

A St. Paul ediface for the ages: Pioneer Press editorial

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Whatever our beliefs, the Cathedral of St. Paul is in some way or another ours.

Graceful and imposing, the structure has been an orienting presence on the landscape, drawing locals and tourists of all faiths to its doors, for a century.

A yearlong centennial celebration included Sunday's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the first Mass celebrated under the dome of the beloved "cathedral on the hill" -- one of the so-called seven hills of the Saintly City.

On the hill -- also known as St. Anthony Hill -- "there's no better site to put a monumental structure," Twin Cities architecture expert Larry Millett said in a recent edition of the *Catholic Spirit*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. "The cathedral is much more visible in St. Paul than the Capitol."

It was "designed as a monumental, muscular display of faith," said Millett, also a former Pioneer Press reporter.

And so it remains.

"A great, a noble edifice it is -- this Cathedral of St. Paul, regal in the hilltop chosen as its throne, regal in the sparkling granite of its towering walls, regal in vast proportions and in elegance of architectural lines, regal in the grandeur of its peerless dome," Archbishop John Ireland, the visionary cleric who oversaw its construction, said in his first homily delivered in the structure. (An audio rendition of his Palm Sunday, 1915, remarks, read by Cathedral parishioner Patrick Conley, is at

http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci_27796199/cathedral-st-paul-reading-john-irelands-first-homily?source=pkg

Ireland told Catholics of the then-Diocese of St. Paul, "It is your cathedral. You built it; you paid for it; it is yours. Fondly rest your eyes upon it; caress it with tender touch; it is your home, purchased with the fruits of your toil, of your Christian self-denial."

The cathedral took nine years and \$1.6 million (about \$40 million today) to build, and the debt was paid in full the week after the opening Mass, reporter Tad Vezner noted in Pioneer Press coverage.

Under Archbishop John Neinstedt, the building has become an international symbol of St. Paul as Red Bull Crashed Ice events are broadcast around the world.

The archbishop recalled in a Catholic Spirit column last month that, as the ice track was being set up in 2011, he received an angry letter of complaint about the event disrespecting this sacred space.

"I wrote back to say that the cathedrals of Europe often use their plazas for markets, parades, even bull fights," he said, noting that the event "was hardly an anomaly when one consulted the tradition of the church and her history. Here we were permitting a secular event to use the space in front of the cathedral as a way of showing that the church was concerned about the whole person, soul and body."

What is more, he wrote, "the cathedral is a part of a community, a community that is made up of both believers and non-believers. Our allowance for the event on the cathedral grounds makes it clear that we are a part of the neighborhood and part of the common good that is our political community."

In this centennial year, we indeed are appreciative of this extraordinary, monumental member of our community. Information on the celebration is at cathedralsaintpaul.org/centennial.