St. Clare of Assisi Adoration Chapel

Motherhouse of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis
St. Clare of Assisi

St. Clare of Assisi (July 16, 1194 – August 11, 1253) was the eldest daughter of Favorino Scifi, Count of Sasso-Rosso, the wealthy representative of an ancient Roman family who owned a palace in Assisi, Italy, and a castle on the slope of Mount Subasio. Her mother, Ortolana, belonged to the noble family of Fium. When she was pregnant, an angel appeared to her and said that her child would be a light that would illuminate the world. The child was named Chiara (Clare), a word that means light.

St. Clare was one of the first female followers of St. Francis of Assisi. She founded the Order of Poor Ladies, a monastic religious Order for women in the Franciscan tradition. Following her death, the Order was renamed in her honor as the Order of Saint Clare, commonly referred to today as the Poor Clares. Her life was spent in prayer and contemplation because of her great love of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament (Christ’s presence in the form of consecrated bread – also called Eucharist). She lived a life of loving sacrifice, penance, and poverty.

Architecture and Art

In 1927, Monsignor Joseph Straub, Priest Director of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, Sister Afra Schmedtjann, and Mother Magdalene Wiedlocher, Provincial Superior of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, requested the assistance of Springfield architects Helmle and Helmle on the design of this Chapel. The architects had previously designed St. Francis of Assisi Church that was dedicated on April 27, 1924.

The Chapel is shaped like a cross and decorated in a liturgical motif that gives glory to the Eucharist. Through the work of Italian artists affiliated with Daprato Studios and Statuary Company (Chicago, New York, and Pietrasanta, Italy), this overall artistic element is achieved. The echoing circular pattern of arches, windows, and carvings is a reminder of how God has no beginning and no ending.

The Eucharistic symbols of vines, grapes, wheat, and circles are abundant. The vine is one of the most vivid symbols in the Bible and is used to express the relationship between God and all people. It is a reminder of Jesus’ teaching that believers derive life from Christ, the true vine. The Bible frequently refers to the vineyard as being the protected place where the children of God (the vines) flourish under the tender care of God (the keeper of the vineyard). The vine, as the emblem of Christ, follows from
the words expressing the relationship between God and all people. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit because without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Grapes are symbolic of the blood shed by Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of sin, and the fruitfulness of the Christian life. Wheat is a symbol used not only to suggest the bounty of the earth, but in relation to the Eucharist, it symbolizes the bread. From Jesus’ parables, wheat came to represent believers, while weeds represent unbelievers.

**Throne of Adoration**
The focal point of this Chapel is the marble Throne of Adoration on which stands a gold monstrance holding the Blessed Sacrament. This Throne is embellished with mosaic inlays and highlighted by four angels in an attitude of prayer. The base is made from Chiampo Perla marble and is highlighted with gold and white Venetian mosaic lettering of “Sanctus” (Holy).

Supported by four Italian Portasanta marble pillars, the bronze, gold, and marble canopy is elaborately decorated with Eucharistic symbols and four angels in an attitude of protection.

**Monstrance**
Displayed on the Throne of Adoration is a monstrance - a vessel used in the Roman Catholic Church to display the consecrated Eucharistic Host of the Blessed Sacrament. The word monstrance comes from the Latin word “monstrare,” meaning “to show.”

In the Catholic tradition, at the moment of Consecration the gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Catholic doctrine holds that the gifts are not only spiritually transformed, but rather are actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ while retaining the appearance of bread and wine. Because of this belief, the consecrated gifts are given the same adoration and devotion that is accorded to Christ. Because Catholics believe that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, the reserved Sacrament serves as a focal point of devotion. During Eucharistic adoration, the Blessed Sacrament is displayed in the monstrance. When not being displayed, the reserved Sacrament is kept in the tabernacle (Place of Divine Dwelling).
This monstrance was made by Alois Kreiten according to the design of Paul Kreiten, his son—who both resided in Cologne, Germany. It is a gift from the Kuemmet family, Sheboygan, WI. The monstrance was created at St. Gall's Catholic Art School in Switzerland using bronze, silver, and gold. Within the design are figures of the four evangelists (lower tier): St. Matthew is reading a book; St. Mark, is strong with curly hair and a beard; St. Luke, the Roman medical doctor, embodies a refined, learned man; and St. John speaks from one of his works, his visionary glance in the distance. These figures are balanced by:

