

GOD'S HOUSE IS OUR HOUSE

God's House Is Our House

*Re-imagining
the Environment for Worship*

Richard S. Vosko



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I dedicate this work to the pioneers
in the practice of liturgical art and architecture.
They have contributed to the movement
with steadfast exuberance and loyalty.
They have inspired many others
to do good work
with humility.

I am personally grateful.



Adé de Bethune, 1914–2002
Frank Kacmarcik, OBL.S.B., 1920–2004
Robert Edward Rambusch, 1924–
William Schickel, 1919–
Edward Anders Sövik, 1918–

Contents

Abbreviations ix

Introduction: A Context for Change xi

Overview: Processing a Project xvii

PART ONE: Building Blocks 1

1. Memory 3
2. Imagination and Creativity 9
3. Catechesis 18
4. Scriptural Foundations 21
5. Christian Writings 24
6. Early Church History 26
7. Early Church Architecture 28
8. Later Movements in Church Architecture 31
9. Theology 40
10. Liturgy 45
11. The Language of Sacred Space 48
12. Beauty and Aesthetics in Church Design 51
13. Proxemics 56
14. The Place of the Assembly 60

PART TWO: Building Plans 69

15. The Church Gathers 71
16. The Church Baptizes 79
17. The Church Celebrates the Eucharist 86
18. Music Ministry, Instruments and Acoustics 97

19. The Role of Art in Worship	108
20. Light and Color and Glass	142
21. Chapels	149
22. Memorial Places	160
23. Auxiliary Rooms	167
PART THREE: Further Planning	171
24. Art Education for Pastoral Leaders	173
25. Finding and Working with Artists	176
26. Preserving and Enhancing Older Churches and Cathedrals	181
27. Inculturation in Our Places of Worship	189
28. The Architectural Style of Church Buildings	194
29. Megachurch Models	201
30. Cathedral Models	207
31. Stewardship	218
32. Environmental Stewardship: An Ethical Concern	225
Afterword	231
Glossary	232
Documents and Instructions	234
List of Illustrations and Credits	235
Selected Resources	242
Index	245

Abbreviations

BB	Book of Blessings
BLS	Built of Living Stones
CB	Ceremonial of Bishops
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCL	Code of Canon Law
DD	<i>Dies Domini</i> : Observing and Celebrating the Day of the Lord
EACW	Environment and Art in Catholic Worship
EM	<i>Eucharisticum Mysterium</i>
GILM	General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass
GIRM	General Instruction of the Roman Missal
HCWEOM	Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass
IRL	Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy
LA	Letter to Artists
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> : Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
MCW	Music in Catholic Worship
OA	<i>Opera Artis</i> : On the Care of the Church's Historical and Artistic Heritage
OCF	Order of Christian Funerals
OP	Order of Penance
OPW	Our Place of Worship
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
RDCA	Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar
RS	<i>Redemptionis Sacramentum</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> : Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Introduction

A Context for Change

THIS BOOK, the fruit of thirty-five years of work in the building and renovating of cathedrals, churches and chapels, is intended, first of all, for those who are becoming involved in any way in this important work. Where possible, read this book well before even the bare beginnings of organizing yourselves for the work ahead. For others, the book may serve as an update on the art and architecture reforms set in motion by the Second Vatican Council.

The creation of an appropriate Catholic place for the worship of God is a complicated task. History and geography may provide innumerable examples, but building or renovating a house of prayer is not simply a matter of architectural style, artistic choices, the correct location for ritual furnishings or the seating arrangement of the assembly. Rather, it has to do with the fundamental way in which we understand who we are and how we behave in public. There are disagreements over these issues. Different camps have arisen since Vatican II, each with its arguments. The feelings are deep and it may take generations before a common ground is realized. Unfortunately the eucharistic liturgy has become the touchstone for these disagreements. In that context the environment for worship has become the subject of intense debate. This book will address these issues. The basic principles of the Conciliar documents and post-Conciliar writings provide the foundation for this work.

- All baptized members of the Church have been called to holiness.
- The Church is the sacrament of unity.
- The baptized are obligated to participate in worship as partners and not spectators.
- Our church buildings are metaphors for this Church and must reflect these realities.

The task of building or renovating a place of worship occurs not in a vacuum but in the midst of a large *mélange* where the Church lives its life in any given place and time. The basilica churches of the fourth century were constructed in the aftermath of persecution. The Romanesque and Gothic buildings of thirteenth-century France were built at a feverish rate while the seventh and eighth crusades were being waged. The Renaissance of fourteenth-century Italy provided the backdrop for the artistic and architectural wonders of that age. The churches in fifteenth-century Spain were erected during the Inquisition. Churches in the new world were built while indigenous peoples were being colonized. The Protestant Reformation and the Catholic reforms provided the setting for both the iconoclasm and the Baroque flourishes of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany and other parts of northern Europe. The Church cannot live in isolation from global events. The design and construction of church buildings happens within the events and critical thinking of each age.

Today at least four major concerns need to be identified. The first has to do with the global situation. As I finish this book in the winter of 2005, the planet is fragile and broken-hearted. A tsunami has just wiped out the lives and hopes of hundreds of thousands of people. Civil wars abound. Terror against innocent people is now a common weapon of states and individuals alike. Hundreds of millions of people live short lives, lacking food and health care and even potable water. HIV/AIDS takes lives in epidemic numbers. Deforestation continues. Fewer corporations monopolize the market place. The corporate culture is plagued by greed and unethical practices. Pollution and waste are destroying the very power of our planet to provide for future generations. Wealth and the planet's natural resources are enjoyed by a small percentage of earth's people.

