



The Church Building As
Image of Heaven: A Pastoral Guide

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Introduction

Throughout the history of the Church, the church building has been understood as a sacramental image of heaven which gives a “foretaste of the heavenly liturgy.”¹ The Book of Revelation gives a mystical vision of heaven, calling it the “New Jerusalem,”² a radiant, jewel-like city filled with heavenly beings singing God’s praises in the eternal liturgy. This image provides the model for every earthly church building, which, as Vatican II reminds us, manifests the “signs and symbols of the heavenly realities” (SC, 122) in and through the medium of the arts: architecture, paintings, statues, and stained glass.

In much of recent Catholic church architecture, this sacramental notion has been lost, and the result is much confusion about the nature of church buildings. Many present-day churches are built which confuse the faithful because they do not “look like” churches, and where the role and place of images is frequently misunderstood. As a result, the church building misses the opportunity to aid in “full, conscious and active participation” (SC, 14) in the liturgy, which includes its heavenly component (SC, 2). The loss of this heavenly element, therefore, runs the

¹ Second Vatican Council, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott, S.J. trans. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Herder and Herder Association Press, 1966), 141. Hereafter referred to as SC.

² Revelation 21:2. Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotes are taken from *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1971.

risk of collapsing the heavenly liturgy by way of the earthly liturgy, losing or flattening the heavenly dimension of liturgy into a liturgical minimalism where the congregation is focused on the earthly dimension of the liturgy alone. This lack of transcendence can domesticate the sacramental life and its moorings in its heavenly prototype. When this happens, the sacramental life is no longer viewed in its larger framework of sanctification of all creation, but as a merely nourishment of the individual soul.³

As part of the rite, the church should be thought of as a “sacramental building,” as an influential and formative part of the faithful’s experience of the rite. As M. Francis Mannion states:

While liturgical architecture has an indisputably functional element, this functionality operates within a framework that is constitutively sacramental. To say that liturgical architecture is sacramental is to affirm that architecture participates integrally in the sacramental order of the church. Architecture enters intrinsically into the action of the liturgy.⁴

When designing or renovating a church, it is of utmost importance to be conscious that the building and all of its parts support the mission of the Church, the “sanctification of man and the glorification of God” (*SC*, 10), and this is done through the earthly liturgy, which is a sacramental presentation of the heavenly liturgy (*SC*, 8). The church building is a sacramental image of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the setting for the heavenly liturgy lived sacramentally on earth.

³ M. Francis Mannion, *Masterworks of God: Essays in Liturgical Theory and Practice* (Chicago, IL, Hillenbrand Books, 2004), 244.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

This essay provides a pastoral guide to understanding Catholic Church architecture in sacramental terms. It is scripturally based, using architecture prototypes rooted in the Book of Revelation (21:10ff), as well as Old Testament types: the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 35:34), Moses' sanctuary (Ex 25:8-9), and Solomon's temple (1 Ch 28:12, 19, Ws 9:8; Ezk 4:10-11).⁵ The paper will also make use of the documents of the Church as they pertain to architectural matters: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (122-130), the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), and *Built of Living Stones* (2000). Finally, throughout this paper the thesis will be augmented by examples from the tradition and artistic heritage of the Church. It is the intention that this article will assist pastors, architects, builders, parish committees, and artists in building, renovating, and decorating their churches as they, with the entire faithful, journey to their heavenly home (Jn 14:2). The ideas presented in this paper are intended to increase the consciousness of the sacramental purpose of the church building, and help to form the answer to the first question anyone building or renovating a church should ask, "How can this church be a sacramental image of heaven?"

Many questions of a more practical nature when building or renovating a church are addressed in the attached documents. This essay provides a sacramental foundation for undertaking a church building or renovation project. Also included in this packet are supplemental material provided by the Archdiocese of St. Louis

⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Fr. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990), 144.

offices of Finance, Building and Real Estate, Disabilities Ministry, and Music, which will provide invaluable guidance in such an undertaking. Should the reader have any further questions they should feel free to call the Office of Sacred Worship for the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7230.

The Church Building As Element of the Rite

Whenever money is spent on building or renovating a church, all personnel involved in the project must have a clear understanding that the undertaking is not merely a matter of erecting four walls and a roof in which people gather, or simply try to decide if the baptismal font should go in the back or front of the church, or if the walls should be painted beige or have some color. The building or renovating of a church is an issue of great importance because it is a matter of making visible, in signs and symbols, man's relationship with God, for divine revelation is always communicated in a human way (*CCC*, 1146). It is God's manner of teaching, the "divine pedagogy," that a sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols rooted in the work of creation and human culture is not only used to manifest this relationship with God (*CCC*, 1145), but in fact can nourish, and strengthen this relationship as well (*SC*, 59).

In considering the importance of the church building, the sacred action taking place within the building is of paramount importance. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger addressed the high dignity of the liturgy writing: "Thus it brings heaven into the community assembled on earth, or rather it takes that community beyond

itself into the communion of saints of all times and places.”⁶ Since liturgy is man’s highest act of worship and communicates man’s salvation, the church building holds a singular purpose in expressing man’s ultimate destiny, which is union with God in heaven. Not only is the rite carried out within the church, but the church actually becomes a sacramental image of man’s union with God as well. In other words, the church building should not remain neutral in celebrating the liturgy, but rather become a much needed element in the act of worship; it becomes part of the symbol system of the rite. It expresses the Christian faith and also deepens the faith of those who gather within (CCC, 1186).

On the importance of the church building M. Francis Mannion writes: “the church building is a sacrament of the city of heaven and a sign of glorified humanity.”⁷ Entering a church should afford the faithful the opportunity to catch a sacramental glimpse of heaven where the heavenly liturgy is taking place. Even if a rite is not being celebrated at that particular time, the church building can be a wordless and unspoken witness of the heavenly reality. For what Sacred Scripture is for the ears, the church building can be for the eyes.

Biblical Sources for Church Architecture

But what does heaven look like? What is the authoritative source for modeling a church after the pattern of heaven? Where does a person turn to catch

⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 71.

⁷ Mannion, 250.

this glimpse of where the heavenly liturgy is taking place without signs, “where celebration is wholly communion and feast” (CCC, 1136)? What is man’s role in imitating God by creating architecture? The answer is found in sacred scripture.

In sacred scripture God is revealed in many ways. He is liberator (Ex 3:7-10), provider (Ex 16:1-4), lawgiver (Ex 24:12-13), and most importantly for this discussion, creator (Gn 1ff). Man, because he is made in the image of God (Gn 1:26), is presented as an artist whose work “bears a certain likeness to God’s activity” (CCC, 2501). When man creates works of art, or in this case builds churches, man gives shape to truth and truth is not only expressed with words but may evoke what is beyond words reaching to the very depth and mystery of God (CCC, 2500).

The Book of Genesis presents to man the image of God as creator. From the beginning, the world and all creation is the result of God’s creative activity,⁸ and makes note that God created the world out of nothing. God is truly God because He creates out of nothing, man’s creative activity is different for man because man, as artist, must create or give shape and form to already existing material, such as wood, clay, canvas and paint. In his “Letter to Artists” (1999), Pope John Paul II speaks of this concept when he states:

What is the difference between “creator” and “craftsman”?
The one who creates bestows being itself, he brings something out of nothing – *ex nihilo sui et subiecti*, as the Latin puts it – and this, in the strict sense, is a mode of operation which belongs to the Almighty alone. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something

⁸ *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, SS., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 10. Hereafter referred to as *JBC*.

that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning.⁹

When man creates, as an artist, he acts or shares in God's creative power. Unlike God, man must create from already existing material, but like God when man creates he reveals something of his very being since when God creates it is a reflection of Himself.¹⁰ When an architect designs a church it is of highest importance that the church reveals the beauty of God that is clearly seen by the faithful. As John Paul II quoted Cyprian Norwid, a noted Polish poet: "Beauty is to enthuse us for work, and work is to raise us up,"¹¹ meaning that the beauty of a church building energizes us for the work of prayer, and prayer makes us more like God. The church building as a sacramental image has the effective grace to dispose the soul to be in communion with God, and for this reason careful consideration must be given by the architect to convey this sacramental image of communion between man and God.

God as Architect

The Book of Psalms presents God as the prototypical architect, and man as worker with God in the construction business: "Unless the Lord builds the house its builders will have toiled in vain..." (Ps 127:1). Humans can build houses, cities, airports, bridges, and monuments. Humans can, as his or her most fundamental endeavor, even go about making their lives works of art, as John Paul II says in

⁹ "Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Artists (4 April 1999)," 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

Letter to Artists, “building” a life consisting of a spouse, family, and job. Yet, as this psalm reminds its reader humans are not doing these things all by themselves. God is the giver of all good gifts. Man can be about many labors of work but if the Lord is not the architect behind man’s toil, then all the work of man is unproductive. It is the task of the church architect and pastor to allow God to work through them for His greater glory.

