



St. Mary's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Self- Guided Tour

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WELCOME

Welcome to St. Mary's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the mother church of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon. We hope that you will be uplifted by your visit and allow this beautiful edifice to remind you of your heavenly home. During your visit you may wish to light a votive candle as a sign of your prayers.

WHAT IS A CATHEDRAL?

A cathedral is the main church of a diocese, distinguished by housing the bishop's official chair, or *cathedra* (latin for chair), symbolizing his teaching authority and role as spiritual leader of the diocese. It is the focal point for diocesan events, often large and architecturally significant, but size is not the defining feature - the presence of the *cathedra* is what makes a church a cathedral, serving as the "mother church" for all other parishes in the diocese. The Archbishop is the pastor of the Cathedral Parish, however he appoints a rector to oversee the day to day ministry of the parish. A cathedral should set the tone for the liturgy, music, preaching and ministry in the diocese. As the Archbishop's church it should strictly follow his teaching and serve as an example for the whole diocese.



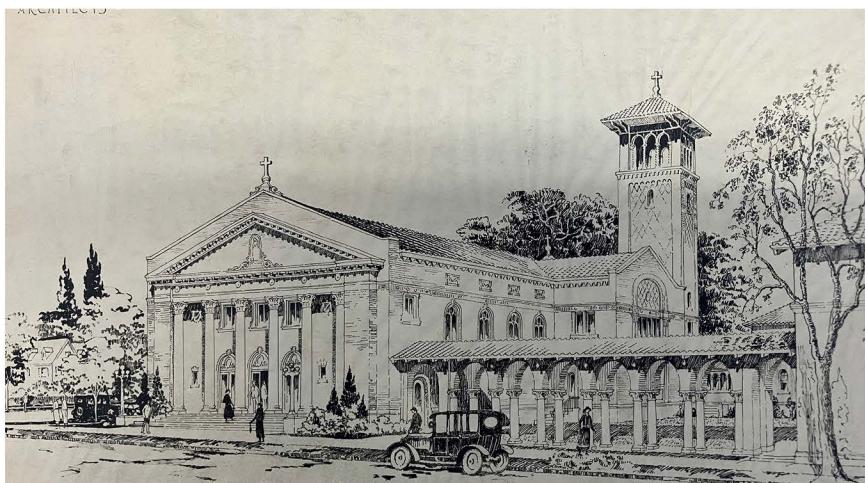
ORIGINS OF THE CATHEDRAL

In 1851, a small group of Catholics built a modest church near the present NW 5th and Couch Streets. At the time the area was a forested tract some distance from the center of town. In 1854, the parishioners purchased land at the present SW 3rd and Stark Streets and moved the church to this location. This church became the pro-cathedral in 1862, when Archbishop Blanchet established his residence in Portland from nearby Oregon City.

The parish thrived and additions were made to the cathedral. On August 15, 1885, a completely new cathedral was dedicated at this location. In 1895 after severe flooding of the downtown area, a temporary cathedral and school were built at NW 15th and Davis Streets.

In 1925 Archbishop Christie authorized the construction of a new cathedral at NW 18th and Couch. With the support of Catholics around the archdiocese, the present cathedral was dedicated on February 14, 1926 and the first Mass was celebrated on February 19 that year.

The cathedral was designed by the architectural firm of Jacobberger and Smith. It is in the Romanesque style with some Byzantine features, covering an area of 15,000 square feet.

