

25th ANNIVERSARY OF CHAPEL RENOVATION

By Sister Margaret Clarke

Central to every Benedictine monastery is its chapel, where the community gathers for Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist. During the century that the Duluth Benedictines have occupied their Kenwood site, the Monastery chapel has changed its location, size, and décor a number of times to accommodate the size of the Community and the current understanding of the norms of divine worship. This fall we are commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the most recent of these changes.

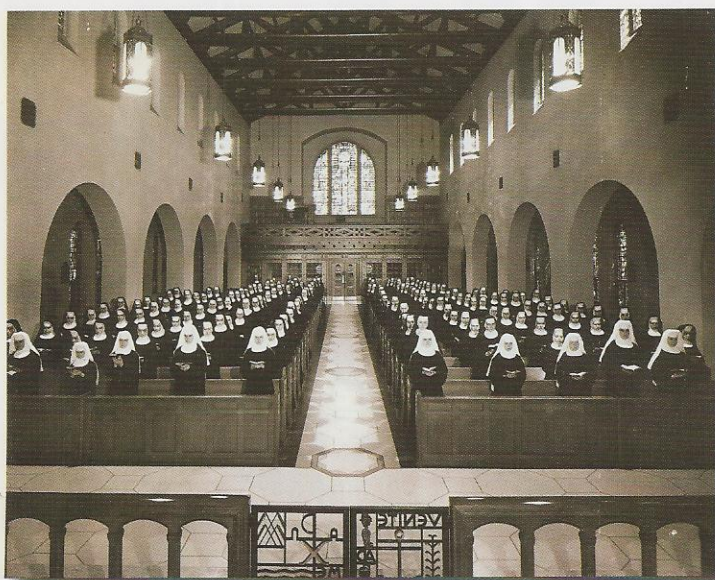
In 1909 when the Sisters moved into the newly completed Villa Scholastica, two adjoining rooms on fourth floor were utilized for a small chapel. Five years later, Mother Alexia Kerst moved the chapel down to second floor as more central to the life of the Community. It was not until 1920, with the extension of a westward-trending wing that a purposefully-designed chapel was constructed, large enough to accommodate both Sisters and student body, although not simultaneously.



Altar prepared for the first Mass in the Villa fourth floor Chapel 1909.



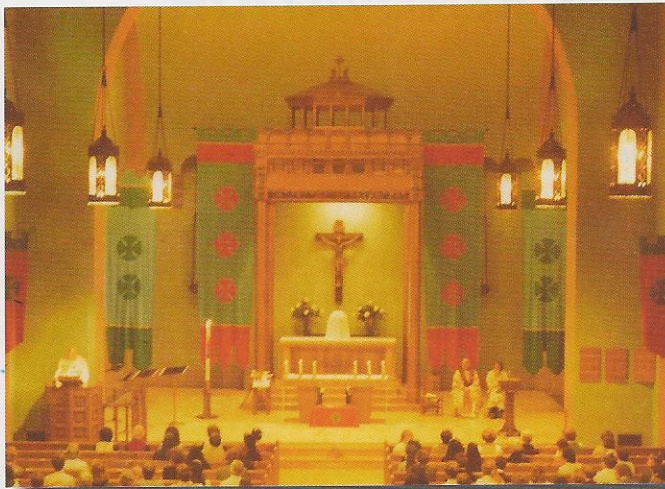
College students in the third floor (1920) Chapel. This is now the College Music Hall. The statues of Sts. Benedict and Scholastica were from Sacred Heart Institute, and now stand at the Monastery end of the Cloister Walk.



