standing on a *predella* or platform of **Tennessee marble**, the altar of the cathedral is situated as the center and focal point of the cathedral. Its **mensa or tabletop is a great almost six foot square slab of marble** fashioned in Italy and set on a base made from the **tops and columns of the cathedral's former devotional altars**. Underneath is a reliquary containing the relics of St. Francis Xavier, patron of missionaries and St. John Vianney, patron of diocesan

priests and formally deposited there on February 9, 2002 by Archbishop Rembert Weakland. The reliquary **come from the top of the old side altar and has the tongues of fire** on it.

The Altar Crucifix

Suspended twenty-eight feet over the altar is a *corona* or crown **14 feet in diameter**, designed by the well-known Italian sculptor **Arnaldo Pomodoro** in collaboration with **Giuseppe Maraniello**, who created the figure of Christ that completes the piece. It is made of fiberglass that has been bronzed and gilded. This piece serves to highlight the altar as the symbolic center of the cathedral. **Johanine in its symbolism**, it presents a powerful portrait of Jesus, thoroughly incarnate, yet Divine Lord and Master of every moment. His inner glory shines forth, especially at that hour when he is lifted up on the Cross and gives his life for the salvation of the world. **The Dove in his open right hand represents the gift of the Holy Spirit**, the very life of God, breathed out upon the entire world at the moment of his death on the Cross (*John 19:30*). The corona can be seen as a symbol of the crown of thorns transformed into a crown of glory radiating from and transforming the sufferings of the Lord's Paschal Mystery. **Originally**, it was to contain a cup/bread in your right hand side and this stylized gift in his left hand represents the Bread of Heaven given for the life of the world (*John 6*). However, during the installation, the artist believed that it detracted from the work and decided not to install this symbol.

The Cathedra

The word "**cathedral**" comes from the Greek word *cathedra*, meaning "**chair or throne.**" The cathedra is the bishop's chair. It is the symbol of his role as chief teacher and pastor of the local church. Thus the cathedral draws its name from the symbol of the unity of the archdiocese.

The present cathedra has been fashioned from marble from the old communion rail and is on the two-step platform directly south of the altar. Collamendino rossa marble from the communion rail was used in the construction of the chair or *cathedra*. It is located on the axis extending south from the altar, with two of the cathedral's pillars as a backdrop. This is the place from which the archbishop presides over cathedral celebrations. It is also a place from which he may choose to preach and teach.

The Presider's Chair

Since the cathedra is reserved to the archbishop alone or to other bishops to whom he may delegate its use, this is the chair used by all others who preside at the Cathedral.

Like the cathedra and the presider's chair, the seating for the rest of the assembly faces the altar but also allows people to see one another, reinforcing their unity as the Body of Christ. The flexible seating helps the people to gather around the altar while allowing for processional and other movements called for by the rites of the Church. The seating may be expanded for large crowds at major archdiocesan celebrations, or it may be arranged for more intimate gatherings.

The flexible seating also accommodates non-liturgical events appropriate to the role of the cathedral as a center for the arts in the Milwaukee community. It is fashioned of the same marble as the cathedra.

Break into small groups and continue tour:

Memorial Plaques

Upon entering the cathedral, there are two memorial plaques prominently displayed in the narthex. On the right side of the main door is a plaque memorializing the rebuilding of the Cathedral after the devastating fire of 1935. It reads:

"This Cathedral Church, erected in 1853 AD by John M. Henni, first bishop and archbishop, was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1935. In 1936, Samuel A. Stritch, fifth archbishop, began to rebuild it more spaciously and more ornately, thus saving it from complete demolition. His transfer to the Archdiocese of Chicago prevented him from completing the work. In 1943, on the occasion of the centenary of the erection of the diocese, Moses, E. Kiley, sixth Archbishop, completed the work of restoration."

The second plaque honors the Cathedral renovation of 2001 and reads:

"This Cathedral was restored, not without difficulty, exactly according to the norms of liturgical renewal established by Vatican Council II and solemnly and joyously inaugurated and rededicated on February 9, 2002, by the Archbishop and Ordinary, Rembert G. Weakland, OSB."

