# Preservation Pennsylvania 2022 at Risk Nomination

Updated 17 June 2022



#### NOMINATION

Immaculate Conception Church Formerly Saint Maria Goretti Parish 321 Edmond Street Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania 15224

#### CONSTRUCTION

Summer 1959	Construction commences
October 23, 1960	Cornerstone laid
July 8, 1961	Church completed
October 1, 1961	Church dedicated
	Source: Church Dedication Booklet,1963

#### ARCHITECTURE

ArchitectBelli + Belli Architec	ts, Chicago, Illinois (defunct)
Project Architect	Edo J. Belli
Associate Architect	Anthony J. Belli
Builder	Mellon-Stewart Company

Architectural Style ...... Expressionist, Modern

#### ARTISANS

Sculptors......Fred Gentile, Conrad Schmitt Studios, New Berlin, WI Bernard Gruenke, Conrad Schmitt Studios, New Berlin, WI Vincenzo Mussner, Ortisei, Italy Lambert Rucki, Paris, France Johannes Schluter, August Wagner Co., West Berlin, Germany

Stained Glass.....Roy Calligan and Nicholas Parrendo Hunt Stained Glass Studios, Pittsburgh, PA

## OWNER

Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh......2900 Noblestown Road Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15205 412 456-3000 https://diopitt.org

COVER: The original cover image from the 1963 dedication booklet for the church (modified to include the nomination title).



The mosaic reredos and tabernacle, designed by Bernard Gruenke of West Berlin, Germany. The mosaic contains thousands of 24k gold tiles.



The Creation Window towers forty feet over the west nave, designed by Roy Calligan of Hunt Stained Glass Studios, Pittsburgh, PA.

#### IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH HISTORIC DESIGNATION STATUS

Immaculate Conception Church is a Roman Catholic parish, historically comprised of Italian Americans, located in the Bloomfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The church, constructed in the early 1960s, is not currently a locally designated historic structure, nor is it listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Many buildings in Pittsburgh would meet the criteria of a local and/or national historic landmark designation, but have not been listed. Designating historic buildings is an involved process and community resources are not always available to designate, nor is there always a need to do so. Many buildings are de facto landmarks in the public's mind and the notion of a landmark ever being demolished is inconceivable.

As principal nominator, it is my hope that many residents of Pittsburgh would view the Immaculate Conception Church as a cultural landmark. As a work of architecture, the information contained herein will help to demonstrate the significance and uniqueness of the structure in the hope that the building will be protected and appropriately reused in the future.

I have the great fortune of collaborating with Melissa McSwigan, Brittany Reilly, and Amy Fischer of Preservation Pittsburgh, who are graciously guiding me through the process of nominating the church for both local and national designation.

Gregory Weimerskirch Principal Nominator 2 April 2022



"The new Immaculate Conception Church, with all of its uniqueness and functional requirements of the modern age, is a structure that inspires spiritual devotion comparable to the cathedrals." [1]

Cardinal John J. Wright (Bishop of Pittsburgh at the time of dedication) Dedication Ceremony, 1 October 1961

#### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Immaculate Conception Church is located in the Bloomfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh, which was annexed to the city in 1868. In the decades following its incorporation, Bloomfield was settled by German Catholic immigrants, who built Saint Joseph's Church in 1886. Italians from five towns in the Abruzzi region settled in the area in the late 1800s, eventually forming Immaculate Conception Parish in 1905. [2]

Both parishes grew rapidly and operated their own elementary schools, with Immaculate Conception's only recently closing in 2020 after more than 100 years of service. Saint Joseph's elementary school closed in the early 1980s. With dwindling congregations, Saint Joseph's, Immaculate Conception, and St. Lawrence O'Toole (in the Garfield neighborhood) were merged in 2012 to form Saint Maria Goretti Parish. [3] St. Lawrence O'Toole Church, a modern building that was constructed in 1966, was demolished in April 2022.

