



SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH • LAGRANGE, IL



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Welcome to St. Francis Xavier Church!

St. Francis Xavier Church was established October 15, 1890 and named after the 16th century Spanish Jesuit regarded as the patron of the missions. The first Mass was celebrated on November 1, 1890 in the home of Dr. George M. Fox at 60 S. LaGrange Road. Franklin Dwight Cossitt, who founded LaGrange, donated the land for the first church building in 1891.

On June 1, 1930 the cornerstone for the present church was laid. It was built to resemble the 4th century Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople (Hagia Sofia) which is considered to be the finest example of Byzantine architecture in the world. The current building is Romanesque in style, containing both Roman and Byzantine elements. It is built of Bedford Indiana limestone with Italian marble throughout. Its footprint is rectangular with a barrel roof and an apse, or semicircular area behind the main altar.



*Hagia Sofia
(Istanbul)*

The baldachin, or baldacchino, is the canopy over the altar which can easily be seen as a crown for "Christ in Glory." The baldachin derives its name from Baghdad, ancient source of luxurious cloths. At the base of the columns supporting the baldachin are two mosaics [see insets below]. The east mosaic depicts Our Lady of the Rosary with St. Dominic receiving the rosary from the Blessed Mother. The west mosaic depicts Our Lady of the Americas (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Patroness of North and South America.



Interior of the baldachin



East Mosaic



West Mosaic



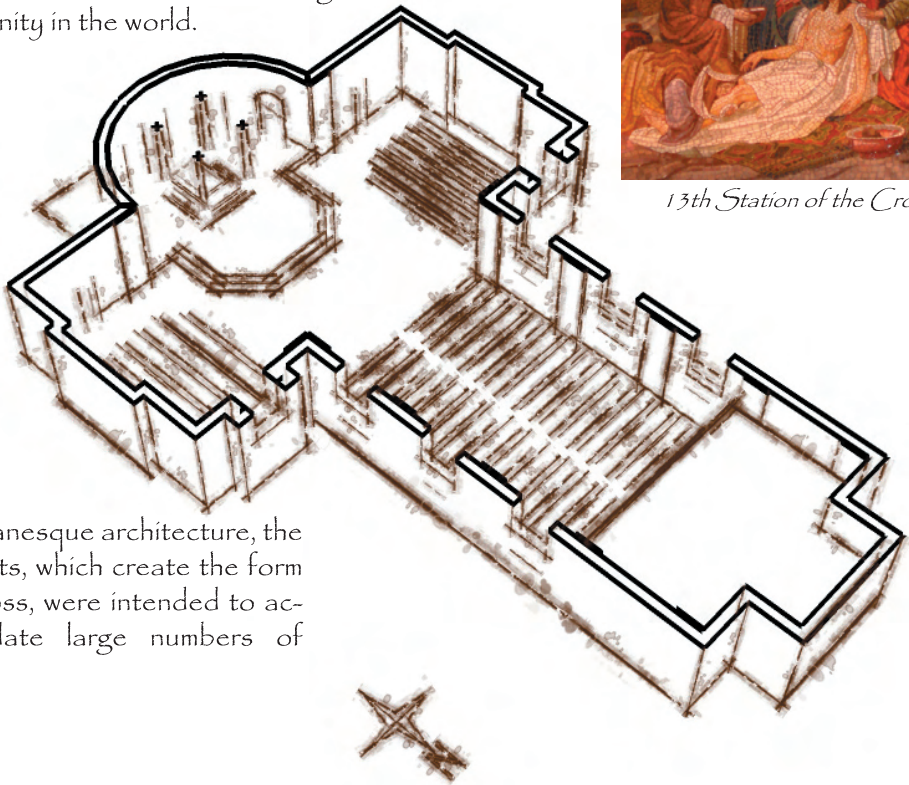


The arches and columns on the altar and in front of the church are examples of classical Roman architectural influence. Another example of this influence is found in the color scheme of red, blue and gold evident in the stained glass windows, the coats of arms over the doorways to the transepts, in the venetian mosaics of the Stations of the Cross, and in the rosy hue of the marble itself.

