

# Restoration of Holy Family Cathedral



The Tabernacle has been moved back to the center of the High Altar, and following restoration the door shines bright.

Story and photos by MIKE MALCOM

The high altar. The stained glass windows. Stately columns. Gothic arches. Catholics in Tulsa have come to expect either a prayerful serenity or joyful celebration at Holy Family Cathedral. This year, you never know what you will see when you walk in. Tulsa's oldest church building is undergoing a major renovation.

Msgr. Gregory A. Gier is preserving the 1914 structure for future generations. The rector's personal involvement with Holy Family goes back almost 40 years. As a young priest in the early 1970s, he served as an associate pastor. By that time, the cathedral already was beginning to show signs of age. The construction of nearby skyscrapers took a toll on the church as powerful pile drivers used to lay their foundations literally shook the altar.

As the pastor of several parishes in the '70s, '80s and '90s, then-Father Gier watched the efforts of Father Paul Donovan and Msgr. James Halpine as they maintained the building, sometimes on very limited budgets. The most recent renovation history has become a tale of repair.

In 1974, Father Donovan repaired and repainted the church following a fire that damaged much of the main entrance and caused extensive smoke damage. He added the cathedra, the chair of the Bishop, when the pope elevated Holy Family to the status of cathedral.

Msgr. Halpine became the rector a few years later. A musician and audiophile, he installed the current 54-rank Austin pipe organ. Msgr. Halpine also replaced the carpeted sanctuary with beautiful marble.

In 1996, Bishop Edward J. Slattery moved Msgr. Gier back to Holy Family, this time as rector. Since then, both have carefully explored ways to renovate the building.

The cathedral is in its 10th decade. Ninety-three hot summers, 93 cold winters and 93 tornado seasons have taken their toll. Almost every plaster wall in the interior is cracked or has rainwater damage. High above the heads of the faithful, the aged aluminum shingles on the roof break apart and flutter to the ground when hail storms strike. During spring thunderstorms, Massgoers often hear the groans of 93-year-old structural beams.

Msgr. Gier hired Manhattan Construction to address the structural issues first. Workers have replaced old and broken beams with new wood. They have installed "hurricane clips" which hold the roof panels close to the steel superstructure.

Cathedral parishioners are getting used to minor inconveniences, especially when the changes make the church more beautiful. Msgr. Gier removed the "gondola," a basket containing unused speakers suspended from the ceiling. At this year's Easter Vigil, Msgr. Gier returned the Blessed Sacrament to the original tabernacle in the central High Altar. He suspended the Sanctuary Lamp in the apse immediately in front of the tabernacle. Bishop Slattery's cathedra now sits to the left side of the sanctuary, as it did when Holy Family was a co-cathedral.

The overall result is an uncluttered look; from nearly anywhere in the cathedral, the congregation can see the whole of the 50-foot-tall faux marble altar and has a clear view of the tabernacle in the central High Altar.

The project has cost at least \$1.5 million, and more work is ahead. Most parishioners and visitors have said they are pleased with the changes, Msgr. Gier said.

*Mike Malcom works at Holy Family Cathedral. Among his responsibilities are producing publications and leading tours.*



The altar stands 50 feet tall.



The congregation now has a full view of the bas-relief sculpture of Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting, "The Last Supper," that graces the front of the altar.



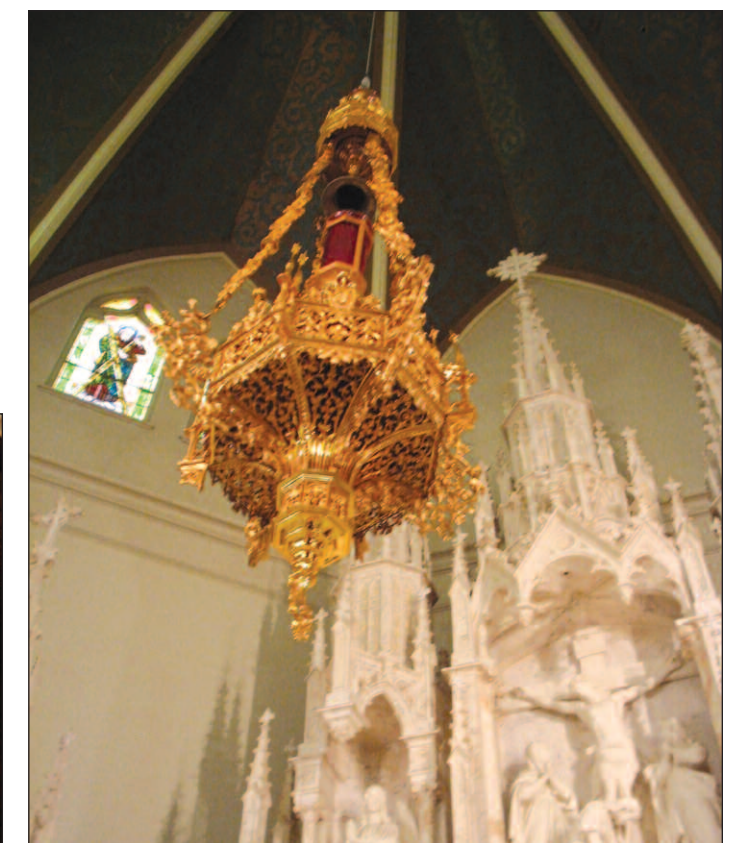
Very few visitors get to see the sculpture's detail work up close.



The view from the back of the cathedral.



The cathedra, the Bishop's chair, is seated on a raised platform carpeted in green, a color associated with bishops. The cathedral gets its name from the cathedra.



The Sanctuary Lamp, the red candle in the brass chandelier, indicates the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. From above, the window of St. Andrew casts light on both the lamp and the high altar.