The second concern has to do with life in the United States. The tragedy of September 11, 2001, still strangles the nation's collective spirit and has created in many a xenophobic paranoia. The middle class struggles to make ends meet while the gap widens between the rich and the poor. There is still no national health care plan, and the cost of drugs continues to climb. The citizenship is torn over the war being waged in Iraq. In the media and among politicians the tone has become mean-spirited and self-serving. Funds for the arts have dwindled while made-for-TV reality shows mesmerize households every evening. Testing scores in the nation's public school systems are below par when compared to other countries. The infrastructures of once great urban centers are decaying while exurban developments are depleting the nation's farmlands and taxing highway systems.

Restlessness in religion is the third concern. The search for the sacred appears to be in a state of restive change. A new and fiery evangelistic form of fundamentalism challenges mainstream religions. Islam is growing in the Western world. Enormous Christian churches are empty on Sunday. New sects offer alternative avenues to spiritual growth blending Eastern mysticism and twelve-step self-improvement programs. Older church members cling loyally to revered rituals while youths search for a more hip-hop venue that speaks to their lifestyles. In North America the ordination of an openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church created divisions in the worldwide Anglican communion, which has in turn challenged relations with other Christian denominations. The Jewish population continues to decrease because of intermarriage. New state laws providing legal status to same-sex partners have altered the traditional definitions of marriage and family. Issues dealing with birth control, capital punishment, abortion, cloning and stem cell research have polarized citizens in both Church and country. In brief, the strong biblical and traditional foundations of old-world religions are being rocked.

The fourth concern is the state of the Catholic Church itself. The pedophile scandal in North America is leaving a mark on everything the Church does. The laity appear to have lost trust in the bishops. Lay organizations like Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful are demanding more participation in the governance of the Church.¹ The September 12, 2004, *Boston Globe* newspaper reported that in discussing the United State sex-abuse scandal with bishops from New England, Pope John Paul II encouraged them to be more open to the needs of parishioners in the wake of a "crisis of confidence in the church's leadership." The bishops themselves seem to differ on important matters. This was obvious when some stated they would deny Communion to church members (particularly civil servants) who do not publicly uphold the moral teachings of the Church. Catholics in the United States can be polarized on just about any significant issue dealing with their lives.

As the membership of the Catholic Church increases annually, the percentage of those attending church dwindles. The number of lay leaders increases, but vocations to the priesthood, brotherhood and sisterhood are in decline. The remnant ordained pastorate claims to be

¹ Read, for example, Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2003) and Stephen J. Pope, ed., *Common Calling: The Laity and Governance of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004).

happy while showing symptoms of demoralization. Shifting populations are altering the Catholic landscape. In larger metropolitan centers the closing or merging of parishes is met with strong opposition. Meanwhile, in the suburbs, especially in temperate regions of the country, churches are being built with megachurch proportions. New immigration paths are also changing the face of the Church. Once solidly Eastern and Western European in its makeup, a new diversity is taking hold as more people migrate from Asia, the Pacific Islands, Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

On the liturgical front some church authorities and laity clearly wish to return to a pre-Conciliar mode. Language, music and ministerial roles during Mass appear to be the first targets for such a restorative effort. Proof for this is found especially in the proposed retranslations of liturgical and biblical texts and the renewed emphasis on the pre-eminent role of the priest during the celebration of Mass. While many responsible faith communities, scholars and bishops continue to work for the adaptation of the rites that would celebrate the diversity of the Church, others seem interested in “restoring” the liturgy to a prescribed homogeneous form to be used by all, defining unity as uniformity.

In the midst of all these perplexing observations, this *is* a book about the environment for worship and how we can re-imagine what characterizes and defines our places for public and private prayer. I hope my insights will enable the reader to think anew about sacred space. During the past thirty-five years, while working with hundreds of congregations, most of them Catholic, I have learned two valuable lessons. First, no one of us knows more than all of us. We can and desperately need to learn from one another. Dialogue works. Second, the construction or renovation of a church building always benefits when all work in awareness of the larger regional, national and global situations. Without this, we divorce ourselves from any sense of stewardship.

I begin this book by presenting a framework for going about building or renovating a place of worship. This process could be used as a guide for any project. Then the book is divided into three parts.

In Part One, “Building Blocks,” I will explore various areas that shape our beliefs. Unexplored misunderstandings about religion, worship, art and architecture will make for an emotional and hostile atmosphere throughout a church building or renovation project. These issues are not always directly architecturally or artistically related. They must be addressed before embarking on a project.

In Part Two, “Building Plans,” I will present a conceptual program describing the spaces and appointments that comprise a place of

worship. These ideas for re-imagining a worship environment are founded on principles that have served us well in the past. For example, I believe that the architectural setting for worship must always accommodate processions. The building itself must feature elements of verticality, color and illumination. The choice of materials and their textures should be harmonized to present a space that is extraordinary to the senses. However, a worthy worship place does not begin with an architectural or artistic idea but a liturgical one. Thus the building must first serve the worship of the assembly and foster its engagement. This is a real challenge in older church buildings. How the site and the building are laid out, then, will be the main thrust of the second section.

In Part Three, "Further Planning," I will review those areas that require more attention and the cooperation of anyone involved in a church building or renovation project. The stewardship factor is troubling in an age where more and more people have neither adequate nutrition nor decent housing. The creation of environments for worship that are ecologically sound has become an urgent issue. The size of church buildings is another concern. They will have to be much larger to accommodate the growing population of worshipers at a time when there are fewer persons authorized to preside over a eucharistic liturgy. But is the megachurch phenomenon a healthy trend? At the end there is a glossary, resources and an index to facilitate your work.

Why write or read a book on church art and architecture when so many urgent issues press in upon us? There is an old saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, how we pray determines what we believe. I believe that *where* we pray shapes *how* we pray and so not only proclaims what we believe but also how we live. In this way there is a vital connection between our church buildings and our lives and deeds as religious people.

This book is written from a Catholic perspective about Catholic places of worship, but through my work with other Christians and with various communities within the Jewish faith, I know that we hold many things in common with regard to the creation of buildings to house our worship. I hope this work will serve others in the ecumenical and interfaith community and that it will advance our work together.