The parish of Immaculate Conception constructed its first church building in 1906 on Edmond Street and Corday Way in a simplified Gothic Revival style. A fire damaged the church interior in 1925 and it was hastily rebuilt. The fire caused lingering structural issues and by the mid-1950s it was determined that a new church building was necessary. Not only was the structure unsafe, it was too small for the rapidly growing congregation of postwar Pittsburgh. [4]

It was announced on March 25, 2022, after nearly two years of internal study by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, that Immaculate Conception Church would close. [5]

The church was desanctified and shuttered on May 1, 2022.



The 1906 Immaculate Conception Church. Structural damage from a fire would eventually necessitate a new church.



Liberty Avenue in Bloomfield during "Little Italy Days." Saint Joseph's Church is on the right.



Google Earth view showing the church in its urban context. [6]



## SITE PLAN

The 1906 church and school (c1940) were originally fronted by Edmond Street, which was vacated two years after the new church was built. The image above, from the 1963 dedication, shows the street still in use.

The church is tucked into the urban fabric of Bloomfield and sits one block away from Liberty Avenue, the main shopping street for the neighborhood.

#### ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Immaculate Conception Church was constructed in the early 1960s in the expressionist manner of architecture. The style emerged in Northern Europe in the early 20th century in poetry and painting, where it attempted to distort reality to express emotional experience. Expressionist architects used materials such as stone, concrete, and glass to create novel sculptural forms and massing, most often distorted and fragmented to express meaning. Very often, expressionism involved a rejection of historical styles, symmetrical forms, and traditional design motifs, and instead embraced abstraction. This tended to result in unusual building forms, using innovative construction techniques that often stood out from their surroundings. [7]

In a 1983 interview with the Art Institute of Chicago, project architect for Immaculate Conception Church, Edo J. Belli, mentioned his desire to break with tradition and "to design buildings that express a deeper meaning in their use and to transcend style, time, and place." [8]

While Pittsburgh has a number of outstanding houses of worship in various styles, the Immaculate Conception Church is unlike any other religious building in the region. Its tight urban site, tucked along an alleyway, along with its innovative construction methods, towering stained glass windows, imported altar mosaic, and numerous site specific sculptures and furnishings, culminate in a building that is truly a remarkable work of mid-century modern design.

The massing of the church is site specific resulting in a unique composition. Images from the Church Dedication Booklet, 1963



Monumental in scale, the church seats nearly 1,000 parishioners.





**A** Looking from the rear of the west nave, towards the mosaic reredos.





**B** Looking from the rear of the south nave, towards the mosaic reredos.



choir loft.

f C (Left) Looking from the altar

towards the west nave and

#### EXTERIOR

The church features a central 2 story, convex, entrance vestibule of glass and aluminum. Two distinct facades extend out to the west and south at either side of the entrance. Both principal facades incorporate a bay of three, 3 1/2 story, stained glass windows, set into concrete arches. The stained glass is of the Dalle de Verre technique in an abstract design, which is embedded into epoxy resin panels.

A circular, stone veneer Baptistry to the right of the main entrance punctuates the glass facade and is capped with a stylized crucifix of approximately 40 feet in height.



Looking from the south nave to the mosaic reredos and altar. The floating ceiling and light cove above the altar were altered in 1989. Four skylights (now louvered vents) and original recessed lighting were removed.



#### INTERIOR

As described by principal architect, Edo J. Belli in 1961:

"Unique and functional are perhaps the words that best describe the new Immaculate Conception Church. Unique in that the demands of the site and its limitations forced a design concept never before investigated and one which turned the limitations of the location to the complete advantage of the designer. Unique also is the isolated Baptistry of circumform design bordering the entrance, the glass doors which encroach immediately upon the elevated Sanctuary without the usual decorated walls, which are often overpowering with false ornamentation as to detract from the main altar." [9]

#### INTERIOR

Edo J. Belli continues:

"In the Sanctuary design of Immaculate Conception, and in keeping with the liturgical laws of the Catholic Church, incorporated are two principal altars:

1. The Blessed Sacrament Altar, or High Altar, supports the Tabernacle placed in such a position as to render a clear unobstructed view from anywhere in the church.

