

Handbook

Regarding the Construction or Renovation of the Parish Worship Space

THEOLOGY

The Second Vatican Council called for the “full, active, and conscious participation” of the people in the liturgy. The purpose of any environment for worship is to facilitate a full celebration of the liturgy. The environment serves the liturgy best when there is ample space for all that the rites call for: a place to assemble around the altar for the eucharist, a place to celebrate baptism, a place for the community to gather for special occasions and to begin processions, and a place to celebrate reconciliation.

The furnishings and ministers must also have an appropriate space. There should be enough room to allow presiders, lectors, music ministry and instruments, communion ministers, acolytes, and ministers of hospitality to carry out their various liturgical ministries.

In most parishes there are also other times of prayer, such as devotional prayer both public and private. Regarding the tabernacle with the reserved sacrament, the Roman documents say that it is to have a space of its own, a special chapel suitable for private adoration and prayer.

Besides being an appropriate place for the community’s worship and its ministry of witness and service, the community’s worship space will also be a place that shows hospitality, sacredness, mystery, beauty, dignity, and authenticity.

The most important activity of any parish community is its worship, that is, the celebration of the eucharist, the other sacraments, and other official rites of the Church. The celebration of the liturgy, particularly the Sunday eucharist, is the heart of any parish. Additionally, when a parish plans to build or renovate its building for worship, it is important that the parish also reflect on and renew its commitment to witness and service, and provide the facilities to carry out this mission.

HISTORY

When we use the word “church,” we are really speaking first of all about people, the People of God. When Jesus was asked about rebuilding the temple in three days, he pointed out that he was referring to his body, a living temple. We too, as members of Christ’s body through baptism, are the dwelling place of God, and therefore we are a holy people.

A church building then is a “house for the Church,” the place where the holy People of God do holy things. The building is a sacred place because God is present in God’s people and because of what these people do there: they hear the word of God, they pray together, they participate in the eucharist, they celebrate initiation, reconciliation, marriages, and they bury the dead.

In the first few centuries after the resurrection of Jesus, the Christians gathered in homes to celebrate the eucharist. In time a special “house-church” became the designated place for their gathering.

In the fourth century, when more space was needed because the communities had become larger, the Christians began to use “basilicas,” the public assembly halls of the time. There the Christians had ample space to gather, to stand - men and women together - to hear the word of God proclaimed among them, and to bring a table into their midst for the celebration of Jesus’ sacrifice.

In the Middle Ages, there was a major shift in this arrangement: the table (altar) was moved out from among the assembly and toward one end and eventually against the wall. This area, the chancel (the “sanctuary”), became the place where all liturgical ministry took place. The people remained where they were, in the nave, but now they no longer participated; they had become separated from the liturgical action and were mere spectators.

This basic arrangement was maintained into the early twentieth century, even though various architectural styles, such as Romanesque, baroque, Gothic, etc., shaped the building.

The Second Vatican Council, through its reform of the liturgy, called for a reordering of this arrangement. The liturgy is now celebrated by the whole assembly, not just by those who are in the altar area.

The Church does not endorse any one particular style of architecture. Parish communities are urged to design their church building to suit their needs and to reflect the cultural character of the parish and its location in the larger community. The challenge is to build for the Church of the future so that it can celebrate fully its rituals and carry out its ministry of service to the whole world.

BUILDING OR RENOVATING THE PARISH WORSHIP SPACE

The Policy of the Diocese of Columbus is:

"Because of the importance of the space for worship it is the policy of the diocese that all plans for the building of new chapels and churches, as well as plans for the renovation of existing worship spaces, are approved before they are implemented. The [Art, Architecture & Environment] Sub commission of the Liturgical commission is delegated to review such plans. This Subcommittee is to be contacted in the initial planning in order to assist and advise the planning group. Any renovation which significantly alters any one of the essential dynamics of worship, namely the placement and arrangement of the assembly, the altar, the pulpit and or the tabernacle must be approved by the Subcommittee before the alteration is begun. Works of art dating from earlier periods are to be preserved and integrated with the remodeling in consultation with the Subcommittee."