I am grateful to the following persons who have helped me think through and write this book. Gabe Huck served as the primary editor and helped me craft a more readable manuscript. His liturgical acumen made his contributions all the more valuable. Good friends and professional colleagues James Bacik, Bill Beard, Larry Cowper, Eileen

Crowley, Dennis Fleischer, Walter Kroner, Maggie McInnis and Fred Moleck read different sections and gave me straightforward critiques. I am indebted to the staff at Liturgical Press whose enthusiasm and hard work have helped to produce this work—Ann Blattner, Susan Hogan/Albach, Stephanie Lancour, Brother David Manahan, O.S.B., Colleen Stiller, Mark Twomey, and Mark Warzecha. I could not have written this book if it were not for the encouragement and support of Janet Walton.

I also thank those to whom I dedicate this work. The late Ade dé Bethune and the late Frank Kacmarcik, along with Robert E. Rambusch, Edward A. Sövik and William Schickel all have been courageous and talented pioneers in liturgical art and architecture dating back to the 1940s. Their work is a solid foundation for all of us.

Finally, because I often recommend that congregations allot a portion of their project budget to construct a Habitat for Humanity home I will donate all royalties I receive from the sale of this book to Habitat for Humanity, Albany, New York.

Overview

Processing a Project

THERE ARE many ways to go about building or renovating a place of worship. In some instances, where the pastor works alone with the architect, there is no real process. In others, there may be a modest one where the pastor invites a few people to participate in the planning. And, in other cases, an elaborate process includes the entire congregation. No matter what approach, every project must follow some steps that are laid out in an organized fashion. In my judgment it would be difficult to build or renovate a church without a process. Yet most projects in North America take place without one. It is for this reason that I begin this book by outlining steps that may be taken to assure the successful completion of a project.

Some professionals use the word “process” as a noun. It is a systematic methodology employed to carry out the project. It will identify the goals and objectives and who is responsible for reaching certain milestones. It will also establish step-by-step ways to develop and monitor plans, the budget and the timetable. I prefer to use the word as a verb. In this sense it has more to do with managing experiences, information, stories of faith, imagination and designs in addition to organizing the project in an efficient and developmental way. When all the members of the congregation, and not just the committees are involved, the end result will be a more complete reflection of the faith community.

A project that includes very few people ignores the baptismal dignity of the rest of the congregation. If there is any truth to the axiom, “We are formed by what we form,” it is imperative that the whole assembly be involved in shaping its house of prayer. This is why I contend that God’s house is our house. The dedication of the building becomes a time for the re-dedication of the whole Church—the people of the community. This is the only way the building can be

understood as a metaphor for that congregation and not just a template copied out of some architectural history book. If the church building is to be a resonator of the community, then there is a responsibility to review what the Church is in the modern world. What does it believe? What is its vision? What is its mission? Not to ask these questions could result in a building that does not reflect the local church. The topics I raise in Part One of this book are the ones the community must wrestle with before they even begin to think about designs.

Here is a brief overview of the steps that have proven successful in many projects.¹ It can be adapted for a small chapel in a religious community or for a large cathedral. Although some of these steps can occur simultaneously, the overall organization is sequential.

STEP 1: OBTAINING DIOCESAN APPROVAL

In the Catholic Church the bishop is responsible for the liturgical life of the diocese. He also oversees the ongoing development of the local church. In this sense the work of every parish and organization must serve the common good and vision of the whole diocese. Some dioceses have established long-term plans for building and property development. Many dioceses have set a limit on how much money may be spent before permission is given to begin a project. This is why contacting the proper personnel is important. It is also a time to review local policies and guidelines, find out if consultative services are available and learn if the bishop has any particular concerns or requirements.² Other denominations may have similar guidelines.

STEP 2: PREPARING A SCOPE OF WORK

Before the congregation hires an architect it should have a clear understanding of what it wants to do in the project. This will facilitate the selection of the best architect and other professionals for the job. Also, it is important to test the economical climate of the community. It makes good sense to find out if there will be financial support later on.

¹ Much of the information presented here is employed by the Architecture and Building Commission in the Diocese of Albany.

² Note here that Catholic bishops have the right to mandate a liturgical practice in their respective dioceses that may not be the norm in the neighboring diocese or even throughout the rest of the country.

A project committee should be organized to prepare this scope of work.

Committee Organization. The primary mission of this committee is to ascertain the needs of the congregation and assure the members that their input is important and that they will be kept informed in a transparent way. A liturgical design consultant (see below) can be very helpful in organizing and guiding this committee. Different tasks can be carried out by various subcommittees: e.g., prayer and worship, acoustics and musical instruments, art and furnishings, architect selection, construction, data gathering, finances, hospitality and logistics, communications and publicity. Inviting women and men with knowledge in these areas has its advantages. However, the insights, wisdom and memories from crones, sages and elders in the congregation should not be overlooked. Nor should the input from teenagers be neglected. The idea is to involve more people from the congregation in doing less work.

Each subcommittee is given a number of reasonable things to accomplish within a realistic timeframe. For example, the prayer and worship team would identify the devotional practices that are popular in the congregation. At the same time the art and furnishings committee would document what works of art are important to the people as well as their artistic value. The musical instruments group might begin its task by evaluating the style of music used during worship as well as the instruments and space required.

Local customs, pastoral instructions and current ritual books can be used to guide these activities. In a renovation project the objective is to document what could be done to the church to improve public worship. In a new church project the report will state what is expected from the community as it prepares to worship in a new building. This committee is obliged to include members from the assembly in determining what is best for their church. Part Two and Part Three of this book can serve as a basis for all of this work.

Some committees spend a lot of time worrying about details. Some even try to design the building. The professionals hired for the project will tend to these issues later in the process. The subcommittees bring their reports and recommendations to the core committee, which presents them to the pastor who is ultimately responsible for the welfare of the congregation. This system is apropos for a hierarchical style of governance. In more congregational-style churches where a board of directors makes all major decisions and where the pastor does not have unilateral authority, other models would be appropriate.