2. The Altar of Sacrifice, is the central culmination point of the church, and its position in form has been so designed as to give expression to this prominence. This altar consists of two parts, the 5-ton textured white granite base symbolizing the Church's strength, and the highly polished 2-ton mensa (flat stone) carved from a solid piece of white Carrara marble.

This all in turn is supported on a three step white marble predella directly tied to the multi-colored mosaic reredos." [10]

- Edo J. Belli, Church Dedication Booklet, 1963



— Brass and teak communion rail

The removal of skylights and recessed lighting in 1989 was detrimental to the spiritual qualities of the church's design (in the principal nominator's opinion).

#### INTERIOR

The church is composed of six distinct spaces: the narthex, baptistry, shrine chapel, west nave, south nave, and the altar.

The church is arranged so that the eye is always focused on the altar, tabernacle, and mosaic reredos. Two groups of towering stained glass windows, the west facing *Creation Window* and the south facing *Judgment Window*, shower each nave with dappled colored light without distracting from the altar. Services at dusk, particularly in the spring and autumn, are transcendent with the quality of light emanating from the windows.

The volume of the space in the naves is articulated in a forced perspective manner to keep focus on the altar: beginning from the highest point of the stained glass windows at 40 feet, the barrel vaulted ceilings and walls gradually taper inwards to converge upon the altar and mosaic reredos. The floating ceiling at the altar is reduced to a height of approximately 25 feet above the elevated marble predella.

Enhancing the concave effect, the walls and barrel vaults are clad in tens of thousands of small, circular ceramic tiles, which gradually progress from darker tones of brown at the stained glass windows to lighter tones of beige as the walls near the altar. The wall behind the altar and mosaic reredos is completely white and composed of the same circular tiles.

Lastly, many design features of the church are arranged in groups of three as an homage to the Holy Trinity. The stained glass window bays and the barrel vaults being the most prominent elements. [11]



The plan for the church illustrates the dynamic arrangement of space on a complex urban site with a demanding building program.

Plan illustration by Greg Weimerskirch

#### INTERIOR



Section illustrations from a site survey conducted by Greg Weimerskirch, March 2022





#### STRUCTURAL DESIGN

In addition to the unique architectural features of the church, the design also incorporates innovative structural engineering for the period of construction.

As described in the dedication booklet by co-architect Anthony J. Belli, "the church is constructed of formed concrete and rebar, with little use of steel girders. [This method] was chosen so that the designers could span great distances, rarely attempted previously, with unobstructed views to the altar." [12]

The impressive engineering for the church is perhaps most evident at the intersection of each nave and the altar, directly above the choir loft. It is at this point that the nearly 150' + long span of the south nave, and the 75' + span of west nave, seemly collide in mid-air with no means of visible support.



Barrel vaults of the south and west naves are supported by two immense beams at about 60' in length (shaded in red).

#### ARCHITECTS

Designed by brothers Edo J. Belli (1918-2003), principal architect, with Anthony J. Belli (1924-2007), associate architect, of Belli + Belli Architects, Chicago, the church is one of their many religious works for the Catholic Church in North America. [13]

The brothers were selected by a building committee of parishioners in 1957 based on their body of work with the Diocese of Chicago. Dominic J. Pronio (the principal nominator's grandfather, deceased), was on the selection committee and recalled "it was great that they were Catholic — *and Italian.*" [14]

Edo J. Belli was born on Chicago's North Side and was the primary designer for all of Belli + Belli's projects. His brother Anthony J. Belli, was concerned with aspects of engineering and project administration. [4] Edo graduated from the Armour Insitiute of Technology in 1939 and worked at Graham, Anderson, Probst & White and Perkins and Will, before forming his own practice in 1949. Edo also served in Guam as a member of the United States Navy Construction Battalion during World War II. Anthony attended the University of Illinois and the Institute of Design in Chicago. [15]

