

St. Edward's

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FOREVER OUR CHAPEL

A RENOVATION BRINGS NEW LIFE TO THE
SACRED SPACE. **PAGE 24**

blessed IS THIS PL

THERE MAY NEVER BE a soaring basilica or towering church at the spiritual heart of campus. But there is a humble, beautiful chapel with a history nearly as storied as the university itself – and it was recently dedicated after a major renovation.



ACE



By Robyn Ross
Photography by Morgan Printy
and Faith Robbins

Anyone well versed in St. Edward's University history can likely list off previous uses for the chapel building: auditorium, theater, classrooms, woodworking and blacksmith shop, and shooting range. Now, at last, it is forever a chapel. After a 9-month renovation process, Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel was formally dedicated in a Mass celebrated by the bishop of the Diocese of Austin, the Most Rev. Joe Vásquez, last October.

The chapel, which looks like a brighter, slightly longer version of its old self, is one part of a complex that includes a meditation garden and a new Campus Ministry building named in honor of **Brother Stephen Walsh, CSC, '62**. Inside, the pews are now oriented processional style, facing an altar at the north end. Natural light sweeps in from the sides and a new clerestory window added above the altar. The restored wood floors and newly installed walls are a lighter shade of brown, giving the whole room a spacious, airy feel.

In Catholic tradition, a church dedication is an intentional commitment of a building for use in worship and prayer. It's also a chance to commit the furnishings inside the building — the altar, the crucifix and more — to their liturgical purposes. In the following pages we'll take a look at each of these pieces, from their beginnings as wood from campus trees to their blessing by the bishop.



Cross

Corpus

Ambo

Presider's Chair

Altar

THE UNIVERSITY COULD HAVE ordered liturgical furnishings — the baptismal font, ambo, altar, crucifix, tabernacle and ambry — from a church catalog. Instead, it commissioned local artisans to create custom pieces integrated with the design of the chapel. Austin furniture designer Mark Maček created some of the furnishings using wood from trees and snapped branches that were blown down during wind storms that came through campus, an approach that emphasizes sustainability but also offers a subtle reminder that out of death can come new life. In addition, using the campus wood echoes the Holy Cross educational mission of meeting students where

they are “and then fashioning something unique out of that,” says Director of Campus Ministry **Father Peter Walsh, CSC**.

Elm trees felled by Mang House’s demolition provided the wood for the altar, ambo, baptismal font and cross. Elm is a fine wood with small pores and a tight grain that, when sanded, feels soft to the touch. When Maček received the logs from Physical Plant staff in June, he took them to a friend’s sawmill to be sliced into 2-inch-thick slabs. But air-drying the wood to prepare it for use would have taken too long: about one year per inch of thickness. So he built a lumber-drying kiln to reduce the time to one month.



Baptismal Font



“Out of death can come new life.”
— FATHER PETER WALSH, CSC

Maček’s concept for all the furnishings began with the **baptismal font**, whose base is formed of two intersecting elm planes. When viewed from the side, space carved from the planes forms an empty almond shape called a *vesica piscis*, recognizable as the ancient Christian fish symbol.

“I’m basically taking the shape of the bottom of the bowl and translating that into the base. It’s a combination of structure, shape and symbolism,” Maček says.

The glass basin was made by artisan Kathleen Ash, who works in fused glass. While clear around its edges, the basin is marked by bands of increasingly dark blue-gray approaching the center, suggesting depth.

The base of the **ambo** is made of intersecting planes that, from above, form a cross.

The design for the **altar** evolved from Maček’s design for the baptismal font. Its base is a cross with two arms. In the intersection of all these planes is a large sphere of empty space.

“A circle symbolizes unity, completeness and perfection,” Maček says, “and a sphere implies all those things even more. I think that relates to how people think about God. But the sphere in the altar is not an object; it’s a space — so it’s there and not-there at the same time. This also relates to how we think of divinity: We can’t really see it, and it’s beyond our ability to comprehend, but we sense that it’s there.”

An altar, too, is two things, Walsh explains: an altar of sacrifice and a table of the Lord’s Supper. The new altar’s top, called the *mensa*, is stone, harking back to its sacrificial function in the Old Testament.

