

WELCOME

to the newly renovated
Mary Help of Christians Catholic Church

It is, indeed, a pleasure to welcome you to our newly renovated Church here at Mary Help of Christians.

- The first Catholic Immigrants arrived in Chester in 1842 (177 years ago).
- The first Mass was celebrated in 1847 (172 years ago). The original Church building was constructed in 1850 (169 years ago).
- The oldest portion of the present church called the **Nave** was built in 1869 (**150 years ago this year**).
- The style of the architecture chosen for the Church building was Victorian neo-Gothic.
- In 1913 (106 years ago), a major renovation occurred with the addition of the **Transept**, two **Sacristies** and a larger **Sanctuary**.
- Since that time, a number of renovations have occurred over the years. Although many have been more cosmetic in nature, some have reflected portions of the guidelines prescribed by the liturgical directives following Vatican Council II.
- The present renovations incorporate the full requirements found in the [Documents of Divine Worship](#).
- Our desire to renovate has been twofold:
 1. After a significant and intense study to strengthen and reinforce the present Church building was undertaken, as a means of preserving the historical building for future years. This was accomplished by a professional study, which was followed by extensive work being carried out by professional and parish volunteers. It is that portion of the renovation, which is not easily visible by those who enter the Church building yet of singular importance to the preservation of the building.
 2. To fulfill the necessary Church requirements on Sacred Space found in Church documents, we sought out the advice of Dr. James T. Hadley, Obl.SB, Sac.Arc.Dip., STL, Ph.D., a liturgical consultant on Art and Architecture. Dr. Hadley performed a complete study on the history and patrimony of the Church building. After careful study and analysis, he offered a detailed plan for the interior renovation, which included: the development of the color scheme and design work for the stenciling. Both color and stenciling drawn from early Church photographs. He designed the altar, font, coronets, and plinths for the statuary. In addition he gave artistic direction to the execution of the paintings and all objects in the church.
- The beauty found in Art and Architecture has always been a traditional part of the legacy of the Catholic Church; not only for the edification of the faithful (who attend Mass), but, also, as a contribution of artistic beauty for the local communities, in which, we have existed throughout the years. This historic mandate to create a space of beauty for prayer played an important role in the selection of the objects and décor used in our present Church renovation.

With this historical background and general information, we invite you to now tour our, newly, renovated Church. The following information, hopefully, will highlight some elements of our renovation:

The Main Vestibule:

Although, easily, dismissed and, quickly, overlooked the vestibule, like the foyers and entranceways in our homes, offers us an insight into what will be found in the building. For our parish, we have chosen to share items, which are treasures from our past. We have chosen to do this in the presentation of objects from our patrimony, formerly, used in the liturgy, which reflect treasured memories of those who have preceded us in faith. On one wall of the vestibule can be found the gates, formerly, used on the old Communion Rail. These, lovely, gates have been refinished to display our connection with those, who throughout the years approached the Lord to receive Christ in the Holy Eucharist. These gates like the entrance doors open for us the gateway to the Sacred. Above the door hangs a crucifix used in the Church on Good Fridays. It is hoped that through the presence of these cherished objects, we might more, fully, understand, the faith of those who preceded us and the legacy we have been given, as we move forward in our faith experience into the future.

The new cabinetry is a generous gift from our Ladies Sodality.

The Doors into the Nave:

In the Catholic tradition our understanding of the doors in a Church opens for us a doorway into the holy; they, also, represent the entrance gateway into the new and eternal Jerusalem. The noble beauty of the doors reflects our deliberate choice to open for ourselves a different world; leaving behind the mundane, profane, worldly concerns and cares of our lives, so as, to seek refuge in the journey of Grace to be found in the comfort of “Holy Ground” and “Sacred Space”. It is through these doors, where we as human beings believe that we will encounter, both individually and communally, the presence of the Living God. As the psalmist declared “I was glad when they said unto me; we shall go into the House of the Lord”. The beautiful doors were manufactured and hung through the design assistance and manufacturing of the local Amish community.

