

Basilica Emblems

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Among the dignities allowed a minor basilica are the *ombrellino*, also known as a papal pavilion, a *tintinnabulum* or bell, the display of the papal keys, and a coat of arms. The *ombrellino* of the Basilica of the National Shrine was displayed for the first time in 2009, the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the National Shrine. The *tintinnabula* or bells of the National Shrine—which chose to use three bells in honor of the Trinity—are housed in a custom made, hand-carved wooden frame with gilded scrolling by Ferdinand Stuflesser, Bolzano, Italy. At the center of the wooden frame are enamel ovals depicting the National Shrine and the Immaculate Conception.

The heraldic achievement or coat of arms of a minor basilica is composed of a shield with its charges (symbols), a motto scroll, and external ornamentation.

The shield of the National Shrine is divided into two parts. On the left, as the viewer faces the shield, or the *dexter* (right) of the shield is a blue or azure field, representing the eastern sky on a clear day; *sinister* (left), is a white field, implying purity, chastity, truth, and justice of the bearer.

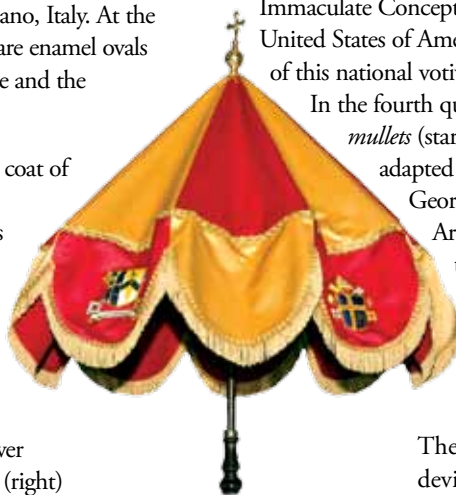
Surmounting the dexter field is a *cross botonée* throughout, adapted from the coats of arms of the Archdiocese of Washington (gold and white) and the Premier See of Baltimore (red and white). In 1846, Baltimore was the location of the Sixth Provincial Council where the determination was made to place the United States under the protection of “the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin.”

In 1947, Washington became an archdiocese independent of Baltimore. The combination of the papal colors of gold and white, together with the red, white, and blue symbolize the presence of the Catholic Church in the United States of America.

The cross divides the dexter field into four quarters. The first quarter contains a gold and white *crescent moon* representing the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet.” Under her title of the Immaculate Conception, she is patroness of the United States of America and the namesake of this national votive church of pilgrimage.

In the fourth quarter are three white *mullets* (stars), of five points. These are adapted from the coat of arms of George Washington and the Archdiocese of Washington; they represent the city of Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States and the location of the National Shrine.

The sinister white field of the device is surmounted with a pile throughout in gold. The pile is an emblem of stability, a sure foundation, a firm support. The color gold is the most brilliant and valuable of all metals.



Ombrellino



Tintinnabula or Bells depicting the National Shrine and Immaculate Conception.

In this instance, the gold pile refers to the Church, whose one and true foundation is Jesus Christ.

A blue *chevron* seated on the gold pile signifies the roofline of a house, in this instance, a church building. The color blue in this case represents the Blessed Virgin. Thus, the combination of pile and chevron represents the Church or *Ecclesia*, the Christian faith community, the place where God dwells, and this particular house or church building is a special sign of *Ecclesia* in this world.

The gold pile is charged at the top with a black *anchor* cabled, shown cast into a stormy sea (the black and white wavy lines). The combination of the anchor and the pile represents the hope placed in Jesus Christ, the Church's one foundation. The anchor is adapted from the coat of arms of Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, the founder of the National Shrine and that of Pope (Saint) Pius X, who gave permission for the building of this church in 1913. Pope Pius X stated, "Hope is the sole companion of my life, the greatest support in uncertainty, the strongest power in situations of weakness." It was inspired by Hebrews 6:19, "This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm."

The charges (scallop and trefoils) on the chevron relate directly to the history and mission of the National Shrine.

The *scallop* (cockleshell) symbolizes pilgrimage and reflects the nature and mission of this national shrine. It is also an adaptation from the coat of arms of James Cardinal Gibbons and is an acknowledgment of the senior churchman in the United States who laid the foundation stone of this church on September 23, 1920.

Trefoil (three-leaf clover) "slipped" or with stem is a symbol of perpetuity, the three leaves representing the past, the present, and the future; the color green represents hope and joy in renewal. Two trefoils are found on the coat of arms of Patrick Cardinal

O'Boyle, the first resident Archbishop of Washington, during whose tenure construction of the National Shrine was completed and the church was solemnly dedicated. In reference to the actual structure of the National Shrine, each trefoil represents an apsidal area: the Crypt Church and

the Great Upper Church. As one of the oldest Celtic symbols, the trefoil also refers to the heritage of the founder of this national church, Bishop Shahan; its first director, Monsignor Bernard A. McKenna; the architects Maginnis and Walsh of Boston; and the principle builders, Charles J. Cassidy Co., Washington, D.C. (Crypt Church) and John McShain of Philadelphia (Upper Church).

Behind the shield are the papal keys symbolizing the

spiritual (gold) and the temporal (silver) and the power given to the Church: "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matt 16:19). The two keys in saltire form a diagonal cross or "X." As determined by the Vatican, a minor basilica may exhibit the papal keys on banners, furnishings, and its coat of arms, signifying the relationship between the pope and the minor basilica.

A ribbon inscribed with the motto of the National Shrine is below the shield: *Ad Iesum per Mariam Immaculatam*, "To Jesus through Mary Immaculate." Given in the classical Latin spelling, this motto is a paraphrase of the writings of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort (1673-1716), "To go to Jesus through Mary is truly to honor Jesus Christ."

The external ornamentation of the achievement is completed with an *ombrellino* or papal pavilion of gold and red. The center scallop carries the crest of Pope (Blessed) John Paul II, who raised the National Shrine to the rank of a minor basilica in 1990, the 35th such church in the United States. ☚

