

= Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (Moscow) =

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary is a neo-Gothic church that serves as the cathedral of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Moscow . Located in the Central Administrative Okrug , it is one of only two Catholic churches in Moscow and the largest in Russia .

The construction of the cathedral was proposed by the Tsarist government in 1894 . Groundbreaking was in 1899 ; construction work began in 1901 and was completed ten years later . Three-aisled and built from red brick , the cathedral is based on a design by architect Tomasz Bohdanowicz Dworzecki . The style was influenced by Westminster Abbey and Milan Cathedral . With the help of funds from Catholic parishes in Russia and its neighbouring states , the church was consecrated as a chapel for Moscow 's Polish parish in 1911 . In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917 , the Provisional Government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks and Russia became part of the newly formed Soviet Union . Because the promotion of state atheism was a part of Marxist / Leninist ideology , the government ordered many churches closed ; the cathedral was closed in 1938 . During World War II , it was threatened with demolition , and was used after the war for civil purposes , as a warehouse and then a hostel . Following the fall of communism in 1991 , it returned to being a church in 1996 . In 2002 it was elevated to the status of cathedral . Following an extensive and costly programme of reconstruction and refurbishment , the cathedral was reconsecrated in 2005 .

In the 21st century , after 58 years of non-religious use , the cathedral is once again the setting for regular liturgical celebrations in multiple languages : Russian , Polish , Korean , English , French , Spanish , Armenian and Latin , as well as benefit concerts featuring organ and church music . Its organ , the third since the cathedral 's construction , was donated by the Basel Münster . The cathedral is listed as a heritage building in the Russian Federation , and is a protected monument .

= = History = =

= = = First construction period = = =

At the end of the 19th century , only two Catholic churches existed in Moscow : the Saint Louis des Français church for the French population and the St. Peter and Paul church for the Polish parishioners . As the congregation for the Polish church had increased to around 30 000 members , the existing buildings were too small . Following the submission of a petition to the Governor-General of Moscow , the local council voted for a new church in 1894 . Construction of a new church was permitted with several conditions , including two pertinent to the building site : the structure was to be built away from the old city centre , and was not to be located in the vicinity of any Orthodox sacred sites .

Bearing in mind the council 's requirements , on 16 May 1895 the parish purchased a 10 hectare (22 acre) site on Malaya Gruzinskaya Street , then located on the city outskirts and surrounded by fields and vegetable gardens . Today , the site is in the Central Administrative Okrug , outside of the Garden Ring road defining the old walled city , just beyond the Moscow Metro 's Koltsevaya Line , and is surrounded by 20th century urban development . The purchase of the land was funded by donations , and cost 10 000 rubles in gold (roughly US \$ 7 200 000 as of 2012) . The purchase agreement and a full list of donations are today kept in the city archives of Moscow and St. Petersburg .

A further condition imposed by the city read as follows : " In the light of the two existing Roman Catholic churches , the future church shall be larger , with a cross on the gable , but without spires and exterior sculpture " . The plans for the building were produced by a Russian architect of Polish descent , Tomasz Bohdanowicz Dworzecki . Although his plan did not follow the council 's latter condition , it was accepted . The plan provided seating for up to 5 000 worshippers . Groundbreaking was in 1899 , and construction took place from 1901 to 1911 . The construction

cost was 290 000 roubles in gold (roughly US \$ 207 000 as of 2012) , much of which was donated by members of the Polish parish of Moscow . More funding came from Catholic parishes throughout Russia , Poland and Byelorussia .

The church was consecrated on 21 December 1911 as the " Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary " . It soon obtained the status of a chapel in the Peter and Paul parish . The consecration received extensive coverage in the Russian and Polish press . The Moscow newspaper , *Russkoye Slovo* , wrote :

In the filthy , wretched Malaya Gruzinskaya (Little Georgian) Street , forsaken by God and the city , there rose the wonderful , highly artistic solidity of the new Roman Catholic church , dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Holy Virgin Mary . Tremendous in magnitude and height , ... with a plenty of conning turrets and towers with crosses . The new cathedral makes a deep impression ... [Every detail] looks impressive and eminent : Not the slightest stylistic flaw could be seen or detected .

