

SAINT PAUL OF THE CROSS MONASTERY CHURCH RENOVATIONS, FEBRUARY 8, 2021

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA – Since 1852, St. Paul of the Cross Monastery has been home to the Passionist Order, but by the fall of 2018, the monastery’s future was in doubt. Although garnering landmark status, the church was in disrepair and under pressure for closure and repurposing. But the Passionist community envisioned an entirely different outcome.

The Passionists approached the architect to reimagine the church interior and restore its lost glory. Beyond the necessary repairs and interior refinishing, the architect was asked to reform the raised sanctuary area to impart the dignity and stature suitable for the sacred liturgy, in harmony with the existing architectural framework.

The binding elements of the architect’s response are the new marble liturgical furnishings, which underscore and crystalize the building’s essential character. The new composition consists of altar, ambo, and tabernacle, which is set within a 28-foot-tall reredos. These key features are rendered in Bianco Carrara, Arabescato, and Rosso Francia marbles, including a life-sized carved corpus. The details are inspired by classical design and drawn from antiquity. To complete and define the holy precinct of the raised sanctuary and screen the seating for the monastic community from view, existing marble statues were restored and repositioned within marble shrines designed to complement the liturgical furnishings.

Within the nave, the interior was refreshed with new finishing and a new lighting system. The rotting subfloor was rebuilt to support the incoming flooring and furnishings, and the decaying plaster ceiling was chemically consolidated and refinished for endurance in the years to come. Flooring was replaced with Italian porcelain tile under the new pews and a new decorative inlaid marble center aisle. A niche in the side aisle near the sanctuary was repurposed as a shrine to St. Maria Goretti, featuring a marble statue of the saint, commissioned for this location.



About O’Brien & Keane Architecture

O’Brien & Keane is a full-service architecture firm located Arlington, Virginia, offering more than 25 years of experience in building design, interior design, and land planning services to a broad spectrum of clients. They specialize in school and traditional Catholic church architecture, and provide full architectural and engineering services for major new facilities as well as church renovation in Virginia and the surrounding area, building additions, and adaptive reuse projects. They also provide consulting, engineering, and specialty design services through subcontracts with allied design professionals, including the design and fabrication of marble liturgical furnishings.

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