- Doctors of the Church, traditional interpreters of Scripture (upper tier) - St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, Pope St. Gregory the Great, and St. Jerome
- intricate gold filigree set with precious stones from Africa and Brazil
- figures of 64 cherubim with extended wings

At the base is a diamond—a gift from Mother Magdalene Wiedlocher, OSF, Provincial Superior of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis (1933-1952).

Latin text is displayed on four sides in cloisonné - a process that involves grinding precious jewels, mixing them with oil and metal, and firing them in a kiln. The text is from the Morning Prayer hymn “Verbum supernum prodiens” (The Word of God Proceeding Forth) - sung for the Feast of Corpus Christi (Body of Christ). The two final stanzas is from “O Salutaris Hostia” (O Saving Host) - one of the five Eucharistic hymns written by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) at the request of Pope Urban IV (1261-1264) when the Pope first instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264. Of the six stanza hymn, the text comes from stanza four: “Se nascnes dedit socium (By birth our fellowman was he); Convescens in edulium (Our food while seated at the table); Se moriens in pretium (He died, our ransomer to be); Se regnans dat in praemium (He ever reigns, our great reward).”
Sanctuary Mural

Behind the Throne of Adoration is a mural of the Blessed Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father holds a scepter (symbol of authority) in his left hand while with his right hand, He gestures to God the Son, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) Beneath the scepter is a globe representing His authority over all things. His halo includes a triangle – the symbol of the Trinity. God the Son raises his right hand in blessing as he holds a book with the letters Alpha and Omega (first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—referencing that God is the beginning and the end) in his left hand. His halo includes a cross – the symbol of salvation. God the Holy Spirit is depicted as a dove in the sky. The halo includes rays of light – the symbol of grace. The six angels are in an attitude of praise (trumpets) and adoration (incense). The doctrine of the Trinity comes first from the story of Jesus’ baptism, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each uniquely present.

Sanctuary, Altars, and Communion Rail

A sanctuary is the most sacred place of a church. The red sanctuary lamp burns continuously as a reminder that God is present in the tabernacle in the form of bread. The tabernacle rests on the Altar of Repose.

On either side of the Throne of Adoration are altars at which Mass was once celebrated. The platform of the altars and Throne, together with the front panels of the two altars, are of Chiampo Perla marble. Centered in these altars is an inlay of Portasanta marble featuring a mosaic cross with four circles symbolic of the eternal nature of the word of God as preached by the four evangelists. Left, is the Latin phrase “Ecce Panis Angelorum” (Behold the Bread of Angels) and right, is “Factus Cibus Viatorum” (Made Food for Pilgrims).

Since Vatican II (1962-1965) and the practice of a priest celebrating Mass facing the people, Mass is now celebrated at the Altar of Sacrifice in the center of the sanctuary. The Communion railing is made from Chiampo Perla marble and the base is made from Rosso Levanto marble.
**Dome**

In the dome is a gold sunburst medallion in similar design as the monstrance. Displayed around a Greek cross (arms of equal length) are portraits of four Doctors of the Church who preached and defended the faith. Clockwise, beginning at 12 o'clock, is:

- **St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Africa (November 13, 354 - August 28, 430)**
  - He is the first Doctor of the Church and called the Pastoral Doctor. He baptized a young man who later became Saint Augustine.

- **St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (circa 338 - April 4, 397)**
  - Pope St. Gregory the Great, (circa 540 - March 12, 604)
  - He wears the Pope’s tiara that was first known in its present form in 1315. The tiara has three crowns that are symbolic of the Trinity. He holds the Papal Cross, the official symbol of the papacy.

- **St. Jerome (circa 347 - September 30, 420)**
  - He wears a red hat and cape and is credited for a new translation of most of the Old Testament into Latin.