Project Catechesis. Before asking for input from the congregation, it is important to provide a catechetical opportunity for all members early in the process. There may be aspects of the project that are unknown to the congregation. For example, some may wonder why the project is even necessary. A liturgical design consultant usually conducts this educational component. This is the time to deal with the topics I raise in Part One of this book that have to do with the identity, purpose and worship practices of the local faith community.

This is also the time for the liturgical design consultant to conduct a series of illustrated lectures that deal graphically with the history of the Christian place of worship, the spaces that are essential in any church building and the role of art and music in the worship environment. These topics are addressed later in this book and can be helpful to the congregation in understanding the nature and purpose of a church building.

The education sessions could be supplemented with handouts at weekend liturgies to assure that all members of the congregation have access to the same information. These sessions could also be video recorded for the convenience of those who cannot leave their residences.

Congregation Input. The primary work of the subcommittees is to collect information from the congregation and make recommendations. In addition to the research of the subcommittees, at least four questions should be asked of all participants at the educational sessions. (1) What one thing about Catholic church buildings pleases you most of all today? (2) What one thing about Catholic church buildings bothers you most of all today? (3) What one thing is absolutely essential for you personally in your church building? (4) If you have very young children, what one thing is absolutely essential for your family?

The participants are invited to talk about the questions in small groups so they can learn from one another. Each group presents a summary to the entire gathering at the conclusion of the session. All participants are asked to return their written answers to the data subcommittee. The compilation of the answers to these questions alone would provide a fairly accurate picture of the needs and expectations of the entire congregation. The advantage of asking the questions during the catechetical phase is that the participants may have learned something new or thought about something in ways they never imagined before. The youth of the congregation should not be excluded from the process. Various exercises could be scheduled to give all ages the chance to discuss their place of worship.

Liturgical prayer should provide the structure for this entire catechetical phase. For example, each teaching opportunity and group discussion could take place before, after or during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. The end result of this period of catechesis could be a document that states the vision or mission of the community, which should then be reflected in the church building.

Scope of Work Document. The end product of this step is the scope of work document that will be sent to each of the architects invited to submit proposals. This document will include data about the congregation (e.g., a budget for the project, sacramental statistics, demographic studies, site possibilities and constraints and programmatic requirements pertaining to the worship environment). It will also describe what is expected from the architects (e.g., economic analysis, site evaluation, existing conditions studies). A liturgical program that specifically addresses the worship space components of the project should be included in this scope of work package. Written by the liturgical designer, it should contain the owner's needs and expectations regarding the worship environment, applicable church teachings and the consultant's recommendations. This "foundation" document could be quite specific and will complement other information and ideas collected as the process moves forward.

STEP 3: ASSEMBLING THE PROFESSIONAL DESIGN TEAM

A church project can involve many specialists. They include the following:

- Liturgical design consultant
- Architect
- Acoustical consultant
- Lighting consultant
- Landscape architect
- Decorative paint studio
- Organ builder
- Fund-raising company

Artists are also part of the design team. Ideally, they should be identified in time to include them in decisions pertaining to the architectural

settings for their art. I will discuss the role of artists more fully later in this book. There are also different project delivery methods, which I will describe at the end of this step. Here, I will discuss the liturgical designer and the architect.

The Liturgical Design Consultant. A liturgical design consultant is frequently the first professional retained for a project. It is important to find someone who understands all aspects of building and renovating and can provide clear and unambiguous direction throughout the process. That person should be able to do a number of things for you including:

- Organize and work with your committees
- Provide catechesis for the entire congregation
- Develop a liturgical and artistic program
- Prepare conceptual sketches
- Guide the design, fabrication and installation of all art, furnishings and appointments

Experience is essential if this person is to establish credibility with other professionals on the design team. At a minimum this consultant should have expertise in liturgy, art and architecture. Experience in organizational development is also helpful. It is not too much to expect a *liturgical* design consultant to have an advanced degree in one or all of these areas. Would you ever hire an architect who had no formal training in architecture?

The Architect. The liturgical design consultant can be instrumental in helping the congregation put together the professional design team. This selection process begins with a list of architects and others to be considered. Some dioceses can provide names of architects that have worked in the region before. Caution should prevail when considering architects that may have done a lot of church work but have not continued their own formation in the field of religious architecture.

Each firm on the list is presented with the scope-of-work statement and a request for a proposal. Interested firms will decide whether to pursue the project. If so, they may visit the site and review all of the information gathered so far. Their reply should include their proposal and a copy of the contract that the congregation is expected to sign. A firm is selected based on the interview and the quality of the proposal. The contract should be negotiated before the signing takes place.

What can be expected from an architect who designs church buildings? Edward A. Sövik once offered these criteria for architects. They could be used in searching for other professionals.

- Not mere competence but extraordinary ability
- The capacity for excellent design appropriate to the Christian faith
- The ability to actualize truth and poetry in structure; not merely to solve problems
- The ability to produce work with spiritual qualities:
 - Integrity (no deceit or affectations)
 - Hospitality and humanity (not presumptuous, dominating, harsh or ostentatious)
 - Beauty (which leads to wonder and is appropriate to God's presence)
- Good technical skills as well as artistic skills
- Good administrative skills
- The ability to be open, responsive and articulate
- Intelligence, literacy and scholarship (worship, theology and spirituality)
- Experience and commitment to the social good more than personal advantage

Not every architect can live up to such expectations. Creating a place for the worship of God will demand that even the most experienced design professionals start from scratch and go through some sort of growth and learning process—a transformation. Although this expectation is laudable it must not be overlooked that the construction of religious buildings is a big business,³ and professionals have to decide if a project is worth their time.

