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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Basilica of Saint Mary Celebrates its Centennial

America's first Basilica reflects on 100 years of history while looking ahead to a strong future

MINNEAPOLIS - The Basilica of Saint Mary has brought generations of Minnesotans together since the early 1900s. In August, the church celebrates the 100th anniversary of its current building and invites the community to help commemorate its centennial with a series of special activities throughout the next year.

"This truly is a milestone for our church and we're looking forward to celebrating the occasion with what makes The Basilica great - the parishioners and community," said Johan van Parys, Ph.D., Director of Liturgy and Sacred Arts. "Many years ago we were the first basilica church in America and today we are still a one-of-a-kind church in so many ways."

To kick off the centennial celebration, The Basilica of Saint Mary will host a weekend of parish and community events on August 25-26, including the commemoration of the ground-breaking, a parish picnic on the church lawn and the unveiling of a new logo. The Basilica of Saint Mary has also invited alumni from The Basilica School - which operated from 1913 to 1974 - to the All Basilica School Reunion.

The Basilica of Saint Mary will continue the celebration throughout the year with a variety of centennial festivities, including the St. Francis Festival in October with the Blessing of the Animals, the Patron Feast Festivities in December, as well as the Basilica Marriage Reunion in February where couples can celebrate the happiest day of their lives all over again.

Closing events in May of 2008 will include a solemn liturgy, a firework celebration at The Basilica, a Sunday brunch and a commemorative placing of the corner stone to close the centennial celebration. The church will also host the elegant Masqueray ball - named for The Basilica's French architect - on Saturday, May 31.

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History of the Basilica of Saint Mary

Along with 100 years of existence, the centennial will also celebrate The Basilica's rich history and strong Minneapolis roots. Originally named the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Mary, The Basilica earned its designation in 1926 by Pope Pius XI, thus making The Basilica of Saint Mary America's first basilica.

Construction of The Basilica was no small feat. From the ground-breaking ceremony to the first Mass on May 31, 1914, the exterior of the Basilica took almost seven years to complete. The interior was not completed until the mid 1920s and the solemn consecration was held in 1941. Subsequent restorations have assured the continued existence of the building while renovations have adapted the building to the needs of each generation that has made use of the building.

Once finished, the time and resources needed to build The Basilica of Saint Mary resulted in one of Minneapolis' most recognized and noted structures. Built using primarily concrete, steel, [Mankato limestone](#) and capped with a bronze dome, the massive basilica reaches 187 feet into the sky and covers 33,360 square feet.

Inside the sanctuary, more than 1,200 people can be seated - in fact, more than 100,000 people from 470 different zip codes visit the church annually. One of the most prevalent images visitors will encounter are angels, which even outnumber depictions of Mary. Although the actual number is unknown, estimates put the number of angels at several thousand.

Each year, hundreds of people also choose the church to have their special events. In fact, in an average year, the Basilica of Saint Mary holds more than 100 weddings and baptizes more than 200 babies.

"We invite everyone to help us celebrate this centennial milestone," Johan van Parys said.

For more information on the Basilica of Saint Mary, the centennial events or if you have any other questions, please visit the basilica Web site at www.mary.org or call 612.333.1381.