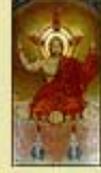




## *Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*



### **America's Patronal Church: 'A Hymn in Stone'**

The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception has become a spiritual home to hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who journey here each year from every state and many foreign lands. Together, they symbolize the Church's catholicity - its universal nature. It is synonymous with the story of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Catholicism in the United States. Each of the more than 60 chapels and oratories represents some history of the multi-ethnic community that comprises the universal Church.



*Founders of the National Shrine, Bishop Thomas Shahan (second from right) and Msgr. Bernard McKenna (third from right) are on hand for the arrival of the Shrine's foundation stone in 1920 (now located at the northeast corner of the Crypt Church).*

The National Shrine is literally, "America's Patronal Church." When the United States' first Catholic bishop, John Carroll, placed the young nation under Mary's protection, he foretold the faith and devotion of its Catholics through ensuing generations - including those who conceived of and built the National Shrine, and those who visit it and support its ministry today. Every stone and artistic nuance of the Shrine proclaims our nation's relationship with Mary, a spiritual bond formalized in 1847 with Pope Pius IX's proclamation of Mary as "Patroness of the United States" under the title of her Immaculate Conception.

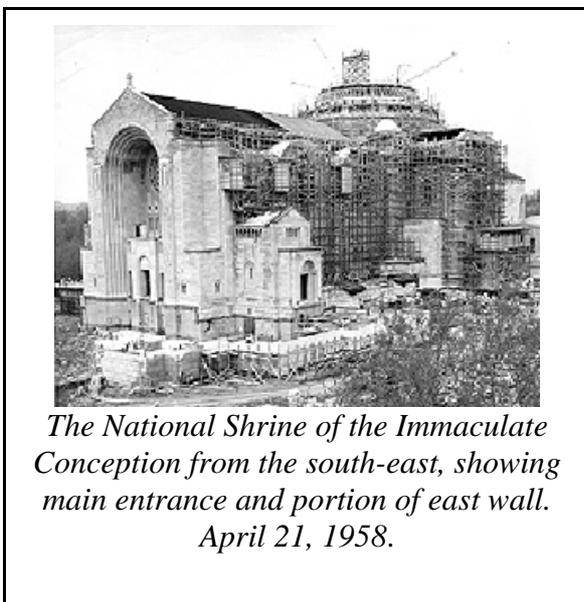
The numerous chapels located throughout the Shrine convey a remarkable story of the faith, devotion, struggles and triumphs of our nation's immigrant heritage. They also tell the story of the Catholic Church's emergence and evolution in this country and of the many hard-working men and women who, through much sacrifice, laid the foundations of their communities and ensured the expansion of the faith in the United States.



*The Crypt Church of the National Shrine as it looked during construction, March 15, 1924.*

"Faith," according to the Letter to the Hebrews, "is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Clearly, no one associated with the Shrine's beginnings understood this axiom of Christian faith better than Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, fourth rector of The Catholic University of America and founder of the National Shrine. In the early 1900s, Bishop Shahan proposed building a national shrine in Washington to honor Mary. During an August 15, 1913 audience with Pope Pius X, Bishop Shahan received the Holy Father's enthusiastic support but also a personal contribution of \$400.

Bishop Shahan returned home and persuaded the Board of Trustees of Catholic University to donate land at the southwest corner of the campus for the Shrine. He then enlisted the help of Catholic groups from across the country to collect funds for the church's construction.



Bishop Shahan published the first issue *Salve Regina* in January 1914, a newsletter that served to create national enthusiasm for the Shrine. Through it, Bishop Shahan promoted his vision of establishing a national shrine in the capital city. The inaugural issue referred to it as "a monument of love and gratitude, a great hymn in stone ... as perfect as the art of man can make it and as holy as the intentions of its builders could wish it to be."

The bishop's passion for establishing a majestic "hymn in stone" soon became contagious. As contributions and letters of support poured in, Bishop Shahan sought out the assistance of a Philadelphia priest, Father Bernard McKenna, to carry out the endeavor. Father McKenna was named the first director of the National Shrine in 1915 bringing the dream of a national symbol of Catholic devotion to Mary gave a step closer to reality.

James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, blessed the foundation stone September 23, 1920 during the second annual meeting of the U.S. hierarchy in Washington. More than 10,000 faithful attended the Mass, including foreign ambassadors, U.S. government officials, military officers, and other dignitaries.

Though the Great Depression and the Second World War temporarily halted construction of the Shrine above the Crypt level, the spirit of American Catholics would not be thwarted. Following the war, Washington's Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle joined Archbishop John Noll of Fort Wayne, Indiana to revive the project. The nation's bishops pledged their support in 1953 to secure the funds required for completion of the Great Upper Church. Catholics in every

U.S. parish responded overwhelmingly to this national appeal allowing construction to resume during the Marian Year of 1954.

On November 20, 1959, thousands of Catholics gathered with their bishops for the dedication of the Great Upper Church. They celebrated the humble beginnings of the great sanctuary and rejoiced in profound affect the Shrine would have on the life of the Church in the United States.



*Aerial Photo of National Shrine of the Immaculate. Released by N.C.W.C. News Service, August 1958.*

With each subsequent year, the Shrine draws closer to its interior completion and the fulfillment of the architects' original design. The recent installation of the '[Universal Call to Holiness](#)' sculpture and the marble and mosaic finishing of the Narthex, bring Mary's Shrine one step closer to finalization.

*To the many faithful who have contributed to the construction and ongoing maintenance of this great sanctuary in honor of our National Patroness: Thank you. Your dedication to Mary's Shrine will ensure that it continues to stand as a beacon of Good News and hope for centuries to come. God and the Blessed Mother will not be outdone in generosity. May you be richly blessed for your charitable spirit.*