Sometimes the best architect for the project is not a local one. It would not be unusual to hire an architect with impressive credentials from outside the community. When this happens it is best to add a

³ Religious building projects accounted for nine billion dollars worth of business according to the 2000 United States Census Report. This is not much compared to the defense budget or what is spent on diets and cosmetics. However, it is a large amount considering it is raised through private donations.

local firm to the team to handle day-to-day concerns (e.g., working with contractors, addressing local code issues).

Some architects advertise as “liturgical” architects. If the liturgical expertise is there, it could be an advantage. However, it could present a conflict of interests when the architect is biased on certain issues. For instance, who will advise a congregation in the most objective way when an aspect of the architectural plan is called into question for liturgical reasons?

Although there are different approaches to architectural services the important thing to remember is that the architect as well as all other design professionals must be willing to participate in the pilgrimage of the community every step of the way. Their role is to be good listeners and good guides. In the end the church building should never be considered the architect’s showcase but the work of the community. The selection process will help the congregation determine which candidate is best suited for the job.

Project Delivery Methods. Designing a place of worship is one thing. Getting it built is another. There are different acceptable delivery systems that can be used in building a new church or renovating an older one.

- a. The Design-Bid-Build is the most traditional method. It begins with an architect who prepares all of the architectural drawings and documents, which are then put out to bid to general contractors (GC). The GC selected is then responsible for building the church according to design specifications.
- b. The Construction Manager method is gaining popularity in church projects. The architect and construction manager (CM) are hired at the same time. The CM prepares bid packages and supervises the work of individual trade contractors who sign a contract directly with the congregation.
- c. The Contract Manager method is a variation on the previous one. In this case the congregation hires the Contract Manager who then hires an architect and all of the subcontractors who sign a contract directly with the congregation.
- d. The Design-Build method has at least two variations. In one, an architect is the manager of the firm, which is also a construction company. In the other, a construction company is the manager and the architect is an employee. In both cases the firm is responsible for the design and construction of the church.

The advantages and disadvantages of each method should be examined carefully to assure the one selected for a particular project is appropriate.

STEP 4:

DEVELOPING A FEASIBILITY STUDY AND MASTER PLAN

Once the architect is selected the first task is to embark on a feasibility study, which will have several parts to it. The end product of this study will be a master plan for the project.

Needs and Constraints. In this part the professionals retrieve as much information pertaining to the project as possible. This would include the liturgical program, the demographic data and the sacramental statistics presented earlier in the scope of work. All needs, ideas and constraints are identified at this time. Certain issues are pursued: What are the site possibilities? Are there any restrictions governing the property or existing building? Is the church on a local or the national historic register, or a potential candidate for such designation? What are the urgent priorities? What is the level of enthusiasm in the congregation? Where is the money coming from to carry out this project? In the case of an older church building that should be stabilized, this phase would include an existing-conditions report.

Studying Alternatives. This part examines various conceptual alternatives that might satisfy the needs and expectations of the congregation. These studies will help everyone work toward an agreement on what is the preferred alternative. If, for example, the congregation has outgrown its church building the alternatives may include: adding on to the present church, razing it and building a new one on the same site, moving to a new site and constructing a church there.

If a decision was made earlier to build a new church the alternatives would include: possible sites, the location of the church on the site, traffic patterns. The preferred alternative also represents the start of a master plan.

Preferred Alternative. After the committee agrees on a preferred alternative and how it fits into a master plan, it is developed into a schematic design so that it can be presented to the diocese and the congregation along with approximate cost estimates. Which presentation is made first will depend on diocesan policies. The diocese will also want to know how the project will be paid for. In other denominations an outside agency can be helpful in reviewing the conceptual plans and estimated costs. They might even be able to assist in funding the

project in some way.⁴ The architect and the liturgical designer should assist the committee in explaining the preferred alternative. The members of the congregation should be given ample time to see the plan and ask questions pertaining to the project.

Search for Consensus. Assuming that the diocese approves the preferred plan a process should be in place to see if the congregation has reached consensus regarding the preferred plan. Mitigated consensus is a reasonable goal because it is highly unlikely that there will be complete agreement on every aspect of a church building or renovation project. Those who are not part of the emerging consensus should be given enough time to explain why they do not agree. It is not advisable to take a vote in the congregation in order to make a decision. When a group votes on something, there will always be winners and losers, which only creates deeper feelings of division. The members of the congregation should also be apprised from the outset that not everyone will be completely satisfied with the church.

Master Plan Development. Once consensus has been reached and the diocese approves the plan and budget, the design team finalizes the master plan, which becomes a stand-alone document. This master plan clearly identifies what is the first phase of the project and details the cost estimates. If the money is already available, the schematic design can be immediately developed. If the money is not yet raised, the master plan and the schematic drawings of the first phase can be used to give everyone an idea of what the place could look like.

STEP 5: RAISING FUNDS

Because the fiscal waters were tested at the start of the project, the stage is now set for the major capital campaign. Sometimes the diocesan comptroller or development officer will recommend or determine how much a congregation can spend on a project. Some dioceses still lend money to its constituents. Otherwise, the local congregation is left on its own to finance the project. Permission to break ground or proceed with a renovation is usually not given by a diocese until a certain amount of money is already on hand. This percentage varies from diocese to diocese.

⁴ Founded in 1880, the Episcopal Church Building Fund (<http://www.ecbf.org/>) provides a variety of services: planning processes, workshops, consultations and loans.

The finance subcommittee can now announce to the congregation how money will be raised. It is most important at this time to explain the *raison d'être* for the plan in a way that energizes the entire congregation. Choose a person who can best speak with vision and enthusiasm. It is essential that the reason for the project be perceived as the collective vision of the congregation. If the catechetical aspects of the project were successful, the congregation will now see the plan as something of its own making—one that truly reflects who they are, what they believe and how they worship. Conventional wisdom suggests that if they feel ownership, they will help to pay for it.

