

St. Matthias R.C. Church

Self-Guided Tour Booklet



58-15 Catalpa Avenue - Ridgewood, NY

Parish History



Rev. Nicholas M. Wagner
Founder and First Pastor of
St. Matthias R.C. Church

On May 2, 1908, Bishop Charles E. McDonnell of the Diocese of Brooklyn, desiring to establish a new Roman Catholic parish for the faithful in the Evergreen and Ridgewood sections of Long Island, appointed Rev. Nicholas M. Wagner as the first Pastor of St. Matthias R.C. Church. Holy Mass was offered within the parish boundaries for the first time on Sunday, August 30, 1908 at a nearby restaurant on the grounds then known as Ridgewood Park, which would today be in the vicinity of Myrtle and Seneca Avenues. The very next week, Father Wagner negotiated the purchase of twenty lots on Elm Avenue (now Catalpa Avenue) from the Meyerose Estate. Ground was broken on the new property the following March 19 for a building that was to house the first Church and School of St. Matthias. The combination building was subsequently developed into what is now St. Matthias School.



At the conclusion of World War I, in the Spring of 1918, ground was broken for a new church building and the first phase, a basement church, was completed in August of 1919. The next few years were spent raising funds for the construction of the current superstructure, and the cornerstone of the current St. Matthias Church building was laid on October 5, 1924.



The intent was to build a church that would accommodate the spiritual needs of the growing parish, and like many churches throughout history, the building was designed to teach the faith through visual story-telling using murals, shrines and stained glass windows to depict various Catholic themes and imagery. Not only educational, it was also intended to offer historic value to future generations. The resulting structure, an Italian Renaissance Revival masterpiece, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2012, and is an important part of the Ridgewood South Historic District of New York City.

In the Year of Our Lord MCMXXIV

On Sunday afternoon, October the fifth

In the Pontificate of Pope Pius XI, and the
Episcopate of Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Molloy, D. D., Bishop of Brooklyn,

Calvin Coolidge, being President of the United States,
Alfred E. Smith, being Governor of the State of New York, and
John F. Hylan, being Mayor of New York City

This Corner-Stone of the Church of St. Matthias

was blessed and placed in position by

Rev. Nicholas M. Wagner, Rector

assisted by his Curates

REV. HENRY HOFMANN and REV. BERNARD RANKER

The Sermon was delivered by Rev. John M. Mulz

FRANCIS J. BERLENBACH, Architect HENRY SCHLACHTER'S SONS, Builders

THE COST OF THE ENTIRE BUILDING IS ABOUT
FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS

Trustees: Florian Menninger and Thomas Grennan,

Thus do we sanctify, with the Blessing of Almighty God, the inauguration of the noble work of erecting a House of God, where God is adored and where the faithful are taught to become glorious citizens of

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN,

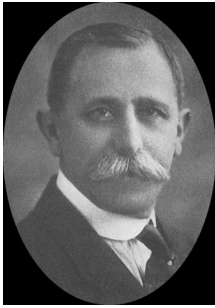
worthy and serviceable citizens of

OUR GLORIOUS COUNTRY,

and upon this our work do we invoke the

Blessing of Almighty God, the
Counsel of His Blessed Mother, the
Protection of St. Joseph, the Protector of the Universal
Church, and the
Aid of our Holy Patron, St. Matthias.

Architecture



Francis J. Berlenbach
Architect

The church building, which is 185 feet in overall length, 104 feet wide at the transept, and boasts a clock and bell tower that rises 150 feet to the top of the cross, is cruciform in plan and was designed by Francis J. Berlenbach of Brooklyn, NY. Mr. Berlenbach was considered an expert in ecclesiastic architecture having designed several churches throughout the Brooklyn Diocese, including St. Finbar, Blessed Sacrament, and St. Aloysius Churches. He also designed our own rectory, convent and the original church and school building. One of his first designs, a Queen Anne-style home located at 174 Meserole Street in Brooklyn, which was built and owned by his father, is also a NYC Landmark.

