

# Cathedral Update



Final phase of renovation needs nearly \$1 million

By DAVE CRENSHAW

Wooden support beams in the three signature spires were rotting. The roof leaked. Chunks of plaster were falling into the sanctuary. The electrical system was a tangled bird's nest of cloth-covered copper from original construction mixed with relatively modern patched-in wiring. There was no fire suppression system. When it was working, the tower clock gained 12 minutes every hour, and the interior of the church hadn't been painted in 35 years.

Holy Family Cathedral needed help, so in 2006, a three-phase restoration project began.

After two years, two phases and a little more than \$3 million spent, the most visible parts of the Cathedral restoration – vivid new paint inside and copper shingles for the three spires – are just a small part of the total \$5 million project. Funding for the restoration was seeded by \$1 million earmarked from 1998's Fund for the Future. Major private donations and the generosity of parishioners provided an additional \$2.2 million.

Interior colors were carefully chosen to provide a more intimate place of prayer and to enhance Gothic features that were virtually hidden by the old, comparably drab color scheme. The colors behind the three altars to St. Mary, St. Joseph and the High Altar match colors found in the Cathedral's stained glass windows. Colors lighten in hue as they approach the ceiling.

"The purpose of Gothic architecture is to raise one's mind and eye to God," said Msgr. Gregory Gier, the Cathedral's rector. Nothing in the old monochromatic color scheme did that.

"Catholic worship is an exercise of the senses. You hear the music, smell the incense, and you are visually engaged with the motion of the liturgy and the beauty of the art."

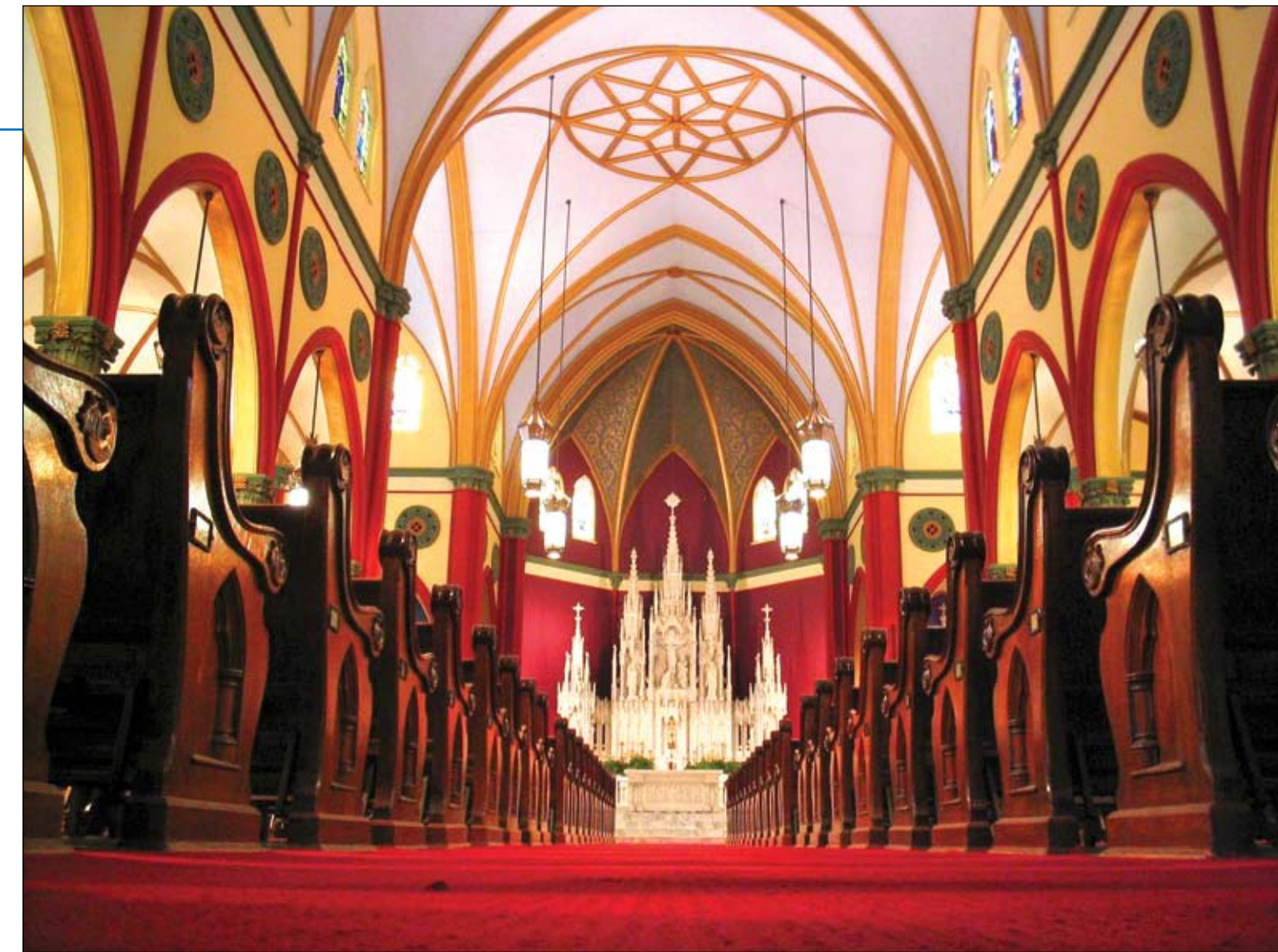
Architect Thomas Gordon Smith of Notre Dame University, who designed Clear Creek Monastery, and former associate pastor Father Matt La Chance, a former architect, chose the color scheme. Father La Chance also played a major role in restoring arched doorways and new tile work.

