

# San Policarpo



**San Policarpo** is a modern parish church in the district Appio Claudio, in Piazza Aruleno Celio Sabino, dedicated to [Saint Polycarp](#), bishop of Smyrna

## History

The church was built near the remains of the [Aqua Marcia aquaduct](#). The parish was erected in 1960 by decree of the Card. Clement Micara, then the Pope's vicar for the diocesan in Rome, and the church was begun in 1964. It was designed by **Giuseppe Nicolosi** and completed in 1967. It is considered to be one of the more successful and interesting of Rome's 1960's churches. The church was inaugurated on 15 July 1967 by the Cardinal Vicar Luigi Traglia.

## Exterior

The church has an unusual plan, consisting of an irregular pentagon stretched along the vertical axis (strictly speaking a hexagon, as the corner behind the altar is chamfered). The structure is topped by a dome in the shape of a six-pointed star.

A triangular ferial chapel is attached to the right hand side of the entrance portico.

The frame of the church is in reinforced concrete, displayed to great effect in the interior. The exterior walls are laid in rough-cut tufa stone blocks, each course having a different size. Thin horizontal stripes of red brick are laid in the masonry. This fabric imitates an ancient Roman one, the so-called opus vittatum, and apparently the architect wished to evoke the presence of the ruined aqueduct of the Aqua Claudia which runs round the back of the church. The rooflines, however, are thin concrete eaves (actually the edges of the concrete roof).

The church's fenestration is limited. The four diagonal side walls have thin window strips under the eaves, and those nearest the entrance have a central thin vertical slit window running from this strip to about halfway down the wall. In contrast, the two far side walls have small vertical rectangular

windows lower down, five on each side and well separated. The cut-off apex of the pentagon, behind the altar, has a vertical strip of stained glass.

### Dome

Although it is actually in reinforced concrete, the pitched roof is covered in red tiles. It is dominated by the stellate dome, in the shape of a six-pointed star with the tips cut off. These tips display the tops of the supporting concrete columns, and each of these is flanked by a pair of window strips. The twelve sides of the star are walled in the same style as the main body of the church, and the inner corners also have window strips.

The roofing is in the form of six pitched and tiled lozenges, arranged like an inverted flower round a central lantern. Concrete ribs separate the lozenges, and are continued as ribs on the white conical lantern which has a little circular aperture at its tip.

### Façade

The bottom of the pentagon is the entrance frontage, with the open porch having a gabled canopy in white concrete. This has a suspended horizontal double concrete beam hanging from its apex within, and visible at the tip of the gable rather like a vertically bisected keystone. The porch sides are in the same sort of walling as the rest of the church. The design is asymmetrical, as the right hand side wall is one side of an attached triangular ferial chapel and the front wall of this runs off to the right.

The double-keystone motif of the portico canopy is continued by a doubled vertical concrete beam up the middle of the otherwise blank church frontage above the portico, joining to the gabled roofline with its concrete eaves. Thus, the façade bears the symbol of a vertical arrow. Tucked into the roofline gable is a window in the shape of a squashed pentagon bisected by the vertical beam, with two diagonal mullions from the bottom outer corners to the roofline.

### **Interior**

The interior is dominated by six enormous free-standing hexagonal columns in raw reinforced concrete, holding up the dome and adjacent to the walls. These support an open lattice of six intersecting concrete beams in the shape of a Star of David, with each column having a thinner extension above this which forms the outer corner of one of the dome's star arms. The dome walls stand on the outer faces of the triangles in the Star of David. The interior of the dome, and that of the pitched roof around it, is again in raw concrete with the shuttering marks showing. The walls are blank brickwork and are puce in color, laid so as to give a diapered texture.

The window strips at the tops of the walls are in clear glass. However, the other windows have stained glass, the small rectangular windows in the walls flanking the altar depict scenes from the life of Christ, and the main window behind the altar has a swirling abstract design evoking *The Spirit Hovered Over the Waters*. The far pair of columns bear a pair of modern icons in the classic Byzantine style, the *Madonna and Child* on the left, and *St Polycarp* on the right.

The free-standing altar is in grey granite, the mensa standing on a single cubical block. The former bears the inscription *fons pietatis* ("fountain of piety").

The tabernacle is an interesting arrangement. It has a silver-gilt door, within a niche in the brickwork of a red brick screen wall below the main sanctuary window. The niche is five-sided in outline, a triangle on top of a square, and is screened off by an open metal screen formed of zig-zags separated by horizontal gilded bars.

Between the red brick wall and the sanctuary window is a copy of the San Damiano crucifix.

### **Artists and Architects**

Giuseppe [Nicolosi](#) (1901-1981), Italian engineer, architect and urban planner

### **Location**

Addr: Piazza Aruleno Celio Sabino 50 Rome, it

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