



Above the tabernacle is the gold-leaf dome with nine of the 33 doctors of the church in stained glass by Judson Studios of Los Angeles.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

The University of Southern California Caruso Catholic Center stands as a religious and architectural landmark. **PART II**

By John Geraghty | Photos by Robert Reid Hepler

If you live in Southern California, or planning a visit to the “City of Angels,” I highly recommend you visit this uniquely inspirational facility for a truly stimulating artistic and moral fervor of creativity.

The Our Savior Parish and USC Caruso Catholic Center, located adjacent to the campus of the University of Southern California, is a newly completed complex spanning 37,000 square feet. It encompasses an Italianate Romanesque-style, single-story, 6,000-square-foot stone chapel and a 14,000-square-foot two-story brick student center, which is synonymous with the architectural design of the university. The student center includes a large multiuse room with ancillary storage and kitchen facilities, two lounges and office spaces. Design treatments throughout the project feature a wide variety of traditional

materials, from rich woods to sparkling stained glass, beautiful marble and varied stone.

The name Caruso associated with the project invokes a high level of respect and credibility. Rick J. Caruso is the president and CEO of Caruso Affiliated Holdings LLC, one of the largest, privately held real estate companies in the United States. He has been recognized by the *Los Angeles Business Journal* as developer of the year. Aside from actively serving on more boards than I can list, Caruso serves on the board of councilors of the University of Southern California, school policy, planning and development.

When Caruso, an alumnus of the university and a practicing Catholic, was approached as a supporter of this project, he not only became the leading benefactor representing his family, he made a commitment to personally be

involved in the project.

Caruso brought to the project Elkus Manfredi Architects, an international architectural design firm from Boston, Massachusetts, which collaborated in several of Caruso’s major development projects.

Caruso’s perception was to erect a center for the 10,000 Catholic students and all other denominations to interact. A church that would evoke the passion of Christ for all and stand the test of time. Caruso stated he, “wanted to create a statement that faith is important, that Catholicism is relevant in your life however you may view Catholicism.” He also stated he wanted the church, which echoes elements of a 13th-century sanctuary, to have “a feeling of permanence and solidity that calms and allows you to contemplate, to pray and think.” Contemporary design, he said, “would not have conveyed that.”

Our Savior Parish bell tower reaching for the heavens.

Life-size bronze of Fray Junípero Serra, founder of the California missions (1713-1784), below the bell tower of Our Savior Parish.





The open beam arched ceilings convey a wide selection of rich woods.

Other supporters hope the complex will become a religious and architectural landmark for the school and neighborhood.

Varun Soni, USC's Dean of Religious Life, said, "I expect the complex to become an important place of faith and activism in a neighborhood that already has an impressive array of Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu institutions. It will be a place for all students to think about their own faith and how that connects to their lives."

The church has an exterior of Italian travertine stone, selected from a 2,500-year-old quarry outside of Rome; the cornerstone for the church was finished then blessed by Pope Benedict.

With a clear theological and pastoral vision as the guiding force, the Liturgical Design Committee actively engaged in the research, planning and procuring of artisans who were creating sculpture, sacred paintings, carvings, glasswork and more, which occupies prominent placement within the church and surround exterior.

As you approach the front of the church over the entrance you will see the tympanum by Jason Arkles, an American sculptor who has become famous in Florence, Italy. In Romanesque architecture the tympanum

constitutes the area between the lintel over the doorway and the arch above. During the 11th century and 12th century in Europe, tympana over church portals were decorated with intricate and stylized relief sculpture. The theme of Our Savior Parish is "Christ in Triumph." Christ and two heavenly angels sculpted in white Carrera marble measure 8 feet in diameter semicircle with a 6-inch bas-relief. Entering the sanctuary the floors and altar are marble and wooden arches reach 50 feet into the ceiling. Arkles also is responsible for two magnificent life-size wooden sculptures; one of Mary, the other of Joseph, located on each side of the altar.

Suspended 25 feet above the altar by steel rods is a 7-foot crucifix by sculptor Christopher Slatoff, known for his ability to capture the physical form with all the depth of human emotions. Slatoff modeled the image of Christ in several stages with revisions ending in a dramatically moving image of Christ saying his last words that is certain to cause reflections among parishioners.

"The facial expression, hands and feet are providing an emotional impact that reaches the visceral impact meaning of life itself," says Elaine Adams, director of American Legacy Fine Arts.

Slatoff states, "For the first time I could feel

some of the pain that Christ felt, as well as the effort that he exerted as I sculpted each muscle and joint in their fight against gravity. I struggled to twist my own body into the pose to feel the strain." Slatoff continued, "It is my hope that everyone will experience the same physical presence of Christ that I experienced in sculpting him."

Throughout Our Savior Parish are 27 magnificent, sacred stained glass artworks created by the renowned Judson Studios of Los Angeles. Eight Beatitude windows, 24 feet tall by 12 feet, representing the supreme blessedness of the declarations made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-11), each sponsored by the families of prominent USC alumni, hold a particularly striking and visually commanding place inside the church and will be a focal point from the exterior vantage points as well. Each of these magnificent windows complement the 14 Stations of the Cross by Peter Adams placed at eye level between the windows.

David Judson is the third-generation owner of Judson Studios, an USC alumnus and great-grandson of the founder of the USC School of Art. Judson has overseen the extensive design details and craftsmanship required to convey the entire spiritual stories and messages in



Suspended 25 feet above the altar is the 7-foot crucifix sculpture by Christopher Slatoff. A masterwork in bronze, the dramatically moving image of Christ saying his last words, the facial expression and the precise detail of the hands and feet, each muscle of the body in their struggle against gravity and pain provides an emotional impact that reaches the meaning of life itself. Mysteriously, when the interior lights are on there are two identical images of the cross upon the upper side walls adjacent to the altar, which could be interpreted as the crosses of the two convicted thieves crucified with Christ.



One of the 14 Stations of the Cross, which are placed at eyelevel between the Our Savior Parish stained glass windows.




Father Lawrence Seyer, pastor of Our Savior Parish. Above the entry doors is the tympanum created by Jason Arkles, an American sculptor who has become famous in Florence, Italy. Christ and two heavenly angels with their trumpets heralding the theme of Our Savior Parish, "Christ is Triumph," in white Carrea marble, 8 feet in diameter semicircle, with a 6-inch base-relief. Arkles is also the artist who created the two life-size wooden sculptures of Mary and Joseph located on each side of the church altar.

stained glass.

Upon leaving the church, inside on each side of the doors, are large Belgium tapestries placed upon the walls designed by John Naza, representing the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

In closing, I would like to provide you with the Mission Statement of this amazing complex: "Our Savior Parish and USC Caruso Catholic Center embraces the University of Southern

California's mission of 'The cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit.' We realize this mission by worshipping in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, fostering fellowship, and promoting social justice and nurturing the spiritual life of students, alumnus, faculty, staff and members of the local community. Through these means, we seek to develop transformative Catholic leaders bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ." 

About John Geraghty

John Geraghty, Trustee and Special Advisor to the Autry National Center's Masters of the American West Fine Art Exhibition and Sale, shares his insights on the Western art scene. Both he and wife Saralynn were afflicted with the incurable passion of collecting Western art.

