

Art & Architecture

St. Peter Church is built in a modern English Gothic style. This style is characterized by pointed arches, large windows and flying buttresses. St. Peter Church incorporates these features, but updates them for a cleaner, less ornate style. The exterior is constructed of brick with limestone trim and a slate roof. The interior is decorated with Italian marble wainscoting and plaster walls. The ceilings consist of open truss-work with beamed, paneled ceilings between the trusses. White oak is used throughout the church for confessionals, pews and other furniture.

The shape of St. Peter Church has multiple meanings. First and foremost, the church is laid out in the shape of a cross with the sanctuary and Tabernacle standing at the head of the cross. This demonstrates the centrality of Christ's sacrifice and redemptive love to our faith. Secondly, the nave and sanctuary form an upside-down Noah's Ark. This symbolizes that Christianity is a continuation of the Covenant established between God and Noah and reaffirmed between God and the Jewish people.

Statues

St. Peter Church contains several beautiful statues and sculptures within the church and its grounds. These statues serve to honor saints important to the people of St. Peter Parish.

Crucifix

The crucifix hanging in the sanctuary is the most prominent sculpture in St. Peter Church. This life-size wooden sculpture depicts Jesus' final moments on the cross.

Blessed Virgin Mary

Located above the side altar to the left of the sanctuary, the statue of the Blessed Virgin is sculpted out of marble. She is depicted standing on a snake, a symbol of Mary's role as the "New Eve" through whom God redeemed mankind from the original sin of Adam and Eve. At the foot of the sculpture is a mosaic depicting three roses, symbolic of Mary's purity and Immaculate Conception.

St. Joseph

Located above the side altar to the right of the sanctuary, the statue of St. Joseph is sculpted out of marble. He is depicted holding a lily, representative of the legend of how he came to be Mary's spouse. According to the legend, the high priest Zechariah was instructed to assemble marriageable men and have them leave their staffs in the temple overnight. God would reveal through a sign which man was to be the husband of Mary. The following morning, Joseph's staff had grown flowers and, thus, he became Mary's husband. The altar beneath Joseph's statue also contains a mosaic of carpentry tools, another traditional symbol of St. Joseph.

St. Peter

St. Peter Church is blessed with two statues of St. Peter, the patron of the parish. The first is located in the shrine to the right of the sanctuary. This marble statue depicts St. Peter holding the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, a symbol of his authority as the first leader of the Church. The second is in front of the Fr. Welch Hall at the corner of Market and Pine Streets. This statue also shows Peter holding the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and is surrounded by a beautiful flower bed.

St. Paul

The statue of St. Paul is located in the shrine to the left of the sanctuary. This marble statue depicts St. Paul holding a sword, representative of both his time spent as a soldier before his conversion and his role as a soldier for Christ following his conversion.

Infant Jesus of Prague

Located in the niche to the left of the sanctuary is a replica of the Infant Jesus of Prague. The original stands in Our Lady of Victory Church in Prague, Czech Republic. There are many legends and traditions regarding this statue among them that it originally belonged to St. Teresa of Avila and was brought to Prague by a Spanish noblewoman in the 16th century. Many blessings and miracles have been attributed to the statue.

St. Joan of Arc

The statue of St. Joan of Arc stands on New St. behind St. Peter Church. This monument depicts St. Joan in full battle armor holding a flag and serves as a memorial to those members of St. Peter Parish who fought in World War I. By depicting St. Joan in this memorial, the creators honored both the heroism of the men who served and the French origins of the parish.

Windows & Mosaics

In the Middle Ages, most people were illiterate and could neither read nor write. In order to learn their faith, the churches and cathedrals these people attended were filled with images and artwork which told them the stories of the Bible and used symbols to teach them about their faith. This practice has continued in modern churches, especially in the use of stained glass windows. The twenty-one stained glass windows of St. Peter Church depict stories from the life of Christ.

Sanctuary Windows

The windows in the sanctuary depict four of the five Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary. Originally, the fifth mystery, The Descent of the Holy Spirit, was to be on the back wall of the sanctuary. This plan was never completed, but the outline of where the window would have been can be seen on the back of the church.

Nave Windows

The windows in the nave of the church depict the life of Christ from the Annunciation to the Crucifixion. Each window contains a depiction of the story it is telling in the main part of the window and then contains symbols related to that story in the square below and triangle above. There are also windows above the confessional and cry room depicting the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

St. Peter Receiving the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven

Located in the choir loft, this large window depicts St. Peter receiving the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven from Jesus. It is the only window in the church to feature tracery and contains the crossed papal keys and tiara at the top.

The Baptism of the Lord

Located in what was originally the church's baptistery, these windows depict St. John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River.

The Prodigal Son

Located in the transept on St. Mary's side, this window depicts the parable of "The Prodigal Son" at the moment when the prodigal son is welcomed home by his father.

Jesus Teaching in the Temple

Located in the transept on St. Joseph's side, this window depicts Jesus teaching the scribes and elders in the Temple in Jerusalem.

"Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me"

Located in the cry room, this pair of windows depict Jesus and Mary welcoming children to listen to the Gospel message.

"The Harvest is Great, But the Laborers Are Few"

This window is located in the stairs leading down to the basement of the church on St. Joseph's side. The windows depict Jesus and St. Joseph, the patron saint of workers. The passage depicted refers not to an actual harvest, but to the mission of spreading the Gospel message.

St. Cecilia

Located in the stairwell leading to the choir loft, this window depicts St. Cecilia, the patroness of musicians, with an early organ.

