

EducationARCHITECT

ADDRESSING THE DESIGN NEEDS OF TODAY'S NON-PROFIT INSTITUTIONS



*American Martyrs
Church exterior
renovation and newly
designed front entry
plaza. Design by Pica +
Sullivan Architects.
Photograph by Randall
Michelson.*

REJUVENATION *American Martyrs Church*

Easter is a time of renewal; a reminder of life restored; a spiritual and physical re-emergence. If there was ever a year to anticipate the promise of Easter, 2021 was it.

By all accounts, the past months had been stressful. Personal, business, education, social and spiritual activities experienced significant impacts as Covid-19 swept through the country and the world. Churches,

impacted by social distancing protocols, curtailed in-person indoor services.

As the restrictions continued over the extended lockdown, churches adapted with 'live streaming' of services, parking lot gatherings, curbside communion and even curbside confessions. Parish ministry groups initiated direct food and medical assistance, wellness phone calls to elderly parishioners, and the now-ubiquitous Zoom gatherings for group prayer and spiritual support.

Due to the extended hiatus, American Martyrs Church in Manhattan Beach elected to begin planned renovations of the interior and exterior of their church. The extended shutdown provided a window of time for unhindered access. On Easter Sunday, congregants joined together to celebrate in the newly rejuvenated house of worship. At American Martyrs the 2021 Easter season was truly a time of reemergence.

The circa-1957 Mid-Century Modern-style church had been sorely in need of loving attention. The brick structure required repair, the 35 year old roof leaked badly, there was inadequate support spaces and handicap accessibility was wanting. While important to address these

issues, a renovation project also offered opportunities - to emphasize welcome, reinforce community and enhance the worship experience.

American Martyrs Pastor Monsignor John Barry, Parish Business Manager Bob Hodges and Parishioner Jan Holtze led the extensive revitalization effort. The project design and construction team consisted of Maureen Sullivan, Principal of Los Angeles-based Pica + Sullivan Architects, John Van Dyke, President of Los Angeles-based Vancrest Construction and church lighting specialist Bridget Williams of Apple Valley-based Williams Design and Consulting.

The project came about in concert with the Los Angeles Archdiocese-wide ***Called to Renew*** capital campaign that focused on investing in improvements and encouraging parishes to address their facility needs and those of parishes less fortunate.

The rehabilitation effort included an extensive re-design of the entry plaza to provide a welcome place for gathering and greeting. The newly enlarged entry portal was fitted with custom bronze doors created by San Diego-based Design Synthesis, Inc. The

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Pica + Sullivan Architects, Ltd. publish the *EducationArchitect* newsletter. The Southern California-based firm specializes in master planning and architectural design for non-profit independent and religious-based schools, religious institutions, social service organizations, NGO's and charitable foundations. Since its inception in 1990 the firm has been involved in over 600 projects of varying size and scope.

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Renovation Retains History and Permanence



choir area. New spotlights highlight the Stations of the Cross, chapel statuary and artwork, reredos, new crucifix, as well as the altar, ambo and presiders chair. The existing chandeliers, refurbished and fitted with new curved glass reflectors, provide general lighting.

The new dimmer control package offers numerous pre-programmed lighting “scenes” of various intensities and colors. The system can create different moods and theatrical effects and is designed to work in conjunction with live-streaming and broadcast productions.

The new audio-visual installation was the product of numerous studies by acoustic consultant Dohn and Associates and sound specialists AMT Systems, Inc. Judicious placement of speakers, microphones, and monitors provide flexibility and added opportunities for the enhancement of the worship experience.

The totality of the refurbishment maintains the history and permanence of the original church, enhances the spiritual and communal experience, and allows for a closer connection between the celebrant and congregation.

The church revitalization and renewal was made possible by the generous and enthusiastic support of the American Martyrs parishioners.



Easter services at American Martyrs Church. Photograph by Randall Michelson.

View of Nave and Altar through new entry from the Narthex (lower right). Design by Pica + Sullivan Architects. Photograph by Randall Michelson.

weighty 5 ft by 10 ft door leaves required engineered hardware for precision balance and ease of opening. Bas-reliefs on the interior side of each leaf herald the celebrants when fixed open for Sunday services.

The transformation of the 8,500 square-ft nave involved new ceiling acoustical treatment, new flooring, the refinishing of existing pews, new lighting and an extensive AV system. The project also included newly designed confessional rooms, side chapels, crying room, choir area and handicap accessible restrooms.

Chacas, Peru-based Artesanos Don Bosco, a non-profit group of artisans, created an extensive sculpted reredos of the eight American Martyr Saints. Spanning the entire apse, the linden wood panels are carved bas-reliefs with highlights of color and gilding. The linden wood continued around the nave as wainscot, confessional enclosures and all interior doors.

The most impactful part of the renovation was the inclusion of an elaborate lighting package. The carefully integrated fixtures provide multiple accents throughout the nave and apse as well as decorative and general lighting at the narthex. Multiple luminaires were introduced at the chapels, transepts and new