

# THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

### Grants

**Sacred Sites**  
City Ventures Fund  
Emergency Preservation Grants  
EZ Consulting Grants

### Loans

Technical Assistance  
Easements  
Surveys  
Endangered Buildings Initiative

## ADVOCACY

## EVENTS

## PUBLICATIONS

## MAPS

## ABOUT US

## JOIN US

## NEWS

## ENEWS SIGN UP

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Conservancy Inspects Historic Buildings on Governors Island [More »](#)

Spotlight On: Church of the Most Precious Blood [More »](#)

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GO

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## Sacred Sites

### Church of the Most Precious Blood

As a part of the Conservancy Sacred Sites Program's 25th Anniversary, we will occasionally highlight important religious restoration projects. This month, we're focusing on restoration of intricate Art Deco aluminum decorative metalwork at the Church of the Most Precious Blood in Long Island City constructed in 1932. Two Conservancy supporters – Professional Circle members – are guiding the restoration: architects Zaskorski & Notaro (ZNA) AIA, and conservation firm Jablonski Building Conservation Inc.

The Conservancy first contacted the church in 2007, as part of our city-wide survey of historic religious properties. We worked with the church to obtain preliminary National Register eligible status for the church, which was designed by architects Henry J. McGill & Talbot F. Hamlin. Hamlin, founder of Avery library and a noted architectural historian, was known for Colonial Revival designs, while McGill, is notable for his careful attention to detail, and his integration of routine building elements into unified decorative elements of the whole. Most Precious Blood shows McGill's hand in its front façade, with exquisite limestone carving, including flat bas-relief panels punctuating a stylized cross motif at the entrance gable, and a streamlined, neo-Byzantine arched entrance surround.

Delicate perforated and molded decorative aluminum metalwork, with a pattern of abstract peacocks and flowers, crowns the tower. Grey metal leader head boxes are decorated with reliefs depicting fantastical fish. Stepped steel multi-light casement windows punctuate the side entrance wings and side elevations. Art-Deco figural stained glass windows light the altar and side aisles of the sanctuary, while a Mondrian-like geometric window with colored glass and alabaster panels lights the organ loft. The stained glass is by Richard N. Spiers & Son; the studio also created windows for Riverside Church Towers, Temple Emanuel, and the Church of the Heavenly Rest.

The tower, which is almost entirely one large, open, vertical space, was leaking badly, damaging interior finishes below. The restoration scope includes masonry repointing, new through-wall flashing, in-kind replacement of the standing seam aluminum roof and cross, and restoration of the badly corroded and brittle perforated aluminum parapet screen, with its fabulous peacock motif. The half million dollar tower project is Phase I in more comprehensive one million dollar plus roof and masonry repair project at the main sanctuary.

In 2009, Conservancy staff learned of Zaskorski & Notaro's initial conditions assessment and planned repairs at the church at a Conservancy Professional Circle breakfast. Excited about the project, Conservancy staff reached out to the Diocesan real estate staff and priest, and quickly awarded a \$40,000 challenge grant to the project. The parish has raised initial project funds through the sale of a former convent.

Atop the massive granite belfry tower of the Church of His Most Precious Blood, alight a flock of 16 silvery peacocks perched in pairs creating a lace like filigree screen. The peacock in Catholicism signifies rebirth, resurrection and eternal life – fundamental beliefs held in Christian faith.

Originally, the plan was to repair cracks in the exterior granite and interior brick including replacing all the rusted steel and damaged steel stained glass windows. ZNA was optimistic about the condition of the aluminum peacock screen and elements but it soon became evident there was much more restorative work required.

The peacock screen itself was constructed of cast aluminum manufactured by Alcoa, circa 1930.

To begin testing, two metal samples were taken from the bell tower. JBC conservator Xsusha Flandro removed a sample of cast metal from the decoration around the screen. Both the screen and the roof tested positive for aluminum.

Electrolysis caused major damage in the form of corrosion and loss of material between the soft aluminum and the harder steel bolts supporting the concrete conical roof. The screens were removed from the structural steel to be taken to Victoria Restoration's shop for repair.

The screens will be cleaned and then repaired with molten aluminum where there has been section loss due to electrolysis. Braces reminiscent of a buttress were found to be too impractical to repair. Replacement buttresses constructed of identical aluminum are to be made.

The 80 year old conical belfry roof material was tested and found to be aluminum in a decorative V shaped pattern. While the roof was in fair condition, it will be replaced. After all, it was 80 years old.

Above the standing seam aluminum roof rises a ten foot high crucifix. The existing steel frame will be refinished and coated to repair electrolysis damage.

The leadership of the project and fund raising is under the direction of Father William Krlis, who coincidentally grew up in the parish. Technical direction and administration is by Robert DaDona and Peter Fede of the Buildings and Properties office of the Archdiocese of Brooklyn.



**Church of the Most Precious Blood**  
Church of the Most Precious Blood in Long Island City