The wide central area of the church is called the *nave*, from the Latin word *navis* meaning "ship." In the arches that separate the transepts from the nave and in other sections of the church are symbols which celebrate the long history of Christianity in the world.



13th Station of the Cross

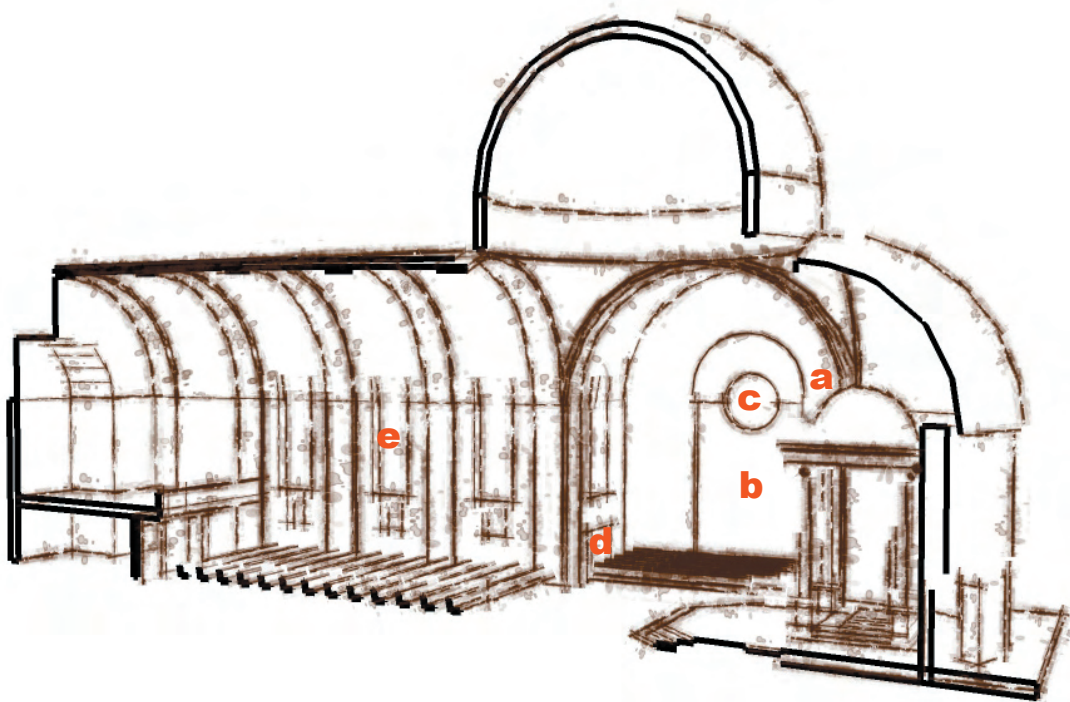


In Romanesque architecture, the transepts, which create the form of a cross, were intended to accommodate large numbers of people.

