

## Santa Margherita-Maria Alacoque all'Esquilino



**Santa Margherita-Maria Alacoque all'Esquilino** is a 20th century convent church near the basilica of Santa Croce in the rione Esquilino. The dedication is to St Margaret Mary Alacoque.

### History

The church was built as part of the Roman headquarters of the "Sisters, Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart". This congregation had been founded at Viareggio in Tuscany in 1896 by Clelia Merloni, although it was later based at Piacenza. A major part of the foundation charism was to give religious assistance to Italian emigrants to the United States, Latin America (especially Brazil) and later worldwide.

The church was designed by Pietro Picca and Raffaele Pietrostefani, begun in 1922 and completed in 1925 as a single-naved building in the neo-Romanesque style. Oddly, the consecration was delayed until 1950 (the rule used to be that a church could only be consecrated when the costs of construction had been fully paid).

The dedication to St Margaret Mary Alacoque was chosen because she was one of the major propagators of the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

The body of the foundress was exhumed from the Campo Verano cemetery and re-buried in the church. The Cause for her canonisation was opened in 1989.

The convent remains the congregation's Generalate, and there are nine sisters resident in the Diocese of Rome.

In the latter part of the 20th century the name was changed to the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Apostole del Sacro Cuore di Gesù), which needs to be distinguished from the Apostole del Sacro Cuore. The latter is a diocesan institute from Milan, which has a base in Rome at Via Pasquale Revoltella 108.

## Exterior

The church's frontage is not on the street, but on a courtyard separated from the street by a free-standing block. The latter is part of the complex, and is now a guest-house (casa di accoglienza - "welcome house") run by the sisters and called Mater Amabilis. This is an attractive building of its type, which is early 20th century eclectic. Its web-page describes the architecture as stile liberty, or Art Nouveau -which it is not. (Incidentally, Italians have named this art movement after Liberty's department store in London.)

The church is part of a larger flat-roofed convent block. It stands over a crypt, and so the entrance is approached by a pair of transverse staircases meeting at a little entrance patio. Stairs and patio are protected by a pin balustrade.

The two-storey façade is neo-Baroque, and is only partly visible from the street. The colour scheme is in light grey, with architectural details in white (it used to be in brown before a recent restoration). The first storey has four Doric pilasters on two limestone plinths, which support an entablature with a dedicatory inscription on its frieze and modillions on its cornice. The single entrance has a segmental pediment, above which is a narrow string course running across the width of the façade behind the pilasters. In between the inner pair of pilasters this supports a large molded archivolt which touches the entablature. The two narrow rectangular panels in between the pilasters of each side thus divided by the string course each has the outline of a panel in white.

The second storey has four short blind pilasters which support a crowning entablature. There is a small triangular pediment over the inner pair of pilasters. This storey, much lower than the first one, has a central square window and four of the outline panels matching those below. The pediment is false, as the roof behind it is flat.

## Interior

The interior decoration and furnishings are rich, using polychrome marble and gilding. There are three altars, with paintings executed by Cleto Luzzi (1884-1952). The one over the high altar depicts the Sacred Heart being adored by the patron St Margaret Mary, as well as by other saints (the apostles Peter and Paul and SS Francis de Sales and Francis Xavier). The two side altars are dedicated to Our Lady and St Joseph.

The high altar frontal is in pietra dura work incorporating lapis lazuli, malachite, onyx and alabaster.

The tomb of the foundress of the congregation is located here.

## Access

The Diocese lists this as a church, but the sisters seem to regard it as a private chapel. It would be interesting to see what happens if their foundress is beatified, as some sort of regular public access would then be expected.

No access arrangements or times of Masses are advertised online.

The feast-day of St Margaret Mary is 17 October.

**Location:**

Address: Via Germano Sommelier 38

Coord: [41°53'20.4"N 12°30'44.1"E](#)

**External links**

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Romafelix web-page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Mater Amabilis web-page](#)