

Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Father Joseph Marcoux, parochial vicar at Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral, admires the new paint job on the cathedral's ceiling June 28. He walks high above the church's floor on what workers call the "dance floor," an elevated platform supported by scaffolding positioned just below the ceiling.

Bright artwork highlights ceiling design

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Dim lighting and fading colors in recent years turned the fine artwork of Sacred Heart Cathedral's ceiling into an unintentionally well-kept secret.

After significant upgrades are completed as part of the cathedral renovation project, however, worshipers will be in for a treat when they crane their necks upward.

"There will be highlights that even the parishioners have never seen before," said Father John Mulligan, cathedral pastor.

"I think they're going to be overawed," added Father Joseph Marcoux, parochial vicar at Sacred Heart.

The ceiling will be available for public view beginning with the planned reopening of Sacred Heart in January or February of 2005. Artwork is being overseen by Conrad Schmitt Studios, a liturgical art firm from New Berlin, Wis., while painting is being done by Painters Union 150 from Rochester.

Among the main areas of the ceiling work:

- Repainting and retouching the decorative shields and stripes on the ceiling in the nave, or central area, of the church. Other than some minor changes in color, these designs have been left largely unchanged. Particularly significant are the large amounts of gold, copper and silver leaf that create a sparkling effect as the ceiling rises to a point some 70 feet from the ground. "The ceiling just shimmers," Father Marcoux said.

- Repainting the ceiling blocks in the transept, a rectangular area that cuts across the nave to form the shape of a cross. The plaster blocks, which also run down the side walls, now feature a sandstone color.

- Refinishing of wooden panels near the cathedral's main doors.

- A newly-created ceiling design in the area where the new eucharistic chapel is being construct-



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ed. The ceiling will depict the night sky as it is said to have appeared on March 3, 1868 — the day the Diocese of Rochester was founded. "It's our attempt to remind people of the history of our diocese and cathedral," Father Mulligan said.

The eucharistic chapel is the only area that will feature brand-new ceiling design. With respect to the rest of the cathedral ceiling, "we tried to stay very close with the existing patterns," Father Mulligan said.

Sacred Heart, built in 1927, originated as a parish church and was patterned after the historic Ely Cathedral in England. It became a pro-cathedral in 1937 and was formally designated as the diocesan cathedral in 1957. Since then, time has taken a toll on the beauty of its ceiling artwork. "It just fades over the years. Dust and soot and incense just got up there," Father Marcoux said.

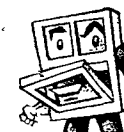
Even if the ceiling design hadn't become worn, Father Mulligan noted that the cathedral's notoriously poor lighting undercut the beauty of this art. "No one ever noticed. It was always pitch-dark up there," he said.

Father Mulligan said lighting upgrades will include spotlights pointed toward the ceiling. The lighting aspects of the cathedral renovation are being handled by Rambusch Lighting, an architectural firm from New York City.

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