



Exploring the Bishop's Garden and Olmsted Woods

Welcome to Washington National Cathedral and the 59 acre Cathedral Close. Three acres of the Bishop's Garden and five acres of the Olmsted Woods await exploration.

The Cathedral Close was planned by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. His plan was modeled on the walled grounds, known as the *closes*, of medieval cathedrals. The overall ambiance was to be an urban oasis. His plans included the location of the major Cathedral buildings, the Bishop's Garden, and the woodlands now known as Olmsted Woods.

The Cathedral's horticultural staff maintains the gardens and grounds of the Cathedral Close. All Hallows Guild was founded in 1916 with a mission of maintenance and beautification of the grounds, gardens, and woodlands of the Close. Today, the Guild plans and oversees garden design, raises funds to accomplish its mission and offers educational programs about the woods and gardens.

A self-guided garden tour brochure is available in the Shadow House. The pamphlet, *The Olmsted Woods & All Hallows Amphitheater* may be found in a box at the head of the Olmsted Woods Pilgrim Way. For more information and to arrange a group tour, visit the Guild's website: www.allhallowsguild.org

To enter the gardens, turn left as you exit the west [main] doors of the Cathedral, and then enter through the Norman arch in the garden wall on South Road. The woods are located on a path just opposite the south entrance of the gardens on Pilgrim Road.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., instructed that the area south of the Cathedral was to serve as an entry point to the Cathedral.

"The great charm of approaching the Cathedral through and up a wooded hillside, leaving the city far behind and below, helping one to forget the hurly-burly, the busy-ness of a work-a-day world," Olmsted wrote, "must be taken advantage of to the fullest extent. The great sweeping branches of the trees seem to brush off . . . the dust of the city. So that one at last reaches the Cathedral cleansed in mind and in spirit."

It is through this lens that we can focus our attention on the gardens and woods of the south side of the Cathedral Close.

The Bishop's Garden

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Florence Bratenahl, the wife of the first dean of Washington National Cathedral, planned the Bishop's Garden. Inside its stone walls are two herb gardens, a beautiful rose garden in bloom from May to November, two perennial borders, a manicured lawn, and a Shadow House. Architectural elements from medieval Europe are tucked into the garden.

Plaques, Artifacts and Sculpture

A reconstructed twelfth-century Norman arch welcomes you into the Bishop's Garden. A second twelfth-century Norman arch is at the end of Norman Court, as you enter the Bishop's Lawn. Both are of Caen limestone from France. Mounted on a wall of Norman Court is a fifteenth-century *bas-relief* depicting the crucifixion of Jesus with St. Mary and St. John.



Shadow House, a gazebo located at the southeast corner of the Bishop's Lawn, is of Carderock stone taken from President Grover Cleveland's summer home, once located in the nearby Cleveland Park neighborhood.

A baptismal font thought to be of the time of Charlemagne (742-814 A.D.) centers the Hortulus, an enclosed herb garden filled with Carolingian and medieval –era herbs.

At the end of the upper perennial border is St. Catherine's Pool, named for the fifteenth-century stone *bas-relief* depicting the martyr St. Catherine. In the shape of a primitive cross, the pool was designed by Florence Bratenahl.

The Celtic or "Wayside" Cross at the head of the rose garden dates from early Christian pilgrimages, and is considered to be "the heart of the garden." The Latin inscription around the outer edge translates: "Our soul is humbled even unto the dust."

A thirteenth-century capital, now a bird font, sits in the far right of the upper perennial garden. It is made of Caen limestone from the Cluny monastery in France where the monk Abelard died. Below the main garden and adjacent to the lower perennial border is the Prodigal Son, a modern sculpture by Heinz Warneke, depicting the parable of redemption.

Olmsted Woods and Pilgrim Way

To the south is the five-acre Olmsted Woods, one of the few old-growth forests still standing in the nation's capital. Originally part of an oak and beech forest, these woodlands have been kept free of development in keeping with Olmsted's plan.

Over time, the woods had deteriorated, suffering from soil compaction, erosion, uncontrolled water run-off and the invasion of exotic plants. An extensive restoration begun by All Hallows Guild in 1997 has included restoring the soil, removing invasive plants such as English ivy, and encouraging the return of wildlife. More than 2,500 native plants and 300 small native trees have been planted, and restoration continues.

In 1999, the project was expanded to include a series of walkways, including the new Pilgrim Way, pools to control water run-off, and a revitalized Amphitheater. Now visitors can walk the Pilgrim Way from the George Washington equestrian statue at the north end of the woods on Pilgrim Road to the Garfield Plaza at the south.

