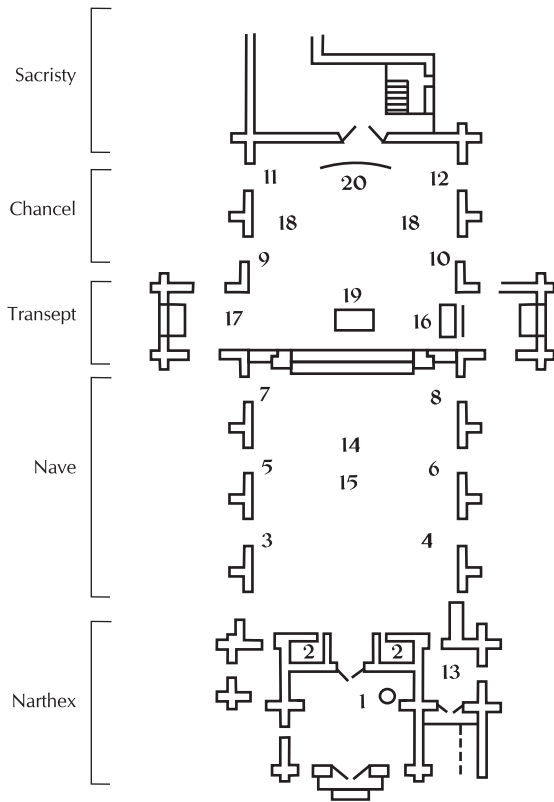
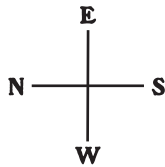


FLOORPLAN



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|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Baptismal Font | 10. Saint Gregory window | 17. Blessed Sacrament Chapel |
| 2. Confessionals | 11. Saint Maurus window | 18. Monks' choir stalls |
| 3. Saint Gertrude window | 12. Saint Placid window | 19. Main Altar with "Risen Christ" (above) |
| 4. Saint Walburga window | 13. Bell Tower | 20. Statue of Mary, Help of Christians (above) and Coat-of-Arms of the Abbey Basilica (mounted above chair) |
| 5. Saint Boniface window | 14. Consecration Crosses on walls around whole church | |
| 6. Saint Patrick window | 15. Stations of the Cross on walls around the nave | |
| 7. Saint Bernard window | 16. Console for the Zimmer Pipe Organ | |
| 8. Saint Anselm window | | |
| 9. Saint Leo window | | |

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Abbey Basilica of Maryhelp



Belmont Abbey
Belmont, North Carolina

The **Abbey Basilica of Maryhelp**, under the patronage of Mary Help of Christians, is the central figure in the composition of Belmont Abbey and of the Belmont Abbey Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. It is axial in both design and function.

Belmont Abbey is a monastery of Roman Catholic, Benedictine monks, founded in 1876. The Abbey follows the tradition of Saint Benedict of Nursia, who initiated Benedictine monasticism in the sixth century. Primarily, the Abbey Basilica is an oratory, a house of prayer. It oversees no parish. Benedictines punctuate their day with the Divine Office, liturgies of Psalmody and Scripture. The Monks call this "*opus dei*," the "work of God." *Opus dei* invests the church with a pivotal role in daily life.

The Abbey Basilica is also the spiritual stay for Belmont Abbey College, for generations of school alumni, and for area Catholics. The basilica has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973. It held cathedral rank until 1977.

Construction

A small, frame chapel served the monastery from 1877 until 1893. Ground was broken for the present church on 21 March 1892. The cornerstone was laid on 4 May. The new basilica was positioned at the

forefront of the central campus, framed on three sides by the senior buildings of the monastery and its college. A cloister

courtyard on the south and open lawn on the north completed the setting. Peter Dederichs (1856-1924), a Detroit architect, designed the church. The building is Gothic Revival, forming a Latin cross, eight bays by two. The narrow width eliminates the need for interior vaulting. The slate roof is steeply pitched, with ornament in wood and metal. The west facade is dominated by two towers, one of one hundred fifty feet, the other of one hundred. The towers serve no structural purpose.



