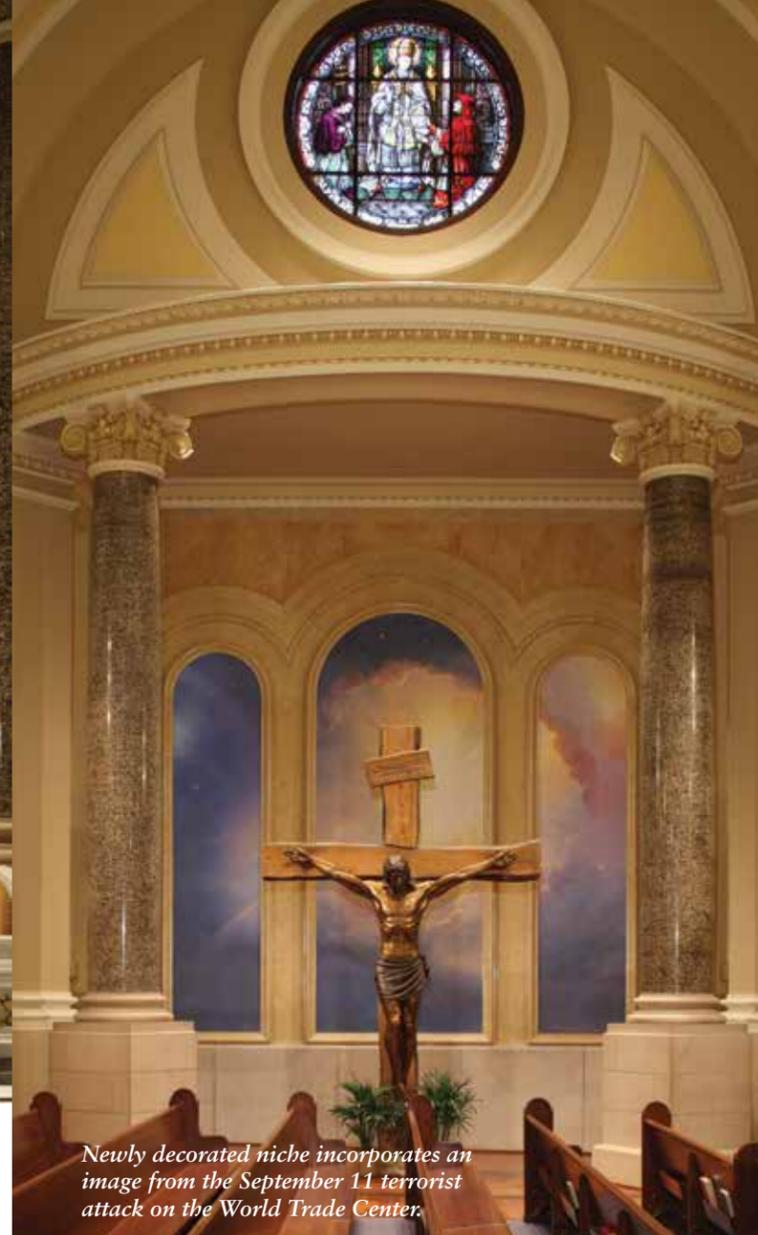


The restored chancel pulls the altar 23 feet out toward the congregation and inserts a reservation chapel behind it.

Photo: Whitney Cox



Newly decorated niche incorporates an image from the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

Photo: Whitney Cox



New font at the entrance to the nave incorporates a dome with an image of the Holy Spirit.

# Restoring a Masqueray Cathedral

## Designers, artisans, and architects collaborate on an ambitious restoration

By Randall Crook

When Emmanuel Masqueray originally oversaw the decoration in the early 1900s of his traditional design for the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita, Kansas, it likely included a rich color palette characteristic of Victorian-era buildings at the turn of the century. One hundred years and several renovations had been cruel to the building. A 1970s-era whitewashing and the introduction of a mishmash of marbles had taken their toll. Bishop Michael Jackels knew it was time to restore the diocese mother church to its former glory. He hired our firm, Architectural Innovations (AI), to oversee the remodeling as well as to coordinate the artisans who were commissioned to provide the teaching tools the bishop needed for his mission. An arts committee was formed and chaired by Monsignor

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Robert Hemberger; it met numerous times to make the decisions on the art and décor of the church required to enhance a modern liturgy.