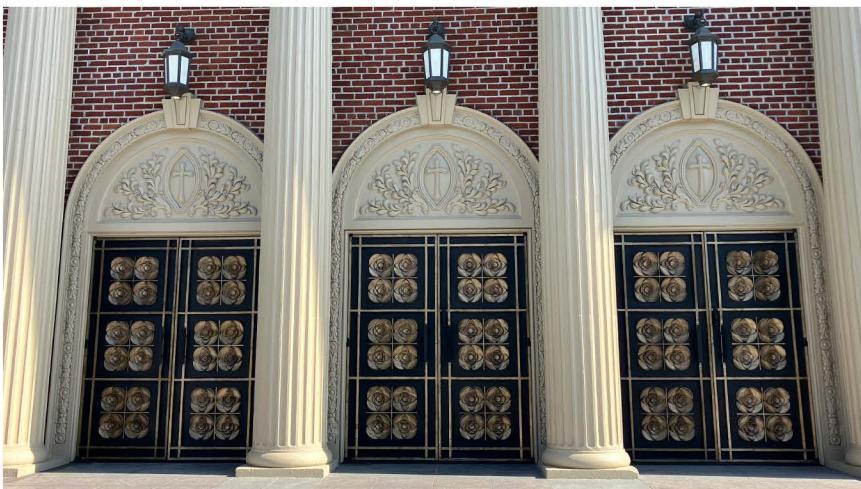


A number of items which had already acquired histories of their own were brought from the soon to be demolished pro-cathedral on NW 15th and Davis. As a first step to dismantling the old church in 1925, workmen removed the three bells which were later hung in the bell tower of the new cathedral. The bells were cast in Baltimore in 1885 and given the names: Immaculate Conception, St. James, and St. Francis.

RESTORATION

With the 150th Anniversary of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon, Archbishop Levada determined that one of the principal activities would be to fulfill the plan of his predecessor Archbishop Power to restore and renew the cathedral. So restored, it could rightfully stand as a symbol for the strength and vitality of the Church in Western Oregon and a major center of worship in the city of Portland.

The architectural firm of Thomas Hacker and Associates was engaged for the work which included liturgical and artistic modifications as well as seismic strengthening, with electrical, heating and lighting updates. The general contractor was a local Portland firm, Schommer and Sons. Again, Catholics from around the Archdiocese supported the project, and the rededication of the newly restored cathedral was celebrated on February 14, 1996.



EXTERIOR & VESTIBULE

The outside doors of the cathedral are white oak clad in cast bronze on the exterior. The rose reliefs on the doors symbolize both Mary, the Mother of God and Portland, the city of Roses. Matching doors can be seen on the west entrance. These doors were refinished in 2025. The granite sign of the cathedral features Roman majuscule lettering in the style of Trajan. It was designed by Rev. Robert Palladino, a priest of the Archdiocese. The cathedral coat of arms completes the sign.

The vestibule or narthex has glass doors and wall which allow parishioners to use the space as a cry-room. The wall features references to the sacraments and the wave design on the walls represents the waters of baptism.

BAPTISTRY

From the quiet lighting of the narthex, we enter into the brilliance of the cathedral by way of the baptistry. The placement of the baptistry at the entrance of the cathedral symbolizes that through the sacrament of baptism we become adopted sons and daughters of Almighty God, and members of the mystical body of Christ.

Architect Thomas Hacker designed the Venetian Tesserae tile mosaic in the baptistry pool. The mosaic was fabricated in Italy through Conrad Schmitt Studios of Milwaukee, WI and features ancient Christian symbols of Baptism.

The interlocking Italian Marble spirals on the floor symbolize the Holy Spirit. The spirals are echoed on the floor surrounding the sanctuary, thus connecting the sacrament of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.



STATUES & STATIONS

The marble statue of the Sacred Heart and the Madonna were carved in Switzerland and brought to the United States by the Benedictine Monks of Engleberg. The monks sold the statues to the Archdiocese for the pro-cathedral at NW 15th and Davis.

The stations of the cross are original to the cathedral. The R. Wagner Company of Portland repainted the stations and highlighted the crosses and halos in gold.

STAINED GLASS - NAVE

New windows in the nave feature the sacraments and the saints of the Americas. They were designed by Deborah Combs, originally of England, but living and working since 1997 in Massachusetts. The eight clerestory windows high in the nave represent the seven sacraments.



From the front of the nave on the east side (right facing the altar), the saints represented in the stained glass are as follows:

A. **St. Damien of Molokai** (1840 - 1889) devoted his life to victims of leprosy. This window celebrates the Hawaiian people and serves as a symbol of healing and hope for ostracized and forgotten people the world over.

B. **St. Rose of Lima** (1586-1617) lived a life of constant prayer and penance; **St. Turibus de Mogrovejo** (1538-1606) Archbishop of Lima, a brilliant scholar and champion of oppressed native peoples; **St. Martin de Porres** (1579-1639), patron saint of black and mixed-race people, barbers, and all those seeking racial harmony; and his fellow brother **St. John Macias** (1585-1645) known for his love of the rosary and generosity to the poor.

C. **St. Frances Xavier Cabrini** (1850-1917) founder of 67 institutions across three continents; **St. Marie-Rose Durocher** (1811-1849), a Canadian Catholic religious sister and educator who founded the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary; and **St. Andre Bessette** (1845-1937) a miraculous healer devoted to St. Joseph, and patron of laborers. The lower window provides a map of the New World that illustrates the missions and paths of saints represented in the new nave windows.