"Oh, he did so, so much, he put glass in the doorways and designed the tile in the new bathrooms, as well as the woodwork," Msgr. Gier said.

As the restoration continues, the Cathedral's art will receive further attention.

To enhance the color scheme, gold stenciling is planned behind each of the altars. Statuary will be cleaned and restored where necessary.

Outside the church, the three signature spires were in critical condition before the restoration. Support beams inside were rot-



ting, and aluminum shingles leaked and blew off on a regular basis during thunderstorms.

"There was serious, serious consideration to remove the spires entirely, they were in such bad shape. It would have been cheaper," said Msgr. Gier. "But they are a distinction, a part of who we are. We found that it was the mind of the people and Bishop Slatery to keep them."

Steel support beams were added to the spires and portions of the upper structure of the building.

Many unseen features of Tulsa's oldest house of worship have been improved and modernized in the first two of the three-phase venture. Some of the projects were part of the original plan; others were not.

Lightning struck the Cathedral early in the restoration process. With the center spire reaching 251 feet, that is not an unusual occurrence, but this time it damaged the sound mixing panel.

"It was so old we couldn't even get parts for it," Msgr. Gier said. A new sound system designed specifically to match the building's acoustics was in order.

The new system is a vast improvement and comes with a wireless headphone system for the hearing-impaired.

Highlights of other infrastructure improvements: a state of the art fire suppression system, improved handicapped access – including a wheelchair lift at the south entrance and accessible restroom in the east vestibule. Mass and special events that draw overflow crowds can be broadcast downstairs to big-screen televisions in the Halpine Room and the Heiring Auditorium; lighting has been improved throughout the church, and the sacristy features new paint and improved lighting.

The first two phases are nearly finished and paid for. The third phase, which includes stenciling behind the altars, flooring improvements and finishing the sanctuary roof, is still unfunded.

Msgr. Gier pointed out that the money spent so far has been to preserve the structure of Holy Family Cathedral, which "is the sacramental center of the Diocese. It belongs to the entire



Msgr. Gier and music director Ernest Neal.

Diocese."

A fund drive to finish the restoration was begun on Sept. 4 with the hopes of raising at least \$500,000.

