

The Basilica Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption or the Cathedral of Mariana. The present parish dates from 1704 and the Chapel of the Beatific Virgin Mary of the Mount Carmel was the only temple in the hamlet until 1711, when it gained the status of village. The chapel was then elevated to main church and was dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception.

The temple was built during the term of Governor Antônio Francisco de Albuquerque (1710-13), and in 1734, more work was done on the façade and the towers.

A papal bull created the Diocese of Mariana in 1745, elevating the village to the category of city, and the church became a cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. The changes of patron saint follow a Portuguese-Brazilian tradition that assigns most main churches to Our Lady of the Conception and, in bishoprics, the cathedral to Our Lady of the Assumption.

In 1748, the first bishop, Friar Manuel da Cruz, became aware of the need to finish the cathedral, especially the ceiling and the interior painting. Between 1751 and 1760 much work was done, including the construction of the Most Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the application of mortar on the exterior. In 1753, the Schnitger organ arrived in Mariana. Manuel Francisco Lisboa, who built a tribune near the choir to receive it, directed its installation.

The Mariana Cathedral presents a very modest design, similar to some Jesuit constructions on the Brazilian shoreline. The floor plan is rectangular, and so are its walls, denoting a strong classic taste, which its façade, crowned with a triangular pediment and two belfries, accentuates. The baroque exuberance is kept to its interior, richly gilded and polychromic.

Although it was subjected to constant work in the following 30 years, in 1798 the Cathedral fell in disrepair, making it necessary to rebuild the external walls and the roof. This was done according to the original design, but substituting stone and lime for mud.

Between 1978 and 1984 restoration was done, including the ceiling of the main chapel, the roof, chancel arch and towers, inspection of electrical installations, restoration of column covering, the ceiling of the main nave, replacement of floor ceramics for wood planks, and internal and external painting.

In his Baroque Religious Architecture in Brazil, Germain Bazin describes the cathedral's interior thus:

"The Cathedral of Mariana presents an exceptional floor plan, with the main nave limited by two lateral naves, surmounted by tribunes, while the main chapel is surrounded by corridors without tribunes. The sacristy is at the back. Two arms of the cross, inscribed, deep, and at the same level of the main chapel, form the transept. The church's architectonic decoration presents distinct stages. In the first stage, the columns and the arches were covered with wood panels, creating a beautiful Tuscan order with salient cornices. This noble décor remains in its entirety in the main nave, a remnant of the 1734 works. The richer ornamentation of the transept is a composite of Ionian and Corinthian capitals and belongs to a later period. Of course, as the church became a cathedral to house the bishop's seat, the temple had to be richer. Thus, the main chapel was divided into two parts by two consoles of

a composite order that support the pendants from two cupolas of slight relief, in wood. On these two cupolas, an architectonic decoration was painted that houses two times four saintly priests. The date when the work was concluded is provided by the contract for the painting of the two cupolas, as well as that of the main nave's ceiling, which was given to Manuel Rabelo de Sousa ... in 1760. In the same year, Manuel Rabelo de Sousa had signed a contract to paint the interior and gild the lateral altars."

Highlights of the cathedral's decoration are the two fake cupolas of the main chapel, the two huge altarpieces of the transept, one dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and the other to Saint Michael and Souls, both attributed to the Portuguese carver Francisco Xavier de Brito. Also worth mentioning are the windscreen at the entrance, by Francisco Vieira Servas, and the works in the baptistery: the font in stone, by José Pereira Arouca, the lid of which was carved also by Francisco Vieira Servas, and the painting of the Baptism of Christ, by Manoel da Costa Athaide.

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