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The University of Dayton expects to begin in August a $12 million renovation of the Immaculate Conception Chapel, the symbol of its Catholic identity and the University's heart for generations of students, faculty, staff and their families.

The chapel's iconic cupola, exterior look, historic dimensions and footprint will be largely unchanged. Inside, updates will improve how the chapel functions to allow fuller liturgical participation and will blend with familiar elements to echo the chapel's traditional look.

"We are a Catholic university; we should have a powerful symbolic place and space for God," said the Rev. James Fitz, S.M., vice president for mission and rector. "Since the chapel was built in 1869, it has been adapted to meet changing needs and circumstances. This renovation will preserve the chapel's essential traditions and history and allow us to celebrate Mass in accord with today's liturgical norms."

A significant amount of the fundraising for the project has been completed with a recent anonymous gift of $3 million. With that gift, the University is just $1 million from its $12 million fundraising goal, and expects to meet that goal by March, Fitz said.

Renovation plans have been revised since 2008 when a plan called for an expansion that would nearly double the seating capacity to 500. However, through a new collaboration with Holy Angels Church, the University will be able to use the church, which is located in the heart of the campus on Brown Street, when a larger space is needed.

"The Immaculate Conception Chapel is the spiritual heart of our campus and deserves a thoughtful and unified renovation that respects the chapel's history and meets contemporary liturgical requirements," said Daniel J. Curran, president. "We're very grateful for the gifts of trustees, alumni and friends making it possible for this project to go forward in August."

"We're also very appreciative to Holy Angels Church for our new partnership that strengthens our Catholic education programs and will enable large gatherings of our campus community to worship together."

The goal of the interior design is to unite all of the elements of the chapel into a warm, unified whole that retains essential traditions and history, said Beth Keyes, vice president for facilities. A number of existing elements will be reused and wood finishes, warm colors and simple elegance will evoke the early beauty of the chapel.

The altarpiece with Mary will be positioned to allow better sight lines of the circular window on the east wall. New stained glass windows along the walls of the nave will complement the jewel tones and traditional style of the windows of the saints currently behind the altar.

"The Church has always used art and architecture to raise our hearts and minds to the presence of God in our lives," said Fitz. "The chapel reminds us that we need to set aside a place and a space for God in our daily lives."

Key aspects of the renovation will be:

- Installation of wood pews and kneelers to retain the existing seating capacity, while creating better flow throughout the sanctuary in accordance with liturgical requirements.
- A vestibule for a gathering space with a glass wall just inside the front doors. The 18-foot, wooden entry doors will be refitted to open and close easily and will once again become the main entrance to the chapel.
- A baptismal font will be placed near the entrance, and a small reservation chapel for Eucharistic adoration will be located near the altar.
- A modest addition on the south side will include restrooms, a reconciliation room, support space and a bride's room.
- Universal handicap accessibility will allow those with physical disabilities to have easier access not only to the chapel itself, but also allow fuller participation in the Mass.
- Upgrades to the lighting, HVAC, sound and other mechanical systems will enhance comfort and energy efficiency. The
University of Dayton: During the renovation, the chapel’s Masses will be held in a temporary chapel in Chaminade Hall as well as Holy Angels.

The project will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, emphasizing sustainability in materials and design in order to be environmentally responsible and resource efficient.

The chapel has long been a popular location for alumni weddings, but starting July 28, Masses and weddings will be temporarily discontinued. During the renovation, the chapel's Masses will be held in a temporary chapel in Chaminade Hall as well as Holy Angels. The renovated chapel is expected to be rededicated in August, 2015, when regular use for Masses, weddings and other celebrations will resume.

For information on how to schedule weddings after the renovation, contact Campus Ministry at 937-229-2019. For updates during the renovation, visit udayton.edu/ministry.

Brightman & Mitchell Architects of Dayton, who have worked on many other area church projects such as St. Helen's Church and Ascension Catholic Church, are creating the design. Liturgical consultant Kenneth Griesemer has provided direction on the requirements for space, flow, function and design in accordance with Church documents. Renderings are expected to be available in January.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu.