

# BASILICA *of the* NATIONAL SHRINE *of the* IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

*America's Catholic Church*

400 MICHIGAN AVENUE, NORTHEAST WASHINGTON, D.C. 20017-1566  
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## ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS OF THE BASILICA

The Basilica: Architects, Builders, Architectural Details, Construction, and Glossary

### Architects

1919 - 1936 Maginnis and Walsh of Boston, with associate Frederick V. Murphy, Professor of Architecture at CUA.

Timothy F. Walsh (b. 1868 - d. 7 July 1934, North Scituate, MA)

Frederick Vernon Murphy (1879 - 1958)

1954 - 1959 Maginnis and Walsh and Kennedy of Boston, active architect: Eugene F. Kennedy, Jr.

Charles D. Maginnis (b. 7 Jan 1867, Londonderry, Ireland; d. 15 Feb 1955, Brookline, MA)

Eugene F. Kennedy Jr. (b. 31 Jan 1904, Brooklyn, NY - d. 7 Nov 1986, MA)

### Builders

1922 - 1925 Charles J. Cassidy Co., Washington, D.C.

1925 - 1928 R. P. Whitty Co., Washington, D.C.

1928 - 1933 John McCloskey & Co., Philadelphia, PA

1954 - 1959 John McShain, Inc., Philadelphia, PA

John McShain (b. 21 Dec 1898, Philadelphia - d. 9 Sept 1989, Killarney, Ireland)

1960 - 1961 John A. Volpe Construction Co.

## **Dimensions**

The Shrine stands more than 200 ft. above sea level.

### **Exterior**

Length:	459 ft.
Width including transepts and porches:	240 ft.
Width at the nave:	157 ft.
Height of campanile (to top of cross):	329 ft.
Height terrace to apex of main roof gable:	120 ft.
Height terrace to the top of the great dome cross:	237 ft.
Diameter of the Great Dome:	108 ft.

### **Interior**

Length:	399 ft.
Width at the crossing and transepts:	180 ft.
Width at the nave:	58 ft.
Width at the nave and two side aisles:	87 ft.
Height, nave floor to the apex of the nave domes:	100 ft.
Height, nave floor to the apex of the Trinity or Great Dome:	159 ft.

Diameter of the Trinity or Great Dome:	89 ft.
Gross floor area of the Great or Upper Church	76,396 sq. ft.
Gross floor area of the Lower Level, including Crypt Church	129,912 sq. ft.
Seating capacity, Upper Church (approximate):	3,500 persons
Total capacity, Upper Church (approximate):	6,000 persons

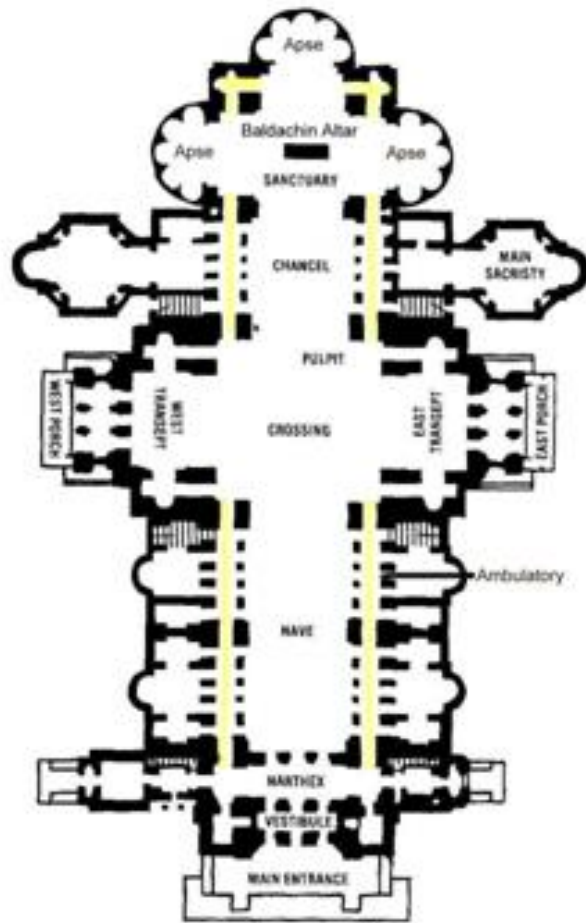
## Construction

Exterior walls:	Indiana Limestone (350 train carloads)
Lower areas, e.g., steps:	New England Granite
Roof:	Mission tile
Great Dome and Campanile pyramid:	Polychrome tiles
Common brick:	10 million
Face brick:	1.5 million
Concrete:	10,000 cubic yards
Heating System:	Radiant Heat (6 miles of pipe beneath 50,000 sq. ft. of marble flooring)
Nave lighting:	21 spotlights of 500-Watts in each dome
Great Dome lighting:	37 spotlights of 500-Watts and a circlet of 18 spotlights of 1000-Watts

## Exterior Iconographic Schemes

East Facade:	Faith
West Facade:	Charity
South Facade:	Mary, the Mother of Christ, the Messiah and the Divine Redeemer
North Facade:	<i>Mary, the Immaculate Queen of the Universe</i> by Ivan Mestrovic (1883-1962)

Questions and inquiries may be addressed to the Archivist of the BNSIC.



## Glossary

### Ambulatory

A covered walkway or aisle that makes the circuit of the nave and apses of the Upper Church, with chapels radiating to the east, the west, and to the north.

### Apses

The vaulted, semi-circular areas to the east, west and north of the sanctuary in the Upper Church.

### Baldachin [*baldacchin, baldachino, baldaquin*]

The free-standing canopy of four columns and arches above the altar in the sanctuary of the Upper Church. The term comes from the Spanish *baldaquin* or the Italian *baldacco*, which refers to the lavish brocaded material imported from Baghdad and hung as a canopy over an altar or doorway. The term also applies to the canopy used in Eucharistic processions and to that which covers the episcopal throne or *cathedra*. The most famous of baldachins is that of Bernini (1598-1680) in the Basilica of St. Peter.

<b>Chancel</b>	In the Upper Church it is the area between the baldachin altar and the main altar.
<b>Clerestory</b>	That part of the Shrine, which would be a second "story" and "clear" of the floor, thereby allowing an unobstructed view of the roof. The large windows above the nave are Clerestory Windows.
<b>Galleries</b>	Span the width of the narthex, the length of the nave and the chancel area. Located in the south gallery above the narthex are the Rose Window ( <i>Ave Maria</i> ), the South Gallery Organ (1965 by M. P. Möller, Op. 9702) and the bank of pontifical trumpets; in the east and west nave and the chancel galleries are the clerestory windows; in the west chancel gallery is the Chancel Organ (Möller, Op. 9702).
<b>Narthex</b>	The area of the church extending across the south side, between the nave and the vestibule. In former days, it was the area reserved for the penitents and catechumens.
<b>Nave</b>	From the Latin <i>navis</i> for "ship." The central open space of the church, traditionally for the worshipping community. It is believed that in early Christianity, the symbolism of the ship related to St. Peter or the Ark of Noah.
<b>Sanctuary</b>	The area in which the baldachin altar is located.
<b>Transept</b>	A rectangular area which cuts across the main axis of the building. It gives the Shrine the shape of a Latin cross.
<b>Vestibule</b>	The area between the main outer doors and the main inner doors which lead into the narthex.