Mosaics

Mosaics are small pieces of tile or glass which are arranged to form an image. They have been used as decoration since Roman times and were an important form of art in early Christian churches. St. Peter Church is graced with several mosaics in and around the sanctuary.

The Pelican

The mosaic on the left side of the back altar depicts a mother pelican feeding her baby pelicans. The symbolism of the pelican is rooted in an ancient legend that preceded Christianity. The legend is that the mother pelican fed her dying young with her blood to revive them from death, but in the end lost her own life. This tradition was adapted by early Christians as a symbol of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The mother pelican symbolizes Jesus as our Redeemer who gave his life for our redemption through His passion and death. We were dead to sin and have found new life through the Blood of Christ and continue to be nourished with His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist.

The Bread and Wine

The center mosaic on the back altar depicts the Holy Eucharist. In this mosaic, we see a chalice with grapes representing the wine and a communion wafer. Two doves representing the Holy Spirit are coming down to partake of these gifts, symbolizing how the Holy Spirit comes down during the consecration to convert the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The location of this mosaic in the center of the altar directly beneath the tabernacle is representative of the centrality of the Eucharist to our Catholic faith.

The Phoenix

The mosaic on the right side of the back altar depicts a phoenix rising from flames. In mythology, the phoenix was a majestic and beautiful bird with feathers and plumes of all colors which lived in Arabia. According to legend, only one phoenix was allowed to live on earth at a time, and it would live for about 500 years. When it was time for the bird to die, it would build a nest of spices and herbs then set the nest on fire and sit within the flames to die. As the embers died down, a new phoenix would rise out of the ashes. For early Christians, the phoenix became a symbol for the resurrection of Jesus. At St. Peter Church the phoenix takes on a second meaning. In addition to representing Jesus, the phoenix represents the parish itself rising from the ashes of the fire in 1957 which destroyed the old church building.

The Candle

Located on the front of the ambo, this mosaic depicts a lighted candle. This candle represents Christ, the Light of the World, illuminating the darkness by preaching the Word of God.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

Occupying the niche to the right of the sanctuary is a mosaic honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This mosaic depicts Jesus Christ with His heart literally on fire with love for His disciples. It is a representation of divine love and serves as one of the most widely practiced devotions in the Catholic Church.

The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven

Inlaid in the floor of the church immediately in front of the sanctuary is an image of two crossed keys. These keys represent the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and are the traditional symbol of St. Peter, the patron of St. Peter Parish.

The Sanctuary

The sanctuary of St. Peter Church is filled with many artistic features which lend to the beauty of the church and its ceremonies.

Baldacchino

A baldacchino is an ornamental structure resembling a canopy used especially over an altar. Such structures have been used in churches for centuries and originally began as cloth canopies. Over time, these canopies evolved into permanent architectural features. The baldacchino at St. Peter Church is located over the back altar and tabernacle. It is a metal structure plated in gold and decorated with geometric designs on the sides and grapes around the top. At the very top of the baldacchino is a silver dove representing the Holy Spirit. A red cloth is draped behind the grate of the baldacchino, providing an appropriate backdrop for the Crucifix suspended from the baldacchino.

Back Altar and Tabernacle

When St. Peter Church was first built before the Second Vatican Council, the back altar was the only altar in the sanctuary and served as the focal point of the church. It is constructed out of Italian marble and inlaid with multiple mosaics. The tabernacle is located in the center of this altar. The tabernacle is also constructed of marble with a gold plated door decorated with images of the Holy Eucharist. The interior of the tabernacle is decorated with embroidered designs symbolizing the Eucharist.

Main Altar

The main altar was added following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council when changes to the Roman Missal required the altar be situated such that the priest could more easily face the people. It is constructed of wood and metal. The simplicity of its shape more closely resembles the type of table which would have been used by early Christians in their offering of the Eucharist. In the space between the legs of the altar, a Chi Rho can be seen made out of metal. This ancient symbol combines the first two letters of the Greek word "Christos" and is one of the earliest symbols of Jesus. The main altar is often covered in altar cloths in the appropriate liturgical colors.

Ambo

An ambo, sometimes called a pulpit, is a raised platform resembling a lectern from which the Word of God is proclaimed. The ambo is located on the left side of the sanctuary. It is constructed of marble and gold plated metal and decorated with a mosaic of a candle representing Jesus, the Light of the World. It is also often covered in cloths representing the liturgical season.

Candles

For millennia, candles have been used in sacred spaces to create an atmosphere of reverence and to set such spaces apart from the secular world. At St. Peter Church, candles can be found flanking the tabernacle, main altar and ambo. Flanking the back altar are two gold plated candelabras, each containing seven candles, which are used on special occasions such as weddings, Christmas and Easter. Additionally, the sanctuary contains a sanctuary lamp.

This is a red candle which signifies the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle in the form of the Holy Eucharist.

Communion Rail

When the present St. Peter Church was built, it was still customary to receive the Holy Eucharist while kneeling at the communion rail. While this is no longer the practice, St. Peter Church retains a beautiful marble communion rail. This communion rail has three gated openings with bronze gates. While the communion rail is no longer used and the gates are never closed, the communion rail does serve to set the sanctuary apart from the rest of the church and remind us that this is a sacred place.

Baptismal Font

Although not located in the sanctuary itself, the baptismal font plays an integral role in the faith life of the parish. It is here that infants are baptized into Christ throughout the year. The baptismal font is octagonal in shape, made of marble and inlaid with designs on each side.

The front panel depicts a cross, symbolic of the prominence of Christ in our faith and our baptismal promises.