Mother of Perpetual Help / Moses

The large mosaic of Mary is fashioned in the **style of the Stations of the Cross** with Venetian mosaic inlay. This area provides a suitable and popular shrine for those who stop in to pray. In the north ambulatory, one finds the statue of the patriarch, **Moses, originally placed in the cathedral in honor of Archbishop Moses E. Kiley** who was responsible for the completion of the **1943 rebuilding** of the Cathedral.

Cathedral Treasury and History

This area houses artifacts and information about the long and distinguished history of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. Visit to learn more about this building, the people of the cathedral parish, and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The Baptistry

The tomb-shaped baptismal pool signifies the journey from death to new life; it points from the darkness of the west to the rising sun in the east, its three steps a reminder of Christ's three days in the tomb. On axis with the altar, it directs us to the place where we gather for the nourishment we need to live out our baptismal covenant.

The **twenty-four-inch** deep baptismal font is made from granite and marble. Designed in the shape of a tomb with three steps down at its east end, the font is suitable for immersion of adults and children. Adults and infants can be immersed in these flowing waters, assisted by their sponsors and surrounded by the initiating Christian community. The **upper font is from the 1943 cathedral renovation**; its basin is carved from pink marble and supported by three pillars of burgundy, green, and yellow marble symbolizing the **Holy Trinity**. It has been refashioned to be the source of the flowing water for this new baptistry. It serves as a holy water font and may also be used for the baptism of infants. The balusters surrounding the lower pool were originally in the cathedral sanctuary.

The three footed Paschal Stand comes from the 1943 restoration.

Situated prominently in the Cathedral, the baptistry now takes its proper place in the celebrations of the community of believers.

The Second Reconciliation Chapel

The second Reconciliation Chapel is northwest corner of the cathedral, located in relation to the baptistry. This juxtaposition serves as a reminder that this sacrament, like Baptism, leads to the altar, and was once even known as a "second Baptism."

The Ambry

In the niche directly to the south of the baptistry is the Ambry, the place for the storage and display of the holy oils blessed and consecrated at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week. These oils are used in sacramental celebrations: Oil of Catechumens at Baptism; Oil of Chrism at Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders (*and also for the dedication of Churches*); Oil of the Anointing of the Sick to minister to those who are ill. It is to this place

that all the parishes of the archdiocese come during the year for the holy oils that they need.

Side Aisle

On both sides are niches for devotion art to be installed as it is commissioned.

Shrine to Blessed John XXIII

The easternmost devotional niche, near the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is the shrine to Blessed John XXIII. This life sized Bronze statue honors the saintly pontiff who inaugurated the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The statue is the work of local artist and sculptor, David Wanner.

The Chapel of Eucharistic Reservation

The former baptistry of the cathedral now serves as a beautiful setting for the Blessed Sacrament's place of reservation. One may find in this special place of prayer a number of beautiful treasures from the cathedral's past.

Marking the entrance to this special place of adoration is **the newly recovered restored original cathedral sanctuary lamp**, which hangs from the archway overhead. In the center of the chapel is **the nine-hundred-pound polished and brushed bronze tabernacle**, the place of reposition for the Blessed Sacrament. It is decorated with symbols of the Eucharist (**wheat, grapes, the host, the Eucharistic cup**) and of Christ. The tabernacle is enthroned on three pillars of **Breccia Serravezza marble fashioned from the columns that were originally part of the baldachin**. The configuration of these pillars harmonizes with the circular patterns in the marble floor of the chapel.

The stained-glass windows in this chapel portray events in the **life of Jesus Christ**. The first window portrays Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the Temple; the second, the baptism of Jesus; and the third portrays the crucified Jesus supported by the hands of the Father with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove in the overhead medallion.

The Crypt

The cathedral crypt is the burial place of the archbishops and bishops of Milwaukee. Constructed in 1984, the crypt accommodates **twenty-four burial vaults**.