STAINED GLASS - NAVE

D. **St. Junipero Serra** (1713-1784) dedicated his life to achieving harmony between peoples of different ethnicities and creeds. He is best known for his founding of nine California missions; **St. Rose Philippine Duchesne** (1769-1852) founded the Society of the Sacred Heart in North America, New Zealand, and Australia.

E. This window celebrates those who work in education. **St. Elizabeth Ann Seton** (1774-1821) a native New Yorker, advanced the American parochial school system; **St. John Neumann** (1811-1860) Bishop of Philadelphia was a multi-lingual scholar, a beloved pastor, and the publisher of two catechisms used throughout the United States.

F. **St. John de Brebeuf** (1593-1649) and **St. Isaac Jogues** (1607-1646) were missionary Jesuits martyred by the Mohawk, gained many conversions, thus preparing the ground for **St. Kateri Tekakwitha** (1656-1680), "Lily of the Mohawks," who suffered for her Christian faith and is beloved by Native American Catholics.

G. **St. Peter Claver** (1581-1654) brought food, comfort, and medicines to victims of the slave trade; **St. Katherine Drexel** (1858-1955) gave her fortune and life to the service of the under-privileged and established a system of black Catholic schools in thirteen states.

H. **St. Juan Diego** (1474-1548) experienced visions of the Virgin Mary at the top of Tepeyac Hill outside Mexico City. These visions and the imparting of the miraculous image on his tilma are the basis of the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



ORGANS

The chancel organ, located at the right of the main sanctuary was built for the newly renovated cathedral by Martin Ott Pipe Organ Company of St. Louis. This organ is the company's Opus 75; it is the secondary instrument of the cathedral and was designed specifically to match the acoustics of the building. The main task of this organ is to accompany the choir and the cantor. From the manual of the chancel organ the Great manual and the pedals of the great organ can be played.



The great organ is located in the balcony or choir loft. It is a Murray/Harris Los Angeles Art 32 stop electro-pneumatic action pipe organ, built in 1904 for Holy Cross church in San Francisco. After an earthquake in 1906 the organ was rebuilt. However after the Oakland earthquake in 1989 the church was not restored and the organ was eventually brought to Portland, where Bond Pipe Organs Inc. restored it and added four stops for the cathedral. The organ was built into the new balcony as part of the renovation.

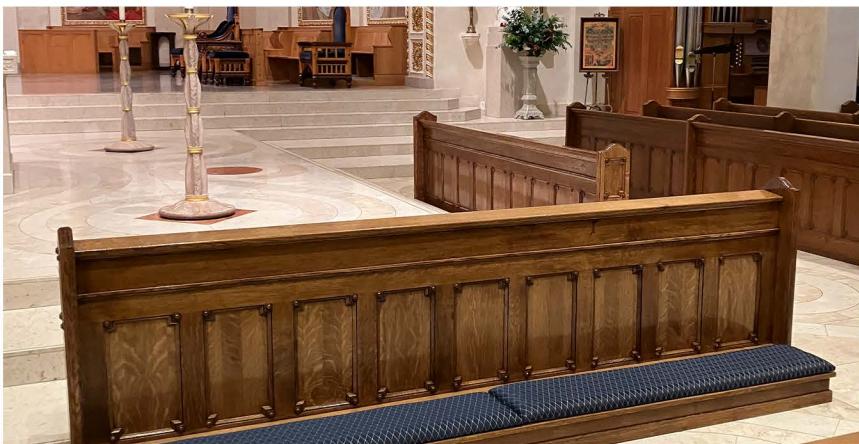
Rising from a height of 17'3" at each side to 20'3" at its apex, and approximately 10' wide the organ fits perfectly in the rear balcony. It has 37 stops and 41 ranks.

This organ has been featured at meetings of the Organ Historical Society, having been "selected for recognition as an instrument of exceptional historical merit." It is often a favorite with visiting organists and the American Guild of Organists.

The cathedral piano, a rare 7'5" Steinway Model C built in 1887, was completely restored in 1996.

