

# Cathedral Restoration 2000

A Newsletter of Past, Present and Future Parish Renewal

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Oftentimes when guests visit our homes we hear comments like, “What a beautiful home” or “I love what you’ve done with your kitchen” or “I wish my house had such character!”

While we accept the compliments with a smile of appreciation, deep inside we’re sometimes thinking “Oh, if you only knew about the leaky toilet in the upstairs bathroom” or “I’m glad she didn’t notice the broken tiles on the kitchen floor” or “He wouldn’t be so interested in character if he knew how drafty this house was last winter.”

As parishioners at the Cathedral, we have similar experiences. Out-of-town visitors and local guests often remark about the beauty and grandeur of the building. You’ll hear them say, “Oh, what gorgeous windows” or “I just love the reverence I feel in this church” or “The statue of Mary is so lovely.”



Like any householder, we love to hear compliments about our church home. We’re proud that it is the mother church of the diocese and we enjoy showing it off to newcomers. At the same time, as parishioners, we know that this house also has its “problems” which must be addressed in our Cathedral Restoration.

The term “restoration” was chosen to reflect the fact that

## Beautiful? Sure ... But Look Beyond The Compliments

the space within the Cathedral will be restructured to accommodate the celebration of the liturgy according to the reforms of Vatican II. At the same time, however, we will

be restoring our building in very basic ways. We encourage you to spend a few moments to “take a closer look” and see those household problems which may have escaped your attention:

- The peeling plaster in the sacristy
- The water damage in the ceiling behind the organ
- The torn floor covering in the side aisles
- The uneven floor by the baptismal font
- The dirty paint behind the Blessed Mother statue
- The lock on the front door which does not cooperate
- The unpredictable sound system

The list could go on and on just because our Cathedral, like our homes, shows the wear-and-tear of daily life. Just as we get excited about restoration in our homes, we have a chance to get excited about restoration in our church home.



## I Remember ...

When I was a girl of five, the Cathedral seemed so big to me that I just KNEW that everyone in Memphis must come to church here! I had just seen “The Wizard of Oz” and I was very frightened of the “Wicked Witch of the West.” If she came to church I knew I would be HORRIFIED, so I kept looking around in Mass so I’d see her first before she couldn’t surprise me.

I also remember staring up at the ceiling – different parts were so intricate! I did a lot of that staring during Mass. I think many children still do that today.

My husband and I gained a big advantage from that, though. When it came time to name our second son, I remembered the “John” from the gospel writers pictured up above and we named him John Henry.

Once, our oldest son, Peter, was looking at Mary and the angels in the golden domed ceiling above the Altar. He asked me, “Mommy, is that really heaven, or is it just a picture?”

– Meg Synk, choir and “Cabaret” cast member, wife of Mike, and mother of 19-month-old Martha and the boys.

### What Do You Remember?

Do you have memories of Immaculate Conception parish that you love to recall? Would you like to share them with our readers?

They don’t have to be fancy ... or even of a religious nature. We’re just looking for your fond memories of events that have happened here over the years.

If you have stories to tell, please contact Mary Baltz, 276-6642

## History:

### *Into West Tennessee ...*

Father Joseph Stokes left Nashville on November 4, 1839, heading westward on a unique missionary journey.

He crossed the Tennessee River by ferry and entered Jackson. Only a year earlier, the Diocese of Nashville had been created and the trip by Father Stokes was an answered prayer for many West Tennesseans who had long requested an official visit by the Roman Catholic Church.

Six days later, Father Stokes celebrated the first public Mass in West Tennessee. His homily, delivered at the First Baptist Church in Jackson to both Protestants and Catholics, was designed to dispel the anti-Catholic spirit of the time. In the following days, he visited other communities acquiring land and friends for the Church as he made his way toward the southwest corner of the state.

He arrived in Memphis on the 14th, and was welcomed by the small Catholic community of Memphis which was lead by Eugene Magevney, an educated Irishman who had come to Memphis in 1833 as a private tutor but was soon to become an American citizen and establish “The Male Academy” on Court Square. On Friday the 15th, Father Stokes celebrated a small Mass in the parlor of Magevney’s house.

The first public Mass in Memphis was celebrated by



Father Stokes on Sunday the 17th in Magevney’s log schoolhouse. Those four days set the foundation for the first permanent parish in West Tennessee. In 1841, the first building of the St. Peter Parish was dedicated next door to the Magevney house with secular priests in charge. Five years later, it became a Dominican parish and grew quickly – so quickly, in fact, that there was talk of moving the diocese from Nashville to Memphis.

With the pace of world events increasing, the need for new parishes to meet the needs of the growing Catholic Irish, German and Italian immigrant communities exploded.

By the end of the Civil War, Memphians had three parishes downtown with the addition of St. Mary and St. Patrick Parishes, and St. Peter Parish had a new main building.

By the end of World War I, Memphians had a total of eight parishes along with Catholic schools, cemeteries and a hospital.

As the 1920s roared in, continued growth plus the increasing population of the southern suburbs of the city, called for another parish – our own Immaculate Conception.

– Source: *Between the Rivers*

## Environment:

### *The Proscenium Arch ...*

As we continue to examine the painted surfaces of our cathedral and parish church, we look now to the triumphal arch which frames the altar. This arch is located between the transepts and in the center of the four large mural paintings. The inscription on the arch is from the Gospel of Matthew and reads, “Come To Me All Ye Who Labor And Are Heavily Burdened And I Will Refresh You.” Who among us has not at one time or another been comforted by these words?

At the crown of the arch we see two angels supporting a Latin cross. This in turn supports the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, “Alpha” and “Omega.” This symbol refers to Revelations 1:8, “The Lord God says, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!’”

The remaining painted symbols, from the lower left to the lower right of the arch, are ancient symbols for Christ from His nativity to His resurrection as follows. At the bottom left of the arch is the Glasonbury Rose representing Our Lord’s nativity. This is followed by the butterfly, for eternal life through Jesus Christ, and the unicorn, for Our Lord’s incarnation and His sinless life. Next come the phoenix, resurrection, and the pelican, representing atonement in blood. The following figure of the lamb represents the Lamb of God, while the peacock denotes immortality – death overcome. The next figure, the stag, indicates that Our Lord conquers – tramples on sin. The figure of the fish stands for Jesus Christ Savior, and the final depiction of a pomegranate represents unity and hope.

Thus, in a pictorial fashion, this arch contains a narrative of the life of Jesus and His Divine attributes.

### ***A Model for Churches***

The cathedral church should be a model for the other churches of the diocese in its conformity to the directives laid down in liturgical documents and books with regard to the arrangement and adornment of churches.

– Source: *Ceremonial of Bishops*