Nine archbishops have served the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Three of them now rest here: **John Martin Henni**, the first archbishop of Milwaukee; **Moses E. Kiley**, who was most responsible for the reconstruction of the cathedral after the fire of 1935; and **William E. Cousins**, one of the fathers of the Vatican II Council. Auxiliary

Bishop **Leo Brust**, who died in 1995, is the most recent bishop to be buried in the crypt.

The Day Chapel and Main Reconciliation Chapel

The day chapel, **named in honor of St. Joseph the Worker**, can accommodate small gatherings and is used for daily Mass. The altar and ambo have been fashioned by skilled local woodworkers from the **white oak of the former confessionals**. On the chapel's north wall are carved wooden statues of **St. Joseph and St. Therese**, the Little Flower. Both of these statues are **from the cathedral's former side devotional niches**. The Crucifix is from the 1943 restoration and was repainted in 1977. The crucifix and devotional art were designed and executed by Moroder Studios for the 1943 rebuilding of the Cathedral.

The entrance to the main Reconciliation Chapel is here in the Day Chapel, and when it is not in use, one can peer in and see a carved wooden statue of the Sacred Heart and the round stained glass window. Spacious and uplifting, this chapel fosters prayerful participation in the sacrament. Options are provided for both face-to-face and screened reconciliation.

Upon entering the space, one is greeted by a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, providing yet another opportunity for prayerful reflection. It is dedicated to Archbishop Kiley, who directed the completion of the cathedral reconstruction after the 1935 fire. The crucifix was designed and executed by German-American sculptor Karl Gehl. The second statue in the Reconciliation Room, original in the alcove before the renovation, **is St. Jude**.

The Music Areas

The east end of the cathedral where the high altar and baldachin is now used by the music ministers. Adequate space is now available for the Cathedral Choir, Cantor, Instrumentalists, Piano and Organ Console. Additional seating for the congregation is placed on the stairs preceding this space in overflow situations. Seating capacity of the Cathedral is approximately 975.

The Organs

The organ casework in the apse will house a new **Nichols and Simpson** organ by some time in 2004-2005. The console, which presently operates the organ in the west gallery of the cathedral, will control both organs. This console is 7 feet wide and has four manuals (or keyboards). The original console in the gallery is still operational and only controls the gallery organ.

The gallery organ was built by the world-renowned recitalist and teacher, Robert **Noehren**, and installed for the **Fifth International Church Music Congress** held in

Milwaukee in **1966**. The four-manual, **seventy-four rank** Noehren organ has **3,586** pipes. Designed in the French Classical tradition, it is flexible in handling the complete range of organ literature.

Upon completion of the apse organ, the two instruments will comprise of 111 ranks of pipes. For this renovation, the pipes were removed, washed and replaced. The casework has been painted to reflect the new color scheme in the cathedral. The blower was replaced just prior to the dedication.

The Ambo

“... a striking reminder to the faithful that the table of God's word is always prepared for them.”
Book of Blessings, No. 1173

The ambo is the place from which God's word in the sacred Scriptures is proclaimed to the assembly of God's people. Situated on the same central axis as the baptistry and altar, the cathedral ambo symbolizes the dignity and significance of the word of God proclaimed at the liturgies celebrated here. Its prominence is a fitting reminder that the table of God's word is placed before the faithful together with the table of Christ's body. Those who come here are nourished by both the Word of Life and the Bread of Life.

A gift of the priests of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the ambo is constructed of marble to harmonize with the altar. Of a simple design, the ambo stands on a platform extending forward from the apse, the ambo is high enough to be visible throughout the cathedral, yet it also serves for smaller gatherings and celebrations of the Word. Originally from the main altar of the cathedral, the **front panel bears the trigram IHS**, representing the name of Jesus Christ. The **side panels show the Greek symbols of Alpha and Omega**, meaning “beginning” and “end.”

Shrine to Mary, the Mother of the Church

This shrine is dedicated to **the Blessed Mother under her title, “The Mother of the Church.”** In the shrine is a newly-commissioned bronze statue of the Blessed Mother. On a pedestal is a bas relief featuring people from a number of the ethnic and cultural communities that make up the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The statue and pedestal are the work of Chicago artists **Jeffrey and Anna Koh-Varilla**. This shrine portrays Mary as the mother of everyone in the Church.

