

Shine the Light on The Basilica



Restoration lighting plans to light up the night

BY MAE DESAIRE



The multi-phase restoration planning has continued throughout the winter months with the dedication and hard work of the Restoration Committee. On a cold night this past December, FMS Lighting demonstrated several mock-ups of possible new lighting schemes for the exterior of The Basilica of Saint Mary. The results were spectacular and the committee was very excited about the future lighting possibilities.

FMS (Fisher Marantz Stone) is a nationally acclaimed architectural lighting design firm, specializing in museums, performing arts centers, and historic renovations. FMS has been recognized for state-of-the-art projects around the world including New York, Rome, and Dubai. They work in light as a medium to enhance spaces and transform environments.

FMS has assembled a dedicated team of four people for The Basilica project: Margo Wiltshire, Katie Czub, Seth Margolies, and Pat Kasemtreerat. They are able to pull in other designers from the firm of about 25 to collaborate when additional resources are needed.

Continued

*In the same way, let your light shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your Father in heaven.*

— Matthew 5:16

Conversation with Margo Wiltshire, Associate Principal at FMS

Recently, Margo shared a few more details about the façade lighting project at The Basilica.

“Our exterior mock-ups mostly affirmed our theories for which lighting positions would be most successful and allowed us to see up-close some of the challenges and opportunities for accessing power and mounting fixtures. Our calculations, coupled with our experience, establish a foundation of what to expect generally in terms of basic effects, but especially with an existing structure, in-place testing is invaluable for better understanding the finer details. Shifting a fixture position a few inches or adding an accessory can make a big difference!

For a façade lighting project in particular, the greatest benefit of testing on site is demonstrating what is possible and facilitating prioritization of objectives. It was great to receive positive feedback, not only from our concept sketches presented earlier in the process, but also from the mock-ups proving the initial ideas.”

Lighting Improvement Goals

“Our primary objective with the current scope of façade lighting is to reveal the architecture of this impressive building. While safety and security are always important considerations, they will be the focus of the future ‘site lighting’ phase of work, which emphasizes visibility of people and paths. The decisions being made now will inform some of our site lighting strategies later.”

Improve the Warmth And Welcome

“The Basilica team has had a clear vision of how light can be a tool to not only highlight The Basilica as a key feature of the broader Minneapolis skyline, but to also make the base of the building more approachable on the street level. Currently, most of the building illumination has been concentrated on the dome and upper portions of the south façade. These elements give The Basilica great visibility from beyond the immediate neighborhood but can make the entrances and grounds feel dark by comparison.

We are planning to reduce some of the contrast on a grand scale by adding illumination to the east and west façades, as well as at a more micro level by softening some of the shadows created by the existing schemes. Shadows are important in this work, and not inherently negative, but they can make an already grand building feel imposing.

Embracing The Basilica’s potential to positively impact its surroundings at night by expanding the surfaces being lit, we are also looking to increase the overall warmth of hue by shifting the color temperature of the light itself to a slightly warmer white, complementary to the existing building materials.”

Highlight the Architectural Details

“The Basilica is a remarkable building and has many layers of detail to discover. FMS will play a role in revealing these with light, both on the exterior and from the inside out. In addition to highlighting the broad expanses of the long façades and enhancing the glow of the associated windows, we will also improve legibility of key sculptural elements, like those incorporated into the pediment above the portico and at the bell towers, with strategically placed accent lights.”

Seeing the Vision for the Future

“Aside from addressing basic needs of utility, thoughtfully deployed light can enable simple appreciation for beauty in our world and allow even those very familiar with the building to see it with fresh eyes. Most importantly, exterior illumination can send a message to the surrounding community that The Basilica is not only an enduring edifice, but also a welcoming place for people to visit, and to be nurtured by the services provided within.” ✚

Mae Desaire is the Communications Director at The Basilica.



Restoration Committee

Tom Paul, Restoration Coordination Lead

A former senior executive at a Fortune 100 company, Tom is one of two Basilica Trustees and coordinates efforts among internal teams and external partners. Given the immense scope of this restoration, Tom’s attention to detail and strategic leadership are invaluable to our success.