The brothers formed a lasting relationship with Chicago Archbishop Samuel Stritch, and won commissions for many churches and schools in the growing archdiocese. The Archbishop supported the Belli's early commitment to innovative engineering and a decidedly modernist style. [16] Archbishop Stritch also introduced the Belli's to financier John F. Cuneo, Sr., who hired the Belli's for multiple major projects, including the 1957 Frank Cuneo Memorial Hospital, which was demolished after a long preservation battle. The Belli's single major remaining work is most likely the 13-story Saint Joseph's Hospital on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, completed in 1963. [17]

The firm practiced in nearly every state and in Italy, Spain, and France. It had a staff of over 50 architects at the height of the firms success. [18]



Anthony J. Belli

Edo J. Belli

#### STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The monumental stained glass windows of Immaculate Conception Church are undoubtedly its most significant feature. The windows measure nearly 40 feet tall (nearly 4 stories) at their highest point in the center of each nave. The Judgment Window in the south nave is 68 feet wide at its base and the Creation Window in the west nave is 59 feet wide.

The Creation and Judgment windows were designed by Roy Calligan of the Hunt Stained Glass Studio in Pittsburgh. Roy was design director at the studio until 1967 until he left Hunt to open his own practice in Carnegie, PA. Roy previously worked for the August Miller Studio and the Conrad Schmitt Studios, who designed much of the church statuary and furnishings.

Nicholas Parrendo joined the Hunt Studio in 1950 and designed the Baptistry windows. Nicholas also designed the etched glass doors that were installed during the 1989 church renovation. Nicholas purchased the studio in 1987 and was chief designer at the studio until his death in 2016. [19]

Hunt Stained Glass Studio is still in operation and is now owned by Nicholas' children, David and Celeste. David has confirmed that the original sketches and drawings for the windows are in the Hunt Studio archive. [20]

The windows were created in the Dalle de Verre technique, developed by artist Jean Gaudin in Paris in the 1930s. The method utilizes 1 inch-thick pieces of colored glass, which are chipped at the edges (or faceted) to increase their brilliance. Once the glass is cut, the pieces are arranged in a wood form. An epoxy resin is then poured into the form to set the glass in place. The resulting panels are then combined together to create the window. [21]



The Creation Window in the west nave is spectacular at sunset.



The Judgment Window in the south nave is most stunning in the afternoon.



The Creation Window in the west nave illustrates the story of Adam and Eve. Its composition utilizes horizontal bands of blue, yellow, and red glass, interspersed with the Hand of God on the left and the figures of Adam and Eve on the right. The sun, stars, trees, birds, fish, and other animals, are dispersed throughout the composition, representing abundance in the unspoiled newborn world. [8]



The Judgment Window in the south nave illustrates the second coming of Jesus Christ. Vertical swaths of blue colored glass are used in contrast to the horizontal red and gold bands of the Creation Window. The blue glass represents the water of life, nourishing the faithful. Serpents in the water, as well as Satan (illustrated by a dragon on the right), are overpowered by the descending Christ. [8]

#### SCULPTURE

The church's statuary, including the bas-relief panels of the Stations of the Cross (which align each nave of the church) were designed by Fred Gentile of the Conrad Schmitt Studios, New Berlin, Wisconsin. They were carved from lindenwood by Vincenzo Mussner in Ortisei, Italy. The statues were originally finished in a gold-toned lacquer but were repainted in color during the 1989 renovation (artist unknown). [22]

The sanctuary lamp, tabernacle, and altar furniture were designed by the Conrad Schmitt Studios and fabricated by Johannes Schlutter of West Berlin, Germany. The mosaic reredos (pictured next page) was designed by Bernard Gruenke of Conrad Schmitt Studios and fabricated by the August Wagner Company of West Berlin, Germany. [23]



Statuary in the church was originally gold toned.





Detail of a Station of the Cross bas-relief. Note the circular ceramic tiles behind the sculpture. There are tens of thousands of tiles on the walls and barrel vaults of the church.