Flooring:

It may, at first, be seen as a matter of choice of color and design, but like so many things in the Catholic Church, rarely, is something included, simply, because it may appear pleasing. In such a sense, the flooring selected in our renovation offers a symbolic representation to assist us. Visually, the sight line of color directs us from the main entrance doors to the Sanctuary. A clear passage way, symbolically, opening before our eyes a designated pathway to follow. In so doing, the main aisle, symbolically, represents the Spiritual Journey, which connects the Baptismal area, (wherein, we receive the first of the Sacraments of Initiation begins through the cleansing waters of Baptism) to the Sanctuary, (where we receive the nourishment of the Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist.) Our attention is at last, eventually, drawn to the image and presence of Christ in Glory, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. For we have set our sights towards the New Jerusalem our Destiny.

All of the flooring found in the Nave and Sanctuary and the carpeting found in the Organ Loft was installed by our neighbor across the street from St. Mary’s Catholic School, Mr. Mike Neal of [Neal and Sons](#).

The Font and Space:

Upon entering the Church, the first objects to be found are the old Baptismal Font enjoined to the new Font with flowing waters. The waters used in Baptism are first blessed at the Celebration of the Easter Vigil during the Holy Triduum. History has left us a record, that in the very first buildings used by early Christians they were baptized in the entrance pools. Following the liturgical directive we have returned our Font to the entrance. Easily seen as the gateway sacrament to all other sacraments. We have chosen to incorporate the Old Font because of its historical importance. (The old font and the statues of St. Mary and St. Joseph are the oldest items left from the original 1850 Church construction.) It is the place, wherein the majority of parishioners were baptized. The old font will now be used as the “Holy Water Font” to bless ourselves, as the early Christians recalled their own baptisms and would reach into the Baptismal pools, where they were, originally, baptized and pouring waters on their foreheads reenacted their own baptisms, while signing themselves with the Sign of the Cross. The new Font with moving waters offers us a symbolic representation of the living waters pouring out from Christ into our lives and the world. The starry ceiling above the Baptismal Font reflects the firmament above which God is ever present and who breathed over the waters of creation and brought new life.

The new Font was carved in Sicily, The white marble is from Carrera in Italy and the yellow from Sienna. They were hand carved at the Marble Studio of [Cusenza Gaspare](#).

The majestic Paschal Candle stand was donated by the local Knights of Columbus Council. The Paschal candle is lighted at both baptisms and the Reception of the Body or cremains of deceased parishioners.

The Holy Water used to baptize and to bless the deceased are taken from the Life giving waters found in the Font. The new Font was blessed by Bishop Braxton at the Dedication Mass, which was held on November 24, 2019.

Not yet finished but planned for later installation are two large paintings. These large paintings will hang above the radiators on the wall underneath the Organ Loft. The paintings have been commissioned with Ms. Kiki McGrath, a renowned religious artist. Ms. McGrath has been an artist in residence and faculty member at the Boston College in Boston and other East Coast Universities.

The paintings, although appearing contemporary in nature will represent the Breath of God breathing on the Waters of Creation and the Waters of Baptism.

The Nave:

The Nave is the place where the faithful gather to assemble and be present before the Holy. Reflected in the stained glass windows can be seen images of Acanthus leaves recalling the scripture remembering Christ’s words: “I am the vine and you are the branches.” Above each window is an image from the Passion narrative of Christ. Along the

walls, the Stations of the Cross can be found. Not by accident they lead us on the journey to our salvation. They are for us, an insight into the final days and sufferings of Christ. They are for us a reminder, that we join our own difficulties and sufferings to his. These beautiful base-relief statues have, once again, been encased in Gothic surrounds fabricated by **Roots Woodworks** by the skillful woodworking skills of Mr. Dave Deterding.. The background paintings have been, beautifully, executed and painted by our own beloved Principal, Mrs. Janelle Robinson.