This is also the time to recognize the lead donors. Some projects start off with a generous gift from one or two donors that encourages others to join the cause. Banks and other local institutions often will provide some financial support for religious buildings because of their architectural presence and the congregation's service to the community.⁵ Plans should also be made for the ongoing fiscal management of the space—a never-ending project. For example, I usually suggest that the estimated operating budget for the first year be included in the project budget. The whole campaign should be conducted in the spirit of good stewardship, which is discussed in Part Three of this book.

STEP 6: DEVELOPING THE DESIGNS

Based on the success of the fund-raising campaign, the architects begin to develop that part of the master plan that the congregation can afford to build at this time. During this phase the architects work closely with engineers and consultants to prepare more detailed drawings. This is when careful attention is paid to the lighting and acoustical plans. Also, final decisions are made regarding materials, finishes, architectural ornamentation, decorative painting and other specializations, e.g., the incorporation of glass art.

As plans become more detailed and comprehensive the costs will change. Therefore during this phase it is also a good time to review the budget, continue the capital campaign and keep the congregation informed about the progress being made. Some dioceses ask for a review of plans at the completion of the design development phase.

⁵ Consider the questions asked most frequently by someone moving into town because of a new job. What is the cost of housing? What is the crime rate? How good is the school system? And, where is the nearest place of worship?

STEP 7: WORKING WITH ARTISTS AND ARTISANS

I will discuss in more detail the process of finding and working with artists in Part Three. The integration of art and architecture is important. The art program developed during the liturgical programming phase will identify the pieces that need to be commissioned. The locations for all art, furnishings and appointments should be incorporated into the schematic plans mentioned above. The liturgical designer and architect should be able to pinpoint these places with the help of the arts-and-furnishings committee. However, the best approach is to have the artist who will actually be doing the piece involved in the design details of the setting, including the choice of materials, color and light.

This means that, ideally, the selection of artists should occur in the early stages of the process when other professionals are being hired. If the money is not available to establish a full contract, most artists are willing to prepare a sketch or a maquette along with a cost estimate for a fixed fee that would be applied to the account. That model then could be used in presenting memorial opportunities for the congregation. The important thing is to involve the artists in the design of the settings that will eventually house or frame their works of art.

STEP 8: PREPARING RITUALS

As the drawings are being developed attention should shift back to the involvement of the congregation in preparing the church or the site for the work that will soon begin. In the case of a new church the groundbreaking liturgy should be an event that is more engaging than merely watching dignitaries turn over the sod. Consider inviting the whole congregation to walk the site, pray over it and claim it for the worship of God. Again, the process suggests that this holy ground is an extension and reflection of the people of God. It does not become blessed or sacred simply because a bishop sprinkles water on it. Rather, the whole assembly blesses God for the gift of the earth. The human response is to care for that land in the best way possible. I will discuss environmental and ecological issues in the final part of this book.

In the case of renovating or departing an existing church, a “leave-taking” liturgy will be important. Over time churches become vessels of personal and communal experiences of God. Most often the memories connected with sacramental celebrations are foremost in the

minds of the members. This is why closing a church can be so traumatic for some. When moving from an old church to a new one, it is essential to transfer significant images, books and relics. These belong to the heritage of the community. There is theological impoverishment when only the reserved sacrament is transferred while the sacred Scriptures are not.

Committee work at this time would include liturgical planning and rehearsals. The publicity-and-communications team would see to the promotion of the events. The financial campaign could be given a boost as people begin to see something happening. More catechesis can help newcomers catch the spirit.

STEP 9: PREPARING CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

During this phase the working drawings or construction documents and the project manual are completed. There are frequent professional design-team meetings to monitor the schedule and the work being done. A review of code issues should take place especially if there is a chance that changes were made since the inception of the project. A final diocesan review of plans may be required.

STEP 10: NEGOTIATING BIDS

Many dioceses are closely involved in the bidding process and may have applicable policies. Typically the project is advertised and bids are received and reviewed. A selective bidding process is when certain firms are invited to submit their interest. In some cases the bid is negotiated with a contractor who may have an outstanding reputation in the diocese or the region or who has done work for the congregation already. When the congregation uses a construction manager, contract manager or design-build method of delivery, there will be no bidding process. However, every caution should be taken regarding the credentials of the subcontractors and all others working on the project. It is wise to agree on a guaranteed maximum price in every case.

STEP 11: CONSTRUCTING THE CHURCH

Once the contract is awarded, the entire design team should meet with the builders to review everybody's responsibilities. The general contractor or construction manager is responsible for completing the project

according to design specifications. That person prepares a schedule and conducts weekly meetings with various subcontractors and the congregation's representative. During this time it is important for the liturgical design consultant to monitor the work of artists and artisans. The timely delivery and installation of all art, furnishings and appointments should be coordinated by the construction manager or general contractor.

STEP 12: DEDICATING AND CARING FOR THE CHURCH

The liturgy planning team in the parish should prepare for the dedication or re-dedication of the church. It is important to know with assurance that the project will be turned over to the owner and that a certificate of occupancy will be issued by a certain date and *before* a dedication date is set. All consultants should gather for a review of the building either before or just after the dedication.

Liturgical planning sessions and rehearsals are held at this time. Collaboration between the bishop's office and the parish planners regarding the dedication ritual is important. Care should be taken to use the event as a time for the re-dedication of the faith community.

PART ONE

Building Blocks

In any church building or renovation project certain theoretical foundations must be recognized and appreciated. One objective is to identify and understand issues that will affect the project. Another is to clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement. The establishment of a common ground early in a process can alleviate misunderstandings later on. These conversations should occur before specific planning programs or drawings are developed. Difficult as it may be to take the time, planning committees should discuss these issues at their first meetings.

I summarize these foundations in Part One in order to create a platform for examining other issues later in this book. I will identify each factor here and present the practical applications in Part Two. This brief overview of the following fundamental factors is not intended to be all-inclusive.