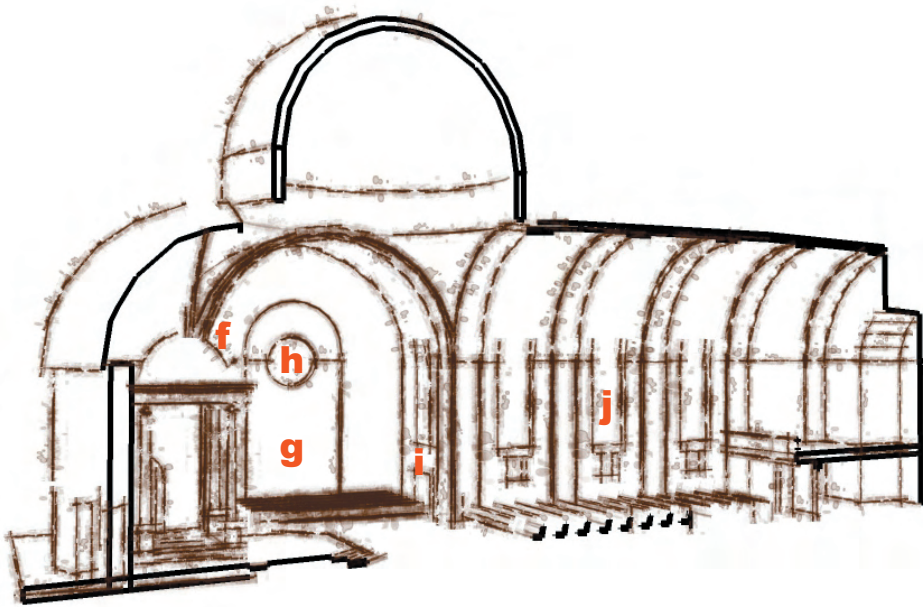
Located in the east transept is the baptismal font, which is visible and accessible to all who enter the church. A statue of St. Francis Xavier, co-patron of the missions, is above the doorway in the east transept (a), an area dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. To the bottom left of the Blessed Virgin statue is a snake encircling the globe, a symbol of the fall of man and to the right is a heart pierced by a sword, symbol of Mary's heartache. Mary (b) is standing on a crescent moon with a serpent beneath her feet, which reminds us of God's promise in the Garden of Eden that a woman would crush the head of Satan. The circular window above the statue shows the deep blossoms of the Mystical Rose, symbol of Mary (c).

In the alcove is the ambry (d) which stores the holy oils of the sick and catechumens, as well as the chrism. This area also has a reliquary that contains a relic of St. Francis Xavier, placed there on the feast of St. Francis, December 3rd, on the 500th anniversary of his death.

The taller windows along the nave present the three divine powers given by Christ to the church ~ to offer Mass, forgive sins, and preach in his name. The smaller windows below depict the patriarch David, and the prophets Daniel & Isaiah (e).



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In the west transept above the door is a statue of St. Therese of Lisieux (**f**), the co-patroness of the missions. This area is dedicated to St. Joseph (**g**). To the left of the statue of St. Joseph are a hammer and a carpenter's square, symbols of the foster father of Jesus and of the dignity of labor. To the right of the statue are a traveler's or pilgrim's staff and bag, symbolizing both the flight into Egypt and the pilgrim church. Above the side altar is a circular window depicting three lilies, the sign of St. Joseph (**h**). The alcove beneath the Christ the King window houses a version of the Madonna della Strada painting, also known as Our Lady of the Wayside (**i**), which was a gift from one of our early pastors. The original painting hangs in the Church of the Gesu in Rome, mother church of the Society of Jesus religious order. The other piece of artwork, a cherub, is in memory of one of our parishioners.

On the west side of the nave, the taller windows represent the major events in Christ's life - the Annunciation, his birth, and the Sermon on the Mount. The smaller windows below depict the patriarch Moses, and the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah (**j**).

The poses of the six figures on the smaller windows are all taken from Michelangelo; all but Moses appear on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

In the dome area above the altar are words in Latin spoken at the church's dedication in 1931, translated:

"O Lord, bless this house, which was built in your name, hear the prayers of those who come to this place."

"My house shall be a house of prayer, says the Lord, in which all who ask will be heard."

"O Lord, I love the beauty of this house and the place where your glory dwells."

"You have crowned him, O Lord, with glory and honor. You have put all things under his feet."



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The church worship area you see today is the result of renovations begun in 1993. The interior of the church was cleaned and repainted. The pews and doors were repaired and refinished. A new quarry floor tile was installed. The altar and ambo (pulpit) were moved forward, and the sanctuary (altar area) was re-carpeted. The Mary and Joseph shrines were modified. Both the baptismal area and reconciliation room were moved. Electric service was upgraded and repaired. A ramp leading to the altar platform and a new handicap-accessible rest room were installed. The choir loft was extended and part of the original altar railing was placed at the front of the loft.



One of the most recent additions is the pipe organ, which has its home in the choir loft. It has a beautiful sound that so enhances worship in liturgical celebrations and in sacred concerts. A detail from one of the former confessional doors was added to the front of the pipe organ. There is also a stained glass window of St. Cecilia, Patroness of Music, on the way up to the choir loft.

