News



Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin delivers a homily after announcing the elevation of St. Mary's Pro Cathedral to formal cathedral status at a Mass to mark the bicentenary of the church's dedication in 1825 and the feast of the city's patron, St. Laurence O'Toole, on Nov. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy of Dublin Archdiocese)



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The Catholics of Dublin have a dedicated cathedral for the first time in 500 years following Pope Leo XIV's decision on Nov. 14 to designate St. Mary's Pro Cathedral as the Irish capital's official Catholic cathedral.

The elevation of St. Mary's to formal cathedral status was announced by Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin at a Mass to mark the bicentenary of the church's dedication in 1825, the feast of the city's patron, St. Laurence O'Toole.

It was approved by papal decree following a request by Farrell and consultation with the faithful in the archdiocese.

Tucked away down a secondary street in Dublin's north inner city, St. Mary's shift from pro cathedral to cathedral status corrects circumstances rooted in Ireland's tumultuous religio-politico history, notably the repressive Penal Laws enforced under British rule, which banned the public practice of the Catholic faith and persecuted Catholic priests and people.

Though it served as Dublin's principal Catholic church, St. Mary's was designated a pro cathedral because Christ Church Cathedral has for hundreds of years been viewed as the official cathedral in Dublin. It was designated as such by Pope Alexander III after he met St. Laurence O'Toole in Rome in 1179 while attending the Third Lateran Council.

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However, in 1539, following King Henry VIII's break with Rome, all Irish monasteries and churches, which were loyal to the pope — including Christ Church Cathedral —

were dissolved and handed over to the newly established Protestant church. Christ Church Cathedral today is the seat of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough.

Speaking to RTÉ Television's "Nationwide" program, Fr. Kieran McDermott, administrator of St. Mary's, explained: "Christ Church was the Catholic cathedral and would have been the seat of the bishop of Dublin. That changed with the Reformation. The rupture was the Reformation in the 1530s — that was the break with Rome — and we are still living out of that rupture 500 years later."

Catholic emancipation was only granted in 1829, four years after St. Mary's was opened, and there still was sufficient concern in the 1820s for those overseeing the project to opt to locate the church on Marlborough Street, at a discreet distance from the capital's main thoroughfare.

Speaking previously to OSV News, McDermott stressed, "A cathedral should be a noble and fitting place enabling the church of Dublin to gather as the body of Christ in prayer and worship with its chief shepherd."



Choir girls are seen at a Mass announcing the elevation of St. Mary's Pro Cathedral to formal cathedral status Nov. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy of Dublin Archdiocese)

He explained that St. Mary's has a number of limitations currently in its interior structuring.

"Those seated in the side areas have either partial views of the sanctuary or very restricted view, which is unsatisfactory in any liturgical space, but especially in a cathedral setting."

He added, "The Palestrina Choir and Girls' Choir are accommodated in what can only be described as carved out spaces in the attic area, which is really unsuited for rehearsals, robing, and the storage of music manuscripts."

The Dublin Archdiocese is seeking planning permission from Dublin City Council to refurbish St. Mary's, which, if successful, would see the church's internal space reconfigured at a cost of roughly $23 million.

On Nov. 14, Dublin Auxiliary Bishop Paul Dempsey said Archbishop John Troy (1739-1823) and those behind the building of St. Mary's "could never have imagined where we would be at as a church 200 years on after they opened St. Mary's in 1825."

He added, "What they did at that time was sow the seeds for what was to come. In a sense we find ourselves in a similar position," that is sowing the seeds of a future filled with hope.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin announces the elevation of St. Mary's Pro Cathedral to formal cathedral status at Mass Nov. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy of Dublin Archdiocese)

Announcing the good news about St. Mary's prior to cathedral designation, Farrell said the cathedral's location puts it close to situations of poverty in Dublin. The north inner city is grappling with drug addiction and poverty.

"For its many challenges this is a huge blessing. Of all who come here, it is most of all to the poor that this place belongs. The cathedral in the center of the city has a prophetic value," he said.

Noting that Dublin is undergoing rapid transformation, Farrell noted that with it comes dislocation and the potential for conflict over priorities and resources, "as recent disturbances have shown," a reference to Dublin's riots in November 2023.

He lamented that traditional inner-city communities "are literally overshadowed by rapid commercial development, while the streets of the city center bear witness to the extent of homelessness and addiction."