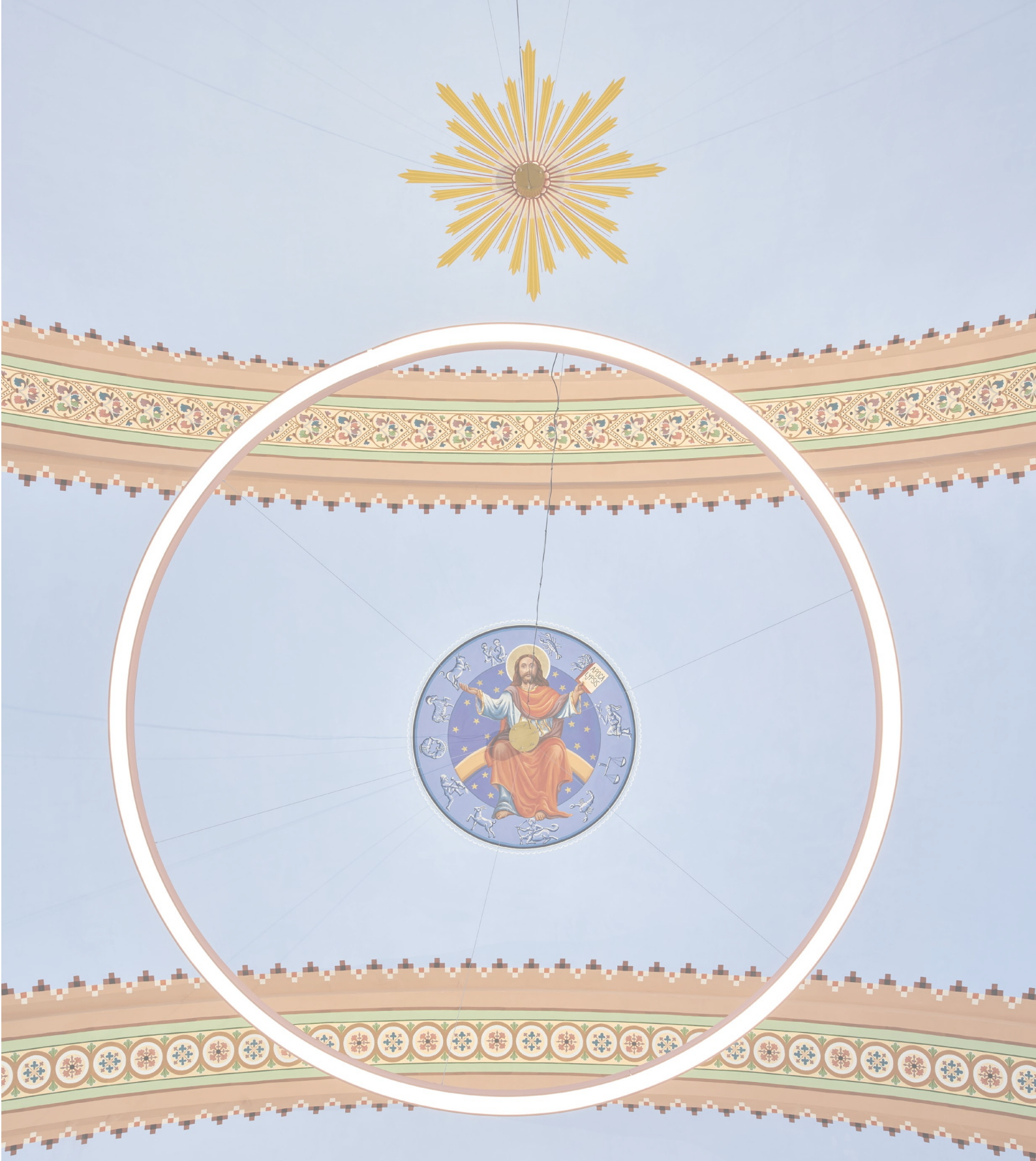




Conservation and Restoration Works on Revitalization
of Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Snows in Žabalj



Recovering authenticity through evidence-based restoration and contemporary interpretation

Located on the central square of Žabalj, alongside the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas, the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Snows was built between 1900 and 1902. The single-nave brick church, distinguished by its integrated bell tower and timber roof structure, represents an important element of the settlement's historic urban fabric.