Marble from the original altar and crown molding from the old confessionals make up the current altar. Recently, a chair belonging to the first pastor was reupholstered and now enjoys a place of history and honor in the sanctuary area as the president's chair.

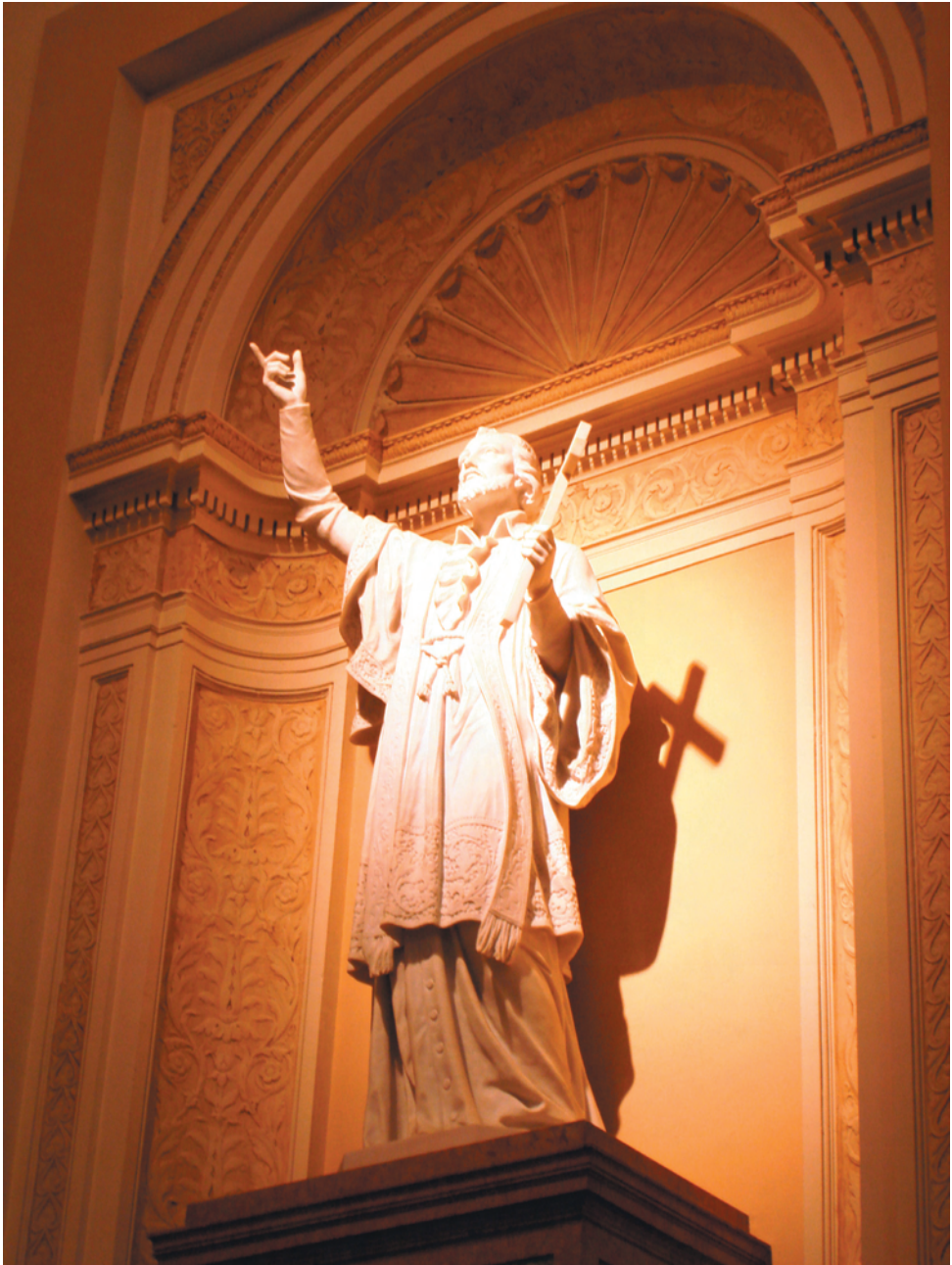
The room located on the west end of the vestibule was originally the baptistry. Over time, it became the reconciliation room, then the vesting sacristy and finally a comfortable room for brides to rest in before their wedding ceremonies.