The altar continues another very old tradition: inside a recess in the underside of the *mensa* is a relic of Saint Brother André Bessette, CSC. Many Catholic churches incorporate a relic of a martyr or other saint into their altar to form a connection to the ancient Christians who celebrated the Eucharist on the burial sites of martyrs in the Roman catacombs. The relic of Saint Brother André, the only Holy Cross saint, was taken from his blood at the time of his death in 1937 and was sent to Walsh last spring by Brother Thomas Dziekan, CSC, the congregation’s vicar general in Rome. During the dedication liturgy Bishop Vásquez knelt to place the relic inside the altar, and then Maček sealed it inside with a stone cap.





Ave Crux, Spes Unica: Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope —HOLY CROSS MOTTO



Maček worked with sculptor Rebecca Cantos-Busch to produce a **crucifix** that hangs over the altar. Maček built the **cross** out of elm, and Cantos-Busch carved the **corpus** — the body of Christ — out of separately sourced poplar.

The figure of Christ is stylized instead of realistic. Rather than carve every detail, Cantos-Busch made facets, or tiny planes in the wood, to catch the changing natural light and suggest the spiritual realm. Christ appears to almost float on the cross, embodying the paradoxical-sounding Holy Cross motto *Ave Crux, Spes Unica*: Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope.

“Our understanding of the cross is that it delves into human suffering, but in a transformative way,” Walsh says. “Jesus is actually transcending the experience of crucifixion in the very moment of being crucified.”

To convey this dual symbolism of Christ, Cantos-Busch meditated on the crucifixion, a process she describes as powerful and healing. “I had a lot of visions of selflessness, unconditional love and nonjudgment,” she says. “Meditating on these things, you wonder: where do you need to be more selfless or loving in your life? I feel like in the past three months I’ve grown a lot because of that.”



The **tabernacle** and **ambry** are made of wood from the downed branches of the walnut tree that stands between Andre Hall and the parking lot — an uncommon wood for Texas. At the conclusion of the Eucharist, the consecrated hosts are placed into the tabernacle, which is then locked. “It’s just a cabinet,” Walsh says, “but it becomes a place of devotion and prayer because the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there between liturgies for private prayer and bringing communion to the sick.”

The 16-by-16-inch tabernacle has a central panel of purple agate that contains the shape of a flame, a natural feature that evokes light, knowledge and contemplation, says Maček.

With the altar moving to the north end of the chapel, the tabernacle was placed in a side alcove that recently had been used as a storage room but was once a confessional. This creates a more protected, intimate space for private prayer.

The ambry has a design similar to the tabernacle but has a glass panel in the door that allows a look inside. Placed at the entrance to the church, adjacent to the baptismal font, it holds the oils blessed at Easter for use during the year: the sacred chrism, the oil of the sick and the oil of catechumens.



Tabernacle



Ambry

“A Catholic chapel is the heart of the university. This chapel is a visible sign of the invisible God.”

—Most Rev. Joe Vásquez





THE RITE OF DEDICATION is “considered to be one of the most solemn and beautiful liturgies in the church,” says **Liza Manjarrez**, assistant director of Campus Ministry. The Oct. 21 Mass began in low light, with just the evening sun filtering through the windows, and ended with the sanctuary brightly illuminated. A chalice belonging to Father Edward Sorin, CSC, the university’s founder, was used during the Eucharist. On loan from the University of Notre Dame, the chalice was brought by former director of Campus Ministry Father Rick Wilkinson, CSC, now vicar of the U.S. Province of Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross. It’s a detail that Manjarrez says “brings us full circle in our Holy Cross tradition.”

The altar, the principal symbol of Christ in the chapel, was consecrated by Vásquez, who poured holy chrism on the stone top

and rubbed it in to echo the anointing of Christ. Members of the community then cleaned off the oil and prepared the table for the liturgy of the Eucharist. Each liturgical furnishing was blessed with holy water, and the four walls of the chapel itself were anointed with oil. Small crosses made by Maček with fallen wood from Sorin Oak mark the places where the walls were anointed and remain permanently in place.

“By marking the boundaries of the space — the doorways and walls — we’re saying this space is now dedicated to the purpose of worship and prayer,” Walsh says. “By dedicating it formally, we’re ritualizing what folks intuited all those years: that this is a very special building.”



“Here people should come with their worries, fears, hopes and dreams, confident that Christ will be present.”

—Most Rev. Joe Vásquez



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