

Environment for Catholic Worship

About this series

In November 2000, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Built of Living Stones*, guidelines for the design and furnishing of Roman Catholic worship spaces. This present series of twelve bulletin inserts intends to explore the major issues and themes and quotes extensively from the document.

Part 1

The Living Church

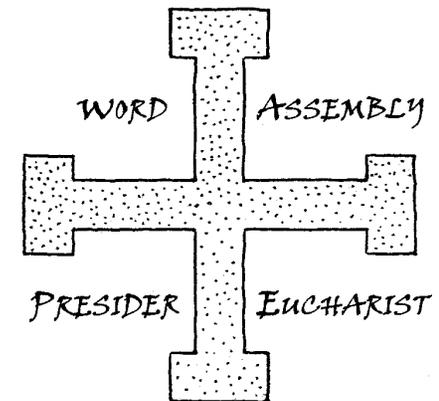
We begin our look at spaces for Roman Catholic worship by recognizing that the word we often use to describe a building—church—is best understood first as a word to describe a people, a community of believers in union with Christ. And even when describing a people it can mean the smallest grouping—the domestic church, to the largest—the universal church. The focus of our attention in this series will be the place where the local church celebrates the mysteries of our faith as a parish.



Orans or "praying figure" in the 4th century Via Latina catacomb

The church building provides a place for the community of faith to respond to Jesus' invitation to become one with him in the praise and thanksgiving of God, whom he called "Abba." Here, we recognize Christ in "the breaking of the bread," in the proclamation of our sacred stories, and in the very assembly gathered here to remember how God has claimed us as a chosen people.

In this place, the church remembers the blessings and covenants of the past. It unites itself with Christ in the New Covenant and responds to Christ's command to "Do this in memory of me." And so this building must serve the action of the assembly as it celebrates the mystery of redemption. It is the place where the presence of Christ is experienced in all of its manifestations—the gathered assembly, the proclamation of the Word, the sharing and the reservation of the Eucharist, and in the person of the presiding priest.



The liturgy that we celebrate here is the source and summit of our Christian life, a life marked by daily acts of self-sacrifice and concern for the poor and alienated, the sick and imprisoned, both within and beyond our circle of family and friends. The hospitality and care that must characterize the daily life of a Christian should also be present in the place where Christians gather.

This climate of hospitality makes it possible for the church to be a school where children and adults learn how to love one another. The respect and dignity shown to each person who crosses the threshold of the church—whether stranger or friend, young or old, able or disabled—is the same hospitality and openness that characterized Jesus' ministry. The design of the entrance and the interior and exterior gathering spaces can be an expression of that hospitality.

Churches have long been understood as places of sanctuary or safety. In our own day, churches can be a second home for the households who come together each week to celebrate the Eucharist, and who come to mark the significant moments of the lives of each of its members.

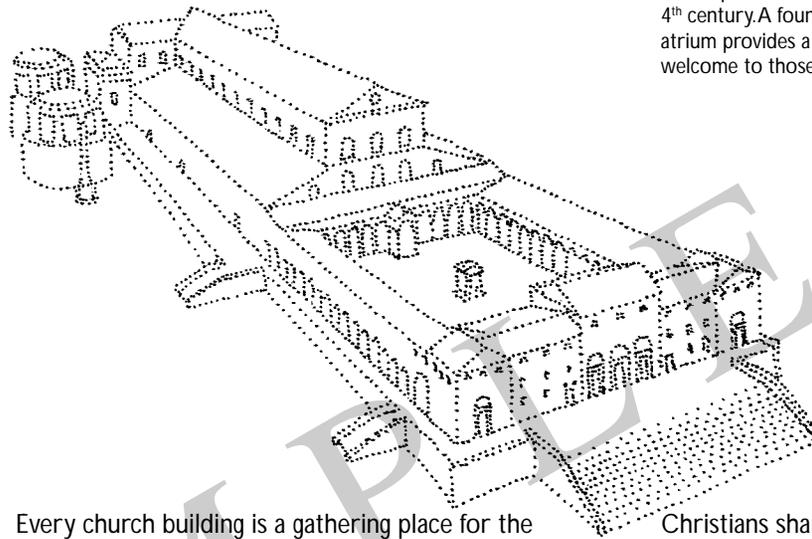
Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

[The following abbreviations designate the sources quoted by *Built of Living Stones*: BB-Book of Blessings; CCC-Catechism of the Catholic Church; CIC-Code of Canon Law; GILM-General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass; GIRM-General Instruction of the Roman Missal; LMT-Liturgical Music Today (US Bishops Statement); MCW-Music In Catholic Worship (US Bishops Statement); N-Notitiae (Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments); OCF-Order of Christian Funerals; OP-Ordo Penitentiae Rite of Penance; PCEF-Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation of the Easter Feasts; RDCA-Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar; SC-The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.]

Just as the term *Church* refers to the *living temple*, God's People, the term *church* also has been used to describe "the building in which the Christian community gathers to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, and celebrate the Eucharist." (RCDA, ch 2, no 1) [16]

...the building itself becomes "a sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and reflects the Church dwelling in heaven." (RCDA, ch 1, no 2)

The pilgrimage church, Ste. Foy in Conques, France was begun in the 11th century and has been visited by countless pilgrims on a journey toward Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain.



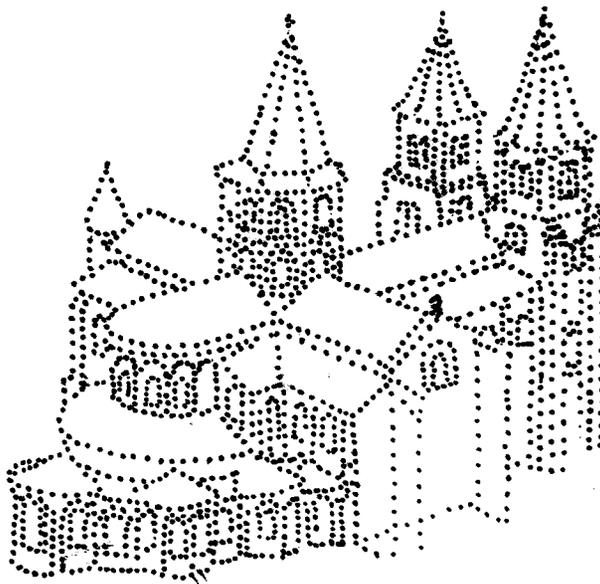
Old St. Peter's Church, built by the emperor Constantine in the 4th century. A fountain in the atrium provides a refreshing welcome to those arriving.

Every church building is a gathering place for the assembly, a resting place, a place of encounter with God, as well as a point of departure on the Church's unfinished journey toward the reign of God. [17]

In the New Testament, the term *liturgy* is intimately connected with the proclamation of the Good News and with active charity. Through baptism and confirmation,

Christians share in Christ's priesthood which they exercise through their worship of God and their vocation of service to others. At the Eucharist, Christ calls his members to conversion in the proclamation of the word; he invites them to join with him in offering his perfect sacrifice to the Father; and he sends them forth from liturgy to serve the community in charity. [21]

The church building houses the community of the baptized as it gathers to celebrate the sacred liturgy. By its practical design and beauty it fosters the full, dignified, and graceful celebration of these rites. The primary concern in the building or renovation of a space for worship must be its suitability for the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical rites of the Church. Consequently, the fundamental prerequisite for those engaged in the building or renovation of a church is familiarity with the rites to be celebrated there. [46]



Environment for Catholic Worship: Part 1 of 12, Page 2
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Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 2 The Altar

It is amazing that two of the most common daily activities that humans share—eating and drinking—are also the way Catholic Christians mark their most important encounter with the sacred. Yet, even though we often find ourselves “grabbing a bite” on the way to something more important or pressing, we can all

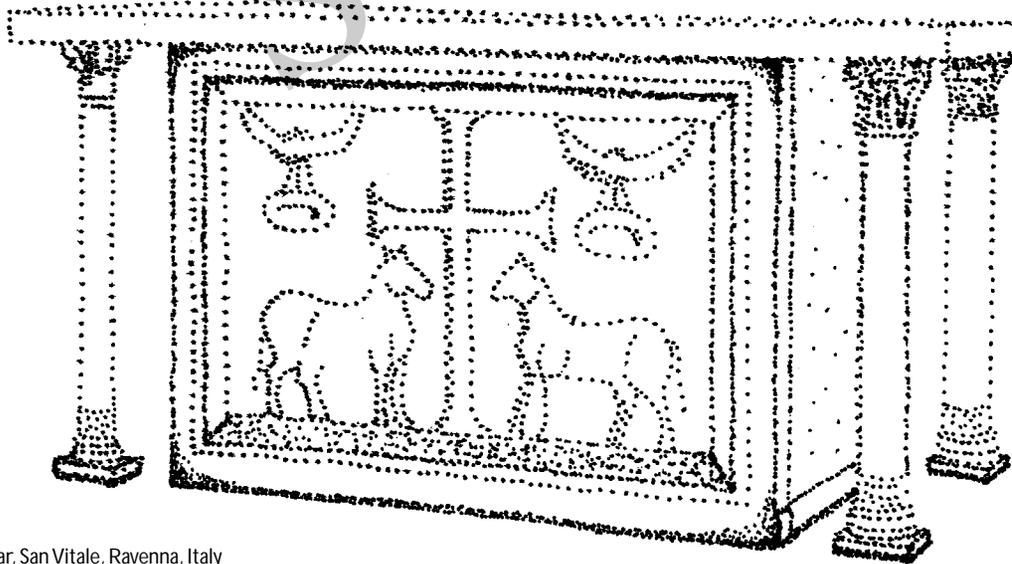
remember times in our lives when a meal meant more than fast food.

Think back to the most important meals in your life. It would be hard to imagine a wedding celebration without some sort of reception following. Funerals too, are often concluded with a meal shared by friends and family.

Jesus, who began his public ministry at the wedding feast at Cana and raised eyebrows by eating with notorious sinners, also chose to gather his closest companions to celebrate a special meal on the night before he died. Within the context of the Jewish Passover, he marked his

own Passover as the sacrificial lamb, by taking, blessing, breaking and sharing the most common of Mediterranean food staples—bread and wine. Now we do the same in his memory, and recognize his presence among us.

