

PROJECT PROFILE

St. Francis de Sales Church Philadelphia, PA

VERTICAL
access



Building description

Completed in 1911, St. Francis de Sales Church was designed by Henry D. Dagit with a massive structural tile dome by the R. Guastavino Company. Built in a Byzantine Revival style, the plan consists of a large, domed central space with shallow transepts to the east and west of the crossing, the sanctuary situated to the north and the nave and gallery to the south. Two domed towers flank the south façade and domes top two smaller towers at the west transept.

The exterior walls of the church are clad in rock-faced, white marble and the trim, window surrounds and figurative statues are carved in Indiana limestone. At the crossing of the church, brick walls form an octagonal base for the terra cotta and brick cylindrical drum and large tiled dome. The dome above the drum is clad in glazed ceramic tile, installed with a concrete substrate in 1955 to replace the original Guastavino finish tile.

The interior of the church is richly decorated with marble, granite and limestone at the lower walls, patterned brick surfaces and polychromatic terra cotta arches at the upper areas and a terra cotta cornice topped by a brick drum and Guastavino dome. The central dome, which has a glazed oculus at the interior, has a diameter of approximately 60 feet and rises 108 feet above the floor level of the church. Guastavino vaulting is employed at the gallery, nave, transepts and sanctuary. Arched stained glass windows line the east and west walls of the nave and round stained glass windows perforate the brick walls at the gallery, east and west transepts and north wall of the sanctuary.



Scope of work

- Surveyed and documented existing conditions at interior and exterior of church.
- Sounded Guastavino tile and masonry materials at interior and exterior to identify loose and hollow areas.
- Performed investigation of all subsurface drains and pipes using a fiber-optic diagnostic tool (See Snake®).
- Provided live-feed video to project team during inspection of representative exterior areas.

Building owner

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

In collaboration with

- Historic Building Architects, LLC, architect
- Robert Silman Associates, P.C., structural engineer
- Jablonski Berkowitz Conservation, Inc., materials conservator
- Femenella & Associates, Inc., stained glass conservator
- Princeton Engineering Group, MEP engineer

Photos: Vertical Access(interior) and Jon Reis (exterior)