Designed by Fred Gruenke and fabricated by the August Wagner Company, West Germany. The mosaic reredos contains thousands of mosaics ranging from 3/8" to 2" square in size. The gold mosaics were made by placing 24k gold lead between two sheets of glass. The theme of the mosaic is the "Apostles Creed." The Hand of God is illustrated to the left of Jesus with the Holy Spirit (a dove) at his right. The Risen Jesus is in the center (this statue replaced a wooden crucifix in the 1989 renovation, artist unknown). Circles, representing the holy host, radiate out from the tabernacle. The words, "I Believe," "And Life Everlasting, Amen" bookend the mosaic.

#### THREAT of NEGLECT and DEMOLITION

The threat to Immaculate Conception Church is twofold: A report for the church's advisory council by an independent building consultant, PEA Group of Detroit, Michigan, determined that the building is currently structurally sound, however, a new roof is critically needed. Roof leaks have caused ceiling plaster to fail in several areas and cracks have developed in the ceramic tiles around the choir loft and at the base of the barrel vaults. If not addressed soon, these problems will begin to compromise the internal structural elements. [24][25]

In addition to the physical state of the building, Bloomfield and the East End of Pittsburgh have seen significant development pressure in the past decade as the area changes and gentrifies. The demand for developable land is high.

The church is part of a campus that includes a convent (built in the late 1950s as an addition to a large Dutch Colonial house), a large 3 story school building with 17 classrooms and a gym, and a large playground and parking lot. As assembled, these buildings alone will provide a highly desirable development site. The campus also sits next to a large public parking lot. It's not unreasonable to assume that this parking lot could be included with the church property to create a substantial development parcel (albeit, public parking would have to be contained within the new development).

Furthermore, the church campus is only a half-block away from The Western Pennsylvania Hospital, which has already amassed neighboring properties along Gross Street for future development. Lastly, and perhaps most threatening to the buildings future, is that it is very unlikely that the church will be reused for another religious occupant, especially given the buildings size.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh requires the removal of all religious artifacts, with no exception. In 1996, Saint John the Baptist Church in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh was sold by the diocese and adapted into a restaurant and brew pub. At the time, the diocese did not remove the stained glass windows or painted murals from the church. The owners of the brew pub kept the windows and decided to place the beer fermentation vessels on the altar. Although striking in design for the brew pub, it understandably upset the diocese. Since then, all religious artifacts must be removed from a church building upon closure.

Given that the altar mosaic and stained glass windows at Immaculate Conception are embedded into the structure, removal of these items will be difficult (if even feasible), expensive, and completely destructive to the integrity of the architecture.

It is not unrealistic to speculate that the diocese would rather see the building demolished and the site redeveloped for another use altogether, as has happened to St. Lawrence O'Toole Church in Garfield.

#### ADAPTIVE REUSE

Adaptive reuse will be a challenge for Immaculate Conception, but not impossible. A potential redevelopment would reuse the school and rectory for housing, while the church could be converted into a community event space, or a collaborative openoffice space for one of the many tech companies seeking space in Pittsburgh. Perhaps an even bolder vision is required, such as a satellite gallery for The Carnegie Museum of Art or a studio for another arts-based organization.

The are many examples in Pittsburgh of reusing older buildings for new uses, including churches. The Priory on Pittsburgh's North Side and the Union Project in Highland Park, to name but a few.

There are stunning examples across the globe of church conversions that manage to preserve the best features of a design while adapting it to a stunning new use.





Saint Denys-du-plateau 1964, Quebec, Canada, office conversion, 2012 Hanganu Architects with Leahy Cadras Architects



De Petrus Community Center and Library 2015, Paris France Molennar & Dillen Architects

#### PRESERVATION PENNSYLVANIA

Buildings of the recent past are easily disregarded without consideration for architectural merit or community sentiment. The threat to Immaculate Conception Church is worthy of public attention, for the legacy of those that designed and built the church, and for those who have utilized its sanctuary for more than sixty years.

