Cathedral of the Holy Cross
Boston, Massachusetts

The Mother Church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston
Welcome to the Cathedral of

The First Catholic Church in New England

The Mother Church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston and the seat of our Cardinal Archbishop, the Cathedral serves a vibrant and diverse community, including English and Spanish-speaking congregations, Ge’ez Rite Catholics, a German Apostolate, and a large and thriving Traditional Latin Mass community.

The Cathedral of the Holy Cross, a cruciform neo-Gothic edifice, was built right after the Civil War and dedicated by Archbishop John J. Williams on December 8, 1875: the year he was named Boston’s first archbishop.

By the time of this dedication, the single diocese for all of New England had grown to such an extent that the New Archdiocese no longer embraced Connecticut, Rhode Island, or Springfield, Massachusetts.

(The Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire, would be established in 1884; Fall River, Massachusetts in 1904, and Worcester, Massachusetts in 1950.)
The Cathedral was designed by Patrick C. Keely (1816-1896). During his extraordinary career, this nineteenth century architect designed sixteen Catholic cathedrals and probably as many as six hundred other churches. A native of Thurles, County Tipperary, Ireland, where his father was an architect, Keely emigrated to Brooklyn, New York in 1842. He began his career as a carpenter.

In addition to the Cathedrals of Boston, Fall River, Springfield, Massachusetts, Providence, Rhode Island, Portland, Maine, Manchester, New Hampshire, and Hartford, Connecticut, Keely designed for the See of Boston nineteen parish churches, the original Boston College, the Immaculate Conception Church in Boston’s South End, and seven other buildings and churches for religious orders.

A devout Catholic and daily communicant, Keely received the second Laetare Medal from the University of Notre Dame in 1884.

Established at the end of the last century, The Keely Society is dedicated to documenting and appreciating Patrick Keely’s contribution to nineteenth century American church architecture and design.
INTERIOR SPACE

The Cardinal Archbishop of Boston presides from a special chair in the sanctuary—called the “cathedra”—from which the word “cathedral” originates. The cathedra is decorated with the Cardinal’s coat of arms and his motto: “Quod cumque dixerit facite” which translates to “Do whatever He tells you.” (Mary’s words to the servers at the wedding feast at Cana: John 2:5.)

Near the entry to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament is a plaque honoring the first bishop, Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus, one of the more remarkable figures to grace New England’s history. Born in France in 1768, he served as a priest in his home diocese for six years until, fleeing the French Revolution, he went to London and then Boston. He mastered several Indian dialects, served heroically in two yellow fever epidemics, and endeared himself to thousands. He was named first bishop in 1808 and in 1823, due to poor health, returned to France to become Bishop of Montauban, and then Archbishop of Bordeaux where he received his Cardinal’s hat.

Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament

To the left of the sanctuary is the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, built in 1870 and restored in 1995. Of special note is the Tabernacle, from Madrid, Spain. The stained glass windows, installed in the 1950s, represent the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. Notice particularly the fifth
The window on the left, which represents not the finding of the Christ Child, but His loss.

The Chapel’s organ is a reconstruction of a nineteenth century Hook & Hastings creation, complementing the Cathedral gallery giant of the same firm.

To the right of the altar is a Crucifix containing the Relic of the True Cross, a gift of the first pastor, Father de la Poterie, when he organized the parish of the Holy Cross in 1788—then the only Catholic church in New England—to serve the few Irish and French Catholics living in Boston at that time.

**The Sacristy**

The Cathedral’s sacristy contains a massive vestment case along the entire north wall. The stairs leading to the lower sacristies are decorated with handsomely carved busts of the four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

**The Lady Chapel**

On the right-hand side of the Main Altar is the Lady Chapel, restored at the same time as the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. The beautiful statue of Our Blessed Mother is from Munich, Germany. The windows depict her Seven Sorrows.
New England’s Largest and Earliest Stained Glass Collection

It is believed that most of the Cathedral’s stained glass collection was made in Munich, Germany. The windows are admirably suited to the interior as the images are framed by fictive architecture that repeats patterns from the church itself, thus linking structure and decoration. The windows show intense colors that attract the eye, decorate the interior, and yet let in a considerable amount of light.

Examine, for example, the windows of Saint Rose of Lima and Saint Brigid. A study of their robes and faces show that the glass painter used subtle tones of blue, purple, red, and green, just as a portrait painter in oils uses such tones. To date, the Cathedral appears to have the finest examples of enamel painting on glass in the United States.

North Transept Window: The Revelation of the True Cross of Christ

Drawing upon the dramatic story in the Golden Legend, a thirteenth century compilation of sacred legends, this window shows the revelation of the True Cross by the restoration to life of a dead woman. After the death of Christ, the three crosses of Golgotha were lost. Their rediscovery came during the reign of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity. It was Saint Helena, Constantine’s mother, who led the search for the Cross of Christ. She summoned learned Jews and questioned them about the location of Golgotha. Finding three crosses, they laid each on the body of a person who had recently died. When touched by the True Cross, a woman is seen to sit up and praise the Wood of her Redeemer. Her child appears at her side, guided by her husband. The crosses of the thieves lie discarded by the
steps. The Bishop of Jerusalem gives thanks, while Helena is recognized standing to his left, her crown and robe silhouetted against a dark stone.