The Community assembled in Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel, 1945

As the population of both Community and College increased, Mother Agnes Somers in 1937 embarked on an ambitious building program which would include not only a new high school building, but centrally located between that building and Tower Hall, a spacious and dignified Chapel and a library for the College. Within this neo-Romanesque structure the College library occupied the ground floor and Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel the remainder of the building. The Chapel was dedicated in August 1938, and remained the center of liturgical worship for the campus for nearly fifty years. With a little “squeezing” it could accommodate up to 500, its ceiling soared about 80 feet above the pews, its stained-glass windows commemorated women saints and the changing light of the day hours. For at least two generations of Sisters it became the beloved House of God that the Psalms extol.





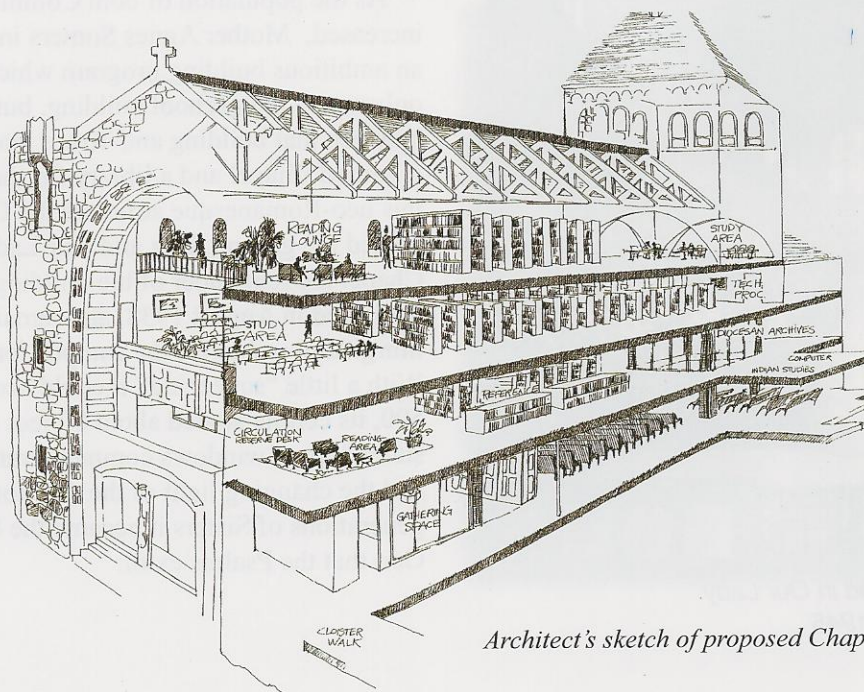
*Interior Chapel during 1980 sesquimillennium celebration
(1500 years since St. Benedict's birth)*



*Exterior, Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel
and College Library.*

In the 1970s, accelerating change in liturgical practices after Vatican Council II and the needs of an aging community inspired a few modifications in the existing Chapel. As early as 1972 the College also had been investigating ways of increasing space for the library. Possibilities explored included construction in the tennis court and Angelus garden, connection with the gym, and a number of renovated sites in Tower Hall. All of these seemed to be either unsatisfactory or structurally impossible. Mother Grace Marie Braun was serving on the CSS space committee, and a Priory committee was investigating monastic space needs. The College settled tentatively on a location for its new library in the elevator wing of Tower Hall.

On May 5, 1984, Mother Grace Marie presented a proposal to the Community gathered in Chapter. She noted: "I would like to present an idea for your consideration. . . another option for the College Library. This idea came from some of you as you talked to me about space needs. I was wondering if we could consider using the [present] Chapel for the Library, and renovate the Library for our Community Chapel." She pointed out that this would provide direct barrier-free access to the Chapel from the cloister walk, we would be able to design the space in accordance with the most recent norms for worship, it would be more energy efficient, all of the Sisters would be able to be present for Community worship, and the exterior of the building would remain unchanged. With the insertion of two additional floors in the remaining space, the College Library would then have at least twice its present square footage.