The 16 blue stained glass windows include: four windows with angels in an attitude of adoration; four windows with symbols of the cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude; and eight windows decorated with crosses and vines.

The words of Psalm 117 circle the base of the dome: “Laudate Dominum, Omnes Gentes, Laudate Eum Omnes Populi: Quoniam Confirmate Est Super Nos Misericordia Ejus Et Veritas Domini Manet In Aeternam. Gloria Patri Et Filio Et Spiritui Sancto” (Praise the Lord, all you nations, praise Him all you people. For His mercy is confirmed upon us and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Immediately below this phrase are paintings of the evangelists: (clockwise beginning at one o’clock) St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John, and St. Matthew. The evangelists are decorated amid crosses, vines, leaves, and grapes in a symbolic gesture of their message of the Eucharist.
**Arches**

Within the four arches surrounding the sanctuary are nine Christian symbols—many of which date back to the days of the catacombs.

- **Coat of Arms of the Franciscan Order** - The traditional Latin Cross is displayed above the crossed arms of Christ and St. Francis of Assisi. The cross is empty as a reminder of the resurrection and the hope of eternal life.

- **Cross, Crown of Thorns, and Four Nails** - Symbols of the Passion of Jesus and also used to represent the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. (Stigmata are marks said to have been supernaturally impressed upon certain persons of high religious character in the semblance of the wounds suffered by Christ upon the cross.)

- **Lamp of Wisdom** - This is a symbol of God's wisdom and a reminder that as incense rises to heaven, so do prayers rise to God.

- **Rose** - The rose has been a common Christian symbol since the 1200s. It may be used to represent the Messianic promise, the nativity of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or martyrdom.

- **Alpha, Omega, and Cross** - The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signifying the beginning and the end. “I am Alpha and Omega,” says the Lord God, “the one who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)

- **Daisy** - A late 15th century symbol of the innocence of the Christ Child.

- **Blessed Virgin Mary** - The Latin “Maria” is illustrated in the letters “M” and “R” - the mother of Jesus.

- **Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit)** - It is a single design composed of three joined circles representing eternity, signifying one God in three Persons.

- **Jerusalem Cross** - The Jerusalem Cross was first used as a coat of arms for the Latin kingdom in Jerusalem. During the Crusades, it was referred to as the “Crusaders Cross.” The four small crosses are symbolic of the four Gospels proclaimed to the four corners of the earth, beginning in Jerusalem; the large cross symbolizes Christ.
Stained Glass Windows
The stained glass windows are the work of Emil Frei Art Glass Company, St. Louis, MO. Founded in 1898, they specialize in Munich antique glass-figured style windows. The windows throughout the main level feature elaborate imagery in black, white, and yellow. The upper windows are displayed in a progression, vertically and horizontally. Beginning on the back left wall and moving forward is:

- **Multiplication of the loaves and fishes: a foretelling of the Eucharist** - “One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?’ Jesus said, ‘Have the people recline.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about 5,000 in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining and also as much of the fish as they wanted.” (John 6:8-11)

- **The Last Supper: the institution of the Eucharist** - “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.’ (Matthew 26: 26-28)

- **Christ breaking bread with the disciples at Emmaus: the celebration of the Eucharist** - “Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at the table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.” (Luke 24:13-16, 28-30)

Beginning on the back right wall and moving forward is:
Noah offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving - a covenant from God that the earth will never be destroyed again - "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered holocausts on the altar. When the Lord smelled the sweet odor, he said to himself: 'Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the desires of man's heart are evil from the start; nor will I ever again strike down all living beings, as I have done. I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'" (Genesis 8:20-21; 9:13)

Moses and an Israelite praying for manna - a covenant from God of salvation - "Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion. In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did no know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." (Exodus 16: 4, 13-15)

Moses and an Israelite with the bronze serpent - a covenant from God of salvation and a foreshadowing of the glory of the cross - "But with their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water? We are disgusted with this wretched food!' In punishment the Lord sent among the people seraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of them died. Then the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned in complaining against the Lord and you. Pray the Lord to take the serpents from us.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a seraph and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks at it, he will recover.' Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered." (Numbers 21:4 -9)
These upper windows feature angels whose symbols relate in a pattern across from each other. Beginning in the back left, and moving across the nave:

- The angel on the left holds the Greek letter Alpha while the angel on the right holds the Greek letter Omega – a reference to “I am Alpha and Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)
- The angel on the left holds the manger of Bethlehem (Bethlehem means “house of bread”) while the angel on the right holds a chalice – symbols of the Body born for us that becomes the Body that feeds us.
- The angel on the left holds two keys while the angel on the right holds a crown – symbols of forgiveness and power.