FLOOR, PEWS, AND WALLS

The marble floor in the apse was laid in 1926. It is made of light pink Tennessee marble inlaid with patterns of black, gold, Botticino marble and Travertine. The new marble on the floor of the altar platform, in the candle chapel, in the aisles of the main church and the vestibule is a pattern of several Italian marbles. The pattern was designed by Thomas Hacker, fabricated in Italy and shipped to Portland for installation by Columbia Stone. The design, inspired by early Christian churches in Rome, links the baptistry with the altar. The interlocking spiral pattern symbolizes the eternal spirit.



The white oak pews are original to the cathedral. They were refinished in the 1996 renovation and reconfigured to fit the renovated sanctuary. In 2025 new communion kneelers were commissioned and installed. Also made of white oak, they perfectly match the design of the 1926 pews. They were designed and realized by Anthony Morris of Mt. Angel.

The painting of the walls was originally completed by R. Wagner and Company at the restoration but have been re-painted in the period between 2021 and 2025. The twelve crosses with their dedicatory candles represent the anointing of these walls at the dedication of the cathedral. They were designed by Thomas Hacker and cast in bronze by George King. They represent the fact that the cathedral has been consecrated as a house of worship.

The architects also designed new hanging lamps, which are made of hand blown glass and cast metal with a bronze patina. The lighting system was upgraded to LED technology in 2025. A new sound system was installed in 2021.

ALTAR & AMBO

The principal activity of the cathedral is the celebration of the sacraments and above all the celebration of Holy Mass. The Mass takes place at the altar therefore the altar holds a place of prominence in any Catholic church. As such the altar stands where the nave and the transepts connect.

The altar's sides were constructed from the 1926 marble altar rail and the *mensa* (top) was carved in Italy from Botticino Classico marble.

The four white oak candle stands were designed by Hacker Associates and crafted by Agrell and Thrope. The candle stands and the refurbished metropolitan cross were gifts of the four suffragan dioceses of the Archdiocese of Portland: Baker, Boise, Helena, and Great Falls-Billings.

The Word of God is proclaimed from the Ambo. In this cathedral, it is positioned so that listeners can see and hear the reader. The ambo was also fabricated from the former communion rail.



The Catholic tradition of placing relics in altars stems from early Christianity, where Mass was celebrated over the tombs of martyrs, symbolizing the unity of heaven and earth, the sacrifice of Christ, and the communion with saints. Under the altar of the cathedral is a first class relic of St. John Neumann.

TABERNACLE & APSE

In all catholic churches the Eucharist is reserved in a tabernacle. A tabernacle is a secure, ornate cabinet or box in a church where the consecrated Eucharist (the Body of Christ) is reserved after Mass, serving as a "dwelling place" for Jesus, symbolizing God's presence, and enabling adoration and communion for the sick, dying or absent. The cathedral tabernacle was designed by Hacker Associates and crafted in Spain. The gold plate exterior contains images of wheat, grape vines and roses. The rose motif found in the cathedral represents Mary, the Mother of God and the city of Portland.

In the 1996 renovation the tabernacle was removed from the sanctuary and placed in a dedicated Eucharistic chapel to the left of the sanctuary. In 2024 the tabernacle and its stand were returned to prominence in the sanctuary.

The base of the tabernacle was fashioned from the former marble communion rail, and the patterned wood tower was designed by Thomas Hacker and fabricated by Agrell and Thorpe of San Rafael.

The two sanctuary lamps that are always lit to indicate the presence of the Blessed Sacrament are from the 1926 cathedral.



The *cathedra* or Archbishop's chair is placed to the left of the Apse, and it dates from the cathedral on SW Stark. Along the walls of the apse is presbyteral seating for the priests of the Archdiocese. These pews and sanctuary tables were constructed by Mike Manion of Portland.

The art glass dome in the center of the apse ceiling was constructed for the 1926 cathedral by Povey Brothers of Portland and restored by Glass Craft Studios in Hillsboro. Many of the original sacristy and other windows of the 1926 cathedral have been restored in recent years by The Glazier in Portland.

MURALS IN THE APSE

Between 1930 and 1936, Flemish artist Emil Jacques (d.1937) painted the canvases attached to the walls of the apse. At the time he was the Dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Notre Dame. The murals were painted on canvas in South Bend shipped and installed in Portland.

The nine panels represent the life and influence of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first panel on the right of the apse is the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Moving left around the apse is the Pieta, which shows the body of Jesus after being taken down from the cross, being received by his Mother. Christ is the bloody sacrifice, while the priest with the Chalice and Host signify the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass.