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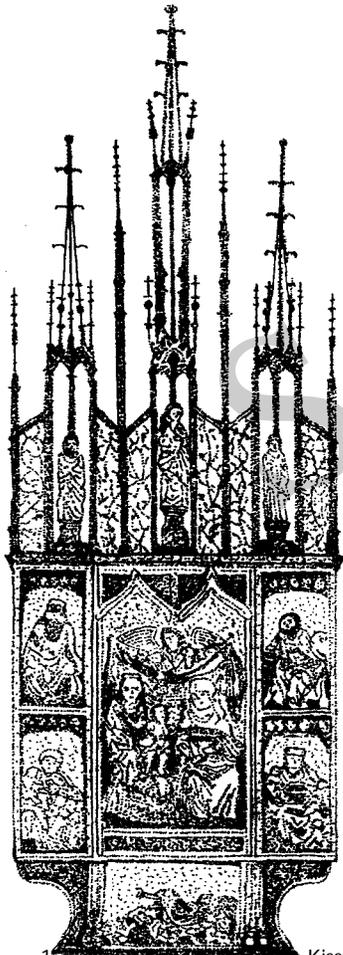
6th century altar, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

In many ancient cultures, altars were erected as stone slabs to offer crops or animal or even human victims as a sacrifice to the deity. In our buildings for worship, we also call the table of the Eucharist an altar on which a ritual, sacrificial meal makes present the paschal mystery—Christ’s life, death and resurrection. We join our lives with Christ in this offering to the Father.

In the beginning, Christian communities gathered in homes to celebrate this ritual meal. As their numbers grew, these communities adapted homes and eventually built spaces specifically for worship. In these spaces, the shape of the table evolved from a dining table for daily

meals to one more suited to the ritual meal. It became taller and more square. Though it frequently retained aspects of a table, it was, at times, also fashioned from stone and more and more became fixed within the building.

As greater numbers of Christians gathered in larger and larger spaces, altars also became associated with the burial places of saints and were frequently built above their remains in large basilicas. Eventually elongated altars moved further from the gathered assembly until they were set in the rear of the sanctuary, often elevated, and with a significant backdrop or *reredos*. Sometimes a canopy of cloth or wood extended over the altar to



15th century winged altarpiece, Kiszeben, Hungary

further define the space. Tabernacles were often placed in the center of these altars, and the liturgy was conducted principally from the altar. Frequently, multiple side altars were also erected throughout a church.

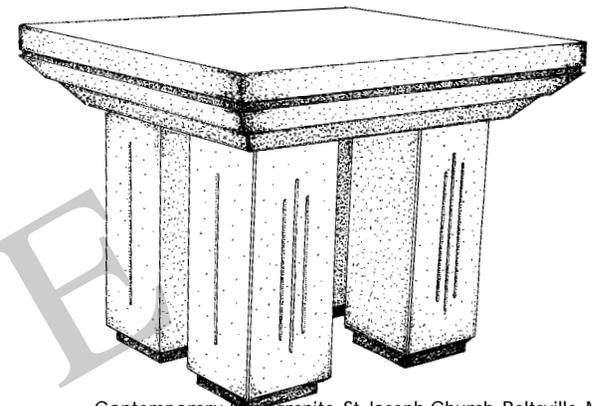
In the recent past, in a recovery of an early understanding of the Eucharist, altars have moved closer to the assembly and are to be designed to express both the meal and sacrificial dimensions of the Eucharist. Only the bread and the wine and the sacramentary book are ordinarily to be placed on it. New churches are to have a single freestanding altar placed in such a way that everyone gathered can have an unobstructed view. The proportions of the altar should be in harmony with the architecture of the space and designed to compliment the other significant furnishings, especially the ambo, the table of the Word.

Many of the parables of Jesus revolved around food and feasts. And so, we are not surprised to hear the kingdom of heaven described as a lavish banquet. Every Sunday, we are called to the table of the Lord to share in this feast, joining with countless generations of believers who have stood around the altar to keep Christ's command: "Do this in memory of me."

Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

At the Eucharist, the liturgical assembly celebrates the ritual sacrificial meal that recalls and makes present Christ's life, death, and resurrection, proclaiming "the death of the Lord until he comes." The altar is "the center of thanksgiving that the Eucharist accomplishes" and the point around which the other rites are in some manner arrayed." (GIRM 269) Since the Church teaches that "the altar is Christ," (RCDA, ch 4, no. 4) its composition should reflect the nobility, beauty, strength, and simplicity of the One it represents. In new churches there is to be only one altar so that it "signifies to the assembly of the faithful the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church." (GIRM 303) [56]

The altar is the natural focal point of the sanctuary and is to be "freestanding to allow the [priest] to walk



Contemporary Altar, granite, St. Joseph Church, Beltsville, MD

around it easily and Mass to be celebrated facing the people." (GIRM 299)

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the altar must be visible from all parts of the church but not so elevated that it causes visual or symbolic division from the liturgical assembly. Methods of elevation can be found that still allow access to the altar by ministers who need wheelchairs or who have other disabilities. [59]

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Environment for Catholic Worship

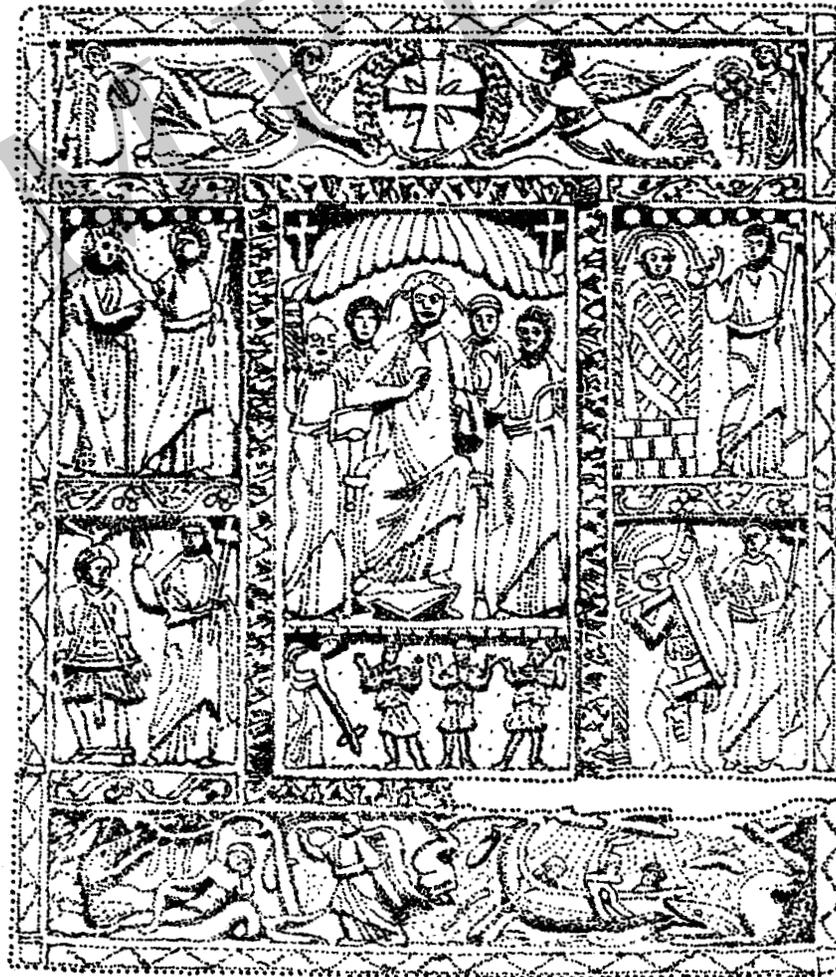
Part 3

The Ambo

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32) With these words, the two disciples who had been walking on the road to Emmaus described to themselves in amazement how a stranger who mysteriously appeared to them made sense of the familiar stories of their people’s history. The identity of that stranger became clear to them at the end of their journey when they broke bread together—he was the resurrected Christ, who made the scriptures come alive in a way they had never experienced before.

In the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Church teaches that when the scriptures are proclaimed in the liturgy, it is Christ himself who is speaking. The Word of God has the power to save us. And so, the Mass that we celebrate today reflects the importance that we give to the proclamation and interpretation of the scripture.

Of all the reforms that were initiated nearly 40 years ago, this recovery of the Liturgy of the Word is perhaps the most profound. We might forget that for centuries, Catholics were not accustomed to hearing a wide selection of scripture passages at Mass or devotions. Still less were homilies focused on the scripture.



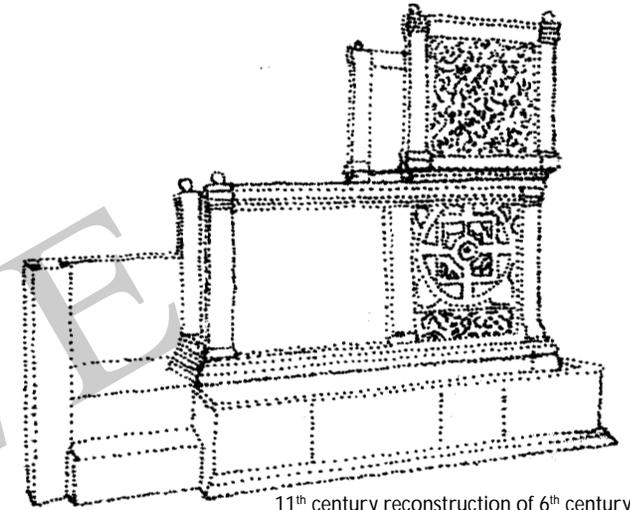
Gospel book-cover,
early 6th century,
Constantinople

Today, Catholics are encouraged to study the scriptures and explore the meaning of the Word in their daily lives. On Sundays, the three-year cycle of readings exposes us to the great stories of our ancestors in faith, the writings of St Paul and the life and teachings of Jesus. Sacraments and all other public expressions of our faith must include some proclamation of the Word. Homilies should be based on the readings and should be given at most liturgies.

The place of the proclamation of the word is called the ambo. To signify its critical relationship to the Eucharist and the altar table, it is often called the table of the Word. At this table, the hungers of our hearts are fed. The ambo must be visible to all and designed to reflect the dignity and reverence we give to the Word proclaimed in our

assemblies. To show its relationship to the table of the Eucharist, it may be designed using some of the design elements of the altar, though it need not look like its twin. It should have a harmonious relationship both with the altar and the architecture of the space as a whole.

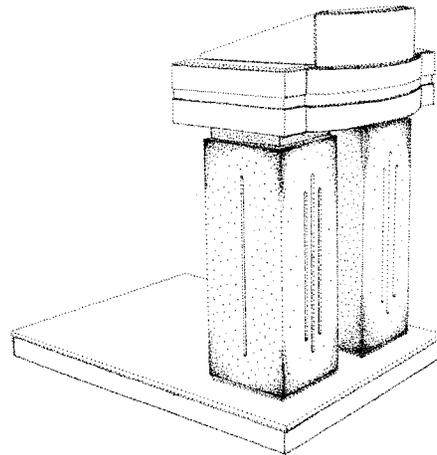
The ambo is generally reserved for the proclamation and interpretation of the scripture and not as a place for announcements or song leading (except in the leading of the psalms). Lectors with physical disabilities can be given an opportunity to participate by a careful design of the reading desk or creating a barrier free space. A well-designed and unobtrusive sound reinforcement system can allow the lector to be heard clearly even in the furthest seat.



