



History

Immaculate Conception Chapel was planned to be the outstanding feature of the main wing of the Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse when it was designed and built between 1892 and 1895. The cost of completing the interior of the chapel was, however, prohibitive and thus delayed for several years. A fundraising effort, which included hundreds of small donations by family members, friends and acquaintances of the Sisters, provided the means for the congregation to complete its magnificent four-story chapel. It was dedicated Aug. 15, 1901, and consecrated Feb. 22, 1905.

The chapel, a blend of Renaissance and Romanesque architecture, is modeled on the Roman Basilica of St. Agnes Outside-the-Walls. Polished columns of dark creole marble form the hallway entrance. Built in the shape of a Latin cross, it features a central dome, a vaulted ceiling, myriad arches, and decorative plaster molding. The interior of the chapel is a symphony of elegant curves and arches. The soft paint tones along with the warm feel of the white quartered oak of the doors, pews, wainscoting and organ loft create a sense of harmony and peace. The nave measures 147 feet by 74 feet with the transept widening to 90 feet. It is separated from the side aisles by 12 rounded arches supported by pink Georgian marble columns with intricately patterned capitals.

Antique painted-glass windows, upper clerestory windows, colorful murals, intricately carved Stations of the Cross, a large pipe organ, and a decorative rose window are all outstanding features of the chapel. Prominent Chicago architect Adolph Druiding won first prize in a Paris contest for best design of a chapel for his work on this project.



Designed to seat 500 people, the chapel was initially referred to as "Byrne's folly" because it had been at the urging of the Community's chaplain and friend, the Rev. Thomas Byrne, that it took on the proportions it did. The chapel was used to capacity for many years as it filled the needs, not only of the Sisters of Charity, but of Mount St. Joseph Academy and the College of Mount St. Joseph. In recent years it has served the Sisters of Charity, their friends and guests during retreats, community gatherings, and many celebrations, as well as for daily Mass and prayer for the Sisters of the Motherhouse community.



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Immaculate Conception Chapel *at Mount St. Joseph*



Sanctuary

The original basilica altar and tabernacle of white marble and inlaid with marble design was created by the Medici firm and imported from Italy. The door of the tabernacle is inlaid with pieces of lapis lazuli (blue) and fior de persico (peach blossom) marble and features a gold chalice. It is located under the marble dome supported by four basilica columns of breccia marble with paneled marble supports. The octagonal baldachin (dome), inlaid with triangles of red, green and yellow marble, is inscribed with the words *Dei Parae Immaculatae* (Immaculate Parent of God).

In response to the liturgical renewal of the Catholic Church in the 1960s, the altar was moved forward in the sanctuary to allow the Mass to be celebrated facing the congregation. The tabernacle remained under the octagonal baldachin.

In the chapel renovation of 1999-2000, a new octagonal altar was fashioned of cherry wood and incorporates marble columns from the St. Joseph altar. The top is white Carrara marble from Italy. This new altar was moved forward and placed in the center of the architectural cruciform of the chapel. The ambo (lectern) is also of cherry wood and incorporates four alabaster columns from the St. Joseph altar. A circular peninsula on which the altar and ambo sit repeats the circular lines of the chapel and allows the assembly to gather on three sides. The pedestal on which the tabernacle sits is of white Carrara marble and includes the lapis and stone from the original altar. A baptismal font of white Carrara marble, placed near the main doors of the chapel, repeats the octagonal shape of the new altar, and incorporates the side marble pieces of the original altar. At the time of this renovation, updated lighting, climate-control and a new sound system were added. The seating in the renovated chapel, a combination of chairs and pews, allows flexibility and greater handicap accessibility.



Murals

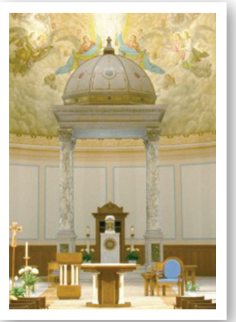
The mural in the sanctuary dome, executed by William Lamprecht, is inspired by the Book of Revelations 12:1, “A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” Lamprecht’s vision of the Mother of God depicts God the Father with the figures of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael on either side, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovering above the Virgin’s head. The Virgin is surrounded by angels and cherubs. The angel at the base of the mural carries a scroll on which is written: “*In umbra manus suae protexit me*” (In the shadow of his hand he has protected me). The fresco, which took eight months to complete, is double-curved like the inside of a bell. It rises 65 feet above the wainscoting with the main figure measuring 15 feet from the top of her head to the bottom of her mantle. The painting has been restored twice. Dimmed by time and the smoke of a 1937 fire, local artist E. Paul Wilhelm was engaged to restore the mural in 1950. During the 1999-2000 renovation of the chapel, it was restored by Evergreen Painting Studios of New York.



The central dome contains a fresco by Richard Bachman. The painting honoring the Blessed Sacrament depicts a monstrance surrounded by four medallions of Doctors of the Church noted for their devotion to the Eucharist: St. Thomas Aquinas (left front) is reading his treatise on the doctrine of the Eucharist; St. Bonaventure (right front) is crumbling up his essay as he listens to that of St. Thomas. The two medallions toward the rear of the chapel portray Saints John Chrysostom and Ambrose.

Other Highlights

St. Joseph’s altar, originally intended to be the main altar in the St. Joseph Motherhouse which burned in 1885, was donated to S. Anthony O’Connell by Cincinnati philanthropist Reuben Springer. When the present chapel was built, it became a side altar. The Marian altar was designed by Joseph Sibbel to match the St. Joseph altar. Both of these altars are of Carrara marble with inlays of yellow Siena marble.



The Carrara marble statues, “Madonna of the Lilies” and “St. Joseph and Child,” were created by Cincinnati sculptor Clement Barnhorn. The statues of St. Vincent de Paul and the Sacred Heart were purchased when the chapel was originally furnished.

The Stations of the Cross were sculptured by the firm of Joseph Sibbel of New York. They are high-relief with imitation old-ivory finish set in frames of stucco sunk into the wall. In the most recent chapel renovation the stations were enhanced by gold trim on the frames and a matching tint for the scenes.

The antique painted-glass windows, with one exception, were made by the Royal Bavarian Establishment of Munich, Germany, and imported through the Mayer Company of New York. “Christ Blessing the Little Children” was manufactured by the Artistic Glass Company of Cincinnati. All of the windows depict scenes from the Christian Scriptures. A colorful rose window is in the rear of the chapel above the organ pipes.

The pneumatic action two-manual pipe organ, Opus 51, was purchased from the Austin Organ Company of Massachusetts in 1901 at a cost of \$3,000. It was an example of the company’s finest craft and was the first one installed in the Cincinnati area.

