

CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

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WORK IN PROGRESS

After the last Mass on Easter Sunday, April 3, 1994, sacristan Jim Johnson (now Father Jim Johnson), locked the doors of the Cathedral, not to reopen them for nine long months. The very next morning, crews of workers descended on the Cathedral to restore and renew.

The first order of business was to lower the floor of the east nave to the same level as the rest of the Cathedral, and to reorient the ventilation tunnels that had been installed there in 1950. The side altars in the north and south transepts were removed. Scaffolding filled the entire building as expert plasterers installed the beautiful coffering on the ceiling, replacing thousands of acoustical tiles from the 1950 renovation. (The coffering also serves a practical function, enhancing the acoustic for music and the spoken word.) It was a wonderful day when the roof of the Cathedral was opened up to make way for the oculus, letting natural light flood the building for the first time since 1916. Meanwhile, workers were building the altar platform of slate and granite, with its patterns inspired by the work of Renaissance master Palladio.

Father Ryan remembers being in and out of the Cathedral every day during the construction, watching the various elements of the building take shape, and forming friendships with the many workers whose skillful hands were bringing the vision of the pastor, Renovation Committee, and architects to life. One day the artisan who was painting the lettering in the oculus called Father Ryan over. Together they climbed to the top of the scaffolding, where the painter showed Father Ryan the letters "MGR," hidden in the final "S" of the word "SERVES"!

Cathedral Administrator Larry Brouse remembers how every Friday, he, Father Ryan, and others would gather for lunch with the workers at the "Roadkill Grill"—actually the Cathedral's west vestibule, which during construction became a lunchroom, with tables running the length of the space. For Father Ryan, these gatherings were another kind of eucharist—"with a lower case 'e'." The workers knew that this project was different—not a warehouse or a department store, but something special. They became a community, as they were caught up in the holiness and mystery of the place and the project.

All this time, the life of the parish continued without interruption. The full schedule of weekend Masses was observed at O'Dea Gym, which was soon affectionately



The Cathedral filled with scaffolding during the renovation, summer 1994.

dubbed "St. Gym." Getting the gym ready for Mass each weekend was the work of a crew of dedicated volunteers, who spent most of every Saturday morning rolling out giant green mats (to protect the gym floor), carrying in a portable altar, arranging flowers and plants, setting out hundreds of chairs, and opening bleachers. From the first, the gym was arranged to anticipate the renovated Cathedral, with the altar in the center of the room, so that when they finally came into the renovated Cathedral, Dr. James Savage recalls, "it felt like home." There were baptisms in the gym, first communions in the gym, confirmations in the gym. Being in the gym proved to be an amazing time of community, as parishioners experienced what the Church has so long taught: that no matter where they worship, the people *are* the church.

As summer turned to fall, the work became even more intense as the day of the rededication drew near—December 22, 1994, 87 years to the day when Bishop O'Dea first dedicated the Cathedral. Project architect Stephen Lee remembers long days and nights supervising the many and various processes that were underway. One Thursday evening after the crews had gone home, he came in to work on aiming lights in the Cathedral, to find the Cathedral Choir gathered around the unfinished altar, singing in the renovated space for the first time. Dr. Savage still remembers the first piece they sang: Bruckner's *Locus iste*. "This place is the work of God, a mystery surpassing all comprehension, above all reproach."

For Father Ryan, one of the most memorable days was November 11, 1994, when Archbishop Murphy replaced the relics of the saints under the altar. To the relics of Adeodatus, Fortunata, and Boniface, placed under the original high altar by Bishop O'Dea, a fourth relic was added, that of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini. Gathered in the sacristy with some of the Cathedral staff, Archbishop Murphy, Father Ryan, Sister Anne Herkenrath, and James Savage signed the document to be placed with the relics. Then the sacristy door was opened and they processed into the Cathedral. As the cantors chanted the Litany of Saints, Father Ryan realized that now St. James not only *looked* like a Cathedral, but *sounded* like a Cathedral—a haunting, reverberant sound in a magnificent space.

—Corinna Laughlin

In our next issue: The Dedication of St. James Cathedral. And the conclusion of our Centennial Gazette. Thanks for reading!