From 1911 to 1917 , money was collected for interior furnishings , which were relatively sparse apart from the impressive main altar . (These original furnishings remained until the 1930s .) Parts of the draft plan were abandoned : the floor was not constructed from marble as intended , but poured from plain concrete ; outside there were no pinnacles on the façade . Writings vary on when the pinnacles were built : some claim they were built in 1923 , but others argue that they were not completed until the renovation of the cathedral in 1999 . Observers that argue for an earlier construction date state that they were damaged during World War II and left dismantled for some time .

= = = Closure and conversions = = =

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917 , the Provisional Government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks , and Russia became part of the new Soviet Union . As the promotion of state atheism was a part of Marxist ? Leninist ideology , the Soviet government ordered many churches closed . The Peter and Paul parish was formally dissolved by the communist government in 1929 , and celebrating Mass was forbidden . The church lost much of its surrounding gardens in 1935 ? a school was built there the following year ? and the church was finally closed on 30 July 1938 (the St. Peter and Paul church had met the same fate nine days earlier) . The church was plundered after its closure , and many items , including the main altar and the organ , were irretrievably lost . The church was used for several months as a vegetable store , and was then reconstructed as a hostel and its interior divided into four floors .

The main tower 's spire was removed during the Battle of Moscow to prevent the Luftwaffe from using it as a landmark . Shortly after the war ended in 1945 , sections of the gardens were annexed for the building of an apartment block . A fire in 1956 caused the collapse of the lantern over the principal tower 's dome . Existing tenants were slowly rehoused , and members of the *Mosspetspromproyekt* (Russian : ?????????????????) research institute took possession of the former church . The research institute dealt primarily with project drawings for industrial facilities , but also designed the Olympic cauldron used at Lenin Stadium for the 1980 Summer Games .

During the 1960s and 1970s , the building 's exterior became increasingly dilapidated ; among those concerned about the church 's deterioration was Russian bard Vladimir Vysotsky , who lived in a house across the street . In the late 1970s the city considered renovating the building , possibly to use as a concert hall for organ recitals , or as a general cultural administration centre . These projects were never carried out due to resistance from the research institute .

= = = Return to religious use = = =

The glasnost (openness) policy , introduced during the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev , played a major role in developing religious freedom in the Soviet Union . Consequently , in 1989 , a group of Moscow Catholics and the cultural association " The Polish House " (Russian : ??? ?????) , suggested that the building should again be used for religious purposes . Following the city 's assent , the first Mass at the site in 60 years was celebrated on the church stairs during the feast of the

Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1990 . The Mass was celebrated by the Polish priest Tadeusz Pikus , who later became an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Warsaw .

In January 1990 , a group of Catholics in Moscow formally founded the parish of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary . On 13 April 1991 Pope John Paul II promulgated the encyclical *Providi quae* , establishing the " Apostolic administration for European Russia " . Its apostolic administrator , Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz , issued a decree for the reconstruction of the church on 21 April 1991 . With the city 's permission , on the Polish National Day (3 May) a second Mass was held , again on the stairs . The constitution of the parish was officially acknowledged on 31 May by the department of justice of the city council . Meanwhile , parts of the church were subleased by Mosspetspromproyekt to various companies .

From 7 June 1991 , Masses were celebrated each Sunday in the churchyard ? the institute still occupied the building . On 15 July 1991 , Father Josef Sanewski , a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco , was appointed the new parish priest . Religious education had been given regularly under the direction of the Salesian Sisters since 29 November 1991 . At the same time , the first charities were founded for nursing and aid to the poor . The vice @-@ mayor of Moscow , Yury Luzhkov , signed a decree in favour of the Church on 1 February 1992 ordering the institute to vacate the property by 1994 . Parish members entered the building on 2 July 1992 , and occupied the institute 's workshop . Moscow City Council agreed to allow the church to occupy the space , which was subsequently walled off from the remainder of the building . There , in the former workshop , Mass was celebrated regularly .