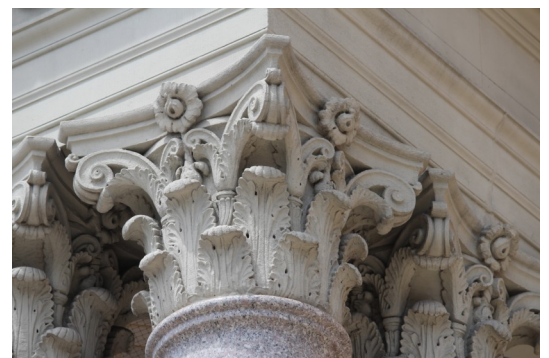


The scheme of our church was based on the Church of St. Matthias, or Matthiaskirche, near Treves, Germany which, although embodying various styles of architecture, is chiefly a Renaissance design. The traits of Renaissance Style—rounded arches, Corinthian columns and pilasters, and classical pediments—can be identified throughout both the interior and exterior of our church. These elements were used by the architect to call to mind the church architecture of 16th century Italy. This style was very popular in the United States during the early 20th Century.

Similar to our namesake, the church is not *purely* Renaissance however, and is therefore considered a revival. The extensive use of marble in the sanctuary and gold leaf throughout the church is

evidence of a baroque influence that was very popular in Germany and Austria in the 17th Century.

Much of what appears to be marble outside of the sanctuary, including the large Corinthian columns separating the nave and the side aisles, as well as the wainscoting on the side walls, is actually an imitation marble utilizing a technique called Scagliola, which was developed in Italy in the 17th century and was very popular in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Stained Glass Windows

The stained glass windows gracing our church were created to be instructive, like everything else connected with our church. In ancient churches, stained glass windows were the first public 'picture books' of the Bible, visually telling stories about God, spirituality, mortality and humanity. Our stained glass windows were made by Franz Mayer Studios in Munich, Bavaria.

S1-3



Shrine Windows

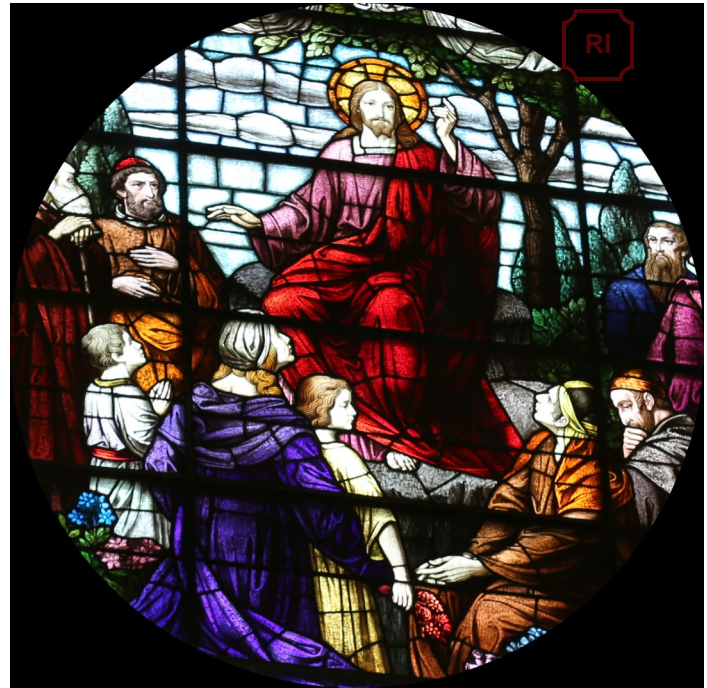
The four shrines contain windows showing pictures of members of the various Religious Orders that were predominant in the Diocese of Brooklyn at the turn of the century. The founders of the parish hoped that these might foster religious vocations.