11th century reconstruction of 6th century ambo at Castel Sant' Elia, Nepi, Italy

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The central focus of the area in which the word of God is proclaimed during the liturgy is the *ambo*. The design of the ambo and its prominent placement reflects the dignity and nobility of that saving word and draws the attention of those present to the proclamation of the word. (GILM 32) Here the Christian community encounters the living Lord in the word of God and prepares itself for the "breaking of the bread" and the mission to live the word that will be proclaimed. An ample area around the ambo is needed to allow a Gospel procession with a full complement of ministers bearing candles and incense. The *General Introduction to the Lectionary* recommends that the design of altar and ambo bear a "harmonious and close relationship" to one another (GILM 32) in order to emphasize the close relationship between word and Eucharist. Since many people share in the ministry of the word, the ambo should be accessible to everyone, including those with physical disabilities. [61]



Contemporary Ambo, granite supports, walnut and maple reading desk, St. Joseph Church, Beltsville, MD

Our reverence for the word of God is expressed not only in an attentive listening to and reflection upon the Scripture, but also by the way we handle and treat the Book of the Gospels. The ambo can be designed not only for reading and preaching, but also for displaying the open Book of the Gospels or a copy of the Scriptures before and after the liturgical celebration. [62]

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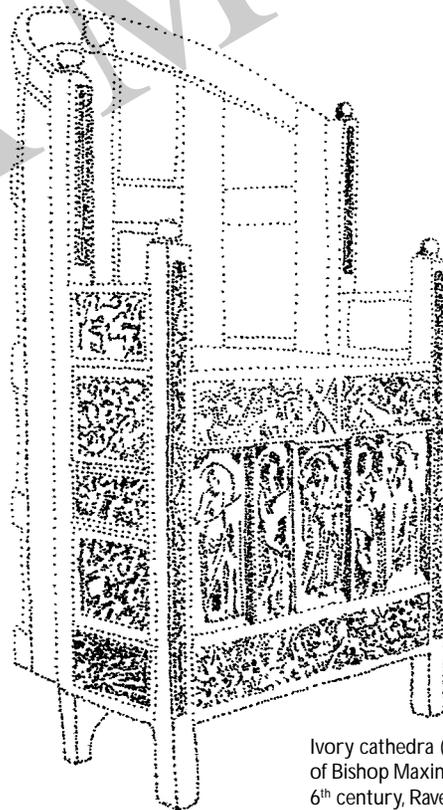
Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 4

Assembly Seating and the Presider's Chair

American visitors to the great cathedrals of Europe are often surprised to notice how few of them have pews or fixed seating of any type. In fact, fixed pews in Christian churches came relatively late in our history—not until the 16th century and generally in the Protestant tradition where extended sermons became a central element of the service. They evolved from rows of chairs, to benches, to pews with sides, and finally to box-pews with doors to the aisle often “purchased” by a family for its exclusive use.

Today, there is a wide variety of seating choices for a parish when considering what is best. Flexible seating (chairs) allows the configuration of the assembly to be shaped according to the numbers expected and the rites to be celebrated. However, the demands of the physical rearrangement of the chairs between liturgies or seasons must be taken into consideration. Fixed benches with some flexible seating at the front is often a compromise that allows for some adjustment without the need to reconfigure the entire space. Because our liturgy has always included processions and movement, some congregations may choose benches with open ends instead of pews with sides that tend to restrict the flow and give a sense static enclosure.



Ivory cathedra (chair)
of Bishop Maximianus,
6th century, Ravenna, Italy

The configuration of the seating should allow everyone to take part in the active participation of the rites. The worship space is neither a concert hall nor a theater. We do not come as spectators. We come as the Body of Christ to join ourselves more fully to Christ in the Word and the Eucharist. There is no stage. Although we give prominence to the place for the Altar and Ambo, we are not passive onlookers to a performance given for our benefit. Instead, we join with Christ in offering ourselves in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Next time at Mass, notice that when the presider speaks the words of the Eucharistic prayer, he always uses the pronoun “we”, never “I”.

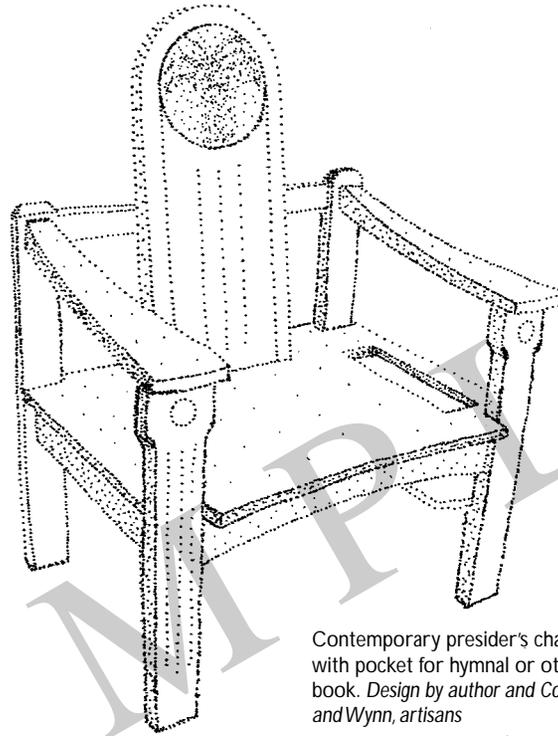
The priest celebrant presides at the Eucharist from a location where he can be seen and heard clearly by all present. Because in his person and role we acknowledge another presence of Christ in our midst, his chair should reflect the dignity of his role in the assembly, but it should not be distant or extravagant.

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The general plan of the building should be such that "in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly. It should also allow the participants to take the place most appropriate to them and assist all to carry out their function properly." (RDCA ch 2, no 3) [30]

The church building fosters participation in the liturgy. Because liturgical actions by their nature are communal celebrations, they are celebrated with the presence and active participation of the Christian faithful whenever possible. (CIC 837 §2) Such participation, both internal and external, is the faithful's "right and duty by reason of their baptism." The building itself can promote or hinder the "full, conscious, and active participation" (SC) of the faithful. Parishes making decisions about the design of a church must consider how the various aspects and choices they make will affect the ability of all the members to participate fully in liturgical celebrations. [31]

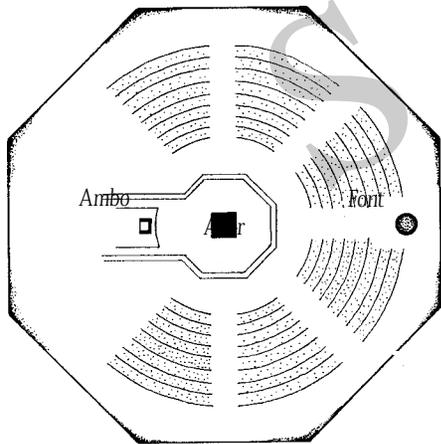
By its design and its furnishings, the church reflects this diversity of roles. The one who presides, those who



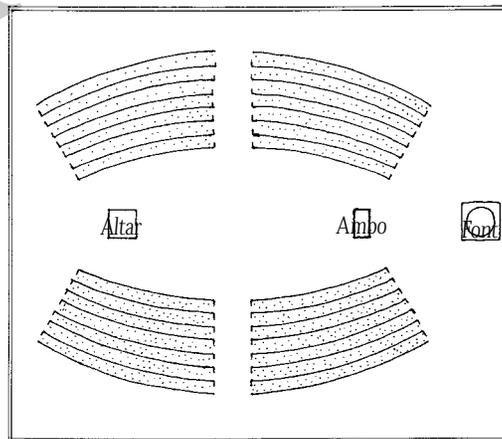
Contemporary presider's chair with pocket for hymnal or other book. Design by author and Condy and Wynn, artisans

proclaim God's word, the ministers of music, those who assist at the altar, and members of the congregation all play an integral part in the public prayer of the Church. The design of the church should reflect the unity of the entire assembly and at the same time insure that each person is able to exercise his or her ministry in a space that fully accommodates the ritual action called for by that ministry. [37]

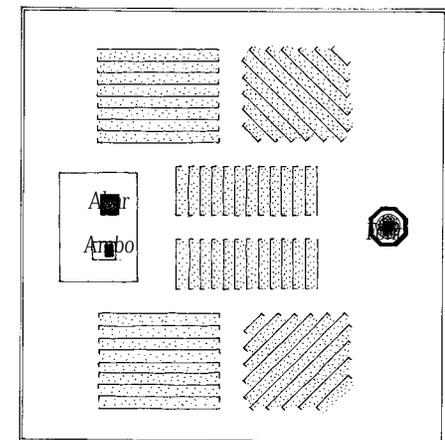
The chair of the priest celebrant stands "as a symbol of his [office] of presiding over the assembly and of directing prayer." (GIRM 310) An appropriate placement of the chair allows the priest celebrant to be visible to all in the congregation. The chair reflects the dignity of the one who leads the community in the person of Christ, but is never intended to be remote or grandiose. The priest celebrant's chair is distinguished from the seating for other ministers by its design and placement. "The seat for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant." (GIRM) In the cathedral, in addition to the bishop's chair or *cathedra*, which is permanent, an additional chair will be needed for use by the rector or priest celebrant. (CB 47) [63]



Central Plan with ambo, altar and font on axis



Antiphonal Plan



Sectional Plan

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 5

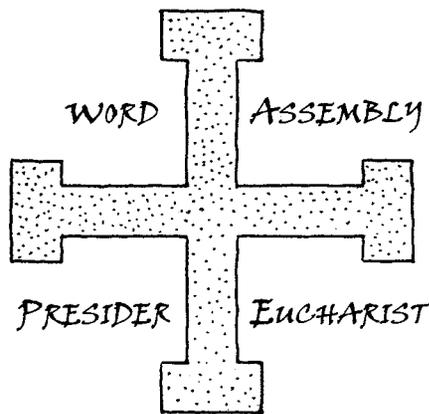
Reservation of the Eucharist

For the last 30 years, Catholics have grown accustomed to hearing much more of the Word of God proclaimed than they had for centuries. Until the reforms of the recent past, Roman Catholic liturgy had focused on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, while Protestant liturgies placed more emphasis on the Word of God and its interpretation. The most obvious architectural symbol of the contrast between these two poles was the central and unmistakable presence of a tabernacle in most Roman Catholic worship spaces. For many, its very

presence within the sanctuary was a statement of the particular and defining belief of the Catholic Church.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the belief of the Church that Christ is present in a number of ways when we gather for worship. While the central teaching of the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species remains unchanged, we are also taught to recognize Christ in the proclamation of the Word, in the person of the presiding priest, and, in the very assembly of believers.

Another recovery that has enriched our liturgical life is the understanding of the Eucharist as an act. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek, meaning “a giving thanks.” It is in the very act of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing that is the heart of Jesus’ command to “Do this in memory of me.” This fuller understanding of the liturgy urges us to unite ourselves with the Christ in a perfect offering to God. The restoration of more frequent reception of communion that has occurred in the last century is yet another return to a much earlier tradition, when all who were present would partake of the meal.