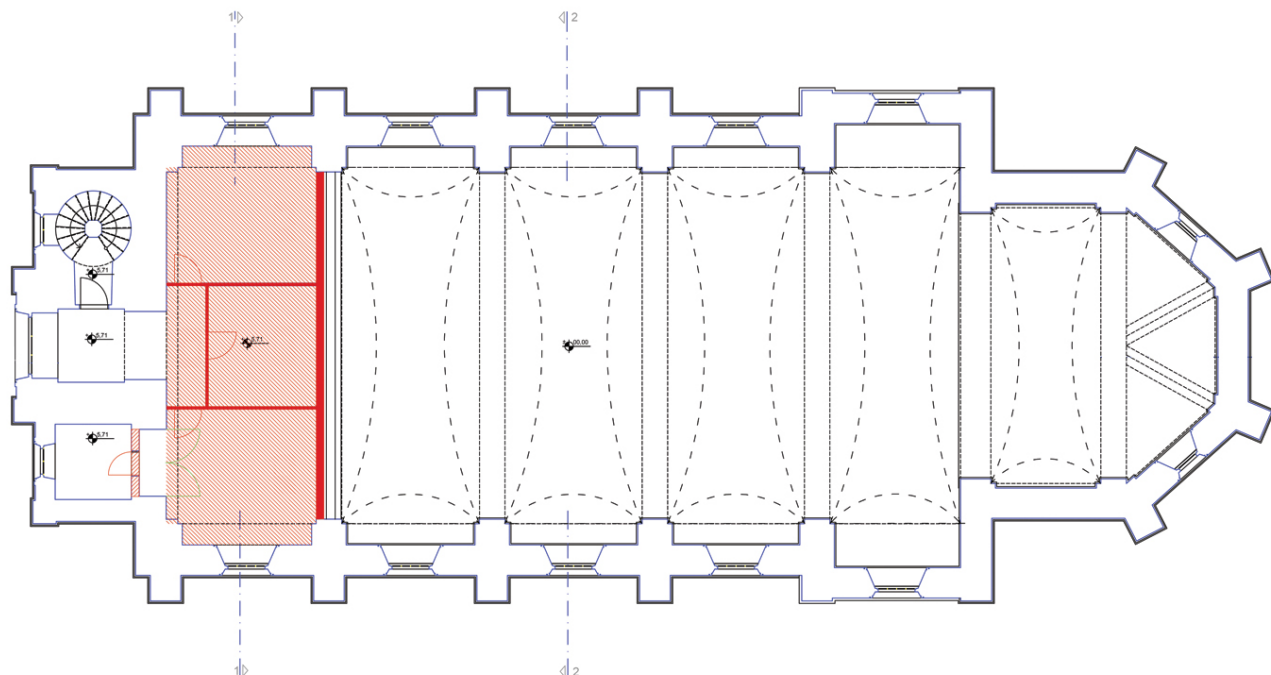
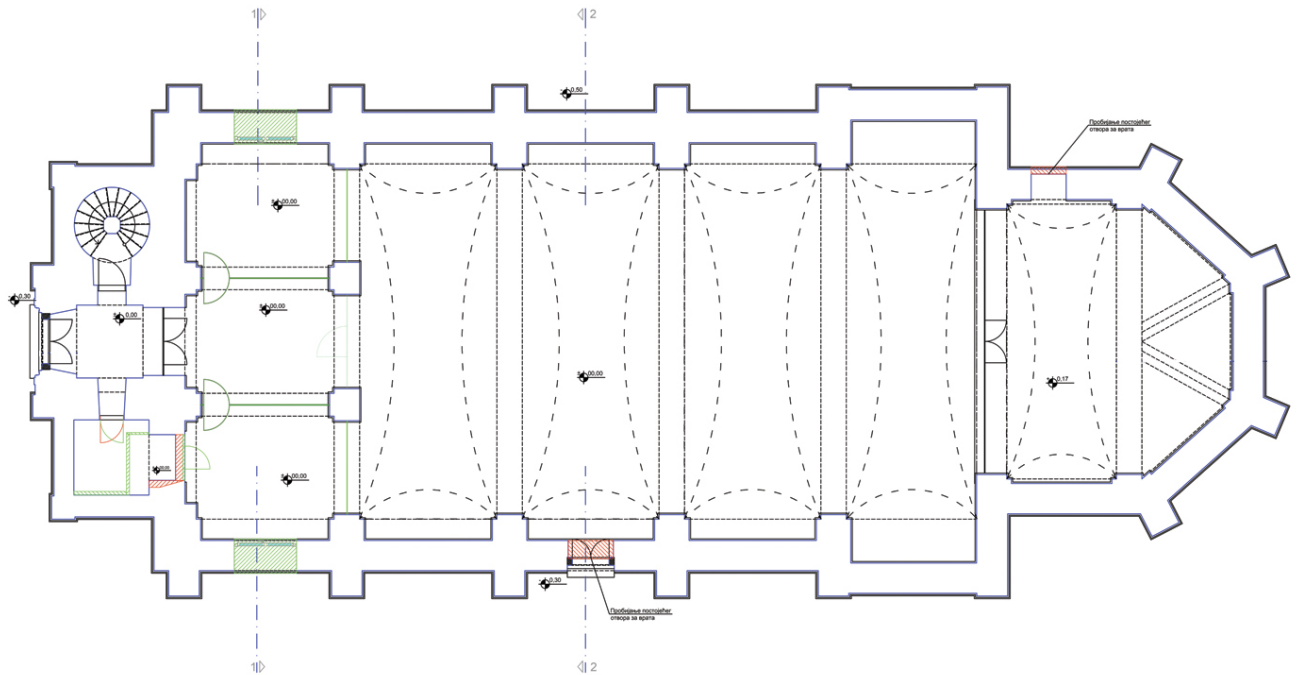
During the 20th century, the church underwent several inappropriate alterations, the most significant in the 1980s, when the choir gallery was converted into residential space through the addition of incompatible structures. By the start of the conservation project, approximately one-third of the nave roof had collapsed, prolonged water infiltration had severely damaged the structure, and extensive areas of the original painted wall decoration had been lost.