Building a groundswell of public support, as well as support from the preservation community, is the first step in helping to find a creative reuse for the building. The decision to close the church has come unexpectedly and has permitted very little time to save the church. The internal study that the parish and diocese had conducted for two years had not been made public until mid-February, 2022. Furthermore, before the Covid-19 pandemic, Immaculate Conception's grade school was in operation with a healthy enrollment — there was little to no indication that Immaculate Conception Church would close.

Bishop Zubik's decree (attached in the appendix), details what will happen to the church immediately upon closing:

"In accordance with our diocesan norms, I also decree that the stained glass windows, sacred items, non-sacred artifacts and any work of some significance be removed to the extent possible for reuse in other sacred edifices in the parish or be transmitted to the Diocesan Archives for use by other ecclesiastical entities. This decree is effective at 12:01 AM on May 2, 2022." [24] Appearing on the 2022 Pennsylvania at Risk list would be an incredible acknowledgment as we begin the long journey of saving the building.

Note: As of June 12, 2022, a group of parishioners has filed a petition with the Vatican to keep the church open. The church will remain intact (no artifacts will be removed or the building sold) until a decision has been rendered.



With the roof failing, plaster ceilings have begun to spall and break apart (upper right corner). Ceramic tiles are also beginning to fail.

#### PERSONAL CONNECTION

As principal nominator, it has been my privilege to research and prepare this document in the hope that the Immaculate Conception Church building can be saved and creatively reused. The information included in this nomination commemorates the enormous task undertaken by Cardinal Wright, Father Farina, the parishioners, architects, artisans, and the Diocese of Pittsburgh, in creating the "new" Immaculate Conception Church.

I believe the church also captures a moment in time for American architecture — a period of forward thinking and aspirational design. A period in which the architects pushed the bounds of convention to create a truly unique and sacred space. One that relied more upon subtlety and sophistication of detail rather than traditional design and decoration.

I was raised in Bloomfield and graduated from Immaculate Conception Grade School in 1982. I was also an altar boy. My grandfather, Donald J. Pronio (deceased), was particularly active with the building of the new church. He was on the building committee and helped to select the architects. He also led doorto-door fundraising drives to construct the new church.

I recall many stories from him about what an enormous task it was to raise money to build such a large and expensive building. But I especially remember him describing what it was like to walk into the church for the very first time:

He told me he had never seen anything like it (remember that this was 1961 Pittsburgh and still a rather antiquated place to a life-long "Bloomfielder"). He went on to describe the church as "monumental — full of light and mystery — that you could feel the presence of God." He also noted that the narthex looked a little like a Las Vegas hotel lobby. My grandfather always had to get a "dig" in (as he would often say).

Throughout my grade school years, I was mesmerized by the size of the church (twice as large to a child) and was especially taken by the altar mosaic and stained glass windows. There was definitely a little fear to a young soul in seeing "I BELIEVE" in big-bold letters at the altar. The mosaic for me, seemed to glow internally, and seeing the sun shine through the oculus skylight above the altar and hitting the crucifix, was simply awe-inspiring.

As I grew older, I realized that there was a theatrical nature to the design, more so than all of the churches I had been in. Everything about the building forced you to look at the altar and mosaic (the stage) and ponder all things spiritual. The lighting was especially theatrical in the large floating ceiling plane above the altar, which had hidden fluorescent lighting around the perimeter, and gave the ceiling a heavenly "floating" appearance. This combined with being back-lit by the enormous stained glass windows was simply amazing to such young eyes.

The church was perhaps my biggest inspiration to study architecture and motion picture set design. As a production designer for feature films, the lessons of scale, proportion, texture, and light, were all lessons that I learned at a very young age from the architecture of Immaculate Conception Church.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this remarkable modern structure for the 2022 PA at Risk List.

#### **CHURCH DEDICATION PHOTOS**

We are fortunate to have a copy of the 1963 church dedication booklet, from which much of the information in this nomination was obtained. The black and white photos on the next several pages were taken by Alfred Cardell, of the Cardell Studio in Bloomfield. Mr. Cardell took the photos of generations of Immaculate Conception students and "Pittsburghers" before passing away in January 1986. [26]

The photos show the church in its most pristine form, for which the church remained until the 1989 renovation.



