

Interior Transformations



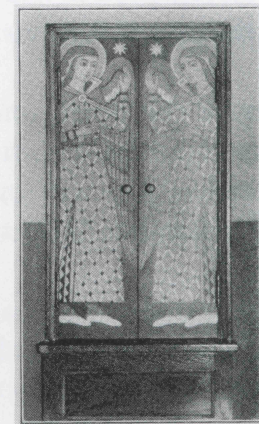
1923



Baptismal Font



1931



Doors of Ambrey in Baptistery

Interior

The interior of the original church was designed in the style of the Church of San Clemente in Rome. Budgetary limitations led to a building design featuring clerestory walls without windows. The broad expanse of wall space served as a canvas for depicting the history of the Church through the lives of the saints. Rendered in oils in the Romanesque style, a frieze of 68 saints in seven panels traversed the walls, their names inscribed above in a stylized font.

On the beams below the frieze were two inscriptions, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament: "FOR WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF SAINTS AND LOOK FOR THAT LIFE WHICH GOD WILL GIVE TO THOSE THAT NEVER CHANGE THEIR FAITH FROM HIM. WHEREFORE, BRETHREN, LABOUR THE MORE, THAT BY GOOD WORKS YOU MAY MAKE SURE YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION." The lessons in that text still are displayed on the beams.

Two rows of octagonal oak pillars separated the nave from the side aisles. The pillars were carved with traditional symbols of death and resurrection: water, shells, etc.

Carved wood Stations of the Cross encircled the walls, and four confessionals — two on each side of the church — featured ornately carved panels. On the side altars, figures of the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart of Jesus rendered in wood from Oberammergau invited the faithful to meditate and pray.

A statue of St. Clement, carved in wood and decorated in the Byzantine style, was mounted on a gilded pedestal above the main altar. To the right of the main altar, the original lectern featured a bronze eagle.

By 1931, the parish had tripled in size, necessitating enlargement of the sanctuary from seating from 600 to 750. Wooden side and front porches were replaced with stone. A new main altar, communion rail, and pulpit — all rendered in marble — replaced the originals, and painted versions of the Stations of the Cross replaced the carved Stations.

Development continued, undeterred by World War II. In March 1942, the church organ, originally a second-hand purchase from a Masonic auditorium in Milwaukee, was rebuilt and enlarged. The following year, the amber glass windows were replaced with stained glass. The new windows were original designs executed by Rambusch Decorating Company of New York.

1972 brought additional changes to the church in accordance with the objectives of the Second Vatican Council. Renovations included a freestanding marble altar in front of the original altar, removal of the communion rail, relocation of the statue of St. Clement from the front of the church to the back of the church below the choir loft, and installation in the sanctuary of a mosaic depicting the risen Christ.



Altar and Sanctuary

Each version of the sanctuary at St. Clement Church possesses a soul worthy of the noble churches, not in grandeur nor loftiness, but in a quality of true piety and devotion. Neither showy nor pretentious, time spent there leaves one filled with a still, quiet earnestness that soothes the spirit.

To ensure that the church lived up to the splendor of its name, but needing to keep the financial burden to a minimum, St. Clement Church was built in a simple, humble style while retaining strength and soundness of foundation. The Italian Romanesque style of St. Clement Church in Rome was used as a general template for the main entrance, main altar, and minor details. The design follows the Basilican type, divided into the vestibule, the auditorium, and the sanctuary.

The first altar of St. Clement Church was a copy of the marble altar of St. Clement Church in Rome, carved from wood and installed in 1923. A painting, "The Martyrdom of Saint Clement, Pope and Martyr", by Pennsylvania artist India Kreider, was the centerpiece of the original altar. What became of the painting remains a mystery.

The auditorium was divided into three parts: the nave, the main aisles, and the side aisles. Two rows of octagonal oak columns separated the nave from the aisles. Because the cost of marble was prohibitive at the time, the floor also was made of oak. Wood trusses supported the ceiling of both the nave and aisles, and arched windows were glazed with amber glass set in lead dividers. Plaster arches separated the sanctuary and side aisles from the auditorium.

By its 10th anniversary in 1932, St. Clement Parish had tripled in size and the church needed to be enlarged accordingly. Many of the wooden features were replaced with stone. A new sanctuary was added.

In the original sanctuary, a statue of St. Clement, carved from wood and richly decorated with a background, stood above the tabernacle. Surrounding the statue was a border of flowers, vines, birds, and ears of corn (symbolic representations of the sacraments) intertwining seven panels representing the life and death of our patron saint.

In 1931, the wood decor within the church was replaced with stone, including the altars. The side altars also were updated: The Gospel-side altar (to the left of the main altar), was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; the Epistle-side altar (to the right of the main altar) was dedicated to St. Joseph. Above the two side altars, new statues carved in wood harvested from Oberammergau (a village in southern Germany known for exceptional wood carving as well as the Lenten Passion plays) were installed. Currently, both statues are installed above the side altar on the left. On the right side is a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, carved in a similar style.

Years passed until November 1968, when, in accordance with the Liturgical Directive of Vatican II, the sanctuary of the church was renovated. The communion railings were removed, and a new freestanding marble altar was added. This third altar was a movable wooden altar that rested at the edge of the predella and was not fixed at the back wall of the sanctuary, as the previous two had been. It was intended to serve as a transitional altar while the main altar and church underwent a large-scale renovation to meet the requirements of the new liturgical directive.

The current altar and the altar of repose, sculpted from an ornate purple-gray marble imported from either Turkey or Italy, were installed at the back wall of the sanctuary. These altars repurposed the marble communion rails formerly located at the front of the sanctuary and a mosaic of the risen Christ on the wall behind the altar replaced the flower-and-vine motif. Both the color palette and subject matter are styled after the mosaics of St. Clement Church in Rome.

This major renovation was completed in 1972, in time for the Golden Anniversary of St. Clement Church. No significant changes have been made to the sanctuary since Vatican II.



A Memory Shared by Sean Duffy

I joined Saint Clement in 2003 after the birth of my first son. Prior to that, I was a very lapsed Catholic.

I recall a few years prior to joining, driving home and passing a man on sidewalk waving his hand in distress asking for help. I passed him, thinking, "Poor guy. I'd like to help, but what if he is dangerous?" That memory haunted me. Fast forward a few years after having joined Saint Clement: I met another gentleman in distress, a man at Saint Clement who had just lost his home. I gave him some money and wished him good luck, but this time I stuck with it. I continued to engage him. We have now known each other for over a decade. He still has many struggles, but is in a better place. He gives thanks to God and Jesus for keeping him safe and giving him friends like me.

It is I, whoever, who give thanks to God for reminding me to see Jesus in everyone.

Dave & Patty Santell's Story

The years our three children attended the PSR Program, between 1986 to early 1990's, Donna Fiening and Lois Vajdovk were a great guidance for all of us, spiritually as were the years I spent as a greeter, prior to COVID, with Pat and Dick Gelb and Tim Speer. Miss them all.

Kathy Dean & The Entire Christmas Decorating Committee's Story

Our tradition is to have pop and pizza on our break, but the fun part was eating it in the back rows of church!