

# SOUTH BERGENITE

## Holy Cross in North Arlington to feature 90 works of art in largest Catholic mausoleum in the country

Meghan Grant

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With its soft music and names carefully engraved on granite, the Holy Cross Cemetery Mausoleum is a place of reflection for those visiting the final resting places of lost loved ones. Undergoing an expansion that will ultimately make it the largest Catholic mausoleum in the United States, Holy Cross is incorporating over 90 works of art into the building, taking on the characteristics of a museum.

Upon completion, the 6,100 new crypts at the mausoleum at Holy Cross Cemetery will contain a total of 35,747 burial spaces and 90 major works of art. The Archdiocese spent \$5 million bringing the art, both antique and newly commissioned, to the mausoleum, but would not comment on its true worth.

"We're more than just a cemetery," Andrew P. Schafer, Executive Director of the Archdiocese of Newark Catholic Cemeteries, said about the 25 incoming works of art. "We have always provided new and existing visitors with a welcoming environment to remember, to heal and to enjoy the beautiful serenity of their surroundings."

The building and its exterior space will house some of the most beautiful works from churches that have closed in the Newark Archdiocese as well as arts commissioned from world renowned artists.



Alexander Mandradjiev stands among the many colorful materials going into his set of six mosaics of the six days of Creation. Along with his wife Daniela, he will have his work featured in the upcoming expansion at Holy Cross Cemetery Mausoleum.

"We wanted to create a beautiful environment that evangelizes our Catholic faith," said Assistant Executive Director Joseph Verzi.

Among the additions are a set of six murals depicting the six days of Creation referenced in the Book of Genesis, created by hand by a husband and wife team, Alexander and Daniela Mandradjiev from Alexander Studio in Southern California. The original concepts were derived from sketches and drawing then rendered into colorized, digital designs.

Over a million pieces of stone and glass on fiberglass mesh were used to form the more than 1,700 colors contained in the mosaic murals, bringing subtle movement to the works. Imported Venetian Smalti and gold leaf were used, the natural materials and precious stones from all over the world chosen for their long-lasting qualities and distinct texture. It took approximately 1,350 hours to complete the first two murals- the creation of light and the dome of the sky. "This will be one of the most expressive artistic interpretations in mosaic technique that we have ever had the privilege of working on," said Alexander Mandradjiev in a release. "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I am thrilled to have been given the chance to create such important pieces of art. It is an unexplainable job working on this project."



One of the six mosaics which tell story of creation.

The next two in the series are expected to arrive in the next month, and the final two by the end of December.

Utilizing the various materials from around the globe more closely resembles the natural elements of Earth's creation, an idea first conceived by Rev. Thomas Dente, director of the archdiocesan Office of Divine Worship, Verzi said.

"People are becoming more and more concerned with the environment, they love nature and the world, and it's a nice way to tie the two together," Dente was quoted as saying.

The Genesis mosaics are part of an evangelical message behind the expansion, a means of promoting the Bible through visuals in the same way as the Medieval churches did during a time when not everyone was literate, Verzi explained.

Nowhere is that more visible than the two outdoor platforms reserved for a pair of 15-foot statues, which upon installation will face passersby on Ridge Road. Carved from marble, the first will be of St. Helen of the Cross, holding a red wooden cross, and the second is truly unique – a "finished" version of Michelangelo's Rondanini Pietà. Lesser known than the Pietà, a famous statue of Mary holding the body of Jesus, the work was never completed due to the sculptor's failing health.

"The beauty of the original is you can't tell who's holding who," Verzi said. The masters selected to carve a "finished" version of the statute are overjoyed at the creative opportunity.

The new chapel takes on a unique structure compared to the traditional layout of Catholic Churches – with a circular altar placed in the middle. Carved from a single block of marble, the center features Adam and Eve and the Tree of Life. Suspended above will be a seven-foot crucifix and corpus.

"The whole idea is to say- we were created by God, we lost our way, and Christ showed us the way back so we could enter heaven," Dente said. "That's the story the building is telling."

Natural elements even make their way into the newer art, demonstrated in a pair of stained glass doorways in a corridor. In a glass doorway facing east will be a radiant sunrise, and in the doorway facing west, a colorful sunset.

"It's a combination of the old and new, both a traditional and modern approach," Schafer said, adding the building embodies northern New Jersey's "American melting pot" character. Even the building's materials are collected from diverse locations, such as wood from Canada, marble from Egypt, Spain, Italy and Turkey and granite from Minnesota, he said.

