

Reclaiming beauty **OF THE PAST**



Father John Cotter and pastoral associate Joe Henige admire the renovated St. Michael Parish. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

Inset: The sanctuary is pictured midway through the renovation process. Quality Wood Products from Ubyly constructed the wooden part of the reredos, framing the Last Supper marble. *Courtesy photo.*



Church renovation includes return of century-old stained glass

While pulling up the old flooring at St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove, pastoral associate Joe Henige pondered the old, worn original wooden floor underneath.

“I couldn’t help but think of how many of my family members walked down the aisle for baptisms and communion and weddings and funerals,” he recalled.

Like many parishioners, Joe’s family has attended St. Michael’s for generations—a connection he especially felt during its recent renovation, which brought back some of the beautiful original features from the 1920 church building.

“Many generations have been proud of the parish and have given

their time and talent to keep it going strong and keep our worship space a beautiful space,” he said. Many current parishioners recalled their grandparents talking about when the church was built.

1920s beauty

When St. Michael Parish was preparing to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2015, parishioners wanted to make needed repairs and renovations. The timeline was shifted a few years, however, due

to the need to replace the slate roof, the realization a capital campaign would be necessary to raise funds, and, most recently, the pandemic.

Father John Cotter, pastor of St. Michael Parish, credited the late Bishop Joseph Cistone with helping them begin.

“We knew we needed some serious help. He put us in touch with (St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio),” Father John said. St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio was also involved in the 2016-17 restoration of the Cathedral of Mary

BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH



of the Assumption in Saginaw.

As the liturgical consultant, Pennsylvania-based St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio coordinated the design, fabrication and installation, helping the parish look as its builders intended.

“The apse [semicircular recess at the front of the church] has been totally restored to the 1920s space that it was,” said Father John. A new carved wooden crucifix imported from Italy hangs in the center, reminiscent of the suspended crucifix that was once there.

The church’s Last Supper marble was placed in a large marble and wood reredos, and the sanctuary reflects the original. A new baptismal font was placed near the church

entrance, the paintings along the ceiling were framed in gold paint, and gold leaf was added to accent the capitals on top of the columns.

“(The work) reinvigorated it to what the original design of the church was,” Joe said.

New homes for old treasures

The renovation also included breathing new life into items from other churches. Pews from the former St. Joseph Church in Bay City were refinished and installed. The Stations of the Cross, acquired from a closed church in Philadelphia, were repainted and given an antique look. Both pews and stations were about 100 years old and fit the style of St. Michael’s.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

A wooden crucifix, carved in Italy, is suspended over the sanctuary. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

The renovation included plaster repairs and adding gold paint to frame the canvas paintings on the ceiling. The capitals on top of each column are also accented with gold leaf. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

Father John Cotter, pastor, sits in a pew that was brought from the former St. Joseph Church in Bay City. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

The Stations of the Cross were purchased from a closed Philadelphia church and repainted in an antiqued white and framed in gold. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

Joe Henige, pastoral associate, describes the renovation as reinvigorating the original design of the church. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

The church’s Last Supper marble was surrounded by additional marble and a large wooden reredos. The tabernacle is a combination of the parish’s former tabernacle and new construction. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*



A stained glass window depicting the Road to Emmaus story from the Gospel of Luke was originally in the 1883 church. It is now in the parish's reconciliation room. The brilliant red hue of the upper piece is made from arsenic and gold. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

“It’s a gift to our children and to our community. Your experience of your faith and God is definitely enhanced when you have a worship space that has all of the beauty that we have here.”

- JOE HENIGE

Perhaps most unexpected, however, was the rediscovery of a stained glass window from the 1883 church. In the midst of the renovation process, Amber Schroeder contacted St. Michael’s about a stained glass window her mother, Alice Simons, had purchased from a Saginaw thrift shop. The window depicts the moment when Jesus breaks bread

with disciples, who recognize him after walking together on the road to Emmaus.

Alice and her husband William had moved to California and back, bringing the window packed between a mattress and a box spring both ways. After Alice’s death, the family tried to find the family of Ottilia Scherer, whose name was on the glass. Ottilia, affectionately

called “Aunt Tillie,” was buried in the St. Michael Parish cemetery, and her great-nieces and great-nephews still attend the church.