The greater tower houses three bells: "Saint Mary," 1,500 pounds; "Saint Walburga," 700; and "Saint George," 400. The lesser tower is silent.

The bricks were made on the property by Lentz and McKnight, a local firm of artisans. Monks supplied much of the construction labor, working under the direction of J.H. Thore, a Charlotte contractor. Brother Gilbert Koberzynski, O.S.B., formerly a boatwright,



crafted the ceiling in the style of a sailing vessel. The contribution of monastic labor, and the presence of wood, stone, and brick clay on the property kept costs low. Construction cost only \$60,000.

Belmont's first abbot, Abbot-Bishop Leo Haid, O.S.B., opened the church with the Mass of Gaudete Sunday on 17 December 1893. On 11 April 1894, the church was blessed by James Cardinal Gibbons.

The exterior of the basilica today has changed little from Dederichs' design. The tower clock was added in 1909 (then revised in 1968 and 1989). The narthex was added in 1964, using brick from the monastery's bakery building. At that time, the granite arch that surmounts the entrance was moved forward to frame the new doors. The ramp for access by the handicapped was added in 1981. A statio corridor was appended and the sacristy enlarged in 1997.

The interior of the church was generously ornamented by the early monks. A variety of tastes was in evidence. Those first appointments served for seventy years, being altered only by new Stations of the Cross (1896), frescoes (1897), and the addition of the monks' choir stalls to the sanctuary (1943).

In 1964, however, the monks commissioned the architect Fredrich H. Schmitt to execute a radical renovation of the interior of the Abbey Cathedral. The present condition reflects Schmitt's vision.

the Narthex

The narthex is an austere baptistry and antechamber for the church. It is dominated by the massive block of granite, now hewed for use as a baptismal font. Tradition identifies the stone as a Native American altar later employed as a slave block. The brass legend explains the present use: "Upon this rock, men once were sold into slavery. Now upon this rock, through the waters of Baptism, men become free children of God."

Behind the font is a fountain, suggesting the waters of life. Its metalwork is by Armondo del Cimmuto. For the Holy Oils, a cabinet sits in the wall, right of the font. At most times of the year, the Paschal Candle stands in the baptistry.

The windows are American-made, executed in 1964. The saints depicted are of monastic interest. The shield over the main entrance shows the original bearings of the monastery. Prior to 1910, the abbot also used this design for his personal arms. The motto of the abbey is "*crescat*," meaning "let it grow." This window is from 1893.



Interior Design

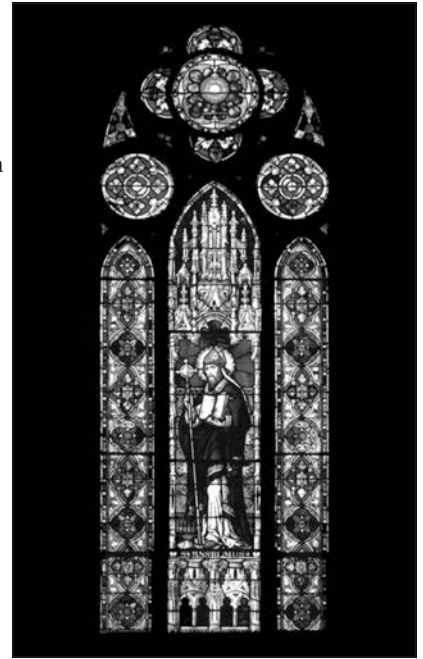
In the interior of the basilica, Schmitt aligns the undissembling expression of natural surfaces with the rich color and ornament of the windows. The ceiling is cedar; the pews and choir stalls are of oak with an olive stain. The floor is undyed flagstone, highly polished, then waxed. The altars and ambos are cut of Georgia marble. The brick walls were imposed as part of the renovation.

the Windows

The nave and chancel of the basilica draw mood and color from ten extraordinary windows from the Royal Bavarian Establishment of Francis Mayer and Company in Munich. They are designed as gothic arches measuring eighteen feet by five.

Mayer included these windows in his display at the Columbian Exhibition, the World's Fair of 1892. The entry took four gold medals. After the Exhibition, the windows were dismantled, then shipped to North Carolina. They were sold to Belmont for \$280 each.