- S1—St. Benedict: founder of the Benedictine Order
- S2—St. Dominic: founder of the Dominican Order
- S3—St. Francis of Assisi: founder of the Franciscan Order
- S4—St. Ignatius: founder of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit Order
- S5—St. Clement Hofbauer: member of the Redemptorist Order
- S6—St. Paul of the Cross: founder of the Passionist Order
- S7—St. Rose of Lima: member of the Dominican Order
- S8—Apparition of our Blessed Lady to Mother Alix le Clere: foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame
- S9—St. Angela Merici: founder of the Ursuline Order
- S10—St. Teresa, the Little Flower of Jesus: member of the Carmelite Order
- S11—St. Margaret Mary: member of the Visitation Order
- S12—St. Clare: first member of the Franciscan Second Order, foundress of Poor Clares

Vestibule Windows

The vestibule of the main entrance is lined by eight windows depicting angels holding scrolls containing the Beatitudes as stated in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

- V1—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;
- V2—Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land;
- V3—Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;
- V4—Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill;
- V5—Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;
- V6—Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God;
- V7—Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God;
- V8—Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



Rose Windows in Transept

- R1—The Sermon on the Mount
- R2—Election of St. Matthias

Side Aisle Windows

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- M1—To feed the hungry.
 - St. Elizabeth of Hungary
 - Abraham entertained the three men.
- M2—To give drink to the thirsty.
 - St. Peter Claver
 - Rebecca drew water for Eleazer.
- M3—To clothe the naked.
 - St. Martin gave half of his cloak to a beggar.
 - Tabitha at Joppe made garments for destitute widows.
- M4—To harbor the stranger.
 - St. Charles of Borromaeus
 - Martha and Mary receive our Lord in their house.
- M5—To ransom innocent captives.
 - St. Luis, Dominican
 - St. Paul rescued in Damascus out of prison.
- M6—To visit the sick.
 - St. Vincent de Paul
 - Good Samaritan and wounded Jew.
- M7—
 - Mary Magdalene.
 - Power to forgive sin.
- M8—To bury the dead.
 - St. Odilo of Cluny.
 - Tobias burying the dead.



Apse Windows

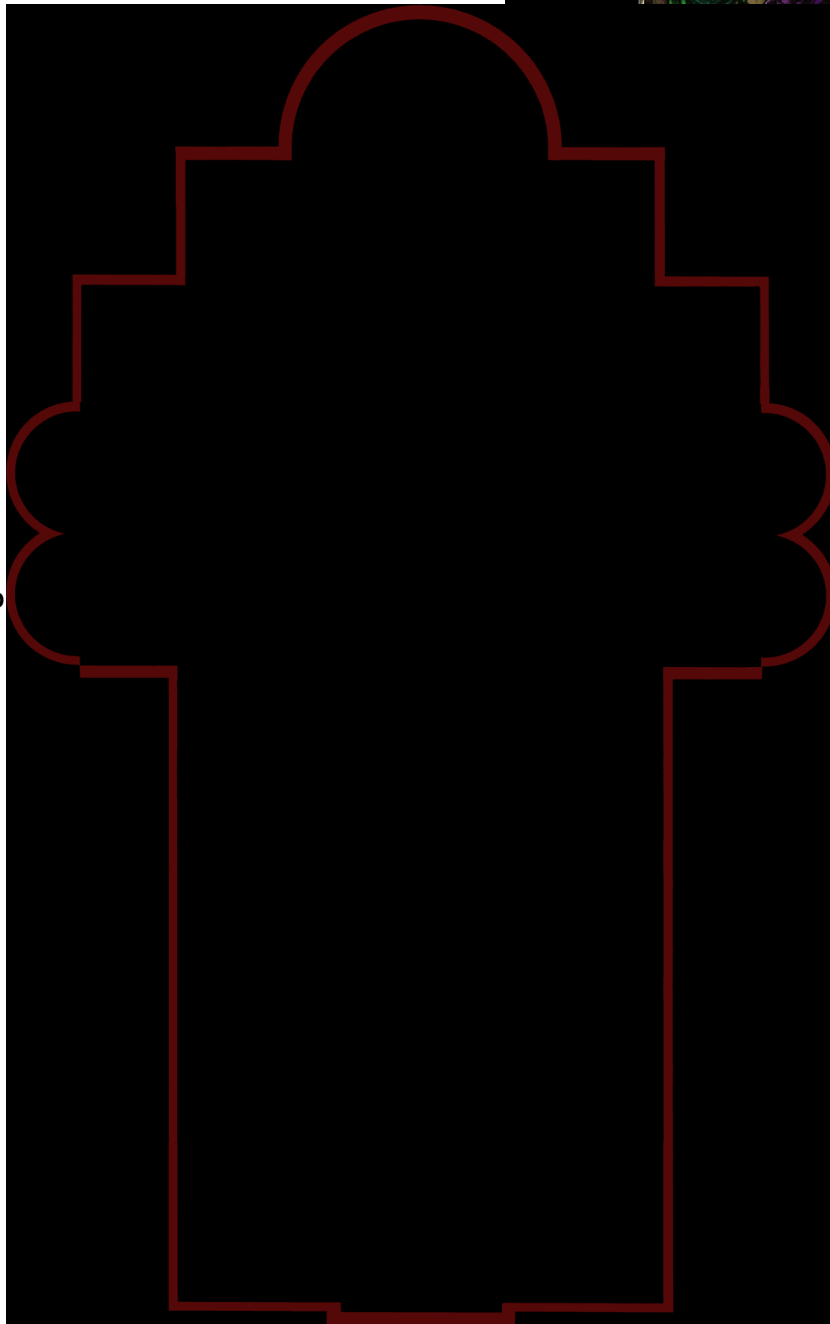
The windows in the apse symbolize Holy Communion