- Memory
- Imagination and Creativity
- Catechesis
- Scriptural Foundations
- Christian Writings
- Early Church History
- Early Church Architecture
- Later Movements in Church Architecture
- Theology
- Liturgy
- The Language of Sacred Space

- Beauty and Aesthetics in Church Design
- Proxemics
- The Place of the Assembly

Chapter 1

Memory

MEMORY is an important component of a worship space. Without it there can be no connection with the history or traditions of a religious group. Words are used to articulate what is remembered. In the *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*¹ expressions like beacon, bride, holy city, vineyard and spouse are used as metaphors for the church. The building is understood as an extension and reflection of the people who gather there. It balances and gives life to both the traditions and the visions of the community. It is not a museum of relics that revere only the past. It is not a mere container for ritual objects, gestures or even people. Instead it is a resonator of the community. It energizes the assembly gathered to enact the narrative that sustains it. This narrative is a story that the faithful believe even though it cannot be fully understood or explained. It is a story about us. In the Christian tradition the paschal event is that story.

I have memories from my childhood that have affected my thinking about art and architecture in a post-Vatican II Church. I grew up in the 1940s and '50s in a mill town along the Mohawk River in upstate New York. Founded in the eighteenth century by Dutch settlers, Amsterdam became an important industrial city because of its location in the river valley. Like many residents, my parents worked in the Mohawk Carpet Mills—the largest rug manufacturer in the world. My mother was a weaver and my father was a night watchman. Neither one had a high school diploma. Both left home as teenagers to earn money to help their parents.

My siblings and I attended the neighborhood Catholic school. Saint Stanislaus was a Polish parish in a city that had seven Catholic

¹ *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, Sacred Congregation for Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, May 29, 1977.

churches. At that time at least fourteen priests served a population of twenty-five thousand people. Neither of my parents was Polish, but this school was the closest to where we lived. My father's family was Slovak. My mother's family belonged to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, but we attended their church, Saint Nicholas, only for weddings and funerals. My childhood memory of that church is filled with incantations, incense and mysterious processions through the elaborate iconostasis.

Saint Stanislaus parish was started in 1894 to serve the growing number of Polish immigrants who lived in the valley and worked on farms and in stone quarries. Like many Eastern Europeans they settled together in neighborhoods, which quickly took on the character of their homeland. They cherished their close-knit friendships and families but were often suspicious of other nationalities and races. Their language, art, music, dances, folktales and recipes affirmed and sustained their identity in the American melting pot. They spent their hard-earned money to build a church as a place to worship God and as a visual and tangible connection to their roots.

My most vivid recollections of that church begin when I was an altar boy. It was quite a responsibility then. First, you had to learn by heart the Latin responses to the priest's prayers. Endless rehearsals conducted by the Felician Sisters guaranteed that the ceremonies of the Mass would be carried out with respect and precision. The church and school were only four blocks from where we lived. The rows of apartment houses and shops along the neighborhood streets were friendly companions during my pre-dawn walks to serve the early Mass. The aroma of fresh bread and buns from the corner bakery eventually got mixed up with the scent of incense and burning candles.

The focal point in the ornate church was the lily white, gold-gilded high altar into which were nestled brightly colored statues of Saints Michael and Stanislaus. Tall angels holding a dozen lights each were perched on pedestals to the left and right of the *reredos*. We switched them on at the Sanctus. Six tall candles and fresh flowers were interspersed between these statues and flanked the shiny tabernacle located in the center. Mindful of the watchful eyes of the sisters who filled the first row of pews, we servers raced to see who would finish lighting the candles first.

Before Mass parishioners carried out their private devotions beneath the ornately painted ceiling that looked like a heavenly picture gallery. Some followed the Stations of the Cross; others knelt before one of the many statues; still others were crouched in their seats fingering their rosary beads. The blowers of the pipe organ in the choir

loft seemed to cough and wheeze, creak and rumble just as I yanked the tiny sacristy bell to signal the start of Mass. The elderly organist chanted back and forth with the priest who almost always wore black vestments. We began by kneeling on the bottom of three steps leading up to the altar. A coterie of smiling angels painted high in the vaulted ceiling of the apse stared down at us as we prayed under our breaths, "Introibo ad altare Dei. Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam." Everyone knelt through the entire twenty-to-twenty-five-minute liturgy but no one else in the church uttered a word. Some received communion. Fifteen years later I was ordained a priest on this very same spot.

Human bodies have a way of remembering things that are not often clear in the mind. That is why people who grow up Catholic have liturgy in their bones. Some may leave the Church, but few shake the memory out of their bodies. Catholic life embraced more than the commandments. It was still in my youth a culture, a way of life, which provided a comfortable framework for morality, education, worship and even athletics. But it was the liturgy and the church buildings that gave the Church much of its unique identity and lifestyle.

I share this glimpse into my past because one of the main roles of a church building is that of a *storyteller*. This is one of the deep-seeded reasons why churches are so important in the lives of people and why there is so much angst when a church is remodeled, merged or closed. These buildings stimulate our memories and imaginations. I am sure my fond recollections are similar to yours no matter where you grew up. For the parishioners of Saint Stanislaus in Amsterdam the church has always been a sacred place that resonated with their stories of faith. The biblical and sometimes fictional narratives depicted in the iconography on the walls, the ceilings and in the stained glass somehow came alive in the personal piety and public prayers of the people in the pews. And even though the imagery was not always directly related to a person's own story, a connection was made and hope was sustained. In this church favors were requested and received, babies were baptized, confessions were heard, Communion was shared, lovers married and the Church said farewell to the deceased. Fifty years ago liturgical customs enacted in novenas, forty hours devotions, Corpus Christi processions and benedictions framed the celebration of the Eucharist and sustained the Old World traditions of the community.

