

Pope Francis names Cincinnati's historic cathedral a basilica

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CINCINNATI — Pope Francis has named Cincinnati's St. Peter in Chains Cathedral a "minor basilica," strengthening the historic landmark's ties to Rome and recognizing its "artistic beauty."

The honor comes just a few months before the 175th anniversary of the cathedral's dedication and makes it one of just 89 basilicas in the United States. It's the sixth basilica in Ohio, the first cathedral in Ohio to be designated a basilica, and the first basilica in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

"This is a great blessing and honor that has been bestowed on our cathedral church," said Archbishop Dennis Schnurr, who announced the Pope's decision Saturday during Mass at the cathedral.

For Catholics, a designation as a minor basilica is more than just a name change. The honor more formally ties the archdiocese's most prominent church to the Vatican and allows the cathedral to keep special items, such as ceremonial bells, that symbolize the cathedral's "special connection to the papacy."

Though it's always been considered a pilgrimage site for Catholics, those who come to the cathedral now that it's a basilica can receive a special indulgence for devoutly visiting. The faithful believe such indulgences can lessen punishment Catholics might face for their sins after death.

The push to make St. Peter in Chains a basilica began in 2018 when the Rev. Jan Kevin Schmidt asked the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and

the Discipline of the Sacraments to grant the title to the cathedral.

The 240-page application focused on the cathedral's historical and architectural importance, as well as its continued use today as an essential place of worship. According to the archdiocese, St. Peter in Chains is the oldest cathedral, built as a cathedral, still in use in the United States.

The cathedral was a landmark from the day it was dedicated in 1845 in downtown Cincinnati. Designed by architect Henry Walter, who also built the capitol building in Columbus, the cathedral features Greek mosaics, Corinthian columns and bronze doors. Its spire rises 220 feet above street level.

When it was built, the cathedral was the tallest building in Cincinnati.

Schmidt said the architecture, the history and ecclesiastical significance make St. Peter in Chains "very special for the archdiocese and in the American Catholic scene."

Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley attended Mass at the cathedral Saturday and issued a statement praising the pope's decision to recognize St. Peter in Chains. He described the cathedral as "a sort of Statue of Liberty" for Cincinnati and said it's a reminder to Catholics that "they have a proud spiritual home."

There are more than 1,800 basilicas in the world, mostly in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. Only four basilicas, all of them in Rome, are considered "major basilicas."