There are some noteworthy features on the outside of the church. At the Ogden Avenue entrance on the west side is the Peace Post erected after September 11, 2001. The following phrase is written in four languages (English, Korean, Arabic & Spanish):

"May Peace Prevail on Earth"

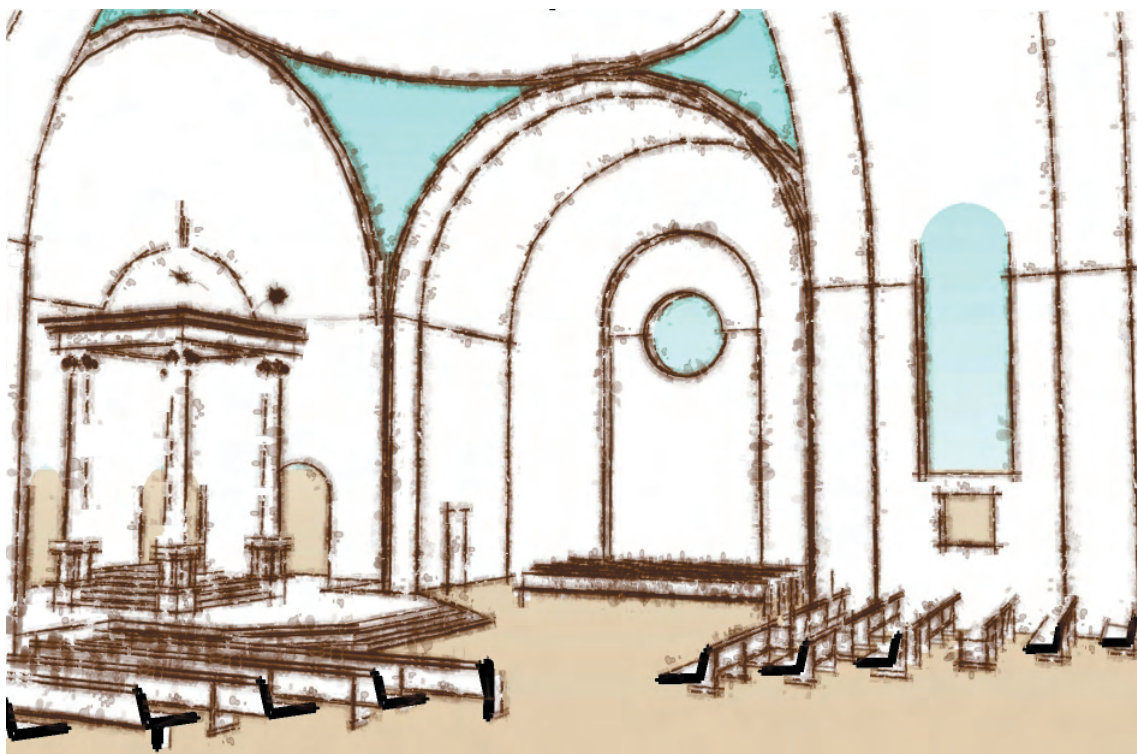
Near the east entrance of the church is the Mary Garden, an area set aside to be used as a place to relax, to pray, or to contemplate Mary, our Blessed Mother. The sculpture was created by Mary Southard, CSJ, given in memory of loved ones.





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Our parish church stands as a gift to God before the eyes of everyone. The wall, the dome, the shrines, the mosaics, the stained glass, and the altars draw our attention and make us aware that this is truly a house of God.



The information in this guide has been gathered from dedication and jubilee booklets, from notes and letters in the church's historical files, and from parishioners and staff, past and present, who love the St. Francis community and St. Francis Xavier Church. Thank you all.

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