6th century paten with a depiction of Christ sharing the Eucharist with the apostles, Riha, Syria

History of Eucharistic Reservation In the early church, when believers were unable to join their brothers and sisters in the Eucharist because of sickness, a portion of eucharistic bread was taken from the celebration to their homes so they could be united with the community in their thanksgiving. It gradually became the custom to store a small amount of the remaining Eucharist for those expected to die. This became known as *viaticum*—food for their journey. The place where the Eucharist was stored gradually gained in prominence from simple cupboards in rooms outside the main worship space to more prominent, even elaborate tabernacles. By the 17th century the tabernacle was commonly found on the central altar. The exceptions were found in cathedrals and basilicas, where tabernacles have often been placed on side altars or in separate chapels.

In recent years, in order to emphasize the importance of the action of the whole assembly gathered around the

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

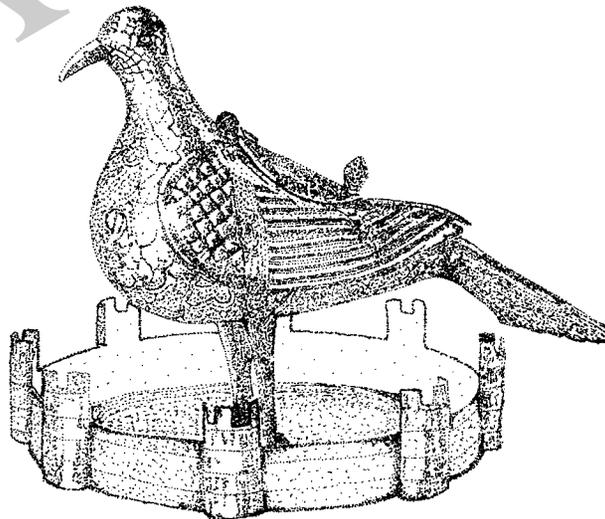
The reservation of the Eucharist was originally intended for the communion of the sick, for those unable to attend the Sunday celebration, and as *Viaticum* for the dying. (CIC) As the appreciation of Christ's presence in the eucharistic species became more developed, Christians desired through prayer to show reverence for Christ's continuing presence in their midst. [70]

The *Code of Canon Law* directs that the Eucharist be reserved in a part of the church that is "distinguished, conspicuous, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer." It directs that regularly there be "only one tabernacle" in the church. It should be worthy of the Blessed Sacrament—beautifully designed and in harmony with the overall decor of the rest of the church. To provide for the security of the Blessed Sacrament the tabernacle should be "solid," "immovable," "opaque," and "locked." The tabernacle may be situated on a fixed pillar or stand, or it may be attached to or embedded in one of the walls. A special oil lamp or a lamp with a wax candle burns continuously near the tabernacle as an indication of Christ's presence. [72]

There are a number of possible spaces suitable for

altar and the presiding priest, the tabernacle has been removed from the altar table. The discipline of the Church requires that the tabernacle be truly prominent in our worship spaces, but never in such a way that it obscures the focus of the principal activity of the celebration of the Eucharist. In some churches, it is located in a separate chapel designed for prayer, meditation and adoration. It may also be set in the main worship space but at some distance or separation from the altar.

Today the reservation of the Eucharist in the tabernacle still serves the needs of the ministry to the sick and dying and other situations when Communion is given outside Mass. It is also the place for the adoration of Christ in the reserved Eucharistic bread. It is not to be seen as a storage of consecrated hosts for future Masses, except in the case of unexpected numbers of communicants.



13th century French pyx in the form of a dove, gilded copper with enamel. The reserved Eucharist was placed in these often suspended vessels.



Contemporary tower for the reservation of the Eucharist

eucharistic reservation. The revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that it is more appropriate that the tabernacle in which the "Blessed Sacrament is reserved not be on the altar on which Mass is celebrated." The bishop is to determine where the tabernacle will be placed and to give further direction. The bishop may decide that the tabernacle be placed in the sanctuary apart from the altar of celebration or in a separate chapel suitable for adoration and for the private prayer of the faithful. In making his determination, the bishop will consider the importance of the assembly's ability to focus on the eucharistic action, the piety of the people, and the custom of the area. The location also should allow for easy access by people in wheelchairs and by those who have other disabilities. [74]

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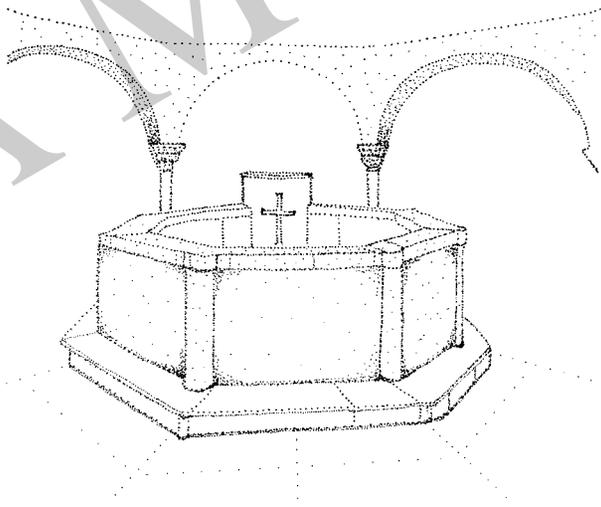
Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 6

The Baptistry

A cool drink, a raging torrent, a gentle drizzle, the depths of the ocean or a warm bath. How can something so powerful and devastating as water be so refreshing and vital to life? In the ancient world, water was long considered with fire, earth and wind one of four basic elements of life. Just as water held a tremendous significance for ancient religions, so also for us Christians. Water is the matter of our first sacrament that brings about incorporation, reconciliation and restoration. Both St John and St Paul speak of the water of baptism as both womb and tomb. It marks the death of the old self and the rebirth into a life in Christ. In baptism, God forgives sin and incorporates a new member into the Body of Christ.

Sacraments transform common elements of human life and experience to create a new reality for the believer. The outward signs of these sacraments should be felt, seen, heard, tasted and smelled. They should be ample signs, never defined by “only what is necessary.” In the sacrament of baptism, this is best expressed by the sight and sound of a significant body of water that is visible and even audible.



5th century Orthodox Baptistry, Ravenna, Italy

History of the Baptistry A room for baptism can be found in one of the earliest known spaces used for worship—a third century house—church in East Syria. There it was decorated with scenes of Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, Christ healing the paralytic and Christ as young shepherd. As Christian communities grew in size and from region to region, baptistries varied in shape

(round, hexagonal and octagonal) in scale, and in placement within or just outside a church. Many were large enough to allow adults to enter and be either fully or partially submerged.

Baptismal pools or fonts have always been given a place of prominence, commonly near the entrance to the church. As centuries progressed and liturgical practice was marked by a sacramental minimalism in the use of the outward signs associated with them, baptismal fonts tended to be reduced in size and prominence within the church. Often a very small amount of water was dripped over the head of infants or adults.

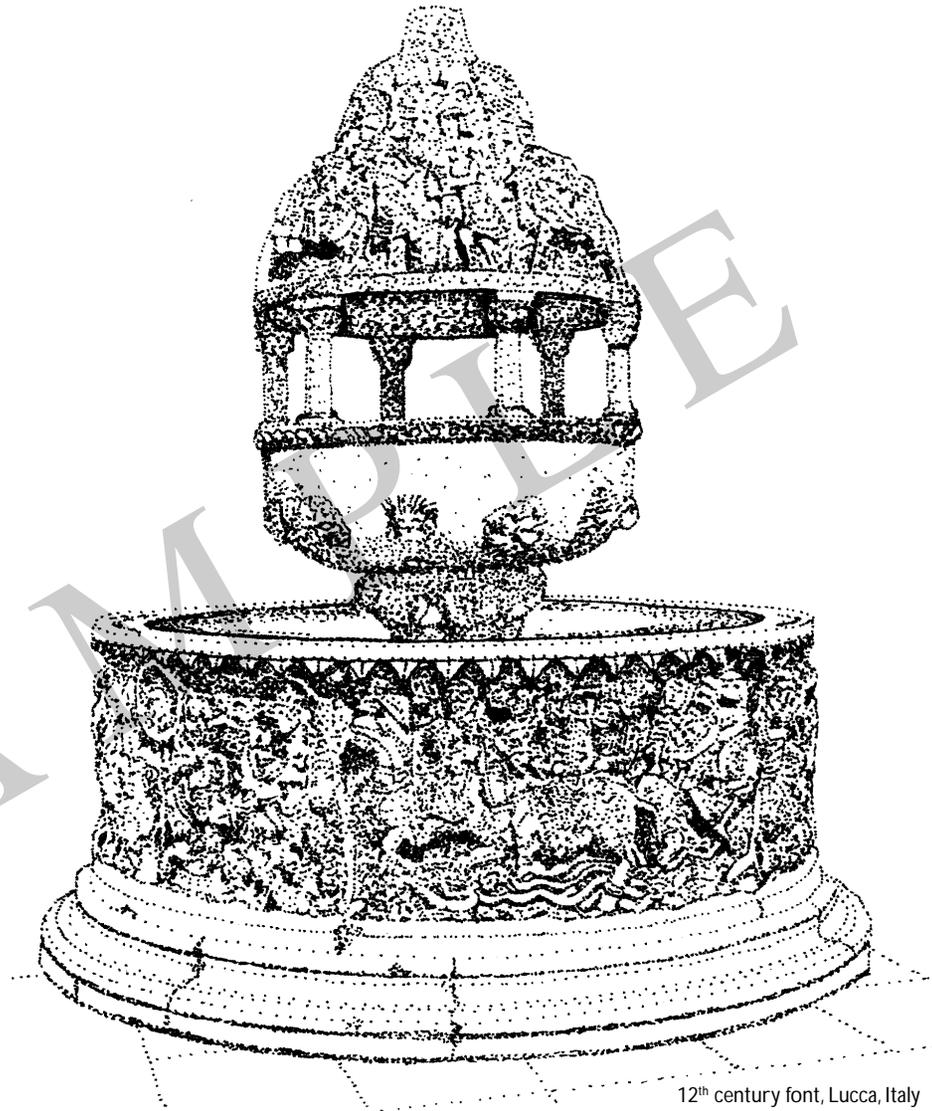
In the reform of the liturgy, there has been a recovery of earlier practices, including the baptism of adults and children by immersion. Baptismal pools are frequently placed in the main path of entry to the church allowing participants to mark themselves with the sign of the cross to recall their own baptism—the first and foundational sacrament in the life of a Christian. Additionally, this placement at the entrance strengthens the imagery invoked at the beginning of every funeral when the baptism of the deceased is recalled.