The pews in the Church were refinished as a labor of love by volunteer ladies from the parish.

The Ambry and Confessional:

In the Nave to the left of the altar is found the Confessional, repainted in Gothic colors to embrace the color palate of a Gothic structure.

To the right of the altar can be found **The Ambry**. The Ambry is the container, which houses the Holy Oils used in the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. The three Holy Oils being: The Oil of the Sick, the Oil of catechumens, and the Chrism Oil.

Lighting the Nave and Sanctuary:

One of the primary changes, for safety reasons, was the entire rewiring and, also, refitting of the Chandeliers with LED lighting. In addition, new lighting fixtures to illuminate the Sanctuary and featured art pieces and statuary were added. Long over do, a new electric panel with flexibility for various lighting options is now in place.

The Extended Sanctuary and Ramp:

Fulfilling the Liturgical Directives of the church, the Sanctuary was extended into the transept of the Nave of the Church. The architectural form or style of the Church is **Cruciform** (the shape of a Cross). By placing the altar into the center of the Church, the symbolic nature of the altar becomes the representation of Christ, in essence, being the very Heart of the Church becomes clearer. By extending the Sanctuary, it allows the Assembly of the Faithful to, physically, surround the altar, as the extended Body of Christ.

The addition of a ramp to accommodate those who have mobility issues is a welcomed addition and an important sensitivity for those who are now able to enter the Sanctuary.

The Altar:

Perhaps the most significant object in the Church is the altar. It becomes the central focus of the Mass. It, symbolically, represents for Catholics the Body of Christ and Heart of the Church. The altar in the Sanctuary, also, represents the Last Supper. It announces the gathering of saved humanity around the Eternal Wedding Feast. It is the symbol of the Eucharistic mystery celebrated by Christ in his Church. In keeping with symbolic nature of the altar, as Christ the Rock and Altar of Sacrifice, the new altar is constructed of stone. Marble to be exact. The altar is constructed in the same marble as the new Baptismal font and carved by the same marble company in Sicily. During the **Mass of Dedication of an Altar**, the altar is center stage in the ceremony. Behind the altar can be found an aperture, wherein the relics of the early martyrs were deposited and sealed. The relics, which were deposited in our altar included: the relics of the four Apostles and Martyrs: St. Andrew, St. Bartholomew, St. Matthew and St. Philip. The rationale and connection of depositing relics in the altar recalls the early days of the Church, when the Mass was celebrated over or near the bodies of the martyred Christians buried in the ancient Catacombs of Rome. In a moving and, highly, significant moment in the **Mass of Dedication of an Altar**, the Bishop poured Chrism Oil over the surface of the Mensa (altar top) and then rubbed the Chrism Oil into the surface of the altar. This symbolic action recalled the anointing of Christ as Priest, Prophet, and King. Having been anointed for sacred use, the altar now stands as the central gathering place for the elect.

The Crucifix:

A dramatic change made during the Church renovation was the suspension of the crucifix over the altar. By so doing, a clearer juxtaposition between the altar and the image of the Crucified Christ is made. For Catholics, the formal name for the Mass is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Our attention is directed to the fact that the fulfillment of the Last Supper is enjoined with the Crucifixion of Christ. In the un-bloody Sacrifice of the Mass we fulfill the command of Christ, "To do this in memory of me." As Moses lifted the staff with serpent for the healing of the people in the desert during the Exodus, we "Lift high the Cross" for the healing and forgiveness of our sins.

The original cross, which the *Corpus* (the Body of Christ) is attached was enhanced and reworked in the Gothic style at the Wood Studio of Mr. Andy Birkey in Bloomington, Il. The design includes Gothic elements, such as the attachment of **Croquets** (the small attachments to the sides of the cross). On the reverse side of the cross is a figurative representation of leaves and vine of the Buckthorn Plant. By tradition, the Buckthorn was the plant that produced the Crown of Thorns fashioned by the Roman soldiers to be placed on Christ's head during the Passion.