The cruciform church had one transept devoted to the tabernacle, with a rich mosaic triptych on the wall behind. The decision was made to move the tabernacle back to the central axis of the church. The blue and gold mosaic tile arches seemed the perfect backdrop for a Marian shrine. The existing Mary and Joseph statues were removed from the niches on either side of the sanctuary. The committee commissioned Oregon artist Rip Caswell, and a narrative was formed:

Mary would be slightly pregnant. Joseph would be beside her in a supporting role. Mary has a hand on her womb and is looking across to the other transept at her son crucified. Jesus would be uttering his words from the cross, “behold your mother.”

Caswell went to work on this dialog between the two art works, sculpting Mary and Joseph during Advent and the paschal mystery

scene during Lent. The architecture team continued on to provide a setting for the two shrines. A triptych of three arches was added to the opposite transept to match the style of the work behind Mary. EverGreene Studios of New York was hired to paint the image within the three arches. After many design attempts had been made, a photo was found from the aftermath of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center that showed a light piercing the darkness. It seemed to represent the hope of resurrection the arts committee was looking for, and it served as the inspiration for the final image.

EverGreene Studios was also commissioned to design and execute an image for the dome and for the surrounding pendentives. The four Evangelists, being the pillars of the Church, would adorn the pendentives, and God the Father was chosen to adorn the peak of the dome. God’s image replaced an image of the Holy Spirit. A new baptismal font at the entrance to the church was a more appropriate location for the image of the Holy Spirit. AI had plans to expand the balcony, and created a dome above the water. EverGreene artists painted a descending dove in the dome. Lighting consultants Yarnell Associates made extensive use of LED lighting, especially in the dome and in places where changing light bulbs would be difficult or even dangerous.

The niches that once housed the statues of Mary and Joseph were also painted by EverGreene Studios. Taking note of the work of John

Nava at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, the team wanted a similar theme of saints processing toward the altar; the saints bearing gifts reinforces the idea of stewardship that is a concept the Wichita Diocese wanted to promote.

The church originally had two main types of marble incorporated into its décor: a common white Carrara marble and a black-veined yellow Paonazzo marble. AI removed all the dissimilar marbles and designed new liturgical pieces that incorporated the marble that already existed in the cathedra, ambo, and reredos. All the marble and granite work in the cathedral was executed by Rugo Stone of Lorton Virginia. The existing reredos was completely dismantled and rebuilt 23 feet forward of its location in the apse. This created an intimate reservation chapel behind the reredos. The tabernacle was placed within its arch where a red onyx was removed. The base of the tabernacle is new. The carved marble reliefs of the four Evangelists were original to the church’s ambo but were thought to be lost. They were found in a church in eastern Kansas and were given back to the cathedral.

The balcony, which houses the choir and includes a large pipe organ, was expanded 12 feet into the nave. This allowed the architect to bring the space up to code, with two exits cut into existing mechanical grilles within the bell towers. A gathering space addition includes an elevator and a bridge to the balcony, making the entire building



*Newly painted dome with God the Father at the apex, and the Four Evangelists on the dome's pendentives.*

Photos: Whitney Cox



Photo: Randy Crook

*(Inset) Interior of the cathedral before the restoration.*



*The restoration articulates the variety of decorative plasterwork, which had been painted out white in an earlier renovation.*

ADA accessible. AI designed the gathering space, using the same Indiana cut limestone used on the existing church. The attachment to the existing building was carefully detailed to match the context of both the existing church and the other buildings on its campus. A new mechanical plant in the basement of this addition supplies the HVAC for the cathedral and for a three-story school building that was remodeled for the local Catholic Charities.

The entire project took five years to plan and build. The collaboration of owner, architect, consultants, artists, and builder was exciting and humbling for this writer to have participated in. From the initial groundwork done by liturgical consultant Ken Griesemer and RRTL Architects to the coordination by Simson Construction services, all involved sought to maintain the original vision of Emmanuel Masqueray, while updating building systems, color palette, and artwork to provide for a modern liturgy. 



*Statues of Mary and Joseph, commissioned of sculptor Rip Caswell.*

Photo: Whitney Cox