"You used to have your Polish church, your Italian church, your Irish church and all those other ethnic churches in the same town," Schafer recalled. "Now we're recognizing a more universal church."

Borrowing from the history of the early American settlers, the chapel ceiling resembles the hull of a ship. This was inspired by settlers turning their ships into the roof for their churches, a sign of their commitment to making a life in America by not being able to return to Europe, Verzi explained.

Similar to existing sections of the building, two exterior gardens accessible from within the complex will feature bronze statues of St. Francis of Assisi with a wolf and a fawn with St. Kateri Tekawitha, who was recognized as a saint just last year. St. Francis will be "releasing" doves 18 feet into the sky, which will rise above the mausoleum's ceiling.

Adorning the northern wing in the new facility will be four life-sized statues of "church mothers" – Mother Teresa, Mother Cabrini, Mother Cope and Mother Seton, carved from Linden wood.

What makes these four unique, compared to statues in other churches, is how the women stand alongside others, situated in almost "action" poses, Verzi commented.

With an over 80 percent of the facility occupied, designers decided to construct two floors, prolonging the life of the cemetery and utilizing less space, Schafer said. Despite the dual level, using large windows and building into the hill, the lower level doesn't have an enclosed atmosphere.

"It's meant to be a passage, not a warehouse," Verzi said. "When you pass through, it's closer to a church and an artistic journey."

Holy Cross expects to complete its inspections and obtain a certificate of occupancy by late October; however, an official dedication won't likely come in early 2014, after all the artwork is installed. That is expected to take an additional six months.

The chapel will host burial ceremonies after the altar is blessed by Archbishop John J. Myers, key supporter of Holy Cross's expansion. The dedicating Mass is a rare event, given that no new churches have opened in the Archdiocese of Newark in decades.

Schafer praised the archbishop's attention to detail during the construction plans, emphasizing the need to create jobs. He estimated over 100 trade people from every discipline contributed towards the expansion. While the general contractors were in charge of hiring sub contractors, he claimed many were from the tri-state area, including local workers hired by some of the international artists.

Elements of the expansion connect to the Catholic Church's rich history of artwork; however, other elements also reflect the changing face of faithful, such as the focus on sustainability and artifacts from closed churches.

While the expansion includes 6,100 new crypts, it also adds a considerable 920 cremation niche spaces, situated behind glass and shelved on rich, green marble. The older portions of the facility have been retrofitted with decorate niche spaces for urns in order to fulfill the wishes of a growing number of Catholics to be cremated.

According to Schafer, about 37 percent of patrons wishing for Holy Cross to be their resting place have opted for cremation. That's up from about 5 percent two decades ago.

How people plan their burial sites is also changing. Eighty percent of crypts are purchased ahead of time, while 20 years ago, 70 percent were purchased at the time of death, he said.

In an effort to go green, the expansion has been fitted with motion-sensing lights, aiming to save on electricity.

Having completed the previous expansion in 2001, this latest expansion will mark the last for the mausoleum.

As many locals are already aware, some neighborhood churches have been closed by the archdiocese. However, their iconic art and artifacts will find a new home at Holy Cross. A committee based in Seton Hall University was in charge of finding new homes for the patrimony, the formal term for the art, which Schafer and Verzi sat on.

Inside the new chapel, visitors can look up to see the 10-foot diameter rose stained glass window from Sacred Heart-Valisburg Church in Newark, which is close to 85 years old. To the left and right are two altars from St. Lucy's Church in Jersey City, which has also been closed, along with statutes of St. Theresa and St. Anthony.

Also from St. Lucy's came four stained glass windows depicting the writers of the Gospel, adorning the lower level of the expansion, installed in light boxes for protection given the delicate condition of the nearly 100-year old pieces. Before installation, the windows were restored during a process that took about two years.

Also in the open-air portion along with the dove figures are a pair of rose windows feature St. Aloysius and St. Augustine, from Sacred Heart-Valisburg Church, encased in glass after being restored. The 16-foot metal crosses holding the windows were handcrafted in Poland, installed by the craftsman himself. The maker also crafted metal gates for some of the private crypt enclosures, featuring a crucifix and ivy "growing" through the gates.

Between the historical artwork and the many believers buried at Holy Cross, who made up the archdioceses, Holy Cross serves a function in addition to being a museum.

"The cemetery and mausoleum is truly the archives of the archdiocese," Schafer said.