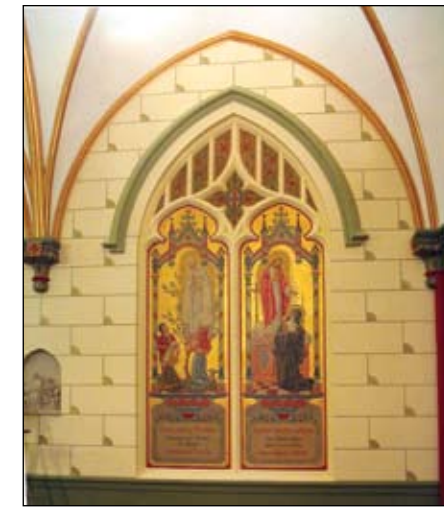
"The point of this restoration is to preserve and minister to the integrity of this Cathedral. I believe that the people of the Diocese want to preserve that, and I hope they are willing to help pay for it. We've got to finish the roof," said Msgr. Gier. "Our commitment is to be in downtown Tulsa as long as there is a Tulsa."

A more complete description of the restoration can be found at Holy Family's web site, [www.holyfamily-tulsa.org](http://www.holyfamily-tulsa.org) Mike Malcom, director of youth and young adult ministries and publications, has maintained an extensive web site with both videos and photographs throughout the restoration process.

Far left, steel girders have replaced rotting wooden beams in the spires.

Left, with the exception of stenciling behind the three altars, painting is finished on the interior of Holy Family Cathedral.

Below, detail of imbrication and gold leaf accent.



Copper shingles replace aluminum on the spires.

Photos by MIKE MALCOM



Original construction on Holy Family's spires, ca. 1914



Mass of Dedication, April 1, 1914



High Altar after the 1947 renovation.



Scaffolding during the 1973 renovation.

## This renovation the most extensive

By MIKE MALCOM

Holy Family Cathedral is the oldest house of worship in Tulsa, opening its doors to the faithful with the Mass of Dedication on April 1, 1914.

With the center spire reaching up to 251 feet, it was the tallest building in town until the Mayo Hotel was built in 1925. On May 12 of that same year, the church was consecrated by the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, Patrick Cardinal Hayes and Father John G. Heiring, pastor and builder of the church. It was elevated to Cathedral status in 1973.

The church has undergone two previous restorations that were mostly cosmetic. Infrastructure repairs and aging issues were addressed as they occurred.

1947 - The interior was repainted using many stencils, and the lighting was updated. The original lighting consisted of a handful of blindingly bright bulbs hanging from the church's centerline. The current 12 brass fixtures were installed. The new fixtures included bulbs to shine up lighting the arches and upper church; bulbs to shine down to illuminate the aisles, and bulbs in the middle of the fixtures to cast light on the windows, walls, pews, and people.

1973 - The primary motivation for the renovation was the elevation of the church to Cathedral status. The fashion at the time was to whitewash everything to remove distractions from the action of the liturgy. Holy Family got rid of the ornate stencils in favor of light colors chosen to reflect the lightest, simplest colors in the windows. The sanctuary grew from the area in the apse to include the new "peninsula" upon which the new altar sits.

Being a Cathedral church, the bishop's cathedra was moved to the center platform right in front of the high altar. (The platform's proper name is a predilla.) The tabernacle used for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament moved from the high altar to the side altar of the Blessed Virgin. Many of the 1973 renovations were unpopular both at Holy Family and in churches around the world. Older parishioners were distressed by the whitewashing of the church and the removal of many of the statues, sanctuary furniture, and communion rail.

The current renovation saw the restoration of the use of the tabernacle in the high altar. When all the stencils are applied, the overall feel of the church will more closely resemble the 1947 renovation. The current fashion in churches is to bring back many of the uniquely Catholic features of Catholic churches.

Mike Malcom is director of youth and young adult ministry and publications at Holy Family Cathedral and also manages the Cathedral web site and has conducted countless tours of the Cathedral.