The Statuary:

As part of the Patrimony of the Parish Church, the statues of St. Mary and St. Joseph are among the oldest elements left from the original Church. The statues created of carved wood had undergone two earlier painting attempts. At the hands of Ms. Michelle Bowman (artist and restorer) at ***Restoration Plus*** in St. Louis. After the meticulous removal of two layers of paint was revealed the original color shades and gold leaf applications. The statues were then repainted in the original shades and colors and gold leaf designs of the original statues.

The Coronets atop the statues and the Plinths, which support the statues on the wall were hand carved by the Mr. Andy Birkey. Not yet completed but to be added at a later date a four foot Gothic Spire will ascend from the tops of the base of the Coronets. These will accentuate the Gothic design to raise our eyes and thoughts upwards to God.

The Tabernacle Tower:

Standing behind the altar is an ornate Gothic Tabernacle Tower used for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. The Tower is a marriage of two separate pieces. The base is a reconfiguration of an old wood altar front found in the Church basement. Utilizing the ornamental features found on the original altar they were refitted to match the base, pillars, roof and spire of the second element. Originally, used in a Gothic Church in England, the two hundred and fifty year old piece was donated for use in the construction of the Tower. The reconfiguration was fabricated by Mr. David Deterding of ***Roots Woodwork***. The painting and gold leaf application was done by Chester native and painter Mr. Ted Mueller. Mr. Muelle, also did several other pieces used in the Church. The Gothic style tabernacle contained in the Tower was manufactured in Spain.

The Icon of Christ in Glory:

On the back wall of the Sanctuary can be found the monumental painting of Christ in Glory. The Icon was painted at Mount Athos in Greece by Mr. Marcos Kampanis. Mr. Kampanis was commissioned for the Parish by Dr. Hadley. Dr. Hadley met Mr. Kampanis, while in Greece at the invitation of the Patriarch of Athens to do design some work in Athens. The painting offers a representation of Christ in Glory seated on the Clouds of Heaven. The earth is his footstool. Behind Christ is the image of the Cross his earthly and glorified throne. Flanking Christ are the wings of the angels, particularly the Seraphim, who worship before the throne. . At the four corners are painted the symbolic images of the Four Evangelists, the authors of the Four Gospels. Christ is located in the center and is holding an open book with the Greek letters Alpha and the Omega. These proclaim him, as the Beginning and the End. Above him in a horizontal bar can be seen the Firmament of the skies with the Chi Rho, the anagram for the name Christ. Below his feet in the horizontal bar, the figure of vegetation with images of mountains and valleys of the earth. It is the image of the Parousia, the Second Coming, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. The large Reredos frame surrounding the image was built by Mr. Andy Birkey, who was mentioned earlier. Still unfinished and to be will be a seven foot Gothic spire flanked by two four foot Gothic Spires to rest on top of the frame. The Icon is the final symbolic image on our symbolic journey to the New and Eternal Jerusalem. From our journey through the Waters of Baptism, we seek to reach the Omega point, which is to be with Christ in Gory in heaven.

The Coats of Arms:

Above the five doors of the Church are historical Coats of Arms: above the main doors are the Arms of the Diocese of Belleville; to the left of the Main doors is the Arms of Pope Leo XIII, the Pope who was Pontiff at the creation of the our Diocese and, also, the building of the 1869 Church building; to the right of the Main Door the Arms of Pope Pius IX, Pontiff during the 1913 addition to the Church building. Over the handicapped entrance the Arms of our Present Pontiff, Pope Francis; above the door nearest the Ambry, the Arms of Bishop Braxton.

The New Ambo:

In the Sanctuary in the Gothic style can be seen the new Ambo (pulpit) created by Mr. Andy Birkey.