- A1—The Manna in the Desert
- A2—First Communion
- A3—The Last Supper
- A4—The Viaticum
- A5—The Multiplication of Loaves

A3



A3



Side Aisle Windows

The side aisle windows remind us of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; below a scriptural scene which refers to a spiritual or corporal work of mercy and above a scene from the life of a Saint, which refers to that respective work of mercy. Above the two confessionals are scenes reminding us of the sacrament of Penance.

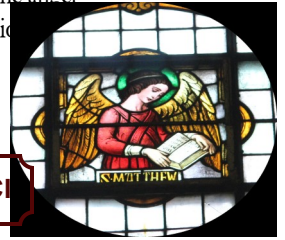
Clerestory Windows

The clerestory windows, those which rise above the roofs of other buildings, serve two practical functions: allowing light and fresh air to come into the church building. The windows can only be opened manually by climbing outside onto the catwalk.

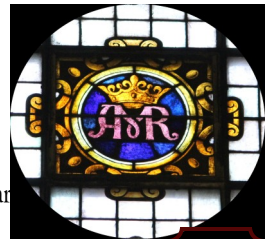
The windows in the sanctuary contain images of the evangelists.

The other windows contain emblems referring to the invocations of our Blessed Mother in the Litany of Loreto.

- C1—St. Matthew and his symbol, the angel
- C2—St. Mark and his symbol, the lion
- C3—Mother Most Pure (lily)
- C4—Two hands joined in prayer
- C5—Morning Star
- C6—Tower of Ivory
- C7—Mirror of Justice
- C8—Tower of David
- C9—Vessel of Honor
- C10—Fountain of Grace
- C11—Gate of Heaven
- C12—Ark of the Covenant
- C13—Mystical Rose
- C14—Queen of the Most Holy Rosary
- C15—Seat of Wisdom
- C16—Cross
- C17—Monstrance
- C18—Name of Mary and Crown
- C19—St. Luke and his symbol, the ox
- C20—St. John and his symbol, the eagle
- C21—St. Cecilia, Patroness of Church Music (over choir loft)