“It was pretty cool! I was so happy,” said Karen (Krupp) Wendling, one of Aunt Tillie’s great-nieces. She fondly remembers Aunt Tillie, who lived from 1877 to 1973, visiting her family—usually treating them with donuts. Karen added the rediscovery of the window has prompted her to want to research Aunt Tillie and learn more about her.

“I’m pretty proud. . . . We’ve got such roots in this church!” she exclaimed, referring to her family. Her grandfather had also donated a window in the current church. Knowing they purchased and donated these windows, she said, shows her ancestors’ commitment to the parish.

“It was just so wonderful (the parish) got hold of it,” she said. “God does work in mysterious ways. The timing was perfect.”

William donated the window back to the church, and they were happily able to add the antique window Aunt Tillie had donated to the 1883 church to their renovation plan. It is now backlit and graces the reconciliation room.

Investing in the future

With more than 2,000 hours of volunteer labor in addition to the contractors’ work, the renovation committee believed they were investing in their parish’s future—not only the building, but also the faith community.

“It’s a gift to our children and to our community. Your experience

of your faith and God is definitely enhanced when you have a worship space that has all of the beauty that we have here,” Joe said.

The renovation, he said, helps others to see that members of the parish community take their faith seriously and are willing to invest their time and money to establish a solid foundation for future generations. If you don't, he added, “you're going to set yourself up to keep up the trend” of declining Mass-goers.

He added they have also considered materials' longevity and durability, ensuring fewer resources are spent on replacements and repairs.

“They're just elated,” Father John said of the parishioners. “It's unbelievable. They took this challenge head-on and they didn't compromise.”

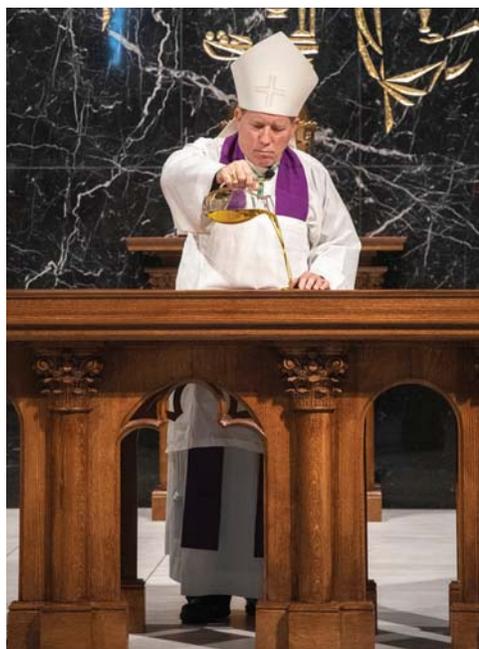
The St. Michael Parish community was able to celebrate the renovation when the church was blessed and dedicated on Dec. 19. During the Mass, Randy Henige, who served as the parish liaison for the renovation project, secured a relic of St. John Neumann in the altar, which Bishop Robert Gruss then consecrated with sacred chrism. Faithful filled the church, taking in its numerous updates.

Joe said he enjoys seeing longtime parishioners' reactions to the beautiful space.

“To see people who have been so faithful to the parish look around in awe just puts a smile on my face,” he said. “It's amazing to see the awe and the work that's been done.” †



The St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove church renovations, including art and environment and building support, were supported by the Diocese of Saginaw through the Office of Liturgy and Office of Building and Maintenance and made possible through **Christ's Mission Appeal**.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

The faithful fill St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove to celebrate the Mass of Dedication on Dec. 19. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

Jackie Harris and fellow parishioners pray during the Mass of Dedication. The pews were originally from St. Joseph Church in Bay City. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

The Wendling sisters— Sheri Warner, Diane Henige, Shelly Emmendorfer and Nancy Vincke— wipe down the altar after Bishop Gruss consecrated it with Sacred Chrism. Father Pat O'Connor, associate for the Office of Liturgy, and Joe Henige, St. Michael pastoral associate and member of the renovation committee, assist in the background. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

Bishop Robert Gruss pours sacred chrism oil over the altar at St. Michael Parish in Maple Grove. This consecrates it as a symbol of Christ in our midst. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*