The dividing wall was removed by parish members on 7 March 1995 , while others started clearing the truss . The institute called the police , OMON , for help . The following day , more conflict with the police occurred and several parish members , among them a nun , were injured . Others were arrested , including a priest and a seminarian , but were released the next day . After these events , the Apostolic Administrator , Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz , wrote an open letter to the Russian President , Boris Yeltsin , on 9 March 1995 , requesting his intervention : " It seems that persecution of the church was history . Is that the case ? I can 't remember seeing a priest arrested , and I can 't remember seeing a nun beaten up . "

As a result , Senior Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov , a Yeltsin appointee , signed a decision for the removal of the institute . The decision , dated 7 March 1995 , ordered the institute 's departure by 1996 . Simultaneously , the institute wrote to Luzhkov describing the earlier events from their perspective , and requested compensation for loss of the building . In a meeting with the Polish Ambassador , Stanisław Ciosek , on 15 March 1995 , the acting mayor of Moscow , Alexander Musykantski , assured him that the return of the church would be complete by the end of the year .

On 19 March 1995 , a Mass was celebrated in the reclaimed part of the church under the direction of Papal Nuncio John Bukowski , who delivered Pope John Paul II 's blessing to the parish . In a new decision dated 2 November 1995 , Luzhkov ordered Mosspetspromproyekt to leave the building by the end of the year at the latest . When the order was still not implemented , parish members entered the institute on 2 January 1996 and began the removal . Institute director Evgeny Afanasyev called the police once again , but on this occasion , they declined to intervene . Subsequently , the institute director asked the parish priest for a final extension of the removal date by two weeks ? Mosspetspromproyekt vacated the building on 13 January 1996 . On 2 February 1996 , the Archdiocese of Mother of God at Moscow obtained official permission to use the church indefinitely .

= = = Restoration and reconsecration = = =

In the early 1990s , plans were made by the Office for Monument Protection to restore the church by 1997 , the 850th anniversary of Moscow 's foundation . This proposal was not implemented because of the dispute over occupancy . However , in 1995 , the city determined that the parish would be responsible for restoration costs . A commission was founded for the planned restoration , chaired by parish priest Josef Sanevski , Russian historian Stanislav Durnin , and Polish building contractor and politician Grzegorz Tuderek .

= = Architecture and facilities = =

The first ten steps to the portal symbolise the Commandments , the eleventh symbolises Jesus Christ . The portal symbolises Heaven 's gate , reached by obeying the Commandments and the teachings of Jesus . The portal is surrounded by columns and crowned by a wimperg , the gable spire of which is formed as a finial . The wimperg is decorated with a relief ornament , in the centre of which is a golden monogram " VMIC " (Virgo Maria Immaculata Concepta , Latin for " Virgin Mary , conceived unblemished ") . The original architectural design provided a Star of David instead of the monogram , a reference to the Jewish faith of the Virgin Mary . Above the wimperg is a 3 @-@ metre (9 @.@ 8 ft) tall rose window , built from a light @-@ coloured , translucent stone .

=== Interior ===

There are benches in the main aisle and confessionals in the side aisles . The confessionals contained benches until the closure of the church in 1938 . After its reconstruction , the left side was reserved for women , and the right for men . Both side aisles are separated from the main aisle by pillar files , consisting of four columns and two half columns . The columns and the roof are painted in white , and the walls in cream . The floor is constructed from light and dark grey marble slabs in a chequered pattern .

Most of the 8 @. @ 5 @-@ metre (28 ft) high stained glass windows have abstract designs .

Those in front feature crests of Apostolic Nuncios John Cardinal Burkowski and Francesco Cardinal Colasuonno . The windows in the transept are slightly larger and have a more complex design . The window in the right lateral arm depicts Saint Peter and Saint Andrew , who symbolise the Western and Eastern branches of the Catholic Church . On the window on the opposite side of the left lateral arm is depicted Pope John Paul II , who is gazing at the Marian apparition of Fátima . In the nave , under the windows , are fourteen reliefs depicting the Stations of the Cross .