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The rites of baptism, the first of the sacraments of initiation, require a prominent place for celebration. (RCIA, General Introduction, no 25) Initiation into the Church is entrance into a eucharistic community united in Jesus Christ. Because the rites of initiation of the Church begin with baptism and are completed by the reception of the Eucharist, the baptismal font and its location reflect the Christian's journey through the waters of baptism to the altar. This integral relationship between the baptismal font and the altar can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, such as placing the font and altar on the same architectural axis, using natural or artificial lighting, using the same floor patterns, and using common or similar materials and elements of design. [66]

The following criteria can be helpful when choosing the design for the font:

1. One font that will accommodate the baptism of both infants and adults symbolizes the one faith and one baptism that Christians share....
2. The font should be large enough to supply ample water for the baptism of both adults and infants....
3. Baptism is a sacrament of the whole Church and, in particular, of the local parish community....
4. The location of the baptistry will determine how, and how actively, the entire liturgical assembly can participate in the rite of baptism....
5. Because of the essential relationship of baptism to the celebration of other sacraments and rituals, the parish will want to choose an area for the baptistry or the font that visually symbolizes that relationship....
6. With the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that culminates in baptism at the Easter Vigil, churches need private spaces where the newly baptized can go immediately after their baptism to be clothed in their white garments and to prepare for the completion of initiation in the Eucharist. ...[69]



12th century font, Lucca, Italy

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 7

Rites of the Church

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the principal liturgical activity for which spaces for worship are designed. However, the Christian community gathers at many other significant moments in its life. Designing spaces carefully for those rites is also important in a new or renovated church.

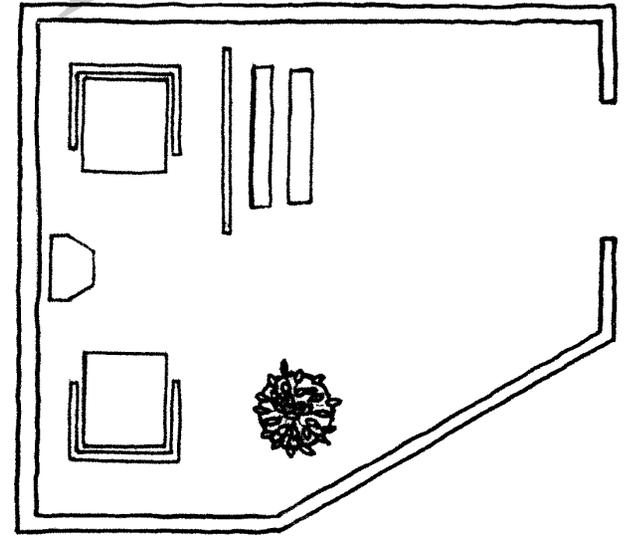
The Sacrament of Penance—Catholics who grew up before 1970 were accustomed to celebrate the sacrament of penance in dark confessional boxes equipped with a kneeler and a screen obscuring their identity from the priest sitting in an adjoining space. Since that time, the reform of the rites has changed the way we celebrate penance.

The celebration of the sacrament of penance focuses on the reconciliation of the penitent with God and the community. While anonymity is still offered, reconciliation chapels or rooms also allow for the penitent to relate to the priest face-to-face. Often the space is brighter, more open and suitably decorated with images of God's reconciling love. A bible is at hand for scripture reading. Because of the relationship of this sacrament to baptism and Eucharist, the place for reconciliation is often located to emphasize this association. When the sacrament is celebrated communally with a large number

of penitents, the entire space for worship may accommodate a number of temporary stations for confessors positioned throughout.

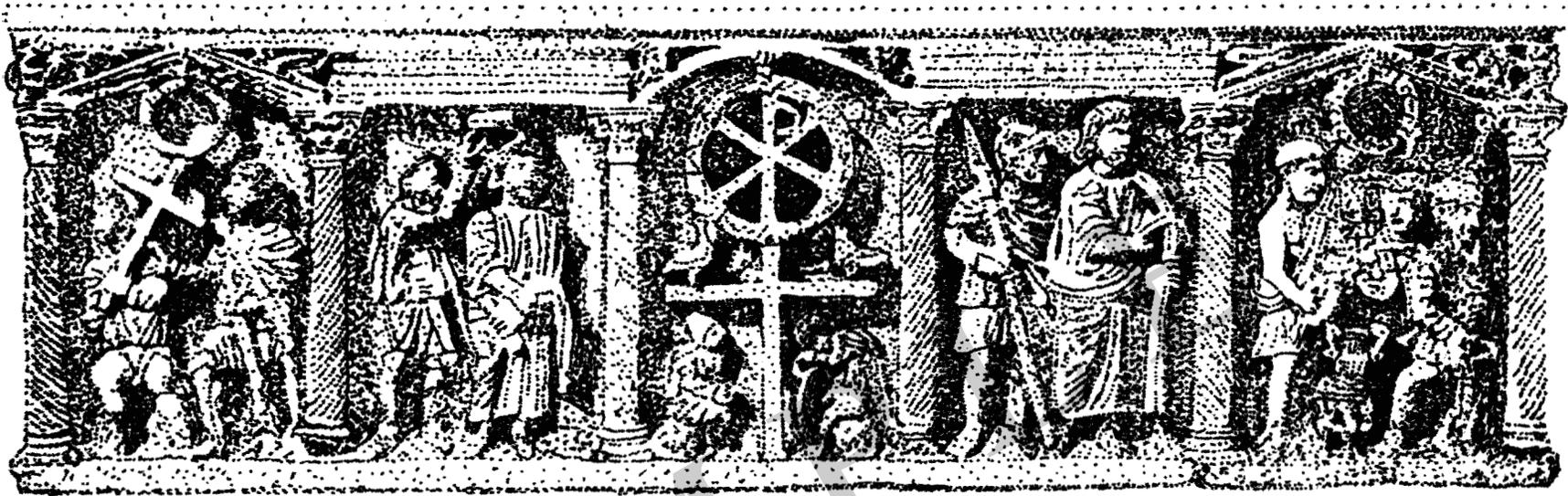
The Death of a Christian—The Eucharist celebrated for a deceased Catholic has many of the same requirements of a Sunday Eucharist. However, the rites at the entrance of the church that speak of the person's incorporation into the Body of Christ through baptism suggest that ample space near a baptismal font could be a goal when considering its design. Sufficient space for the casket near the altar platform must also be considered. Flexible seating in this area is one way to accommodate this desire. Communities that offer vigil services for the deceased may wish to consider providing a room near the entrance for the use of the immediate family as a gesture of hospitality.

Weddings—As with funerals, the design of the space for Sunday Eucharist accommodates most of the needs for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. The participation of the entire assembly should be encouraged to counter the tendency in our culture for the congregation to see itself as an audience. However, sufficient space near the altar must be planned to allow the exchange to be visible to the assembly.



Reconciliation Chapel with provisions for anonymous and face to face encounters

Liturgy of the Hours—In the recent past, only priests and those in religious life observed the liturgy of the hours or the daily office. Now morning and evening prayer are becoming more and more common in the life of a parish. While they may be celebrated in the main worship space, a smaller chapel may be more suited to the number of participants and allow for greater flexibility of seating configuration to facilitate the antiphonal nature of singing and recitation.



4th century Sarcophagus depicting the Passion of Christ

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

In planning the reconciliation area, parishes will want to provide for a sound-proof place with a chair for the priest and a kneeler and chair for the penitent. Since the rite includes the reading of Scripture, the space should also include a bible. (OP 17) Appropriate artwork, a crucifix symbolic of Christ's victory over sin and death, icons or images reflective of baptism and the Eucharist, or Scriptural images of God's reconciling love help to enhance the atmosphere of prayer. Warm, inviting lighting welcomes penitents who seek God's help and some form of amplification as well as Braille signs can aid those with hearing or visual disabilities. Additional rooms or spaces will be needed as confessional areas

for communal celebrations of penance, especially in Advent and Lent. [105]

The *Order of Christian Funerals* rites mark the final stage of the journey begun by the Christian in baptism. The structure of the current rites dates back to "Christian Rome where [there were] three 'stages' or 'stations' [during the funeral rite] joined by two processions": the first from the home of the deceased to the church and the second from the church to the place of burial. (OCF 42) [110]

Because the faith journey of the deceased began in baptism, it is appropriate that there be a physical association between the baptismal font and the space for the funeral ritual. [111]

... Although there are no specific spatial requirements for the celebration of the Hours, the focal points of the celebration are the word of God and the praying assembly. An area of flexible seating can facilitate the prayer of a smaller group divided into alternating choirs. The importance of music in public celebrations of the Hours suggests that the place designated for their celebration should provide access to necessary equipment for musicians, particularly cantors and instrumentalists who accompany the singing community. [115]

Environment for Catholic Worship: Part 7 of 12, Page 2
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Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 8

Gathering Space

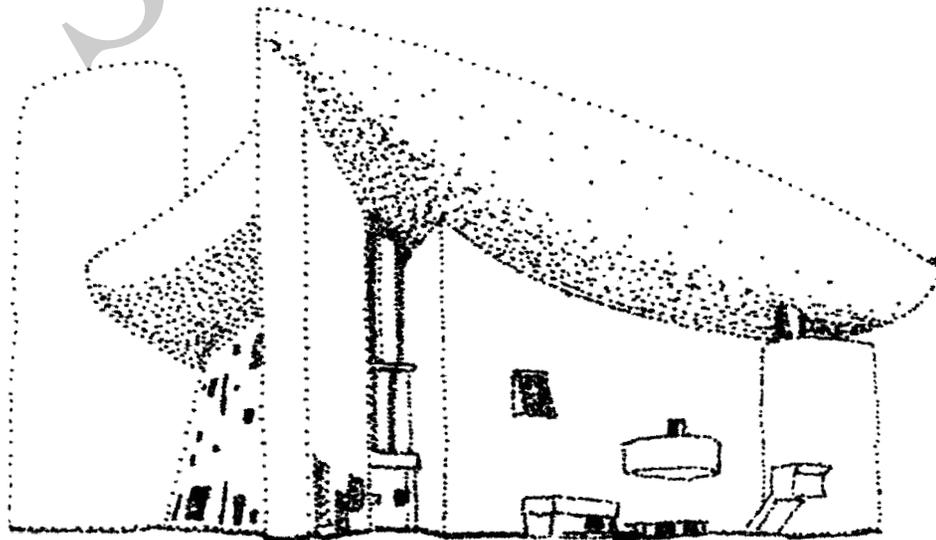
Life is often described as a journey. Even if we rarely leave our own towns or neighborhoods, we are still traveling through time. We often speak of the Christian life as a journey—even a pilgrimage. We set a course, and, though we stumble, we keep our eyes on our destination. Along the way, we recognize Christ traveling with us.

Every Sunday, all over the world, members of Christian households—large and small—begin a journey, a procession from their many homes to the place where they will unite themselves with other believers in the praise and thanksgiving of God. Through a thousand different routines, they prepare to place themselves in the company of friends, neighbors, and even strangers to

respond to God's loving call. The procession may begin calmly in the home of a single person or with all the commotion of a large family running a little late. It may be a short walk or a long drive, but this journey has many stages along the way before we all mark ourselves with the sign of the cross at the greeting of the Mass.

The liturgy is said to be “the source and summit of Christian life.” Notice how even the words “source” and “summit” imply movement. Through the doors of our churches, we bring ourselves, at times, broken, hungry, alone, or confused, to unite ourselves with Christ who has known our pains. At other times, we pass the threshold with great joy, hope and consolation, celebrating the wonderful works of God in our lives. From many individual households we gather in this house of the church.

With that understanding, the design of new and renovated churches often includes an ample narthex or gathering space for people to visit with one another before and after the liturgy. The gathering space encourages people to linger and come to know each other. There we might also learn about the many activities of the parish as it brings about the reign of God in the community.

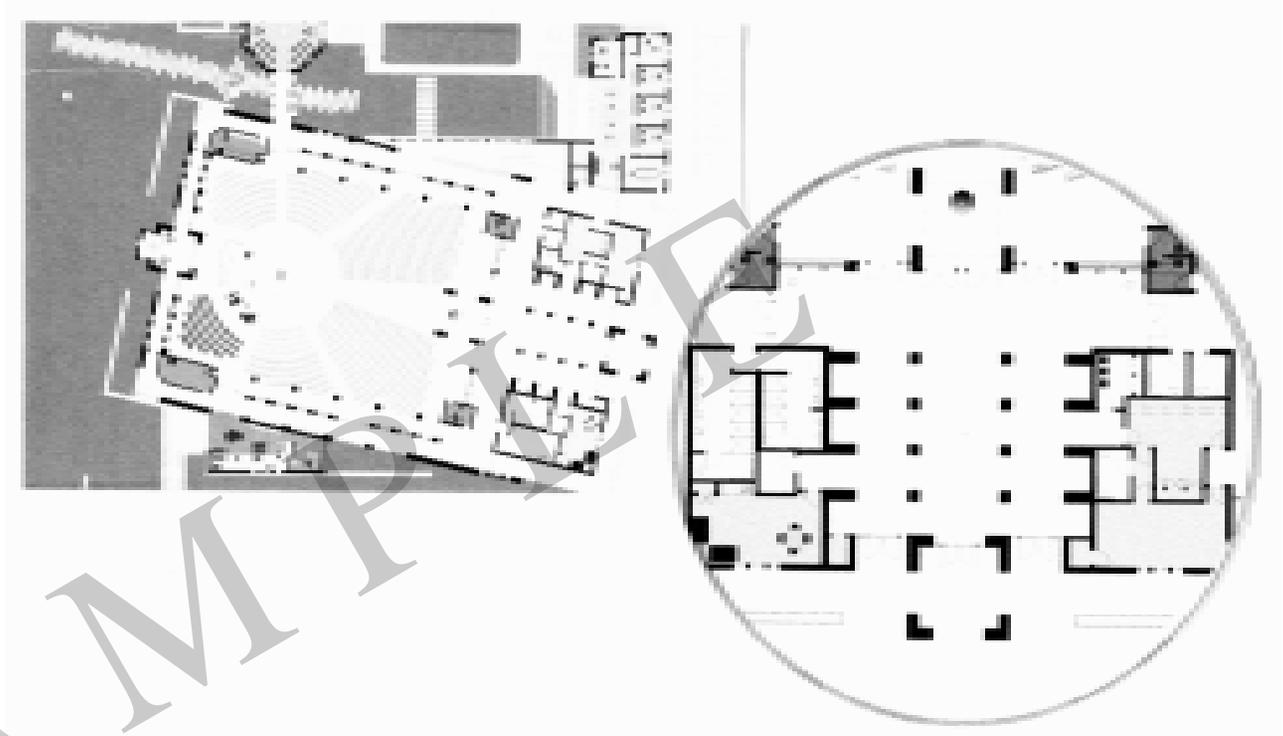


20th century Pilgrim church,
Ronchamp, France.
Architect: Le Corbusier

It also serves liturgically as a place to greet families bringing a child for baptism and for adult candidates for initiation during the Rite of Acceptance. There are moments in the Wedding and Funeral liturgies that are also enhanced by the presence of a significant gathering space. At times throughout the year the entire assembly might process from this space into the hall for the Eucharist.

A vesting sacristy and a room for bereaved families and for brides might also be located nearby. If the narthex provides a view into the main space, this space might also provide a place to walk and comfort an anxious child, as an alternative to a “cry room.” Parishes may also wish to locate an adjacent space for a nursery for use during the liturgy. In colder climates, an opportunity to hang coats nearby is a helpful gesture of hospitality. It also encourages people to be fully present to one another without unnecessary insulation.

The presence of a gathering space will allow those parishioners who wish to visit with one another before and after Mass to do so, while, at the same time, allowing others to pray quietly in the nave.



Gathering area or narthex, with hospitality parlor, vesting sacristy, nursery, ushers room and restrooms in close proximity. *St John the Apostle, Leesburg, VA (Proposed) Morgan Gick and Associates, Architect*

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The narthex is a place of welcome—a threshold space between the congregation's space and the outside environment. In the early days of the Church, it was a “waiting area” for catechumens and penitents. Today it serves as gathering space as well as the entrance and exit to the building. The gathering space helps believers to make the transition from everyday life to the celebration of the liturgy, and after the liturgy, it helps them return to daily life to live out the mystery that has been celebrated. In the gathering space, people come together to move in procession and to prepare for the celebration of the liturgy. It is in the gathering space that many important liturgical moments occur: men and women participate in the Rite of Becoming a Catechumen as

they move towards later, full initiation into the Church; parents, godparents, and infants are greeted for the celebration of baptism; and Christians are greeted for the last time as their mortal remains are received into the church building for the celebration of the funeral rites. [95]

In addition to its religious functions, the gathering space may provide access to the vesting sacristy, rooms for choir rehearsal, storage areas, restrooms, and rooms for ushers and their equipment. Adequate space for other gatherings will be an important consideration in planning the narthex and other adjoining areas. [96]

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 9

Place for Pastoral Musicians

We live in a culture where communal singing is reserved for very few events—birthdays, the national anthem at sporting events and moments of tragedy or loss. Yet since ancient times singing or chanting has been a part of most faith traditions in the world. Perhaps that is because singing involves so much more of one's body and breath than speech. There is a depth of meaning, emotion and conviction conveyed in singing that spoken words alone rarely match. St Augustine expressed it best when he claimed that those who sing pray twice.

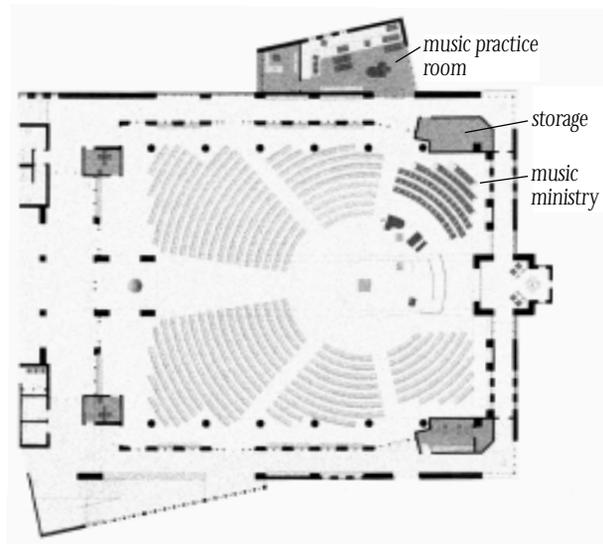
Jesus was well acquainted with the hymns and psalms of the Jewish tradition.

On the night before he died, at the end of his last meal with the twelve disciples, Jesus and his disciples sang a psalm before going out to the Mount of Olives. Even on the cross, Jesus utters the first phrase of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

The reforms of the liturgy at the Second Vatican Council ask that we recover an early tradition of singing by the entire assembly, a tradition that had been lost. For centuries, the assembly's sung voice was rarely heard in Catholic liturgy. Singing was reserved to choirs (generally men and/or boys) and in remote places (generally rear galleries). Now we speak of musical liturgy as the

norm, where choirs or cantors and instrumentalists encourage and lead their assemblies in the singing of hymns, acclamations and responses.

When considering the requirements that liturgical music



Space for the music ministry, practice room and storage. *St John the Apostle, Leesburg, VA (Proposed) Morgan Gick and Associates, Architect*

places on a space for worship, we must start with the room itself. In order for it to support the song of the assembly, there must be enough hard (reflective) surfaces to keep the sound alive for a few moments. When the room is too absorbent because of wall-to-wall carpeting, seat cushions and porous wall and ceiling surfaces, the assembly's singing and spoken responses are seriously handicapped. Careful attention to the design of the space will encourage the assembly's singing while allowing speech to be heard and understood clearly.

The pastoral musicians who serve the liturgy are also members of the assembly and should be seen as such, and be able to participate fully in the rites. The place for the cantor should be visible, though not as prominent as the ambo. Careful placement of the choir will allow its voice to be heard clearly throughout the worship space and yet not create a visual distraction.

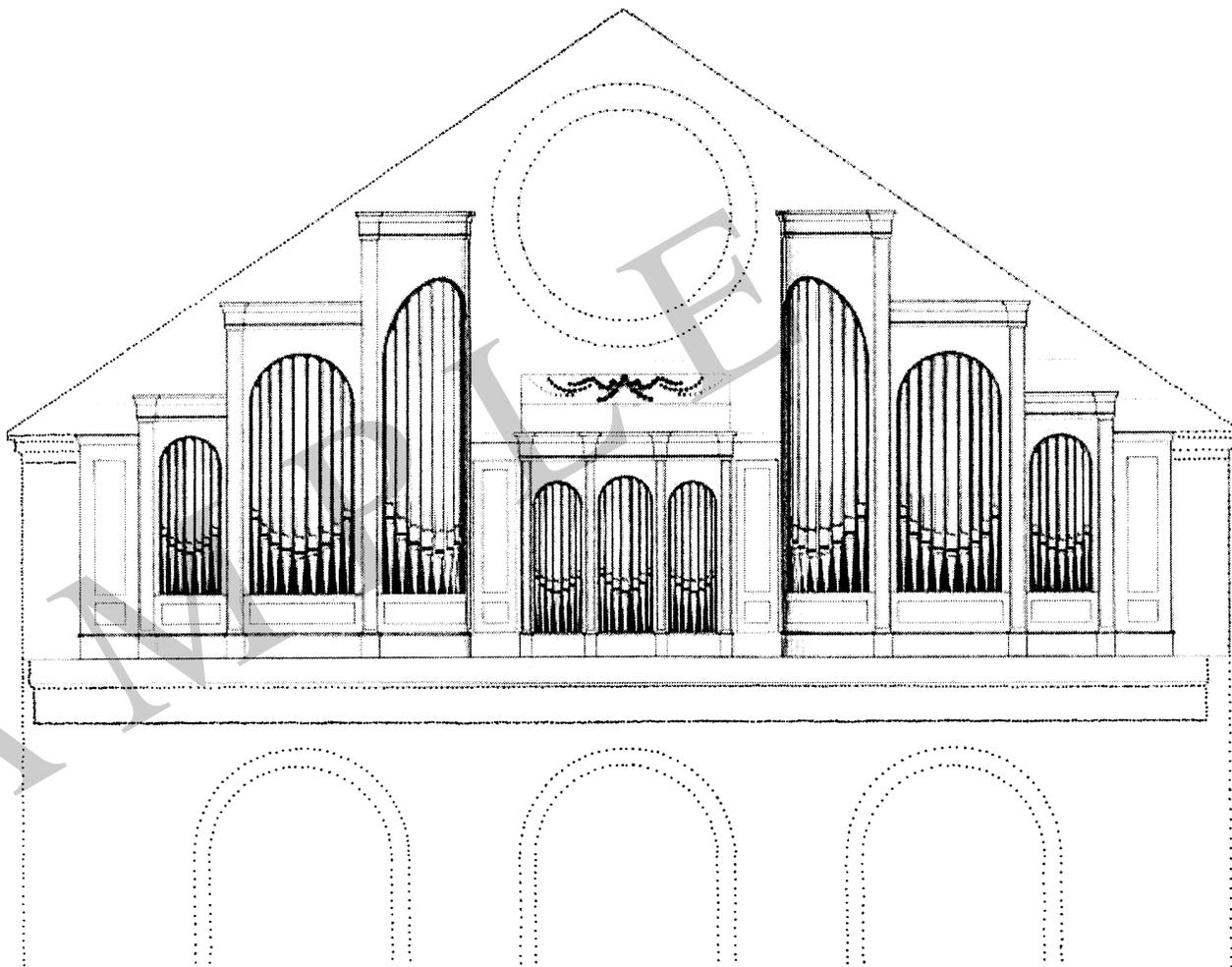
The musicians must be able to interact and, therefore, be in close proximity with each other and the source of the sound of the accompanying instruments. Sufficient space should be considered and planned for the addition of regular or occasional instrumentalists, and for the possibility of a pipe organ. A music rehearsal room is also frequently considered in a new or renovated space.

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

Music is integral to the liturgy. It unifies those gathered to worship, supports the song of the congregation, highlights significant parts of the liturgical action, and helps to set the tone for each celebration. (MCW 232, GIRM 103) [88]

It is important to recognize that the building must support the music and song of the entire worshipping assembly. In addition, "some members of the community [have] special gifts [for] leading the [assembly in] musical praise and thanksgiving." (LMT 63) The skills and talents of these pastoral musicians, choirs, and instrumentalists are especially valued by the Church. Because the roles of the choirs and cantors are exercised within the liturgical community, the space chosen for the musicians should clearly express that they are part of the assembly of worshipers. (GRM 294) In addition, cantors and song leaders need visual contact with the music director while they themselves are visible to the rest of the congregation. (cf MCW 33-38) Apart from the singing of the Responsorial Psalm, which normally occurs at the ambo, the stand for the cantor or song leader is distinct from the ambo, which is reserved for the proclamation of the word of God. [89]

The placement and prayerful decorum of the choir members can help the rest of the community to focus on the liturgical action taking place at the ambo, the altar, and the chair. The ministers of music are most appropriately located in a place where they can be part of the assembly and have the ability to be heard. Occasions or physical situations may necessitate that the choir be placed in or near the sanctuary. In such circumstances, the placement of the choir should never crowd or overshadow the other ministers in the sanctuary nor should it distract from the liturgical action. [90]



Pipe Organ. *Our Lady of Mercy Church, Potomac, MD.*
Guilbault-Therrien, organbuilders, St Hyacinthe, Quebec

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 10

Art in the Service of the Liturgy

In a former convent, surrounded by a beautiful garden in a London neighborhood, Terebinth Trust was established as a Catholic social service agency to give safe shelter and counseling to women and their children fleeing abusive situations at home. The women were often unable to speak about their situations and were suspicious of living hopefully in light of their fears and past experiences.

As one way to help them surface their deep-seated feelings, the staff encouraged the women and children to paint. The results were simple, but astoundingly profound and beautiful images. When asked to describe their meaning, the women and children were able to speak for the first time about the trauma they experienced and what the future might hold for them.

There is something powerful in worthy art that reveals truth and beauty in a way that words alone cannot capture. Art placed in a liturgical setting has the power to help a community to remember and celebrate its relationship with God, who is beyond our complete understanding or ability to contain in words.

Unlike other ways in which we use art in modern life, liturgical art is not first about decoration. Images in a liturgical setting are another form of proclamation of the

message of the gospels—a visual parable—allowing us to see with new eyes. Just as the gospels call us to ongoing conversion and a change of heart, so too, images can confront our complacency and comfortable assumptions.

And unlike art that is created as a tribute to a famous person in society, worthy images of Mary and the saints can move beyond honor to give us some insight into the way in which they shared in the life and work of Christ and in the paschal mystery. We can see in these images a way in which we too might embrace Christ and become one with Christ in the Eucharist, as we are broken and poured out for those who are hungry and thirsty in our midst.

Since the liturgy is an action of Christ and the church, art in spaces for the Eucharist must foster, and never compete with, the principal symbols of the sacrificial meal and the full, active and conscious participation of all those present. The altar and the ambo will always be the most important furnishings in a space dedicated to the celebration of the Eucharist. Images and decorative elements should enhance and not detract from these central elements.

Parish communities have discovered that images can be placed in a variety of spaces throughout a church,

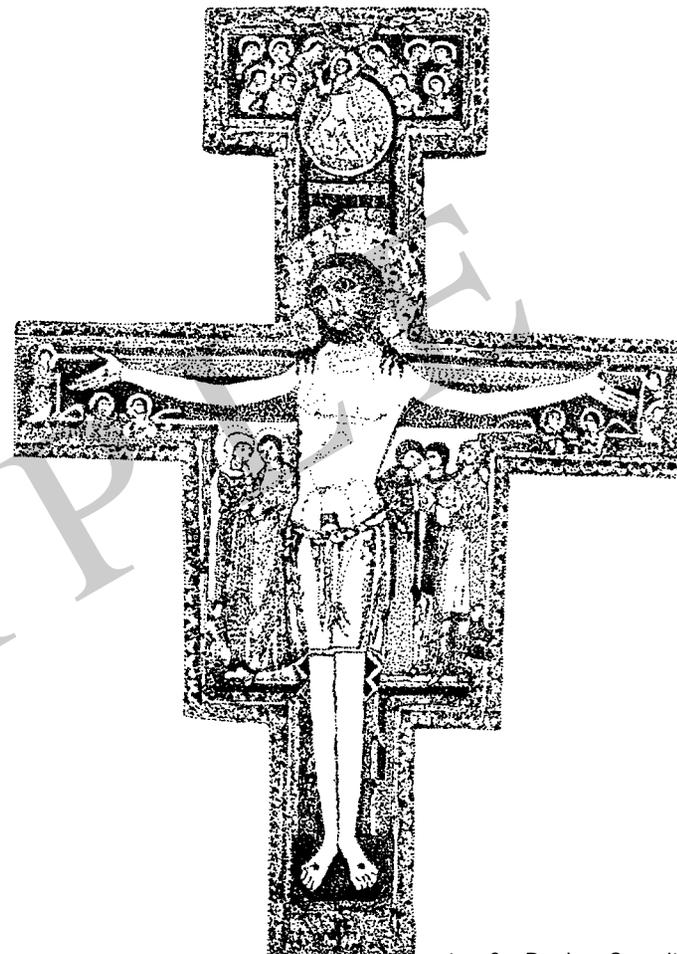


3rd century statue of the Good Shepherd

including the gathering space, devotional alcoves, chapels, meditation gardens and at the entrance.

On the walls surrounding the baptistery of a 3rd century house-church discovered in East Syria, an early Christian community painted primitive, but colorful depictions of stories from the old and new testaments to help them celebrate and remember what baptism means for the newly initiated and for the community. Images included Adam and Eve, the Samaritan woman at the well, the healing of the paralyzed man, St Peter's attempt to walk on the water and the three women who found the tomb empty. Also included was an image of the Good Shepherd, with a ram on his shoulders and a flock of sheep at his side.

Today, parish communities continue the long tradition of commissioning artists who create art that is truly beautiful and that communicates the weight of the mysteries that we celebrate. These images will not be trivial, but should, over time, unfold the truths that are revealed in the scriptures and the life of the living church.



11th century San Damiano Cross, Italy

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

Reflecting the awareness of the Communion of Saints, the practice of incorporating symbols of the Trinity, images of Christ, the Blessed Mother, the angels, and the saints into the design of a church creates a source of devotion and prayer for a parish community and should be part of the design of the church. (BB 1258) Images can be found in stained glass windows, on wall frescos and murals, and as statues and icons. Often these images depict scenes from the bible or from the lives of the saints and can be a source of instruction and catechesis as well as devotion. Since the Eucharist unites the Body

of Christ, including those who are not physically present, the use of images in the church reminds us that we are joined to all who have gone before us, as well as to those who now surround us. [135]

The placement of images can be a challenge, especially when a number of cultural traditions are part of a single parish community and each has its own devotional life and practices. Restraint in the number and prominence of sacred images (SC 125) is encouraged to help people focus on the liturgical action that is celebrated in the church. Separate alcoves for statues or icons can display

a variety of images through the year. Some parishes designate an area as the shrine for an image that is being venerated on a given day or for a period of time, such as the image of a saint on his or her feast day. [137]

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Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 11

Objects and Furnishings in the Service of the Liturgy



12th century Chalice of French Abbot Suger

When a parish gathers for the Eucharist, the objects and furnishings used in the celebration demonstrate how the community understands what is being accomplished.

The care with which these elements are designed and crafted should mirror our understanding of the liturgy as the source and summit of our lives as Christians. These objects may also mirror the distinct community for which they are created. Communities are not bound to choose mass-produced articles found in catalogs. Local artists can be sought who will offer designs that are unique and carry both the symbolic and functional requirements of the liturgy.

The processional cross should be a sign that we are united as a family in the journey toward the altar, just as we live by the sign of that cross in our daily lives. The liturgical books—the lectionary and the sacramentary—should be made of fine materials and good design, as a sign of our reverence and love of the word of God and our common prayers.

The vessels (chalice, flagons, cups and plates) used for the Eucharist should show that this community takes seriously Christ's command to "take and eat—take and drink." They derive their beauty not so much by the preciousness of material as by the clear and evident

honesty of materials and the quality of the design. While they are distinguished from cups and plates we may use in our homes, they still serve the function of sharing the Eucharistic food and drink. They should be large enough to hold the elements of the Eucharist to be consumed and to capture the attention of the assembly.

In contemporary churches, candles no longer provide the principal lighting as they once did. However, they do more than simply mark a special occasion as they might at a holiday or birthday dinner. They are also symbols of the presence of Christ, the light of the world in our midst. Just as the Eucharistic elements are consumed in the liturgy, so too is the wax of the candle consumed in its use.