Above and to the left is a round stained-glass window dedicated to **Pius XII, pope at the time of the reconstruction of the cathedral after the 1935 fire**.

The Stations of the Cross and Dedication Crosses

Along the side and rear walls of the cathedral are located the **fourteen stations of the cross** depicting the passion and death of Jesus. These stations are **replicas of those found in St. Ann's Church in Munich, Germany**, and are of **Venetian mosaic inlay**. Their appearance is enhanced by recessing the bottom by some four inches, with concealed illumination. The stations begin on the south side of the cathedral, near the Chapel of Eucharistic Reservation.

Also along the walls one can see the twelve dedication crosses and candle holders. During the rededication celebration on February 9, 2002, these crosses were anointed with Sacred Chrism and lighted candles were placed to mark each spot.

Outside the Front Door

The main entrance to the cathedral is marked by the building's magnificent tower, **constructed in 1847 and rebuilt above the clock in 1893**. It is one of the most admired pieces of architecture in Milwaukee and has been the subject of numerous etchings over the years. For years after it was erected, the cathedral clock was the official time piece for the City of Milwaukee.

The bronze **eagles which decorate the cornice line of the lower structure flanking the tower are five feet six inches high and weigh nine hundred fifty pounds each**. The eagle is the symbol of **St. John the Evangelist**.

The bronze statues on each side of the entrance doors are of **St. John the Evangelist and St. Peter**. A statue of **Mary and Child stands in an arched recess between the cathedral and the rectory building**. You may wish to take a minute to read the inscriptions on the bronze plaques which designate the Cathedral as a Milwaukee landmark and its listing in the National Register of Historical Places, or to note the cornerstone, newly engraved on the occasion of the cathedral's sesquicentennial in 1997.

The Cathedral Block

However, any description of the Cathedral itself would be incomplete without pointing out the vision contained in the renovations of *the remainder of the cathedral block*. It is the ministries that will be housed in these ancillary buildings that will continue to give meaning to our worship even as what happens around the Cathedral's altar will continue to give shape and meaning to our outreach in Christ's name. This is an essential part of what it means to be a Cathedral.

A new glass **atrium** adjoins the prayer garden of which it is a part and serves as a liturgical gathering place – a space where the blessing of candles, palms and the great

Easter fire are done, where processions begin and hospitality takes place. It is also a space that connects the Cathedral itself to the other buildings which house its pastoral and outreach ministries – a “buffer zone” between the sacred and the marketplace – essentially joining the two.

The **old school building** is our new Ministry Center and will soon house the pastoral and outreach ministries at the Cathedral. In addition to the *administrative and pastoral offices* of the Cathedral parish, *Beyond the Door ministry* will provide a warm, inviting and dignified place where the area homeless and urban poor are fed on a daily basis. The *St. Vincent de Paul Society* will expand its clothing distribution center as well as continue its ongoing work of helping anyone in need. Catholic Charities is setting up a *mental health and AODA counseling clinic* and St. Ben's Clinic sponsored by Columbia-St. Mary's Hospital will provide *medical health screening and services*. This special building will also house *AA and ALENON counseling and support groups* for the downtown community and the Archdiocesan *AIDS ministry*.

The **old convent** serves as an annex to the Ministry Center and is being converted into an *assessment and service center for homeless women and children*. This center will also house an *overflow shelter* – a safe haven for women and their children during assessment and until more permanent housing can be found. Partners in this venture include the Cathedral parish, Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, Catholic Charities, Milwaukee County's ANET Program, Salvation Army and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Other social service agencies serve as collaborators.

To the north of the cathedral, a **prayer garden** provides a quiet and contemplative space in the middle of the busy downtown. An open garden wall serves as an invitation to city workers and passersby to enter, sit, pray and be at home.

In the end, the cathedral is the principal or “mother” church of the archdiocese and, as such, is an image of the holiness and catholicity to which the local Church is called. Again, as we move into a new millennium, may the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist be more ready than ever to suit the needs of the people who pray within its walls. May it continue to shape a people who are equally willing to serve the needs of others as God wills them to.