The entry to the vestry is located at the end of the right side aisle next to the choir ; at the end of the left side aisle is the Chapel for Mercy of God . The tabernacle is situated on the chapel 's altar . The church 's main altar is faced with a dark green marble , and houses relics of Saints Andrew , Zenon of Verona , Gregory of Nyssa , Gregory of Nazianzus , Cosmas , Damian and Anastasia , as well as the Virgin Mary 's scarf and a donation from the Diocese of Verona . The ambo ? a projection coming out from the soleas ? is on the right side of the altar , and is faced with the same marble . Behind the altar , on the wall of the apse , there is a nine @-@ metre high stone crucifix with a three @-@ metre high figure of Christ . Plaster figures depicting the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist by architect Svyatoslav Sakhlebin are located on the left and the right sides (respectively) of the corbels . On the opposite side of the altar and above the cathedral 's vestibule is the organ loft , which had originally room for 50 choristers ; a large part of it is now occupied by the organ .

= = = Organ and bells = = =

The present pipe organ is one of the largest in Russia and the third since the church 's foundation . The first organ was taken by the state in 1938 and the second , an electronic organ with 60 stops , was installed as part of the renovations in 1999 . It was donated by the American charity " Aid to the Church in Russia " , headed by priest Marcel Guarnizo , who received consecration as a deacon during the renovation in 1997 . The electronic organ was replaced by a pipe organ during 2002 ? 2005 .

The cathedral 's pipe organ was built in 1955 by Orgelbau Kuhn AG of Männedorf , Switzerland , for the Reformed Evangelical Basel Münster Cathedral in Basel , Switzerland . The Swiss cathedral donated the organ , dismantled it in 2002 , and all pipes but without the largest ? Nr. 65 principal bass 32 ' , 10 m (32 ft) long ? were transferred to Moscow . The pipes were transported wrapped in new garments donated by the people of Basel , which were later distributed to Moscow 's poor . The installation of the pipe organ in Moscow was performed by the Orgelbau Schmid company from Kaufbeuren , Germany , headed by Gerhard Schmid , who refused payment for his work . During the work , Schmid was killed in a fall from a scaffold on 9 September 2004 ; his son Gunnar finished the work .

The original 10 @-@ metre , 32 ' pipe stayed in Switzerland and was built into a new organ in the Münster Cathedral , which belongs to the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National and Regional Significance . This pipe , capable of reproducing a tone of 16 @.@ 35 Hz , the bass note C0 four octaves below middle C , was recreated in Moscow and added to the cathedral 's organ in 2009 .

The five church bells are located on the cathedral 's roof behind a tripartite screen of lancet arches on the left side of the façade . They were poured by the Felczy?ski bell foundry in Przemy?l , Poland and donated by bishop Wiktor Skworc . The bells are electronically activated . The largest weighs 900 kilograms (2 @,@ 000 lb) and bears the name " Our Lady of Fátima " . The other bells are named , from the smallest to the largest : " John Paul II " ; " St. Jude " , named after the patron saint of archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz ; " Anniversary @-@ 2000 " ; and " St. Victor " , named after the patron saint of Bishop Wiktor Skworc .

= = 21st century = =

On 11 February 2002 , Pope John Paul II created the administration for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Moscow and named Apostolic Administrator Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz as archbishop and metropolitan . However , this decision was criticised by Patriarch Alexy II , who called it "

unfriendly " , as he believed the Roman Catholic Church saw Russia as a field for missionary activity . At the same time , the Church of the Immaculate Conception acquired the status of cathedral of the archdiocese . In March 2002 , members of the cathedral and Catholics from other European cities participated in a rosary led by the Pope via video conference . Since the reopening , many services take place daily in the cathedral . The main liturgical language for Masses is Russian , but services are also held in Polish , English , French , Spanish , Korean , Latin and Armenian (based on an Armenian Rite) .

The re @-@ installed organ ? with 74 stops , 4 manuals and 5 @,@ 563 pipes ? was consecrated by Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Moscow on 16 January 2005 . The mass was followed by the opening concert for the First International Festival for Organ Music . The month @-@ long festival saw several organ concerts in the cathedral . The closing concert was performed by chief organist James Edward Goettsche from St. Peter 's Basilica . Organ and church music concerts take place regularly in the cathedral ; entry is normally free , except for selected concerts , for which admission is by ticket . A service in remembrance of those killed in the 2010 Polish Air Force Tu @-@ 154 crash was held on 12 April 2010 .