Blessing of the corner stone by Monsignor Henry Carlin, 23 October 1960



The entry doors to the narthex were originally solid so that the sanctuary was revealed slowly. They were replaced in 1989 with glass doors. It would have been difficult to get a full view of the church exterior soon after construction as the parish had not finished acquiring the block of houses across the street.



The narthex remains basically the same today. The baptistry was converted into a chapel (the original baptismal font was removed).



The baptistry has a viewing gallery on the second floor. The brass door to the baptistry was designed by Bernard Gruenke of Conrad Schmitt Studios.





West narthex. Note the house across the street through the window. The church had not yet purchased the block of houses for the school playground and parking lot.







Architect Edo J. Belli mentions that the center aisle, which is used during formal services such a weddings and funerals, was to "reveal the sanctuary in a slow and dramatic fashion, much like the narthex of a cathedral." [27] The door to the center aisle is solid (just like the entry doors to the church) so that the sanctuary remains mostly concealed to the viewer. The 10 foot ceiling of the center aisle gives way to the 35+ foot ceilings of the naves and altar.



Top photo by Greg Weimerskirch



Looking from the choir loft. The screens to the organ chamber behind the reredos are not yet installed. The wood crucifix was moved to the narthex in 1989.



The complexity of the structure is most evident in this view. The barrel vaulted ceilings and sloping walls of the south and west naves intersect above the choir loft.



A rare photo showing the altar's floating ceiling with the oculus and skylights intact. Also shown is the cove lighting. The removal of these items in 1989 was detrimental to the spiritual qualities of the design. The current configuration of louvered panels and track lighting was ill-conceived and diminishes the church's grandeur.



The original mid-century lighting for the church provided interesting areas of light and shadow. The lower portion of the pendants had a brass shade punctuated with tiny holes which created a starlight effect, especially in the evening. The current lighting is too bright and harsh and is incompatible with the design of the church.

DAVID ALLEN ZUBIK



By the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See BISHOP OF PITTSBURGH

#### DECREE

#### PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA AND THE REDUCTION OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH BUILDING OF SAINT MARIA GORETTI PARISH TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE.

Whereas, Immaculate Conception church located at 300 Edmond Street, Pittsburgh PA 15224, church of the former Immaculate Conception/Saint Joseph Parish, became part of the patrimony of the newly formed Saint Maria Goretti Parish with a decree issued on March 22, 2012 and effective on June 4, 2012, in accord with the norm of canon 122 §2.

Whereas, Saint Maria Goretti Parish was formed by the extinctive union of the former Immaculate Conception/Saint Joseph Parish and the former Saint Lawrence O'Toole Parish.

Whereas, the age and physical condition and maintenance of parish owned buildings, including church buildings, is beyond the ability of the parish to afford.

Whereas, the Immaculate Conception church building is in poor physical condition: among other things, major repairs are needed for the leaking roof of the building and the resulting water damage to the interior; repairs are required for the heating and air conditioning systems; abatement and removal of hazardous materials; all of which are projected to cost more than \$1.4 Million. Additionally, required maintenance of other buildings owned by the parish are projected to cost more than \$1.6 Million, which together amounts to more than \$3 Million, far exceeding the parish's ability to afford.

Whereas, due to diminished weekly Mass attendance and offertory collection, Saint Maria Goretti Parish has been operating by deficit spending, which needs to be curtailed in order to provide for the continued life of the parish.

Whereas, there is no other source of funding for the costs described above.

Whereas, Immaculate Conception church building is attached to and integrated within an unused school building which adds greatly to the cost of maintenance and upkeep and, therefore, to the cost of sustainability to the parish.

Whereas, the Immaculate Conception church building is not needed by Saint Maria Goretti Parish.

Whereas, parishioner input regarding the possible closure of the church buildings was sought on multiple occasions over several years, and a final parish assembly was held on February 2, 2022.