1 May 1982, promulgated by Bishop Herrmann

13 September 1983 and 21 August 2000, reaffirmed by Bishop Griffin

Any pastors who is considering changes to the community's worship space are to contact the Diocesan Art, Architectural and Environment Subcommittee before they form a committee to address this issue.

The church building serves the needs of the liturgy. Basic liturgical principles for designing and renovating churches today are drawn from the Second Vatican Council and the documents that implemented its decrees. The general plan of the building reflects the Church that Christ gathers there, is expressive of its prayer, fosters the members' participation in sacred realities, and supports the solemn character of the sacred liturgy. Therefore, the first activity of the community and its leaders is to study the documents and to reflect on how the community celebrates its rituals. The newly promulgated document, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture and Worship*, is the primary document to study. All the rituals and their introductions should also be studied. It is only with a good grounding in knowledge that they can then move forward to plan a new or renewed worship space. With a well schooled committee formed from the community, the process of identifying the community's needs can go forward. The subcommittee will work with the community to help begin their process.

The early and continued contact with the chair of the subcommittee will help the parish community with the process – not the design. Final approval of the new or renewed worship space will involve the entire subcommittee membership.

Contact: Fr. Richard Weyls,
Chair of the Art, Architecture & Environment Subcommittee
St. Francis of Assisi Parish: 614-299-5781

ORGAN

The church organ, whether electronic or pipe, is usually the single most valuable and expensive furnishing in the parish. The organ is also a relatively long-lived fixture in the church. Consequently, an organ should be purchased, in most instances, with the intent of it being a permanent fixture. A parish, when faced with the purchase of an organ, must systematically research the different products available.

The Policy of the Diocese of Columbus is:

1. The Organ Committee of the Diocese is to be contacted through the Office of Liturgy at the EARLIEST talk of purchasing or renovating an organ.
2. A good-quality electronic church model is an acceptable substitute if the purchase of a pipe organ is absolutely impossible.
3. Home model organs are not to be purchased or used in parishes.
4. A high-quality new or used pipe organ is the preferred permanent instrument for its churches and chapels.
5. One installed, organs (especially pipe organs) are to be carefully maintained.

8 February 1985, promulgated by Bishop Griffin

21 August 2000, Reaffirmed by Bishop Griffin

Contact: Paul Thornock, Office of Liturgy Music Consultant
Chair of the Organ Committee
Saint Joseph Cathedral: 614-241-2526

GLOSSARY

Building new or renewing a community's worship space is a major event in the life of a parish community. It is an opportunity for the community to grow in faith, knowledge and become a more energized body of Christ in the parish neighborhood. There are four terms used for the process of building a new worship space or renewing the community's current worship space. Each of these classifications will place different requirements on the community and its pastoral staff. The rituals (dedication, rededication or blessing) used to celebrate the new or renewed space will also depend on the extent of the modifications made to the communities worship space.

New Spaces or new church buildings occur when the community has out-grown its current worship space and has decided to build a new structure or a new community has grown to a size that will support the building of their first structure to permanently house their liturgical celebrations. The old space is either sold in favor of a new location or the current structure is razed to allow the construction of the new space.

Restoration is the process of bringing back some features of a past point in time - be it the year of dedication or some later year for which the style and decor was most remembered. Communities that plan to attempt restorations should hire a professional historic preservationist to insure that sound historic preservation practice is applied. Someone who understands the accouterments and architectural styles of that period in which the church is to be restored. Any restoration must not undo the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (i.e. replacing the communion rail or turning the altar to face the wall) that help us celebrate the liturgy.

Renovation does not effect the structure. There is no external modification of the building that houses the worship space. The worship space is adjusted to better accommodate the celebration of the liturgy.