**South Transept Window: The Exaltation of the Cross**

In 615, the Persian Army conquered Jerusalem and carried off the relic of the True Cross. Later, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius attacked Persia and recovered the Cross. The scene in this window depicts the return of Heraclius to Jerusalem. Legend recounts that when the Emperor arrived at the Basilica dressed in imperial robes, an unseen force held him back until Zacharias, the Bishop of Jerusalem, told the Emperor that he must take off his imperial trappings and imitate the poverty of Christ. So Heraclius shed his robes and then, barefoot and bareheaded, he was able to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and restore the Cross to its shrine.

*(See pages 8-9 for a complete list of stained glass windows.)*
THE LOWER CHURCH

In 2009, renovations were completed in the lower church of the Cathedral, transforming it into a quietly elegant and reverential space. The new design primarily accommodates the Extraordinary Form of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The space is distinguished by marvelous wood carvings with statues of numerous saints, including the twelve apostles around the sanctuary, a beautiful altar rail, and comfortable pews and kneelers.

The Crypt

Behind the altar screen is the crypt, containing the remains of Bishop Bernard Fitzpatrick, who planned the Cathedral, and Archbishop John J. Williams, who dedicated the Cathedral and presided as Bishop from 1866 until his death in 1907. The crypt also contains the altar from the first Cathedral on Franklin Street, in use until 1860. The Franklin Street building was designed by the well-known Charles Bulfinch, whose major works also include the Massachusetts State House and the completion of the U.S. Capitol.

(Bishop Benedict Fenwick is buried in the Jesuit Cemetery of the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, which he founded. William Cardinal O’Connell is buried on the grounds of Saint John’s Seminary in Brighton. Richard Cardinal Cushing is buried at Saint Coletta’s in Hanover, and Humberto Cardinal Medeiros is buried with his parents in Saint Patrick’s Cemetery in Fall River.)
THE GREAT GALLERY ORGAN

Built by the prestigious firm of E. & G. Hook & Hastings—at the time the largest builder of organs in the country—the three-manual, seventy-stop instrument the firm, or any other American builder, had created up to that time. Inspired by the lofty nave and the fine acoustical setting so rare in nineteenth-century America, the organ emerged as the culmination of the American organ aesthetic of the Romantic Period. It was dedicated on February 23, 1876, by four of the leading organists of the city. Since 1986 it has been undergoing extensive repair, and we look forward to the day of its complete restoration. The Annual Organ Birthday Concerts, along with other efforts, help to raise funds for this project.
Stained Glass Windows

1. **Rose with King David** (upper organ gallery)
2. **Saint Gregory the “Wonderworker”** (Reverend James O’Doherty)
3. **Saint William** (Patrick Denvir)
4. **Saint Agnes** (Young Ladies Sodality)
5. **Saint Cecilia** (In memory of Reverend Sherwood A. Healey)
6. **Saint Mary Magdalen** (In memory of Samuel J. and Nora F. Sullivan)
7. **Saint Vincent DePaul** (Members of the Saint Vincent DePaul Society, 1876)
8. **Saint Thomas Touches Christ's Wounds** (In memory of Thomas Dwight, 1876)
9. **Saint Patrick** (Pray for the soul of Patrick Treanor)
10. **Saint Brigid** (Reverend William Hallen)
11. **Saint Rose of Lima** (Reverend James M. Glew)
12. **South Transept Window** This window commemorates the Exaltation of the Cross. In 615 the Persian Army conquered Jerusalem and carried off the relic of the True Cross. Later the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius attacked Persia and recovered the Cross. The scene in this window depicts Heraclius’ return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem. Legend recounts that when the Emperor arrived at the Basilica dressed in imperial robes, an unseen force held him back until Zacharias, the bishop of Jerusalem, told him he must take off his imperial trappings and imitate the poverty of Christ. So Heraclius shed his robes and then, barefoot and bareheaded, was able to enter the church of the Holy Sepulcher and restore the Cross to its shrine.
13. **Saint Fortunatus** (Vexilla Regis)
14. **Last Supper**

15-21. **Seven Sorrows Windows**
22. **The Blessed Virgin**
23. **North Transept Window** Drawing upon the dramatic story in the Golden Legend, a thirteenth century compilation of sacred legends, this window shows the revelation of the True Cross by the restoration to life of a dead woman. After the death of Christ, the three crosses of Golgotha were lost. Their discovery came during the reign of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity. It was Saint Helena, Constantine’s mother, who led the search for the Cross of Christ. She summoned the learned Jews and questioned them about the location of Golgotha. Finding three crosses, they laid each on the body of a woman who had recently died. The woman is seen in the window sitting praising the wood of her Redeemer. Her child appears at her side, guided by her husband. The crosses of the thieves lie discarded by the steps. The Bishop of Jerusalem gives thanks, while Helena is recognized standing to the bishop’s left, her crown and robe silhouetted against the dark stone.
24. **Saint Francis De Sales** (Reverend H. P. Smyth)
25. **Saint Thomas of Canterbury**
26. **Saint Michael** (In Memory of Margaret and Timothy Mahoney)
27. **The Virgin, Liberator of Prisoners** (Reverend Michael O’Brien)
28. **Saint John the Baptist** (Reverend J. J. Gray)
29. **Saint John the Evangelist**
30. **The Holy Family** (In Memory of J. Iasigi)
31. **Saint James** (James Collins)
32. **Saint Edward** (Reverend James E. O’Brien)