The next panel introduces a few of the sons of Mary, Queen of all the Saints. St. Jerome, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. George, St. Dominic, St. Edward the Confessor, St. John Vianney, St. Peter, St. Sebastian and St. Patrick.

The subsequent panel shows the Patriarch Abraham and King David singing psalms in unison with the celestial choir, and the three Magi.

The central panel represents the glorified Queen of Heaven in her royal robes with angels holding her crown. To the left is a homage to those of humble positions. The purpose of the artist was to emphasize the universal call to holiness.

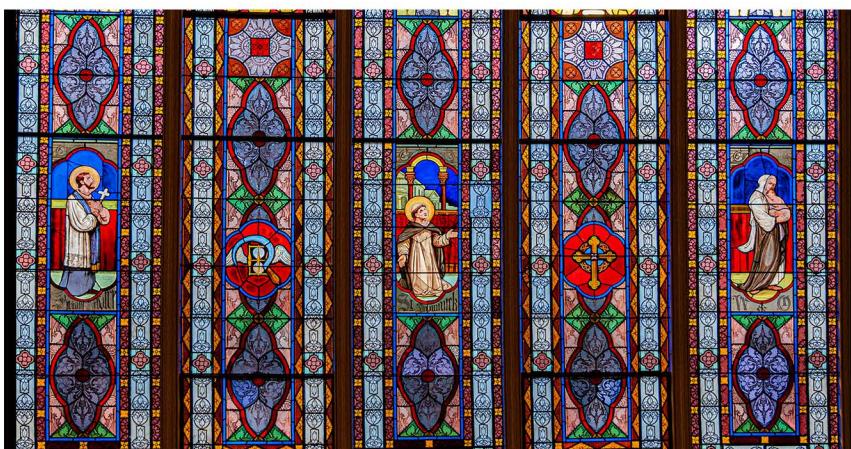
The next panel has a collection of sainted women gathered about their Heavenly Queen. St. Mary Magdalen, St. Agnes, St. Genevieve, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Lucy, St. Joan of Arc, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Cecilia. The final two panels are the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception.



STAINED GLASS - TRANSEPTS

The magnificent stained glass windows in the east and west transepts were removed from the cathedral on Stark after the flood of 1895 and eventually installed in the current cathedral. They were completely restored in 1996. The east transept window (chancel organ side) features images of the four evangelists along with their traditional symbols. An image of Mary graces the lower left corner and an image of St. Jerome can be seen on the lower right corner.

The west transept window features St. Patrick, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Bridget, St. Dominic, St. Francis Xavier and a woman and child representing widows and orphans.



ICONOGRAPHY

There are three icons in the cathedral. The largest is that in the east wall of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. It was written by Br. Claude Lane OSB of Mt. Angel Abbey. The interpretation is that the child Jesus, upon seeing angels holding the instruments of his torture, runs to his mother for consolation and in doing so loses his sandal.

Br. Claude also wrote the two other icons, St. Joseph and the Child Jesus at the entrance to the candle chapel and the Icon of the Nativity which is near the chancel organ. This icon was introduced to celebrate the third millennium. Joseph raises his hand to signify that the child is the son of God. Mary wears red as a sign of the passion associated with childbirth, foreshadowing the blood and water from the side of Jesus.

VOTIVE CANDLE CHAPEL

When the tabernacle was returned to the sanctuary in 2024 this former Eucharistic chapel was repurposed into the Votive Candle Chapel. Since the 1996 renovation votive candles had been absent from the cathedral, but there was a strong desire by parishioners to be able to light a candle in the church. This desire was realized with the new Candle Chapel.

The candle stand was designed and manufactured by local artisan Douglas Ward. It is made of powder coated wrought iron. The design incorporates the 'rose' motif that can be found throughout the cathedral and the metal work is designed to complement the wrought iron gate already in the chapel which leads to the sacristy.

A beautiful replica of Our Lady of Guadalupe from the shrine in Guadalupe is also located in this chapel.



AMBRY

The ambry is built into the west wall of the nave. It contains three silver vessels which hold the three holy oils used in the sacraments: the oil of the catechumens, the oil of the sick, and the Sacred Chrism.

The archbishop blesses and consecrates these oils each year at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, at which all the priests of the archdiocese renew their priestly promises. After that Mass the oils are distributed to every parish in the diocese for use throughout the year in the various sacraments and anointings.



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