“After years of planning, the restoration is finally underway! Our immediate focus is on repairing and safeguarding the exterior of The Basilica. Work has already started on the east roof, where core samples revealed that water had infiltrated through multiple protective layers. Over the next year, we’ll repair and seal the roof and exterior walls to preserve The Basilica for generations to come. This will set the stage for restoring the interior worship space, which will follow.”

More information on the restoration efforts can be found at restoreourbasilica.org.



On December 3, Tom Paul, along with members of the Restoration Committee and the Landmark Board, joined partners from HGA, Mortenson Construction, and FMS Lighting to review lighting options for the exterior of The Basilica of Saint Mary.

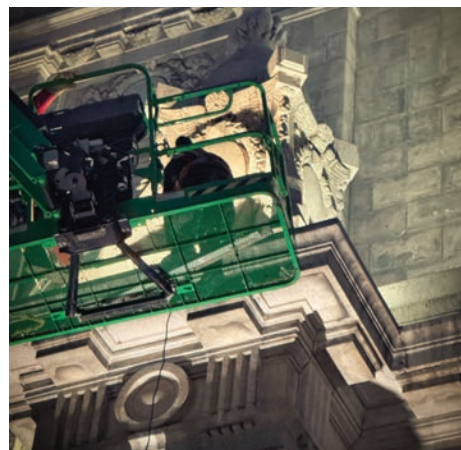
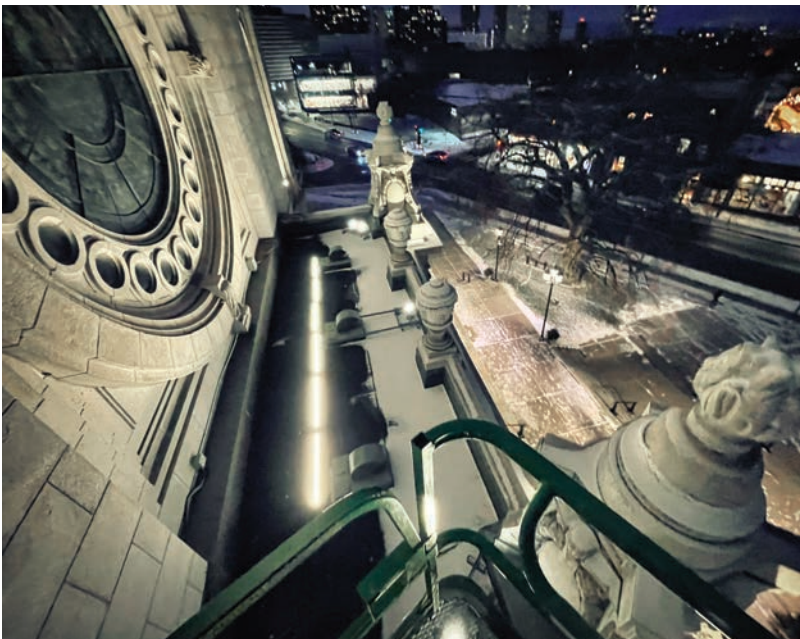
On a brutally cold night in December, a group of staff and parishioners ventured out with the lighting company guide to discuss and evaluate lighting improvements for The Basilica’s exterior.

The Basilica is a majestic building that has a dome that welcomes all who come into Minneapolis from afar. It deserves exterior lighting that magnifies its beauty and architecture. That night we saw test lighting set up to illustrate a plan that would illuminate the dome and areas on the exterior that warrant attention. Currently the lighting is minimal and not brilliant enough to call attention to the uniqueness of the building.

I hope that with a modest budget we can enhance the exterior of The Basilica at night to provide a welcoming sphere to all who approach this iconic structure as they enter Minneapolis by highway or on foot. It deserves an upgrade.

What I saw with the testing was the enhanced intensity of the lighting and the fixtures themselves directed from distant sites toward the building with greater width and focus.

Andrea Hjelm
Basilica and Basilica Landmark Volunteer



Mock-up lighting examples in December 2024 photos courtesy of FMS.

You can support the lighting project at the Landmark Spark event, May 2.

Proceeds from the Fund-A-Need portion of the evening will help shine the light on The Basilica.

thebasilicalandmark.org