

**HISTORY
&
ARCHITECTURE**

**SS. PETER AND PAUL CHURCH
720 WEST MAIN STREET
ROCHESTER, NY 14611
(716) 436-3110**

HISTORY

On the east side of Saints Peter and Paul are three cornerstones. The first two are from earlier buildings that housed the parish church. The third is testament to the current community, a diverse community of warm and welcoming survivors and visionaries.

In 1843 the fourth Roman Catholic Church in Rochester was built on King Street. Named Saint Peter the Apostle, it was home to a large German population who'd settled in the area. Factionalism raged at the new St. Peter's with power struggles between certain lay people and the pastor, and the church hierarchy. In 1859 troubles abated and the pastor, along with loyal parishioners, re-incorporated the church under a new name, Ss. Peter and Paul Church. They also erected a new brick building.

Eventually railroad companies desired the land on which the growing church complex sat, and bought the facility around 1910. Soon construction of the present church on West Main Street was begun. The school was built around the same time. The convent and rectory buildings, however, already existed on the land and instead of razing them, a decision was made to renovate them extensively. Even their exteriors were refaced so that they would complement the church.

In fitting connectedness to its roots, many of the interior elements of the current church, ranging from the High Altar to the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul which guard the apse, originally belonged to the church of 1859.

Preaching and living the Gospel has always been an integral component of Ss. Peter and Paul's mission. As early as 1843 the parish was formally educating its youth. The School Sisters of Notre Dame took over the school in 1847 and continued to oversee the education of both parish and neighborhood children until the school closed in 1972.

The parish flourished through the 1950's. In 1952 five morning Masses were said each weekday and the weekly collection, in those days' dollars, exceeded \$700. The ethnic mix of the community was changing as more people of Italian ancestry became members, but the German heritage still held sway as is evidenced by parish-wide Sauerkraut Suppers.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's the exodus to the suburbs curtailed Ss. Peter and Paul's affluence. The surrounding area became home to more Hispanic and African American people, many of whom knew poverty. The response of the remaining congregation was first to withdraw and then to face the challenges these economic and ethnic changes posed. Administration of Ss. Peter and Paul was given to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in 1967 and this sense of mission became even firmer.

Today St. Peter's Kitchen feeds the hungry. PriceLess Clothing clothes the needy. The Damien Care Center attends to medical needs. Mutual Housing provides affordable rental units for families. The Day Care Center offers growth and nurturing to youngsters. The Neighborhood Community Center is a partner in neighborhood revitalization.

These ministries, always based in Jesus' teachings of love and justice, reach out from the church to its neighbors. Thankfully the faith community of Ss. Peter and Paul has been blessed with support from former parishioners and school alumni, volunteers, other churches, businesses and foundations. Equally indispensable is the partnership between this church and the Bull's Head community which face the challenges of neighborhood revitalization together.

ARCHITECTURE

Ss. Peter and Paul Church was designed by the firm of Gordon and Madden. Construction began in 1910 and took about a year and a half. Its style is Lombard-Romanesque, complete with tapestry brick, a red tile roof, and marble and stone inlays. The 145 foot tall bell tower replicates that of the Cathedral of Lucca in Northern Italy.

(Continued on Back)

Many of the elements of the interior decoration of the church belonged to the church of 1859. The High Altar and its two flanking altars, the All Souls Chapel with its Pietá, the communion railings, the ten statues around the apse, the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul and eleven large windows all date from that time.

The layout of the church follows the grand basilica form with a transept which extends the nave. The huge barrel-vaulted nave is held aloft by an elaborately scrolled cornice and a series of nine pairs of Corinthian columns. The affect of height and lightness is accentuated by an ivory and gold embossed ceiling which reflects light from a clerestory of gold windows. This affect is further accentuated by nine light blue ribs which camouflage steel construction hoops.

The church's focal point is the apse. The great semi-dome rests upon the gallery of saints and has some 21 shades of blue which grow lighter and paler as the plaster squares diminish before climaxing at its apex in the sunburst.

Today the church is bathed in golden sunlight which pours through amber windows imported from England. It is our hope that this same light will light our work as we respectfully adapt the classic grandeur of Ss. Peter and Paul Church to better serve the needs of its community and neighborhood.

6/93

THE PAINTINGS

In the medallions on the main archway before the sanctuary: (left to right)

St. Matthew
St. Luke
The Risen Christ
St. John
St. Mark

Above the confessionals:

St. Paul before Herod Agrippa
St. Peter Liberated from Prison

In the lunettes above the side chapels:

The Resurrection
The Blessed Virgin Appearing to St. Theresa
The Annunciation
The Coronation of the Virgin

Behind the altar:

The Last Supper

Flanking the choir loft:

Pope Gregory
King David

In the spandrels beneath the amber windows: (clockwise from altar)

Patriarch Abraham
Prophet Moses
Prophet Elias
St. James Major, Apostle
St. Simon, Apostle
St. Thaddeus, Apostle
St. Andrew, Apostle
St. Thomas, Apostle
St. Augustine, Doctor
St. Jerome, Doctor
St. Philip, Apostle
St. Matthew, Apostle
St. Bartholomew, Apostle
St. James Minor, Apostle
Prophet Isaiah
Prophet Daniel
Patriarch Noah
Patriarch Adam