

“FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS” THE CATHEDRAL BELL TOWERS

Once, we were king! Well, in a manner of speaking anyway. For a glorious sixteen-year period, the Cathedral of Saint Paul was literally and figuratively the biggest show in town, the king of the hill, the cat’s meow. The Cathedral was in fact the **tallest building in Saint Paul** from 1915 to 1931, when the First National Bank building opened. We are still one foot taller than Ecolab! The commanding site Archbishop Ireland chose sitting on the edge of a bluff then called St. Anthony Hill. He hired French architect Emmanuel Masqueray (1861–1917). Together they conceived a building with a grandeur rivaled only by Cass Gilbert’s state capitol, completed in 1906. But as is well known, the fact that the Cathedral surpassed the State Capitol in height was not well-received by many people at the time.

My nifty Elevation app on my iPad indicates that the **ground elevation** at the Cathedral is approximately **910 ft. above sea level**, while at the State Capitol it is 885 ft. So, right away, the height difference of 25 feet is noticeable. By contrast, the Church of Saint Agnes is located 871 feet above sea level. So, when viewed against the skyline, the Saint Agnes bell tower certainly **appears to be taller** than the Cathedral dome, but in reality, it is an illusion. However, if one measure the height at the point of the actual bell, and not the tower or spire above it, then we have a different story. I will try to report on those details next week.

The **bell tower at Saint Agnes is 205 feet** tall, with an additional 14 ft. occupied by the Cross atop the tower. This makes the complete height **219 feet**, a full nine feet taller than **Assumption Church** in downtown. To dispel all doubt, office personnel at Assumption in St. Paul confirmed the height of their bell towers. They are **201 feet tall** (including the Cross at the top). The same website that added the height of the Saint Agnes cross to the height of the tower (rather than seeing the tower height as inclusive of the cross) did the same to Assumption. So, the Saint Agnes bell tower retains its spot as the tallest bell tower in the city. Whew, now I can finally sleep at night!

As best as I can tell, the Bell Towers at Cathedral are an impressive **166 feet high** from ground to top finial, with the actual space for the bells themselves at least 110 feet above ground level. In some churches (such as Saint Agnes), the remainder of the tower includes a spire that extends far above the actual bells. Here, the tallest point of our church is at the dome, not the bell tower as is more typical. Still, our bell tower is still dwarfed by towers in other parts of the world. The bell tower at St. Peter’s Basilica sports a nine-ton bell, though even that one is dwarfed by St. Paul’s in London, which boasts a 17 1/2-ton bell. Our Cathedral is **152nd tallest Church in the world**, and likely the sixth largest church building in the country, behind St. John the Divine (episcopal), our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City and the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C.

Mind you, the term “largest” is at best a vague term, which is often not qualified by claimants. Accepted measures of largeness could include area, volume, length, width, height, and/or capacity, although even the last is far more subjective. Our own literature says that the seating capacity is 3000, and perhaps we have “grown” as people in a century, but there is no way that we can house 3000 today. With respect to height, this is a much easier measurement to compare. Our Cathedral spire tops out at **306.5 feet tall** making it the **fourth tallest church in United States**, behind the Riverside Church (New York City), Saint Patrick’s Cathedral (New York City), and the Basilica National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (Washington D.C.). From the middle ages until the advent of the skyscraper, churches were the tallest buildings in cities and towns all throughout Europe, which speaks volumes about the esteem in which the Church was held in society during that era of history.

- Please pray for the Catholic Church in the Philippines. The highest government officials there are openly antithetical to the Catholic Church. President Duterte in the Philippines has consistently mocked the church, and recently blasphemed God, going so far as to call Him “stupid”. The comment was in relation to the story of the creation of Adam and Eve. The president said rhetorically to God: “You created something perfect and then you think of an event that would tempt and destroy the quality of your

work,” he said. Lord, have mercy!

- I look forward to this Wednesday evening’s opportunity to visit with the cathedral young adults. This week I will be **“grilled” and asked questions** in a very open forum. I’m very tempted to fire right back and ask the young adults some pointed questions as well! I know that I need to do a better job of understanding their culture and worldview, so I think it should be interesting!
- The pope recently spoke to a group of competitive swimmers in a private audience. He spoke positively about athletics: “Swimming, like any other sporting activity, if practiced with loyalty, becomes an opportunity for the formation of human and social values, to strengthen along with the body also the character and will, to learn to know oneself and accept oneself, among companions.” May I humbly request of the pope a few prayers for the Minnesota Twins? Yikes, it has been a disappointing season!
- Happy 175th anniversary! In 1832, U.S. Indian Agent **Henry R. Schoolcraft** led an expedition to the source of the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Unlike most men in the world, the main reason he succeeded is that he asked for help! Under the guidance of a native guide named Ozaawindib, the party eventually make their way to a glacial lake roughly shaped as an upside down “Y,” arriving on July 13, 1832. He published an account of the expedition, *Narrative of an Expedition Through the Upper Mississippi to Itasca Lake*.
- Did you know how **Lake Itasca** was named? When Schoolcraft realized he had found the true headwaters of the Mississippi, he took parts of two Latin words- truth (**veritas**) and head (**caput**) to come up with Itasca. French traders had previously dubbed Lac Le Biche or Elk Lake. Bravo, Henry, bravo!
- Having hosted our **final Confirmation Mass of the season** last weekend, we now enter a slightly quieter period in Church– whew! Many thanks to all who assisted with our numerous ceremonies. It really takes a team effort to coordinate and execute liturgies in such a way that people feel welcomed and served at the same time.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector