Sacred Art Update

To all of our parishioners who support our Sacred Art endeavor, *The Communion of Saints in Worship Around the Altar*, peace to you all. It has been 22 months since our first installation of panels in the Nave. Lest you think there is no activity, let me share with you the current status to bring you up to date on our project.

**Current status**

- Drawings for all 34 panels have been approved- although we need to add our Diocesan Patron, Saint Vincent DePaul, who was unintentionally omitted from the original list
- The artist, Angel Ramiro Sanchez, has completed the paintings for Panels 1 through 14 as well as 29 through 34, some of these require final approval from Father Joe
- Ramiro is continuing with the next paintings to be completed- Panels 26 through 28, there have only been slight delays based on the pandemic closings in Florence
- The church has commissioned and the mosaicists have completed Panels 1 through 9 and 34, 1 and 34 are installed, 2 through 9 are here onsite in storage at the church waiting to be finally assembled and installed
- Travel restrictions due to Covid 19 have prevented the mosaicists who live and work in Italy from entering the United States since March 2020
- **Travel by non-US Citizens to the US is currently prohibited by Executive Order, only those with a National Interest Exception (NIE) are permitted to enter the US**
- We have enough funds to commission the next 4 panels (10,11, 32,33) but before we do so we want to complete and install what we have here first.

The mosaics we have onsite here are boxed by number coded sections affixed to their paper cartoons with a temporary glue. The sections are to be assembled and affixed to a panel that has been fitted to the church infrastructure. Our contract calls for the mosaicist to assemble the numbered sections and affix them to the panel here in Williamsburg. This is coordinated with the engineering and construction support provided by Saint Bede parish to complete the installation. Both the engineering and construction team from Saint Bede and the mosaicists agreed that final assembly should occur in Williamsburg.

So how do we proceed?

Our team here- Michèle Spike (Legal and Saint backgrounds), John Spike (Art and Design), and Mark Jakobowski (Construction and Logistics) has been in regular contact with the artisans. We were successful in obtaining a VISA for the principal mosaicist, Manrico Bertellotti. Since it seems unlikely that the US will open its borders to non-US citizens this fall, our current efforts are to try to gain a National Interest Exception (NIE) for the mosaicists to come here and complete work on what is already onsite. To date, this process has been hampered by the lack of operational stability in Customs and Immigration, the whole system for passports, VISA’s etc. is extremely backlogged. NIE’s are narrowly being granted to those working on defense or national security connected projects. We have pursued
administrative (State Dept. CBP/DHS, Consulate in Florence) and political (White House, House, Senate) angles both here in the US and in Italy with little success. Nonetheless, we have decided to apply for an NIE for Mr. Bertellotti, our application should elicit an up or down to our request in the next 30 days.

Parallel with this, we have been working with the artisans on an alternative plan to ship the various mosaic components back to Italy for completion and then ship back here for installation. There remain some concerns over any unwanted movement during shipping that might damage the completed panels. We are exploring the costs to this solution and also the risk and will have a decision on that front as we learn of the status of the NIE.

**What you can do?**

Continue to pray for the project, for the safety of all of those working on it and for our artisans to be allowed to complete their work. You can also stop by for a visit - I am happy to share with you what we have onsite- as long as you can negotiate some steps.

Thank you for your support of this wonderful reminder of the feast in store for all of us some day.

Peace be with you always!

Sam