Whereas, on February 11, 2022, the Pastor of Saint Maria Goretti Parish, having consulted his parish Pastoral and Finance Councils, submitted a petition recommending the relegation to profane but not sordid use of Immaculate Conception church building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Whereas, the care of souls will not be impacted as the members of Saint Maria Goretti Parish worship at the nearby Saint Joseph church building owned by the same parish and located less than 600 feet away from Immaculate Conception church building.

Whereas, the rationale for the closing Immaculate Conception church building for divine worship include the following: (1) the financial situation of the parish, including the parish's inability to continue maintaining two church buildings; (2) the need to reduce costs for the financial viability of the parish; (3) the required maintenance that this church building and other buildings owned by the parish currently need, the cost of which is beyond the ability of the parish; (4) there is no other viable source of income to meet the costs; (5) the care of souls will not be greatly impacted because of the availability of another church building owned by the parish.

Therefore, having heard the Presbyteral Council on February 17, 2022 and the Vicars General on the same day and having received a unanimous favorable recommendation from both and in accord with the provisions of canon 1222 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, I hereby close for worship Immaculate Conception church building located at 300 Edmond Street, Pittsburgh PA 15224 and furthermore relegate to profane but not sordid use the same church building in accord with the norms of law.

In accordance with our diocesan norms, I also decree that the stained glass windows, sacred items, non-sacred artifacts and any work of some significance be removed to the extent possible for reuse in other sacred edifices in the parish or be transmitted to the Diocesan Archives for use by other ecclesiastical entities. This decree is effective at 12:01 AM on May 2, 2022.

Finally, those who have the right, may appeal this decree in accordance with the prescriptions of the law.

Given at Pittsburgh this 25th day of March, in the Year of Our Lord 2022.

Most Reverend David A. Zubil

Bishop of Pittsburgh

Ellen M. Ma

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#### SOURCES

#### ARCHITECTURE

Immaculate Conception Church, Dedication Booklet, 1963 [1] [9] [10] [12] [22] [23] [27] A digital copy of the booklet is available by emailing the principal nominator, Greg Weimerskirch: gregweimerskirch@mac.com

Interview with Edo J. Belli, interviewed by Betty J. Blum. Chicago Architects Oral History Project, the Art Institute of Chicago [8] [15] [16] [18] https://artic.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/caohp/id/451

Belli & Belli Architects, firm profile, general information [13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo\_Belli

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#### **REPRODUCTION OF IMAGERY**

Black and white photography from the 1963 Immaculate Conception Church dedication booklet was taken by Alfred Cardell (deceased) of the Cardell Studio in Bloomfield, Pittsburgh, PA. The studio closed before his death in 1986.

I have been unable to find a family member to seek permission for the use of the photos.

## Alfred Cardell, photographer

Alfred G. Cardell, who operated a portrait studio in Bloomfield since 1945, died Friday in West Penn Hospital of complications resulting from heart surgery.

Mr. Cardell, 73, who lived above his studio at 4818 Liberty Ave., underwent a heart bypass operation a year ago.

He was a member of the Triangle Photographer's Association and the Immaculate Conception Church, Bloomfield.

Surviving are two daughters, J.C. Cardillo-Lee of Los Angeles and Marijane Cardell of New York City; a son, Peter A. Cardell of Euless. Texas; four sisters, Marietta Nigro, Edith DiGiorgio, Helen Menton and Dorothy Tripoli; and two brothers, Henry and Robert, all of Pittsburgh. Friends will be received from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. today and tomorrow

in the McCabe Brothers Funeral Home, Shadyside. A Mass will be said at 9:30 a.m.

Monday in Immaculate Conception Church. Burial will be in Mt. Carmel Cemetery, Penn Hills.

The family has suggested memorial contributions to West Penn Hospital Foundation Coronary Care Fund, 4800 Friendship Ave., Pittsburgh 15224.

Pittsburgh Post Gazette, January 4, 1986 [26]

**2022 PENNSYLVANIA AT RISK** 

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