

Italian Artists Beautify St. Sava's Cathedral with Mosaics and MAPEI

When he accepted the commission to fill three apses at St. Sava Cathedral in Parma, Ohio, with mosaic tile murals depicting scenes from the life of Christ, Damien Marchione turned to Daltile of Brooklyn Heights for help. After Damien described how he needed to apply the mosaics to the wall with no slippage and a perfect fit, Scott Gadd at Daltile advised him that he needed MAPEI. The artisans Damien flew in from Italy to install the murals, Tito and Fabrizio Toneguzzo, were familiar with MAPEI products and had used them before in Europe. They agreed that MAPEI would do the best job.

Marchione Studio had earlier installed a mosaic tile mural in the domed ceiling of the cathedral. Damien then worked for two more years, preparing the artwork for the murals that would cover the walls of the apses. Each apse was composed of three semi-circular walls that curved as they approached the dome. The lowest wall was 20 feet by 20 feet (6 meters by 6 meters), and the two upper walls were 20 feet by 10 feet (6 meters by 3 meters). After completing the drawing of each panel, Damien sent them to Italy, where Tito and Fabrizio Toneguzzo painstakingly applied the correctly colored mosaic tiles to the paper template to bring the murals to life.

Then, Tito and Fabrizio flew to Parma, a suburb of Cleveland, to assemble the murals on the walls of the cathedral. The tiles pasted to the paper templates were divided into 500 separate sheets, which had to be installed in exactly the right order.

The Toneguzzos brought with them their own pigments to color the white MAPEI *Kerabond*TM mortar to match the different colors in the mosaic. After mixing the colored *Kerabond* with *Keralastic*TM latex additive, the artisans combed it onto a section of the apse wall. Then, they back-buttered the sheets of mosaic tile, pressing the colored mortar mixture between each of the individual tiles, being sure to match the color of the mortar to the color of the surrounding mosaic pieces. When the sheets were adhered to the wall and the paper front was removed, the colored *Kerabond/Keralastic* mixture showed through evenly between the individual tiles, removing the need to grout the murals.

Lonnie Tullos, a stained-glass master craftsman from Marchione Studio who had observed the original dome installation, served as the project manager for this phase of the cathedral beautification. It was his first opportunity to work hands-on with MAPEI products, and he had many good things to say about the properties of the *Kerabond/Keralastic* System. "First, I was surprised at how easy the mortar was to mix and to work with. Also, I was very impressed with the tackability of the product. The *Kerabond* held the sheets in place really well. There was no

slipping, and we didn't have to keep repositioning the sheets, which had been one of my concerns. There were no problems at all, and everybody I've talked to has really loved the results!"

Nearly a century after its inception, St. Sava's Cathedral continues to illuminate the way for the followers of the Serbian Orthodox religion in Cleveland, and the membership continues to beautify their church and their dream.