Each light shows a single saint. Walburga is the secondary patroness of Belmont Abbey; Gertrude is a late thirteenth century nun and writer; Patrick honors the Irish lineage of local Catholics, while Boniface marks the German origins of the early



monks; Anselm is patron of Benedictine schools; Bernard represents the contemplative vocation; Gregory wrote the first life of Saint Benedict; Leo is depicted here in a window copied from Mayer's design for the Vatican; Maurus and Placid were disciples of Saint Benedict.

The windows are not stained. They are portraits painted on glass. Heat was used to affix the pigment to the surface of the windows. The work of different artists is evident.

The tracery window over the organ pipes and the two gothic windows of simpler design were obscured by the loft until the 1964 renovation.

the Nave

The fourteen, bas-relief scenes that encircle the nave of the church are the **Stations of the Cross**. These depict events from the final hours of the life of the Lord. The sequence starts by the Saint Anselm window, then continues clockwise. The Stations were executed in 1896 by Francis Mayer.

The twelve, small, stone blocks that are positioned at intervals along the walls are the **Consecration Crosses**. These indicate that the Abbey Basilica has received the most solemn form of blessing: it has been consecrated. Each of the crosses is designed to hold a candle. Properly used, candles will only be lit there on the anniversary of the consecration (28 March) and the feast of the patroness (24 May).

The chambers at either side of the main entrance are **confessionals**. There is one of traditional design and one where the use of the screen is optional.

Music

The acoustics of the Abbey Basilica are lively and responsive. Wilhelm Zimmer and Sons constructed the pipe organ in 1964-1965. Zimmer preserved aspects of the Felgemaker instrument of 1894 and the Moller revision of 1946. The present organ has thirty-four ranks, four divisions, and about 2,424 pipes. It sounds in both the choir and gallery. Berj Zamkochian gave the dedicatory recital on 6 May 1965.

the Madonna

The statue high on the east wall is of **Mary as "Help of Christians"**. Under that title, Our Lady is titular and patroness of the monastery and the Abbey Basilica.

This statue first stood in the monastery chapel of 1877. She was positioned atop the high altar when the present basilica was



opened. In the renovated basilica, her anamorphic design is complimented by her position at the highest place, a symbol of her protection and intercession.

the Sanctuary

Over the main altar, hangs del Cimmuto's "Risen Christ." The corona was specially designed for this space. The altar is fixed and free-standing. It is positioned to allow Mass to face the nave or the choir, depending upon the size of the congregation.

The three rows of seats on both sides of the chancel are the monastic choir stalls. Here the monks recite the Divine Office, praying the Psalms and Canticles antiphonally. The basilica's coat-of-arms stands over the abbatial throne.

the transepts

The south transept, behind the organ console, features the Marian Rose Window by Frances Mayer and Company. The side windows were crafted in 1893 by Schneider of Ratisbon, Bavaria. They depict a Guardian Angel and the Archangel Saint Michael. These subjects were selected in tribute to the patronage of the holy angels. The del Cimmuto metalwork over the altar honors Saint Scholastica, the sister of Saint Benedict.

The north transept serves as a Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. Here the Holy Eucharist reposes in the altar tabernacle. The sanctuary lamp, another del Cimmuto design, is placed at the outside corner of the Chapel to indicate the presence of the Sacrament.

The two Schneider windows show Saint John the Baptist and Martin of Tours. At his monastery, Saint Benedict built chapels in their honor. The "J" in the Rose window by Mayer denotes Saint Joseph.

Two del Cimmuto metalworks hang over the altar. At right is Saint Benedict, pictured holding his monastic *Rule* in one hand and staff in the other. The crucifix, hanging left, places three traditional figures from Benedict's life near the base: the raven, the broken goblet, and three stones over a spring of water.

Visitors

The Abbey Basilica is open throughout the day for prayer and meditation. Visitors are always welcome. The monks ask only that decorum, quiet, and reverence of the church be maintained.

Attendance is also welcome at the Mass and Divine Office. A schedule is provided in the narthex.

— Father Paschal Baumstein, O.S.B.