The windows over the entrance honor Mary. From left:

- Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus
- Mary, whose Immaculate Conception brought forth Jesus—the Bread of Life
- Mary crowned as queen of heaven and earth

Beneath this window is a painting of Christ falling beneath the cross – a poignant reminder of how his death opened the gates of heaven to all believers.

Ceiling
On the ceiling are individuals known for their devotion to the Eucharist. They are illustrated within a golden sunburst that is similar in design to the monstrance.

Beginning at the entrance and moving forward are:

- St. Peter Julian Eymard (February 4, 1811—August 1, 1868) was born in LaMure, France and worked at his father’s trade as cutler until he was 18 years old. He then went to the seminary at Grenoble where he was ordained in 1834. After serving several years as a parish priest, he joined the Marists and in 1845 became their provincial at Lyons. He established the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament whose nuns devoted themselves to perpetual adoration.
- St. Charles Borromeo, Bishop of Milan (October 2, 1538—November 3, 1584) who was one of the figures of the Catholic Reformation, was a patron of learning and the arts. He is remembered for bringing the Blessed Sacrament to the sick and dying during a great plague.
- St. Paschal Baylon, a Franciscan Brother and mystic (May 24, 1540—May 17, 1592) who labored as a shepherd, performed miracles, and was distinguished
for his austerity. He also taught himself to read. He had a love of the Blessed Sacrament, so much so that while on a mission to France, he defended the doctrine of the Real Presence against a Calvinist preacher and in the face of threats from other irate Calvinists.

- (Left balcony) - St. Barbara (born in the mid 3rd century and martyred circa 306) was raised a heathen. Her tyrannical father, Dioscorus, had kept her secluded in a tower which he had built for that purpose. Here, in her solitude, she gave herself to prayer and study, and contrived to receive instruction and baptism in secret by a Christian priest. Dioscorus was enraged by her action and by her conversion. He denounced her before the civil tribunal. She was tortured, and at last was beheaded. Her own father, merciless to the last, acted as her executioner. God, however, punished her persecutors. While her soul was being borne by angels to Paradise, a flash of lightning struck Dioscorus. Her message is of being strengthened by the hope of the Eucharist.

- (Right balcony) - St. John (born in the 1st century and martyred circa 90) “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.’” (John 6:35)

**Left Balcony**

The window in the left balcony is devoted to missionary work. The central panel depicts St. Therese of Lisieux (January 2, 1873-September 30, 1879), patroness of the Missions, the Little Flower of Jesus. All the panels depict missionary activities in Asia. At the time of the Chapel’s construction, the Sisters had a number of active missions in China.

This balcony also features two paintings:

- St. Clare of Assisi defending her Sisters from the Saracens through a bold display of the Eucharist.

- The American Province of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis’ Coat of Arms representing the history, traditions, and ideals of the Community. On the left is an eagle crowned with a halo and standing on a book. This figure represents St. John the Evangelist, Patron Saint of the Hospital Sisters’ Motherhouse in America. On the right, the circle with wavy lines represents springs in a field, the figure for Springfield – the foundation
site in the United States. The five stars designate the branch houses of the Community. Even though there were more locations, the number of stars was confined to five in honor of the five wounds or stigmata of St. Francis. Surrounding the shield is the Franciscan cord with its knots representing the holy vows to which each Sister lovingly binds herself: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Beneath the shield is the phrase “Charitas Christi Omnia Vincit” (The charity of Christ conquers all).

**Right Balcony**
The murals and stained glass illustrate the themes of sacrifice and priesthood in both the Old and New Testaments.

