

Brighter cathedral showcases angels

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral has always been filled with angels, but they'll be even more noticeable once renovations there are completed, according to Father John Mulligan, pastor and diocesan vicar general.

The cathedral has been home at one time or another to 116 carved, sculpted or painted angels of various colors and sizes. Sixteen of the angels are life-size and stand at the bases of the cathedral's eight main roof beams. Each angel features a different color robe and sash, and carries a shield emblazoned with a different liturgical symbol.

Such angels are traditional features of Gothic cathedrals — after which Sacred Heart was patterned — but many of the church's visitors have probably never noticed them, Father Mulligan said. Lighting around the angels was dim prior to the renovations, but new uplighting — lights that shine toward the ceiling — will help illuminate them. The uplighting is one of several lighting upgrades that have replaced the large lanterns that hung from the ceiling, blocking the angels from view, and the angels have been repainted in preparation for the cathedral's reopening.

"People have always been fascinated by the angels, but most people haven't even noticed them. We're renewing our cathedral, and we really wanted some of those architectural features to stand out much more clearly," Father Mulligan explained.

The 16 life-size angels are just a few of the cathedral's "hidden gems," he added. Angels can also be found in various places on the cathedral walls, on small, stone plaques beside the 16 larger angels and on either side of the arches above the cathedral's side aisles. This last set of angels is referred to by some as "the coming and the going angels,"



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

The removal of scaffolding used in the renovation of Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral reveals freshly painted and cleaned angel statues, which rise high above the floor on pedestals attached to each ceiling beam.



sixth in a series
Cathedral Renaissance

because you see some of the angels as you're walking into church and the ones on the opposite side of the arch as you're leaving, Father Mulligan said.

Although these are now among his favorite sets of angels in the cathedral, Father Mulligan said he never noticed them until a longtime parishioner mentioned in passing that when she was a little girl, her family loved "the coming and the going angels." Prior to the renovation, these angels were barely visible without a flashlight, but the new uplighting will make them stand out more. As the final designs for the cathedral's decor come together, Father Mulligan said angels might be added in new places.

Angels are seen as a form of communication between God and humans, so it is especially fitting for them to be prominently portrayed in a cathedral, which is also "a communication between God and ourselves," Father Mulligan said.

When the cathedral reopens, Father Mulligan said he hopes parishioners and visitors will take the time to notice the architectural elements around them — including some of the angels — and that parents will point out the many angels to their children.

"Children are also fascinated by angels. With all of the angels now able to be seen, it's going to make the cathedral more of a fascinating space for our children," Father Mulligan said.

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