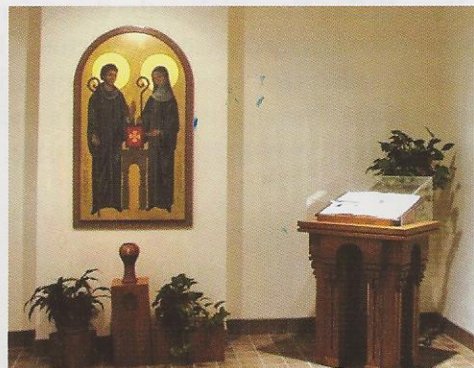
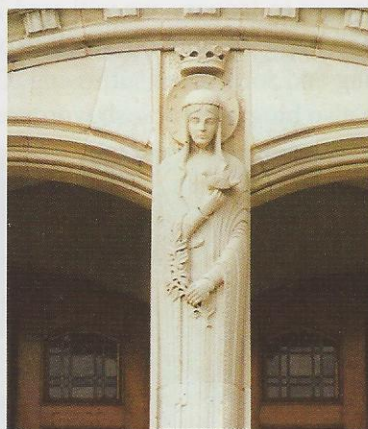
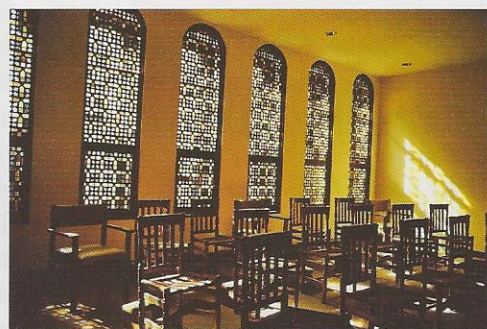
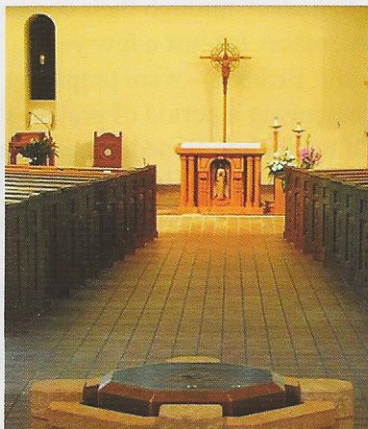


Architect's sketch of proposed Chapel/Library renovation, 1984

Mother Grace Marie warned that this would require sacrifice and inconvenience for some time, and would do violence to our attachment to the current Chapel. A majority of the Community affirmed going further with consideration of this idea, and she then proposed it to the College. By October she was able to report that the College was interested, that the project had been determined to be structurally sound, and that the cost would be sustainable by the College and Priory. The rest of the year was devoted to the intensive study by the whole Community of environment and art in worship, and how this could be incorporated into the renovated Chapel.

At a Chapter meeting on January 5, 1985, a formal vote was taken, affirming the decision to go forward with the proposal. By February the design phase was under way, with William Moser of Architectural Resources as the chief architect and John Buscemi as liturgical design consultant, with a committee of community members. Construction began in July 1985 and continued through September of 1986. The Sisters held their first service in the new chapel on September 28, and the formal dedication was celebrated on October 12, which is now celebrated yearly in Community as the anniversary of the dedication of our church.

Primary areas in the new Chapel include a gathering space centered around the font, a seating area for the assembly, the sanctuary with ceiling that extends upward for an additional story, two side chapels dedicated to Mary and Benedictine Saints respectively, and a Eucharistic chapel beyond the sanctuary. Insofar as possible, many of the materials from the 1938 chapel were utilized in the new construction: the pews, marble from the original altar, wood paneling and carvings, the stained-glass windows. New works of art were also commissioned.



After twenty-five years, the “new” chapel has become for us “the Chapel.” Some of us still feel twinges of nostalgia when we recall the grandeur of the 1938 Chapel, but we can say that for the most part, our decision has stood the test of time, and we are happy with the results. We can say with the patriarch Jacob, “Truly this is the Gate of Heaven and the House of God.”

