

# Liturgical Design for the Renewed Basilica

## *Sacred spaces and experiences*

BY MAE DESAIRE



Nicholas Markell

The restoration of The Basilica of Saint Mary is being guided not only by architectural plans and construction timelines, but by theological questions about how worship is shaped by space. Those questions fall largely to the Liturgical Design Committee, one of several specialized committees working under the Restoration Executive Committee to guide the aesthetic and spiritual renewal of The Basilica.

The committee's mandate is rooted in liturgical design, a discipline that integrates liturgy, art, and architecture. Its work brings together clergy, parish leadership, architects, artists, and parish members to ensure that decisions about sacred space and furnishings remain grounded in Catholic liturgical theology and practice.

To support that work, The Basilica has assembled a team of experienced liturgical design professionals to help articulate a shared vision for worship. Committee members describe the process as intentionally collaborative and prayerful, focused on discerning how The Basilica's architecture and artistic elements can express both theological priorities and pastoral needs. The long-term aim is to create a sacred space that serves the liturgy and sustains the faith life of the community for generations.

Nicholas Markell, the project's liturgical design consultant, said he was honored to work with the committee assembled by Fr. Daniel, whom he described as bringing both the skills of a leader and the heart of a pastor to the work, along with a deep awareness of the spiritual life of The Basilica community. Markell added that the building itself stands as a landmark for both the city and the Church, a distinction that heightens the responsibility of the restoration.

At this stage of the project, the committee is focused on the sanctuary and on discerning which new furnishings will be required to meet the community's wide-ranging liturgical needs. Central to those discussions is the altar table, which Markell described as the first and most consequential element under consideration, noting that its final design will inevitably set the theological and aesthetic tone for all other furnishings that follow.

The committee's work proceeds with a keen awareness of history. The current altar table has been in place for nearly sixty years, shaping the worship life and spiritual formation of parishioners across three generations. Markell acknowledged that change at this scale can be both exciting and challenging, and said the committee is taking care to honor the deep attachments formed around the existing sanctuary.

At the same time, he said, the Church has continued to reflect and grow since the altar's installation in 1966. Markell pointed to Pope Leo XIV's recent call for a renewed reading and rediscovery of the Second Vatican Council, describing the introduction of new liturgical furnishings as consistent with the Church's ongoing pilgrimage rather than a departure from tradition.

The purpose of the redesign, Markell emphasized, extends beyond aesthetics. The goal, he said, is to prepare The Basilica community to live its mission more fully — by fostering deeper participation in the Mass and the Sacraments and allowing that shared renewal to bear fruit in works of charity and justice, particularly in service to the poor and in upholding the dignity of every human person.

*Mae Desaire is the Director of Communications.* ✚



**COMMITTEE**

**Leadership Team:**

- Fr. Daniel Griffith, Pastor
- Nicholas Markell, Liturgical Design Consultant
- Johan van Parys, Managing Director of Ministries, Director of Liturgy
- Tyler Andreae, Associate Director of Liturgy
- Isabel Peters, Administrator

**Committee members:**

- Walter Tambor
- Carol Frenning
- Constance Chen
- Taylor Croissant
- Maureen Bourgeois
- Beverly Hauschild-Baron
- Dan Ahern