Radical Renovation includes the modification of the exterior walls and roof. The space is adjusted to better accommodate the celebration of the liturgy. The structural changes generally are made to increase the capacity of the church.

Dedication of an Altar All new permanent altars are to be dedicated by the bishop following the rite for the "Dedication of an Altar." The altar is by its very nature a table of sacrifice and at the same time a table of the paschal banquet, it is a sign of Christ himself – hence "The altar is Christ." It is through the celebration of the eucharist that an altar becomes sacred, therefore care should be taken that Mass is not celebrated on a new altar before it has been dedicated. (See Chapter IV of the "Dedication of a Church and an Altar.")

Dedication of a Church A new structure dedicated to house the community's worship is to be dedicated by the bishop following the rite for the "Dedication of a Church." This structure we call *church* is a symbol of the community that gathers and does the work of Christ. In the same manner the altar is anointed with chrism, it too has its walls anointed with chrism. It is a monument that stands in the neighborhood representing the community that is Christ's body. If it is possible, the first Mass celebrated in this structure should be the dedication. (See Chapter II of the "Dedication of a Church and an Altar.")

Dedication of a Church Already in General Use For Sacred Celebrations When a church is to be dedicated in which it has already been customary to celebrate the sacred mysteries, the "Dedication of a Church Already in General Use For Sacred Celebrations" (Chapter III of the "Dedication of a Church and an Altar.") is to be followed. The options of this ritual will depend on many aspects, such as the extent of the renovation or reconstruction, the length of time the church was in use, a change in juridical status from mission to parish, or other events and circumstances. The Office of Liturgy will help with these choices.

Blessings There are many blessings to help the community as it builds or renovates its worship space; blessing of the site of the new church, blessing and laying of the foundation stone, blessing of movable or temporary altar, blessing of a new crucifix, blessing of a bell, blessing of a temporary facility to be used during construction, leave taking from the old worship space. There are also blessing of private oratories, chapels or sacred buildings used for divine worship. The Office of Liturgy will help with these choices.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones - Art, Architecture and Worship*, Washington D.C.:USCC, 2000.

Giles, Richard, *Re-Pitching the Tent*, Norwich, Norfolk: Canterbury Press Norwich, 1996.

Hoffman, Lawrence A., *Sacred Places and the Pilgrimage of Life*, (Meeting House Essays, Number One), Chicago: LTP, 1991.

Mauck, Marchita B., *Places for Worship - A Guide to Building and Renovating*, (American Essays in Liturgy) Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995.

_____, *Shaping a House for the Church*, Chicago: LTP, 1990.

Vosko, Richard S., *Designing Future Worship Spaces*, (Meeting House Essays, Number Eight), Chicago: LTP, 1996.

CONCLUSION

This handbook has been prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist parish communities who are considering building either a new worship space or renovating their current worship space. Knowledge is key to any building process that affects the space in which the community prays and gives glory to God.

The Art, Architecture and Environment Sub-commission of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission is currently reviewing the new document, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture and Worship*, and will be working with the Bishop to establish new policies and guidelines.

We are committed to supporting all parish communities and their desire to grow in their understanding of the liturgy and the environment set aside to experience God's presence in the community. It is our hope that this handbook will support a dialogue within the communities considering building projects. "Full, active, conscious" participation in the liturgy by all members is the goal we strive to achieve.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to:

Sister Rene Simonelic, OSF.
Director / Office of Liturgy

Peace and all good!

REFLECTION

Eternal Lord and God,
as ancient as the seasons
are the rituals we celebrate.

Help us in our planning and deliberation.

Allow us to be good stewards of our community's trust
as we reflect on how richness of these rituals
may come forth in our celebrations.

May our new/renewed worship space
call forth from all who pray here
the reverence, honor and glory
we owe you.

Guide us through this holy work
which we begin in your Name:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen!