

Mural is highlight of renovations to historic West Buffalo church

Renovation, work on mural, restores original intent of the founders of Holy Angels Church

By Mark Ciemcioch
Staff Reporter

Nestled in the eclectic West Side community in Buffalo is Holy Angels Church, its twin steeples a pillar of the neighborhood for nearly 150 years. But it is what's happening on the inside of the church that's transforming.

The Bryans Brothers painting company is in the middle of restoring several areas inside the church, including the columns that run along the side aisles, as well as restoring the mural above the main altar back to its original roots.

Founded by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1852, Holy Angels Parish was born as part of an initiative of Bishop John Timon, CM, then bishop of Buffalo, to build a religious and education community on the West Side. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were founded in France in 1816 by St. Eugene de Mazenod, a history honored by a small shrine located on the west side of Holy Angels Church.

On the east side, a mural depicts the sacraments, while a shrine honors St. Marguerite d'Youville, foundress of the Grey Nuns who started D'Youville College in Buffalo. The D'Youville campus is right across the street from Holy Angels, and pastor Father James Fee, OMI, notes the two institutions are tied together, especially as he refers to "the spirit of restoration."

"Historically, it's a very close relationship," said Father Fee. "The Oblates first brought the sisters here for a mission in the parish.

Those are the sisters who eventually established D'Youville College, and

now D'Youville College is having its baccalaureate ceremony in Holy Angels."

The restoration comes during a string of high profile events for Holy Angels Church. D'Youville College celebrated a baccalaureate ecumenical service at Holy Angels in mid-May. On June 13, parishioner Michele DiVito will take her vows as a consecrated virgin during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Edward U. Kmiec.

The mural above the altar is being painted by Timothy Englert, based on the work of artists like Velasquez (1599-1660), Bouguereau (1825-1905) and Tiepolo (1696-1770). Their work with angels is important to the restoration process, as the images depict the coronation of the virgin.

"I'm mixing Spanish, French and Italian artists," said Englert, who said the images are a testament to "Holy Angels and being centered around Mary." Englert created the mural in his home studio using acrylic paints to illustrate the large images in tones of grey. Afterwards, Englert brought the canvas to Holy Angels and hung it using wallpaper paste, filling in the rest of the painting with color.

"You do it on canvas and attach it," Englert said. "It's the best way to do murals."

The mural design was originally done a third of the size to give Holy Angels officials an idea of what it would look like. Englert said he spent about a year researching the project before he started painting in March. He expects all renovations in Holy Angels to be complete in the fall.

"I did a lot of research, downloading hundreds of angel (images)

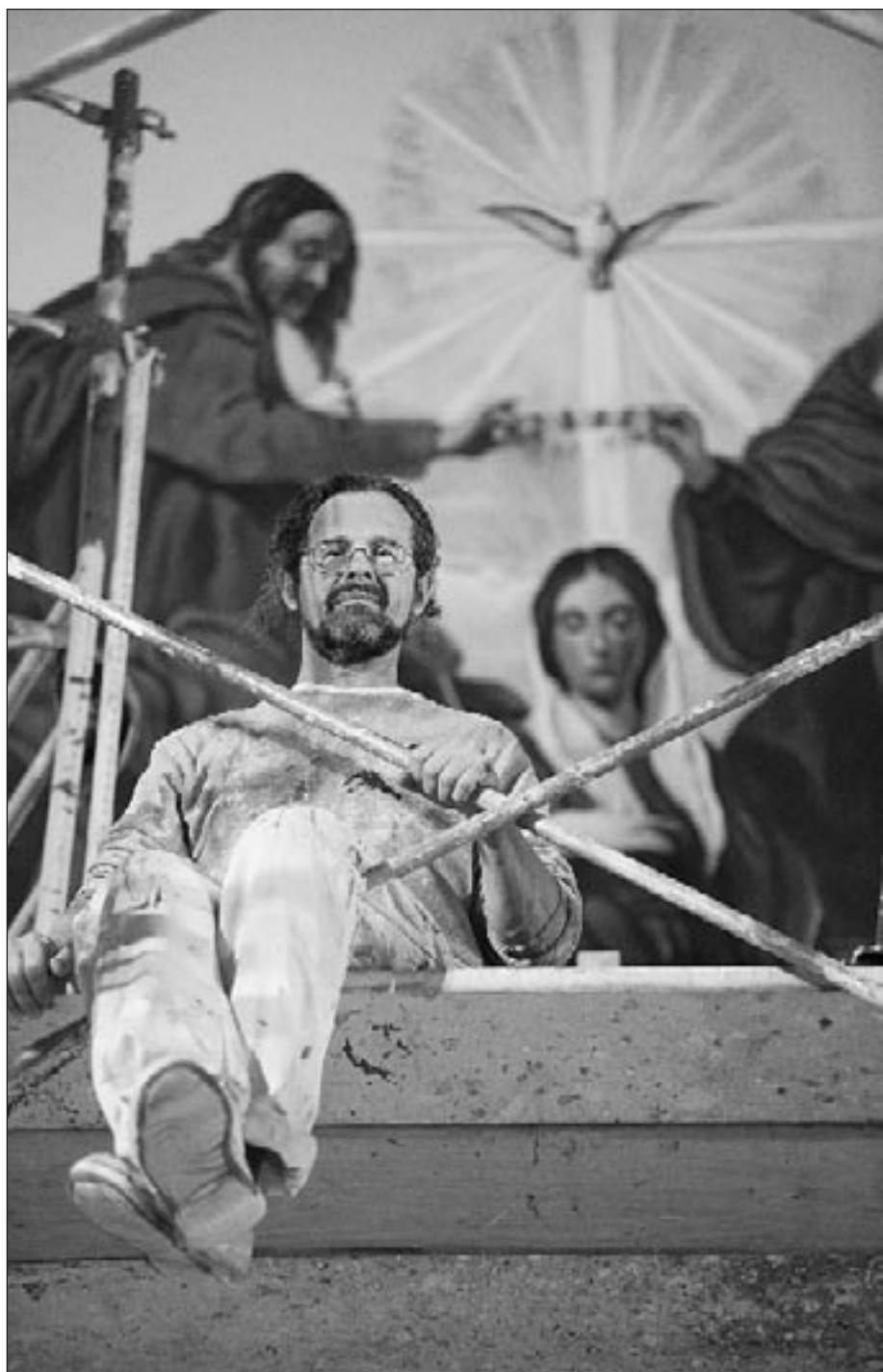


Photo by Patrick McPartland/Staff Photographer

Artist Timothy Englert has been working on a mural depicting the Coronation of Mary as Holy Angels Parish restores the interior of the church including this mural above the altar.

and doing preliminary drawings," Englert said. "I've found the more planning you do, the easier it is for a mural."

Bryans Brothers painters also restored the columns in the church, marblizing the column itself while Englert repainted the angel capitals, sculpted out of horsehair plaster.

"These capitals are unique," Englert said. "I've seen a lot in stone, but I've never seen angels like this."

Although the restoration was approved prior to Father Fee's appointment to Holy Angels last

fall, he remains supportive of the project. He did wonder how the financially strapped parish intends to pay for the restoration, but so far, so good.

"We continue to pay for this by a lot of generous people and special events," said Father Fee, noting an annual appeal and a golf tournament scheduled for September.

The last time Holy Angels was renovated like this was around the 100th anniversary of the parish.

"This really is restoring it to the original intent of the founders of the church," Father Fee said.