Beyond the revitalization of the historic building, the intervention established a dual program that preserves its ecclesiastical function while accommodating contemporary cultural and artistic events.



LEGEND

Demolition ■
Construction ■



0 1 2 5 10

The proposed interventions are based on conservation principles, aiming to recover the building's original architectural character while preserving its historical authenticity.

Comparative Analysis - Facades

Existing Condition / Restaured Condition

LEGEND

Analysis of facade deterioration

- Remnants of painted layer
- Surface without plaster
- Detiriorated plaster
- Biodeterioration

Coloring scheme

- color 1
- color 2

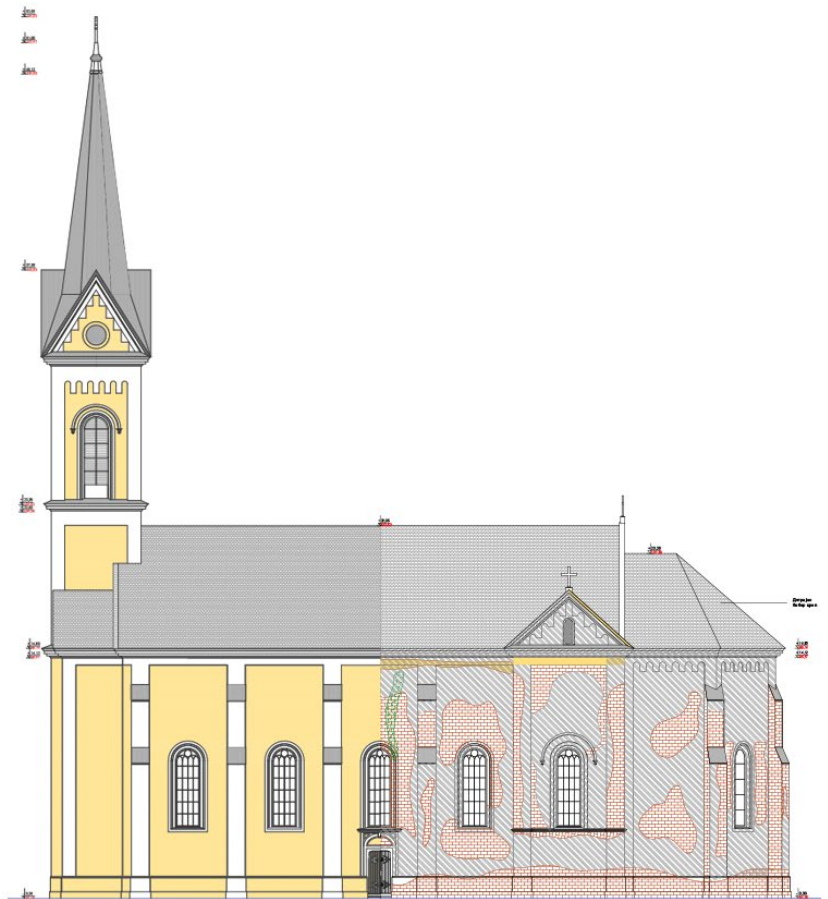
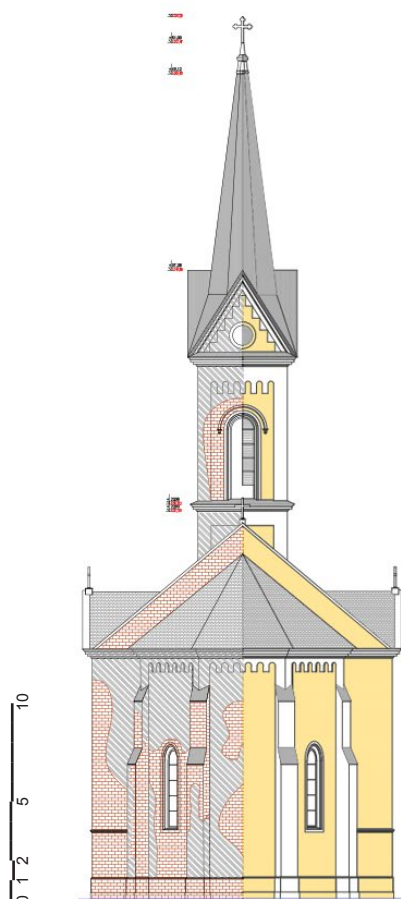
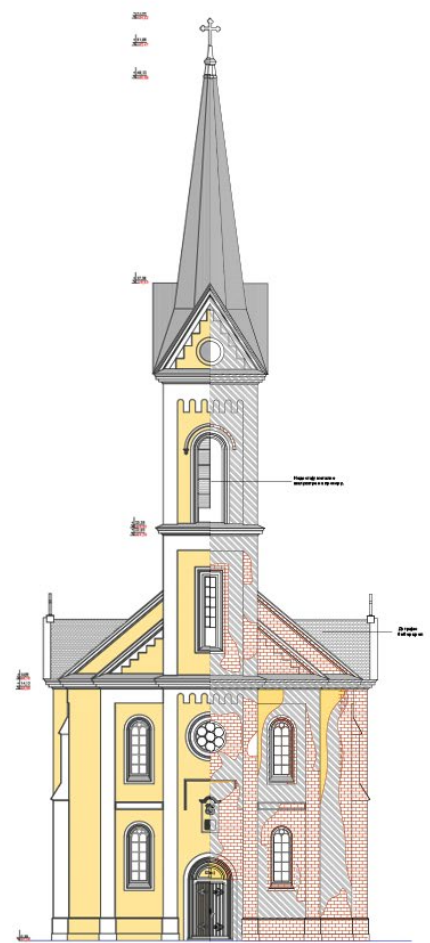
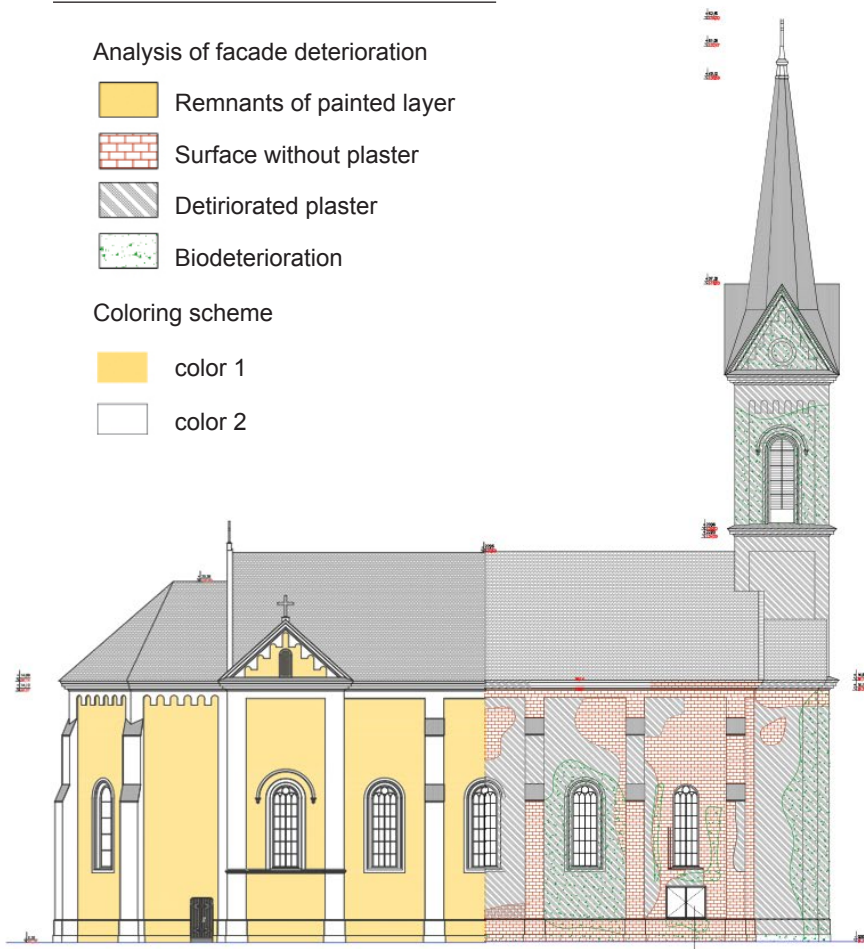


