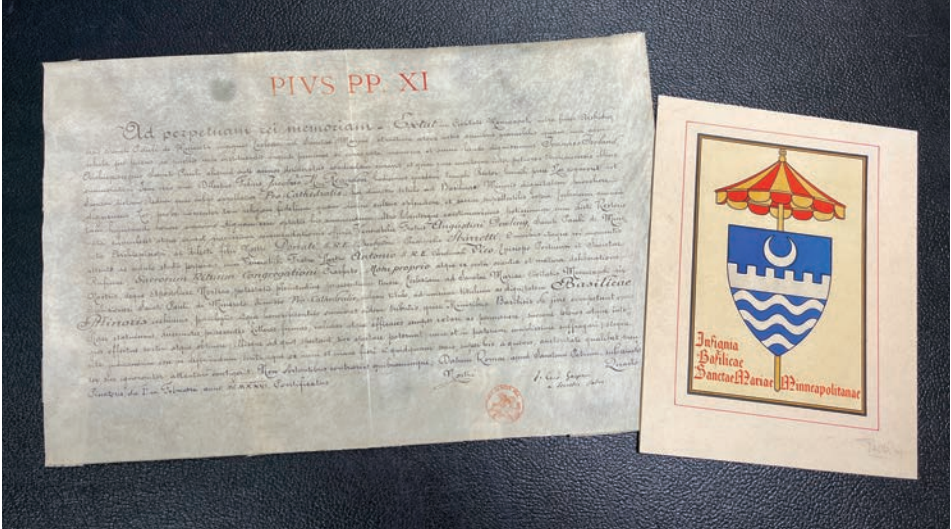


# From Pro-Cathedral to Basilica to Co-Cathedral

## *Anticipating the centennial anniversary of being a Basilica*

BY JOHAN VAN PARYS, PHD



On February 1, 1926, the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary in Minneapolis became the first church in the United States to be named a Basilica. From The Basilica Archives, official document from the Vatican. (Restoration tape visible on the back.)

form and second, an honor bestowed on a Catholic church by the Pope. The latter does not necessarily presume the former.

In origin, Basilicas were spacious buildings that accommodated large gatherings and were used for official business during the Roman Empire. These buildings had a well-defined architectural form. They were rectangular in shape with a half-circular apse on one or both short ends. They had a center aisle and two side aisles. The roof of the center aisle, which was higher than the side aisles, was punctuated by a series of large clerestory windows that allowed for lots of light to flood the space.

When Christianity became a recognized religion during the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine (AD 306-337), the church started to grow quickly. This growth was even hastened when emperor Theodosius (379-395) declared Christianity the religion of the empire. As a result, spacious buildings were needed to accommodate large liturgical gatherings. The established shape of Basilicas was easily adapted for Christian worship. Some of the best-known examples of Basilica-style churches are the Major Basilicas in Rome (Saint Peter, Saint John, Saint Mary Major, Saint Paul-outside-the-walls), at least in their original renditions, which date back to the fourth Century AD. Even today, some churches are still built using the architectural form of Roman Basilicas.

The term Basilica is also used as an honorific title given to a church by the Pope. This title is bestowed on a church for different reasons. The church may have great historic importance. It may be an important place of pilgrimage. It may be a place of exceptional beauty. Or it may be a church where the liturgy is celebrated exceptionally well.

One of the most frequently asked questions during tours of The Basilica of Saint Mary pertains to the difference between a Cathedral and a Basilica.

A cathedral is the church of a bishop. The term cathedral is derived from the Latin word *cathedra*, meaning chair. Borrowed from Roman times when the *cathedra* was a symbol of power and a place of authority, the *cathedra* in cathedrals is the symbol of the teaching office and the authority of the bishop. The *cathedra* is also known as the bishop's chair or the episcopal throne and is prominently placed in every cathedral. No one but the bishop is to use this chair. Generally speaking, there is just one Cathedral in each diocese.

The word Basilica is derived from the Greek *Basilikē*, meaning "hall of the king." Today, the term can mean one of two things: first, a specific architectural



Original sketch and silk samples of the unbrellino.

The Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis, which was built as the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary, though Beaux-arts in architectural style, was built as a traditional Roman Basilica with its rectangular shape, a half-circular apse on the north end, and lower outer aisles which allow for a series of large clerestory windows. The architectural form is, however, not why we refer to this church as The Basilica.

On February 1, 1926, the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary in Minneapolis became the first church in the United States to be named a Basilica. This happened at the request of then-pastor Fr. James M. Reardon and with the support of the Most Reverend Austin Dowling, the archbishop of what was then known as the Archdiocese of St. Paul. Pope Pius XI deemed the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary worthy of this title “by reason of the piety of its worshippers as well as by the splendor of its ritual and the richness of its adornment.” Henceforth, the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary was known as The Basilica of Saint Mary.

Most Basilicas outside of Rome are known as Minor Basilicas. Each of them

is associated with one or more of the above-mentioned Major Basilicas in Rome. The Basilica of Saint Mary is associated with St. John the Lateran, the Cathedral of Rome, and St. Mary Major, one of the oldest churches dedicated to Mary.

Along with the title of Minor Basilica, Pope Pius XI granted all rights and privileges relative to this title. Basilicas may display the typical Basilica insignia such as an Umbrellino or half-opened yellow- and red-striped pavilion, and a Tintinabulum or mounted silver bell. In addition, Basilicas have the right to their own coat of arms. Unlike other churches, a Basilica may place the papal coat of arms above the main entrance of the church as well as on a papal flag in the church. Should he wear these, the rector of a Basilica is entitled to wear red piping on his cassock and a red tassel on his biretta. And if a pope were to visit the Twin Cities, protocol would dictate a stop at The Basilica of Saint Mary, since this is his church in the area.

In 1966, 40 years after being named a Basilica, when the Archdiocese of Saint Paul became the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, The Basilica of

Saint Mary was elevated to the rank of Co-Cathedral of the Archdiocese, thus joining the ranks of a handful of dioceses in the United States with two Cathedrals.

2026-2027 will be a big year for The Basilica of Saint Mary as we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of being granted the title of Basilica and the 60th anniversary of being elevated to the rank of Co-Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Please watch for the major celebrations to be observed starting on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary on December 8, 2026, and ending on the completion of the 100th anniversary of The Basilica on February 1, 2027. ✚

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*the* Tintinabulum



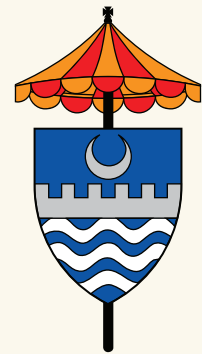
**Mounted silver bell** which is said to have been used during medieval times when a cleric at the beginning of a papal procession would use a bell to alert the people that the Pope was going to pass by.

*the* Umbrellino



**Yellow- and red-striped half-opened umbrella** made of silk. A cleric at the church where the papal procession was heading is said to have held a half-opened umbrella. At the sight of the Pope, he opened the umbrella completely and walked the Pope into the church protecting him from rain or sun. A half-opened umbrellino signifies that a Basilica is awaiting a visit from the Pope.

*the* Coat of Arms



**The Umbrellino** represents a Basilica.

**The crescent moon** refers to Mary based on the book of Revelation, which references the Woman standing on the moon.

**The crenellated wall** is the heraldic sign for a city.

**The waves** are the heraldic sign for water.

**Together the coat of arms reads as follows:** The Basilica of Saint Mary in the City of Waters (Minneapolis).