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A New Era For St. Monica Community Center Opens

On November 3, 2013, after nearly ten years of planning and more than five years of fundraising, St. Monica Catholic Community celebrated the opening of its new Community Center. Archbishop José H. Gomez of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles inaugurated the complex with a formal dedication and Mass.

Designed by Southern California-based Pica + Sullivan Architects, Ltd., the new facilities include the Tina and Rick Caruso Community Center, Grand

Pavilion and Grand Patio, the Carol G. Simon Child and Student Center, and a 175-car, two-and-a-half level subterranean parking garage. Collectively, the additions add over 100,000 square feet to the St. Monica campus.

The Caruso Community Center features 17,600 square feet of assembly and meeting spaces, administrative offices, the St. André Bessette Chapel, Holy Grounds, a new coffee bar and religious gifts/bookstore, and dedicated space for Hope at the Door, a ministry for the needy in the local community.

Dawna Houston, Director of Communications, said that the increased assembly and meeting space will be noticed at the community's 34th annual Thanksgiving dinner, which serves 1,000 homeless every year. "This new facility is going to help alleviate what has been quite an orchestration to make that day happen," she said, laughing.

Previously the campus did not have space to accommodate wedding or funeral receptions. "Let me

tell you, there are a number of brides who have been waiting for this facility to be built so they can have their reception here," Houston said. "It's so much less expensive to go here rather than somewhere else. And it's very convenient."

The Carol G. Simon Child and Student Center will be used exclusively by St. Monica Catholic Elementary School for before and after-school programs and as a classroom during school days.

Holy Grounds will be open to the general public seven days a week and will include a gift/book shop and a coffee bar featuring fair trade coffee from Urth Caffe in Santa Monica.

The St. André Bessette Chapel is the focal point of the new complex. Prominently located at the corner of Lincoln and California Avenue, this petite sacred space sports a unique architectural feature: a translucent window tower that has been lovingly christened "Pillar of Light." The glazed exterior is created with numerous panes, glass colors and transparencies in an articulated composition. Different from a stained glass window that glows into the church during daylight hours, the Pillar of Light will glow at night as a beacon to the greater world; highlighting that St. Monica is a place of spirit and faith.

The impetus for the development was the need for the parish to address its chronic parking problem. As noted by Pastor Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson, cars don't have souls, but they bring souls to worship. With an 850-seat church and multiple Sunday services, the existing infrastructure was unable to handle the demand. During weekdays, with the playground in active use, on-site parking was minimal. These shortcomings were both a detriment to St. Monica and a strain on the neighbor-

*Community Center
Dedication ceremony. Project
designed by Pica +
Sullivan Architects,
Ltd. Photograph by
Glenn Marzano.*

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Project Slated for Gold LEED Certification



(Above) Architects Maureen Sullivan and Joseph Pica present Archbishop Gomez with design plans during Dedication ceremony. Photograph by Anne Wong.

(Lower right) Exterior view of "Pillar of Light" at the new St. André Bessette Chapel. Photograph courtesy of Santa Monica Daily News.

hood. The new structure transforms the campus with easy vehicular access and parking close to the church, schools and all other parish functions.

The new project, slated for Gold LEED certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), incorporates numerous "sustainability" features. These include use of recycled materials throughout, installation of a state-of-the-art high efficiency HVAC system with economizers, daylighting and natural ventilation in every room, and over 50 bicycle parking spaces.

The landscaping is comprised of drought-resistant California plants and a water-stingy sub-surface irrigation system. The Grand Patio features a contemplative garden with a black granite fountain, named in honor of Albert C. Martin, the architect of the adjacent circa-1926 landmark church.

To date, St. Monica Catholic Community has raised over \$28 million toward the building project through a fundraising campaign titled **"Celebrating Our Blessings, Building Our Future, Together."** The development, which includes renovations and additions throughout the campus, is considered to be one of the most ambitious of any individual Catholic parish in United States history. The success of the campaign during a period of economic challenge is a testament to the community's belief in the vitality and future of the parish.

"This is the day we have all been waiting for," said Msgr. Torgerson. "God has graced our parish with the faithful whose numbers have increased, challenging our ability to welcome and serve them properly. These facilities will allow us to answer the Gospel challenge in new and exciting ways as we form loving disciples who will transform the world."