C18



C18

Side Aisle Windows

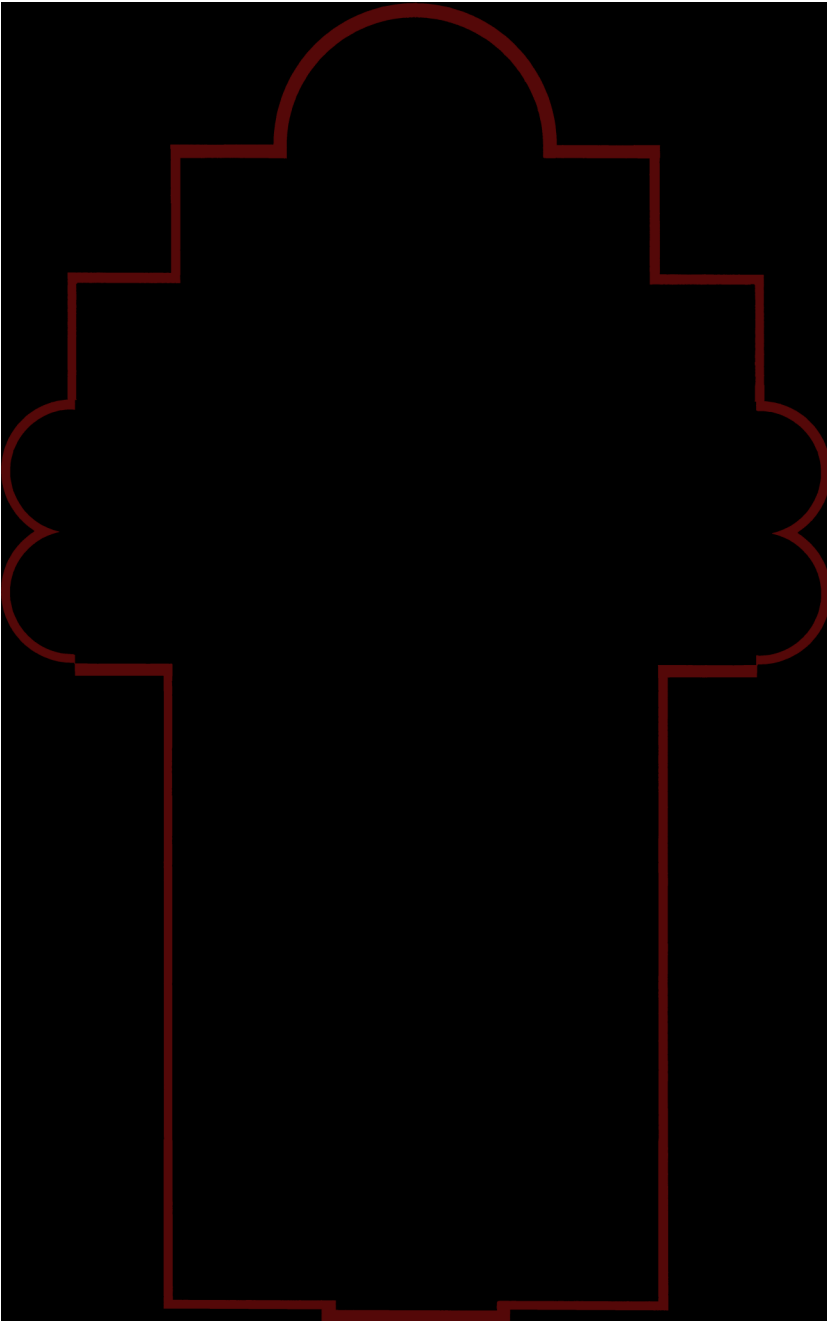
Corporal Works of Mercy

- M9—To instruct the ignorant.
St. Boniface
Joseph gave good advice to Pharaoh.
- M10—To counsel the doubtful.
St. Patrick
Christ and the rich youth.
- M11—To admonish sinners.
Godfrey, the Crusader
Jonas preached penance to Ninivites.
- M12—To bear wrongs patiently.
St. Apollonia
David bore Semei's abuse patiently.
- M13—To forgive injuries.
SS. Henry and Cunigunda
Joseph and his brethren.
- M14—To comfort the afflicted.
St. Teresa, the Little Flower of Jesus.
Our Lord and the Widow of Niam
- M15— Jesus the Good Shepherd
The Prodigal Son
- M16—To pray for the living and the dead.
St. Catherine of Sienna
Moses prays for the people.