What took place in these churches prior to the current liturgical reforms was profound. At those sunrise Masses, the laity and the sisters, the priest and the two of us altar boys were somehow subliminally

wrapped up in the act of repetitive ritual making in a building that literally and figuratively embraced us with familiar words, art, architecture, music, incantations, smells, gestures and postures. Somehow we were involved in the liturgy together and the church building was like a blanket on a chilly night, a cozy and comfortable wrap. And then, of course, it all changed.

The bishops at Vatican II overwhelmingly approved the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy² by a vote of 2,147 to 4. It altered the liturgical practice of the Church almost overnight. The language in the document surprised many: the notion that liturgical celebrations are not private functions but the work of the whole Church (26), the call for a radical adaptation of the rites (40), the required participation of all the faithful who are no longer to be considered silent spectators (48). These were a few of the teachings that would jar old habits and customs.

The implementation of conciliar reforms in the United States came at a time when the sociological and political climate of the country was also in the midst of change. Protests on campuses and in public streets, mistrust of authority figures, political assassinations and an unwanted conflict in Viet Nam contributed to the restlessness even while the council was going on. The exodus from cities to suburbs began the slow disintegration of intimate neighborhoods like the one I grew up in. The Eisenhower Highway Act of the 1950s built highways bypassing urban centers. Sidewalks became a rarity in warren-like suburban housing developments. Longer commutes to and from work changed behavior patterns in the family. More households saw both parents going off to work as the children boarded school busses. Day care centers and sprawling malls provided services to the new communities. The stress was greater for households with single parents. Gradually the nuclear and extended family system that provided a sense of security and familiarity was largely lost.

The scene in church was also different. New churches were being built in the suburbs while some older downtown churches were beginning to look empty and worn. The liturgical experience was significantly changed. New music, the vernacular, and sermons calling for social consciousness rocked the quiet Catholic sensitivities of the congregation. Little time was left for the already busy churchgoers to pray privately near the image of a favorite saint—if one could be found. No wonder why the liturgical life of the church still appears disjointed. It is!

² Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, December 4, 1963.

Although sociologists differ on this, many believe that this untimely coupling of events (Vatican II and the restlessness of the 1960s in the U.S.) led to a perfect storm, the remnants of which still linger today. The current polarization that exists in society also exists in the Church. Some Catholics still object to the reforms. Many of these people, clergy and laity alike, were not even alive when the council took place. It is obvious that while a great deal of attention has been given to the many changes in the liturgy, the actual transformation of the Church itself, the baptized community, prompted by the reforms has been slow to develop. People disagree over exactly what story should be told in their church buildings and how liturgy should be enacted. It is this unsettling atmosphere that greets any congregation planning to build or renovate a place of worship.

Vatican II redefined the Church and everything it does including education, personnel, governance and worship. The bishops at the Council did not act irresponsibly in authorizing such a major reform, but how could they have known that it would take three to four generations before the concepts of the council could be brought into reality?

Some people now consider the council as an unfortunate blip on the screen of church history. Although it would be difficult to negate or turn back the tide in areas like revelation, ecumenism or the role of the Church in the modern world, there is a concerted effort underway to “restore” the liturgy to a pre-Vatican II practice. Pope John Paul II was clearly not among these restorationists. He reminded the Church: “With the passing of years, the Council documents lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, with the Church’s Tradition.”³

The restorationist movement ignores the fact that the pre-conciliar liturgy had serious problems (what else could have prompted the ever-conservative bishops toward such reforms?). That liturgy was basically unrecognizable when compared to the liturgical practice of the early Church. My boyhood experience is a good example. The same glorious solemn “high” Mass of Christmas Eve, which seemed to take forever, was “said” in fifteen to eighteen minutes by the athletic and handsome young priest who usually had the 6:00 A.M. Saturday “low” Mass in the sisters’ convent chapel.

The understanding of the Mass and all other sacraments at that time was summed up in the dictum *ex opere operato*, meaning that the effectiveness of the liturgy occurred because the priest simply did it. It

³ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II, January 6, 2001, 57.

did not matter whether or not it was done with reverence, or if the people understood the language, or if there was no homily, or if few people took Communion, or that there was no music at the “low” Masses.

In any age there will be abuses. The rites are done by human beings. I remember one cleric saying, “Isn’t liturgy supposed to take care of itself?” The Mass today often does lack the reverence, rhythm, silence and *joie de vivre* that should accompany any serious ritual making. However, the correction should not be legislative but catechetical. Yet in the present moment, concern about how the liturgy should be celebrated has become an authority issue. Uniformity is sometimes promoted as if it were the same as unity or led to unity. Imagine some distant office prescribing all the hymns, homilies and artwork to be used in churches. Imagine someone from another culture choreographing every procession, gesture and posture. Imagine a requirement that every church building look the same inside and out.

I raise these issues that, at first glance, have nothing to do with art and architecture because power, authority and clericalism are factors that will affect any liturgical practice and, therefore, the environment for worship. The intent of this book is to focus on how a place of worship is affected by many elements. Churches are different today because the liturgical rites are different. The rituals have been reformed because the Church has been reformed. There is no doubt that over the past forty years the quality of liturgical practice has been uneven and that there is tremendous room for improvement. However, this legitimate hope for a more reverent and relevant liturgical life should not become a time to undo all of the good work that has been accomplished in understanding the liturgy as the public prayer of the entire assembly.

Similarly, there is no doubt that the quality of church art and architecture has also been uneven. Church buildings tell the stories of the local church and how it is connected to a larger body of history, scripture and tradition. Our memories are important here. The ongoing work of creating faith communities, which are distinct but not separate from the whole Church, is far from over. The designs for the church buildings that house these worshipping communities are also in a state of transition. It is too early to turn back. Vaclav Havel once remarked: “Today many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period where it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, is rising from the rubble.”⁴

⁴ Address of Vaclav Havel, Liberty Medal Ceremony, Philadelphia, July 4, 1994.