

The Chapel of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Generalate Chapel: Dedicated to Mary, Mother of the Church

“The History of the Construction of the Generalate, 1961-1966.” (No author given)

Generalate Archives of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

In November, the architect, engineer, sculptor, and Sisters Mary Kunihild (Poehnlein) and Mary Rebecca (Omeis) visited the laboratories of A. Pierotti & C. in Pietrasanta. We wished to assure ourselves work was being accomplished. All looked well. There was a tinge of uneasiness when no Breccia Aurora (model) could be seen. This would be the first to be needed. The optimistic architect and firm assured us it would be in Rome when needed. We had misgivings and stressed the deadline.

Visits had been made to the sculptor and the artist. We were not mistaken in our impressions on the first visit. We had to refuse what he suggested more than once. When we saw his “Gloria” that was to hang in the sanctuary and his interpretation of “Mary, Mother of the Church” were we aghast! It took more than an effort to hide our feelings. The architect had told us we must always find something to praise before we expressed a deviation from what the sculptor had presented. This was difficult. Finally we had him understand what our “semplice” meant: more simple, less clothes, more modern!

The statues had a long way to go before they met with our approval. When we first saw St. Joseph, we saw Julius Caesar. On inquiring, “Wasn’t St. Joseph a Jew?” We received an affirmative. {When we asked:} “Why make him a Roman?” “He wasn’t a Roman,”

“But he was strong, young, noble!”

“Let him be less broad!”

With a humor that was admirable and which always came forth unexpectedly, he said: “It’s Lent. I’ll put him through a strict fast. You will see next time you come!” We did. The good Saint had fasted but he was looking out, as it were, into the distance as though he were contemplating world conquests. Again we resorted to quiet argument.

“St. Joseph loved the Child. What father would act indifferently to the plea for attention as the Child seemed to be asking for it?”

He went to the statue and pushed the head of the modeling clay figure down front. “Just a little more” we suggested, “so the Saint will be regarding the Child!” And so it continued until we obtained what we wanted.

Our Lady went through stages too. After her first presentation with popes, bishops, clergy, religious, men, women and children – we wondered who or what was the most important part of the group. Now she came with a church in her hands. Again we asked that he make her title more pronounced: any saint could be pictured with a church in her hands. Couldn't he bring up something original? Trial and failure succeeded one another until he came up with the present statue.

The Crucifix was more easily obtained. We asked for the Christ who had said: "Consummatum est!" instead of a tortured, agonizing Savior. We wanted the God who had completed the sacrifice of redemption. After long study, his work produced what now hangs in the Sanctuary.

The lecterns came forth the first time "plump, heavy, ready to be put into St. Peter's Basilica." By this time we had learnt the art of praising, suggesting: really there had been sufficient practice in this art of getting an artistic temperament to "come along" with us. The German proverb: "Ubung macht den Meister!" (Practice makes the master) proved itself.