Murals & Statuary

The frescoes in our church are done in the “secco style”, in which the paint is applied to dry plaster using an organic medium such as egg to act as a binder for the pigment to form a crust on the smooth plaster. While most of the painted decorations are done in fresco, several of the paintings, including the Ten Commandments, were done on canvas and then installed in place.

B5



Apse Paintings

There are small medallion paintings over the doors in the sanctuary, on one side is a painting of a fish and bread, and on the other side, a ship—all symbols of Christ and the Eucharist. Over those, there are paintings of angels holding the instruments of Christ's Passion, also known as the Arma Christi.

- A1—Whip
- A2—Title of the Cross
- A3—Nails
- A4—Crown of Thorns
- A5—Pillar of Scourging
- A6—Ladder
- A7—Holy Sponge
- A8—Veronica's Veil
- A9—Holy Lance
- A10—Hammer



A1-2

Ceiling Fresco

- B1—Presentation of St. Matthias Church
- B2—St. Bonaventure
- B3—St. Thomas Aquinas
- B4—St. Alphonsus Liguori
- B5—St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Ten Commandments

- C1—Thou shalt not have other gods besides Me
- C2—Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain
- C3—Remember to keep holy the Lord's day
- C4—Honor thy father and thy mother
- C5—Thou shalt not kill
- C6—Thou shalt not commit adultery
- C7—Thou shalt not steal
- C8—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor
- C9—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife
- C10—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods

Doctors of the Church

Between the arches above the columns of the nave and transepts are medallion portraits of the Doctors of the Church. "Doctor of the Church" is a title given to a certain saint, whose writing or preaching is outstanding in guiding the faithful. Each individual is known for both great sanctity and eminent learning. Each particular portrait is surrounded by a wreath, and the name of the saint is inscribed in the halo around the head.

- D1—St. Cyril of Alexandria (Cyrillus)
- D2—St. Anselm
- D3—St. Ambrose (Ambrosius)
- D4—St. Jerome (Hieronymus)
- D5—St. Augustine
- D6—St. Gregory the Great
- D7—St. John Chrysostom
- D8—St. Athanasius
- D9—St. Gregory of Nazianzen
- D10—St. Basil the Great (Basilus)
- D11—St. Bede the Venerable
- D12—St. Leo the Great

Fourteen Holy Helpers

These are a group of 14 holy Saints that are in the German tradition venerated together. Their images are gathered around the two great transept windows.

- H1—St. Agathius (Acacius)
- H2—St. Vitus
- H3—St. Giles (Aegidius)
- H4—St. Erasmus (Elmo)
- H5—St. George (Georgius)
- H6—St. Cyriacus
- H7—St. Denis (Dionysius)
- H8—St. Margaret of Antioch
- H9—St. Eustace (Eustachius)
- H10—St. Christopher (Christophorus)
- H11—St. Barbara
- H12—St. Blaise (Blasius)
- H13—St. Catherina of Alexandria
- H14—St. Pantaleon



Statuary

- S1—St. Matthias
- S2—Pieta
- S3—St. Anthony of Padua
- S4—Christ and the Children
- S5—St. Joseph and the Christ Child
- S6—Sacred Heart
- S7—Blessed Virgin Mary



Through the Years



Over the years, several changes to the interior of the church have occurred. In 1953, a new marble pulpit was installed to match the altar rail, and then in 1957, the altar rail was moved down and forward to accommodate the people in receiving Holy Communion. In 1963, the original plaster shrine statues were replaced with the current marble statues which are all replicas of masterpieces, and in 1966, in keeping with new liturgical norms after the Second Vatican Council, the baptistery in the rear of the church was closed with the font moving into the sanctuary area, and the tabernacle was moved to the side altar which originally contained our statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



In 1983, as a celebration of the parish's 75th Anniversary, the interior was completely renovated with a somewhat brighter color scheme. Murals were cleaned and restored, windows were repaired, the Stations of the Cross were restored, several pews were removed to provide a break in the aisles and the original Odell organ was replaced by our current Casavant-Freres organ. More recently, in 2001 to conform with current liturgical practices, the Baptismal font was relocated yet again as it was retrofit into the current baptismal pool, located in the nave of the church.