- In the window, the left panel pictures Abraham and Melchizedek. Some time after Abraham had lived in Canaan, he learned that his nephew, Lot, who had lived in Sodom, had been taken prisoner and all his goods had been seized in an attack upon that city. Upon hearing this, Abraham armed his followers and pursued the raiders, defeating them and bringing back all the captives and stolen goods. When Abraham returned triumphant, Melchizedek, King of Salem and high priest, came out to meet him bringing bread and wine. The central panel depicts the Blessed Trinity: God the Father is holding the crucified Jesus, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is depicted as a dove. Blood flows from Jesus into a chalice that is embraced and held by two angels. Incense rises to God. The grace of this sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present through the Eucharist, and when Christians receive Holy Communion (Christ’s body and blood), they receive the life of the Blessed Trinity and hope of eternal life. The right panel depicts the sacrifice of Isaac and how Abraham, who is tested by God, would have sacrificed his only son at God’s command.

This balcony also features two paintings:

- St. Francis kneeling in deep gratitude for the great gift of the Eucharist. The mural in the background shows Jesus with his apostles at the Last Supper.

- The Franciscan Coat of Arms – the crossed arms of Christ and St. Francis with the words “Deus Meus Et Omnia” (My God and my All). The traditional Franciscan emblem shows the crossed arms of Jesus and St. Francis representing St. Francis’ faithful and genuine following of Christ’s teachings in his life. The cross, the symbol of the Christian faith, and the sheaves of wheat, a symbol of the Holy Eucharist, represent the central force and dominating love in every Sister’s life.
History

The Sisters began the tradition of Perpetual Adoration (the continual exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament) on August 2, 1930, when Bishop Henry Althoff of Belleville, Illinois, formally exposed the Blessed Sacrament in the St. Francis Convent Chapel in its former Ave Maria Hall. (photo: circa 1930)

On October 4, 1935 (the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi), after the Investiture and Profession Ceremonies of the Sisters, Bishop James Griffin, Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, and Bishop Henry Althoff, accompanied by the clergy, Franciscan Brothers, and many Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, processed from St. Francis of Assisi Church to this new Chapel, chanting the Litany of the Saints. Arriving at the Chapel, Bishop Griffin consecrated the altars and placed relics within each altar. That afternoon Bishop Althoff, accompanied by Monsignors Geuenewald and Straub, Mother Magdalene Wiedlocher, Provincial Superior, and many Sisters, brought the Blessed Sacrament from the original Chapel to this newly dedicated Chapel.

Since 1930, Sisters have prayed before the Blessed Sacrament in Adoration for the needs of the Church, their Franciscan Community, and special intentions that were shared with the Sisters by telephone, mail, or face-to-face. Adoration was 24 hours a day and recently modified to eight hours per day. (photo: circa 1940s)

On December 8, 2006 (the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – the belief that from the moment of her conception, Mary was without sin), the Sisters expanded their Prayer Ministry to include requests from their website in addition to the requests received through traditional means.
Perpetual Adoration Guild

Since August 2, 1930 the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis have prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, offering to God prayers of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving, as well as prayers of petition. Into their prayers go the needs of family, their Community, the Church, and the world. The Sisters welcome prayer requests throughout the year.

A Guild has been formed and donations received are used for upkeep of the Chapel.

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**Hospital Sisters of St. Francis**

The Hospital Sisters of St. Francis is an international, multi-cultural congregation of Franciscan Sisters founded in Telgte, Germany, in 1844. Presently, there are Provinces in Germany, Poland, the USA, and Japan, and a Region in India. The American Province, based in Springfield, Illinois, was founded in November 1875 when 20 Sisters from Germany arrived and established healthcare services in various communities. Currently, the American Province continues its healthcare ministry as a significant provider of Catholic healthcare services throughout Illinois and Wisconsin as the sponsors of Hospital Sisters Health System, a mission in Tanzania, and other healing ministries in the United States and Haiti. In addition, the Sisters sponsor Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach and Chiara Center.

To learn more, please visit the American Province website at hospitalsisters.org.