Photo: author



Photo: Bojan Zupanec



Before

After



Photo: Provincial Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments



Photo: Bojan Zupanec



The project was based on an evidence-led conservation methodology that integrated archival research with scientific analysis of the original building materials.

Extensive research in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa led to the identification of previously unknown archival documents related to Žabalj, dating from 1884 to 1903. These records revealed new information about the building's authorship, construction, materials, and historical development, directly informing the conservation strategy.

Laboratory analyses of the original materials provided the scientific basis for defining appropriate conservation treatments, ensuring the authenticity and long-term preservation of the historic structure.





Before: View from the choir gallery towards the altar

Photo: author



After: View from the choir gallery towards the altar



Photo: author

Before: View towards the choir gallery



After: View towards the choir gallery



After: View towards the choir gallery

The new interior elements establish a dialogue between the historic fabric and contemporary additions, reinforcing the building's architectural and artistic values without compromising its heritage significance. Their design was guided by the analysis of lost or inadequately replaced historic elements, creating contemporary interventions that respect the original character of the space while remaining distinguishable as additions of the present day.

Where reliable evidence of the original appearance was unavailable, speculative reconstruction was avoided. Instead, contemporary solutions, such as the mirror installation, were introduced as reversible elements, preserving the authenticity of the historic interior while enhancing its spatial experience.

Particular attention was given to the integration of preserved materials with wall finishes (mirror), partitions, metalwork, and lighting, ensuring functional performance while supporting the long-term preservation of the historic structure.

Photos: author



Discovery of arched entrance



Overpainted decorative elements



Demolition of inadequate structures



After: The choir gallery - mirror wall

Before and During: The choir gallery



Photo: author
Before: View from the the choir gallery towards the Altar



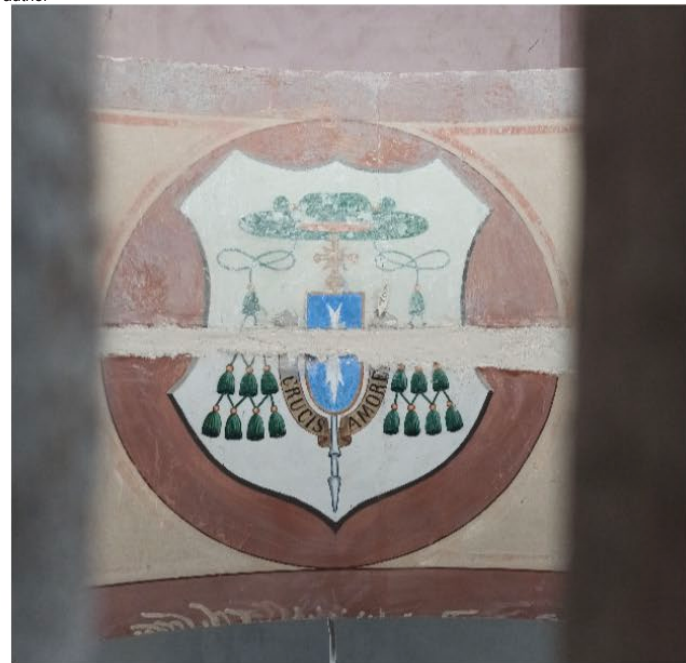
After: View from the the choir gallery towards the Altar







Before: Half of medallion



During: Discovery of the other half of medallion



After: Entrance and restored and conserved medallion

Through a comprehensive conservation and restoration process, the project restored the architectural, artistic, and material integrity of the church, ensuring its continued role as an active part of Žabalj's cultural heritage. Having lost its official protection status due to decades of deterioration, the church is now entering a renewed process of heritage designation, supported by the restoration results and newly discovered historical evidence.

Photo: Bojan Zupanec



After: Entrance view showing the seamless integration of preserved original floor tiles with newly fabricated elements based on the original pattern.