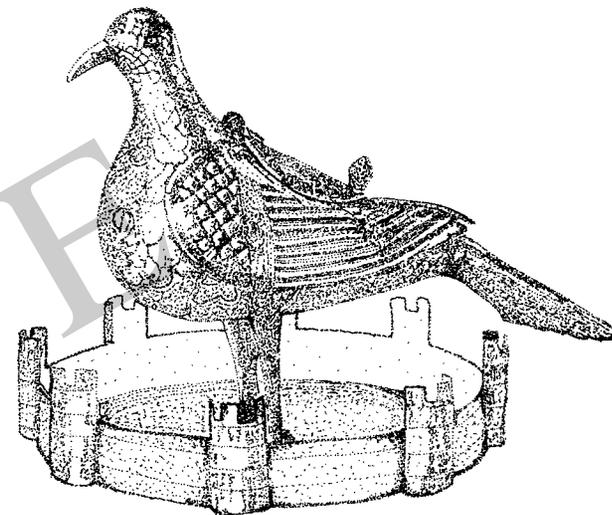
The largest candle is the paschal candle, first lighted at the Easter Vigil. The paschal candle remains prominent throughout the fifty days of Easter and each time the parish celebrates a baptism or a funeral. The presence of this candle proclaims our faith in the resurrection of Christ the unquenchable light.

The design of each of the objects and furnishings should relate to the design of the entire space, creating a harmony of elements. These elements become sacred in the way that they encourage an assembly to fully enter into the mysteries of our faith.

6th century paten with a depiction of Christ sharing the Eucharist with the apostles, Riha, Syria.



13th century French pyx in the form of a dove, gilded copper with enamel. The reserved Eucharist was placed in these often suspended vessels.



Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The Cross: The cross with the image of Christ crucified is a reminder of Christ's paschal mystery. It draws us into the mystery of suffering and makes tangible our belief that our suffering when united with the passion and death of Christ leads to redemption.... (BB 1233) Since a crucifix placed *on* the altar and large enough to be seen by the congregation might well obstruct the view of the action taking place on the altar, other alternatives may be more appropriate.... A processional cross of sufficient size, placed in a stand visible to the people following the entrance procession, is another option. If there is already a cross in the sanctuary, the processional cross is placed out of view of the congregation following the procession. (cf GIRM 122) [91]

Candles: Candles, which are signs of reverence and festivity, "are to be used at every liturgical service." (GIRM 307) The living flame of the candle, symbolic of the risen Christ, reminds people that in baptism they are brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light. For the celebration of the Eucharist it is appropriate to carry candles in the entrance procession and during the procession with the *Book of the Gospels*. (GIRM 117) At least two candles are placed near the altar in the sanctuary area.... [92]

Candles for liturgical use should be made of a material that provides "a living flame without being smoky or noxious." To safeguard "authenticity and the full symbolism of light," (N 10:80, 1974, no 4) electric lights as a substitute for candles are not permitted. [93]

The Paschal Candle: The paschal candle is the symbol of "the light of Christ, rising in glory," scattering "the darkness of our hearts and minds." (Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 12) Above all, the paschal candle should be a genuine candle, the pre-eminent symbol of the light of Christ.... During the Easter Vigil and throughout the Easter season, the paschal candle belongs near the ambo or in the middle of the sanctuary. After the Easter season it is moved to a place of honor in the baptistry for use in the celebration of baptisms. During funerals the paschal candle is placed near the coffin as a sign of the Christian's passover from death to life. (PCEF 99) [94]

Vessels: As in the case of styles of architecture, there is no particular style for sacred furnishings for the liturgy. (GIRM 325) Sacred vessels may be in "a shape that is in keeping with the culture of each region, provided each type of vessel is suited to the intended liturgical use and is clearly distinguished from [utensils] designed for every

day use." (GIRM 332) Materials used for sacred vessels such as the chalice and paten should be worthy, solid, and durable, and should not break easily. ... The vestments worn by ministers symbolize the ministers' functions and add beauty to the celebration of the rites. "In addition to traditional materials, natural fabrics proper to the [local area] may be used for making vestments; ... The beauty and nobility of a vestment should derive from its material and design rather than from lavish ornamentation." (GIRM 342-344) [164]

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 12

What Does a Church Look Like?

Parish communities about to renovate or build a church struggle with the question—what should it look like. In the first article in this series we discovered that the word “church” refers first, to a people—a community of faith united with Christ as its head. The building we often speak of as “the church” is the particular home of the Christian community, the place where households of faith come to remember and celebrate the covenants between God and our forebears in faith.

Just as our homes are places where significant moments of family life are remembered and celebrated, the church building is the place where we gather in response to Christ’s invitation to join in the praise and thanks of God, our creator and source of life.

There, we are bathed and anointed in baptism. There we are fed the bread of life and the cup of salvation. There, we are reconciled with God and the community. There, with the Church as witness, we pledge ourselves in life-long commitments. And it is there that we recall the promise of eternal life given at our baptism even as we are given back to God in death.

Just as our homes differ widely according to climate, age, culture, wealth and size, so too do Christian churches exhibit a variety of styles. In fact, it has always been the

case throughout the life of the church. The Catholic tradition has been truly catholic, that is, universal. From the first houses that were converted to use as a place of worship in the second and third century to the modern era, the design of places of worship has evolved in wide-ranging variety of shapes and styles.

While we tend to think of architecture in terms of a historic progression—Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque—the evolution was not a straight line from period to period. In every age, churches were built as a response to the way a Christian community expressed itself in worship. That expression has changed over time, and, in response, so has the design of worship spaces.

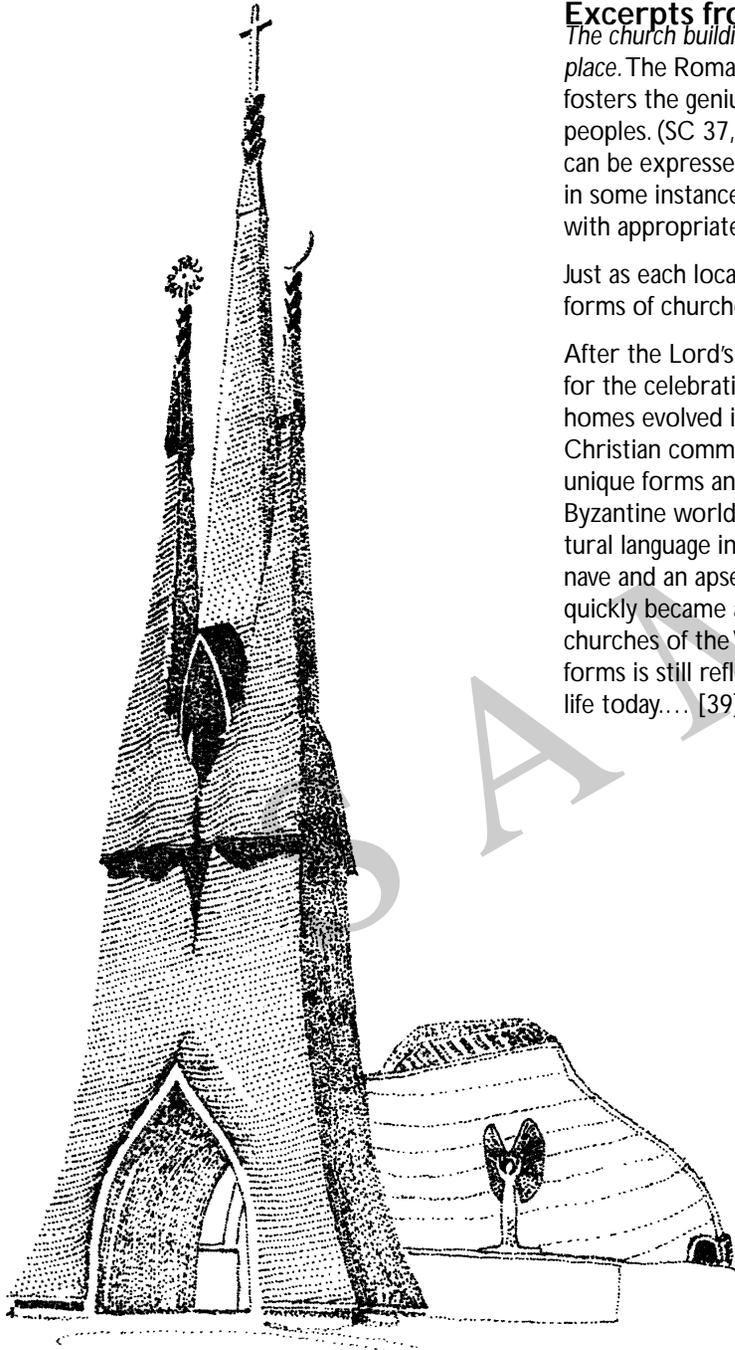
In our own day, there is sometimes a desire that the design of a church should copy or imitate a style from a former time. Certainly, we have much to learn from a careful study of the past. Yet, with a renewed understanding of the ways we experience Christ’s presence in the liturgy and our own participation in the mysteries, we realize that not every former style supports and encourages our present understanding to the same degree.

Churches are more than meeting rooms in which various activities must be accommodated. They are also symbols of the presence of Christ in the world and a beacon of



12th century stave church, Norway

hope to the world. By their design, they can announce to the world that the living Body of Christ gathers there to remember and celebrate the marvelous works of God.



Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

The church building respects the culture of every time and place. The Roman rite respects cultural differences and fosters the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. (SC 37, 119; CCC 1158) This cultural diversity can be expressed in architectural styles, in art forms, and in some instances in the celebration of liturgical rites with appropriate adaptations. [38]

Just as each local community is different, styles and forms of churches will vary. . . .

After the Lord's ascension, believers gathered in homes for the celebration of the "breaking of the bread." Such homes evolved into "house churches" and became the Christian community's earliest places for worship. The unique forms and architecture of the Roman and Byzantine world provided the Church with an architectural language in the form of the basilica. With its long nave and an apse for the bishop and clergy, the basilica quickly became a standard architectural form for churches of the West. The effect of these architectural forms is still reflected in the structure of our liturgical life today. . . . [39]

The rich history of Catholic worship space traces a path through every people and place where the liturgy has been offered. . . . Since the Church is not wedded to a single architectural or artistic form, it seeks to engage the genius of every time and place, to craft the finest praise of God from what is available. (cf SC 123, GIRM 289) The rich dialogue between the Church's liturgy, as a singular expression of divine revelation, and a local culture is an essential ingredient in the evangelization of peoples and the celebration of the Roman Catholic liturgy in a given time and place. . . . [40]

Parishes in the United States today often find their places of worship shared by people of varied languages and ethnic backgrounds and experience vast differences in styles of public worship and personal devotion. What can sustain Christian communities in this challenge of hospitality is the realization that a pluralism of symbolic, artistic, and architectural expression enriches the community. (CCC 1157-1158, cf SC 119) [43]