In many scriptural images God takes on the appearance of an architect, designing with pencil and ruler, compass and protractor, measuring out in cubits the dimensions of things that are used by God to save and deliver man, and by man to worship his saving God. Noah built his ark using the dimensions given him by God (Gn 6:14-17). God declares to Noah, “ This is to be its plan: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits (Gn 6:15). A cubit is approximately eighteen inches in modern measurement, which translates into an ark with the dimensions: 450 feet long, by 75 feet wide and by 45 feet high (*JBC*, 15). Here God uses precise measurements for the ark built by Noah, and so gives us a starting point for our own churches. When they use harmonic numerical relationships and geometry showing the relationship of points, lines, angles and curves in the design of the church, architects echo the mind of God, evoking the same design pattern of the universe itself. Evdokimov states: “The church reproduces the internal structure of the universe. Plato said that, ‘there is no beauty without measure,’ and Aristotle added that ‘beauty resides in measure

and order.’ God is the great architect and the inspired geometrician of the world (*The Timaeus*).”¹²

In considering Noah’s ark here is a paradox to be considered: for in bringing forth the waters from the heavens God destroyed all that He had created in the opening chapters of Genesis, making a new covenant with Noah who will become a new father to mankind. This boat designed by God and built by human hands becomes a vehicle for man’s salvation. The ark is an image of a place where Noah and his family can find sanctuary from the turbulence of the outside world, and an image of the new creation God will establish with man which will eventually be manifested in the new Adam, Jesus Christ. Because the ark is a symbol of the church, architects need to be conscious that the church they are designing, as a reflection of God’s creative act, will be the vehicle or sacramental presence of Christ in the world.¹³

Another set of proportions given by God is found in Exodus 25:10-22, when God directs Moses to design the Tabernacle which houses the Ark of the Covenant. As the first and only article to be placed in the inmost part of the temple, the Ark holds a special significance for it is the “dwelling place” of God among His people. The Tabernacle becomes a model for the church building today, where God continues to dwell with His people in the New Covenant. It would, then, be most appropriate for God to give the design plans to Moses for its construction Himself,

¹² Evdokimov, 145.

¹³ Ibid., 147.

since the Ark would be the symbol of His presence of dwelling in the midst of the people of Israel. This account is later fulfilled and completed by the account of Revelation in which the heavenly Jerusalem no longer features a temple because it no longer needs a sign of God's dwelling among His people. Now God actually dwells there among His faithful (Rv 21:2) and they become the living stones of heaven itself.

The Ark was made out of acacia wood, and had a rectangular shape that measured forty-five inches by twenty-seven inches by twenty-seven inches, roughly a double cube, plated with gold on the inside and the outside (Ex 25:10-11). Four gold rings in which poles could be inserted were placed on top of the box, thus allowing the ark to be transported. Over the ark a cover was constructed called the "propitiatory" (*JBC*, 62). On either end of the ark were two golden angels (or cherubim) whose wings stretched over the ark itself in the act of adoration: "Make two gold cherubim of beaten work at the ends of the cover, one at each end; make each cherub of one piece with the cover. They shall be made with wings outspread and pointing upwards, and shall screen the cover with their wings" (Ex 25:18-20). Within the Ark was placed the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments had been inscribed. These two stone tablets, which Moses received, marked the sealing of the covenant between God and Israel. This Ark of the Covenant would indicate the covenant of Mount Sinai, as well as the throne of God's presence among His people (*JBC*, 62). Because God saw fit to build with worthy material such as gold and to make use of images of angels, architects

through time have used the scriptures as an authoritative source for their own church buildings. Architect can still do this today when building churches.

As important as these images are for God's covenant, His dwelling place, it should be noted that the Ark was not looked upon as a permanent dwelling or housing for God, but rather as a meeting place for God and Moses, as a visible means by which God could communicate with Moses inside the Tabernacle (*JBC*, 62): "It is there that I shall meet you, and from above the cover, between the two cherubim over the Ark of the Tokens, I shall deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites (Ex 25: 22). In an act of humility, God permitted Himself to be present to Moses through signs perceivable by the senses such as wood, gold, and winged figures. These earthly things could not actually contain the transcendent God, but were used as a way of communicating with Moses and to all of Israel, and therefore, church architects have understood the divine mandate for a sacramental understanding of architecture.

In further evidence of God's desire to give man architectural guidance, God's architectural skill was displayed in Solomon's Temple as the ultimate sign of God's presence among His people. In 1 Samuel 7:1ff how David was concerned that he, the king, was living in a magnificent house made of cedar while the Ark of God was housed in curtain. So David purposed to build God a permanent house in which to dwell. However, David will not be the one to build a house for God, but rather, it would be Solomon, David's offspring (2Sam 7:12-13). God tells David

that David will not build a house for God but it is God who will build an “everlasting dynasty for David” (*JBC*, 175).

1 Kings 6:2 records the dimensions of the Temple built by King Solomon at the direction of God: “The house which King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long by twenty cubits broad, and its height was thirty cubits.”¹⁴ This means the approximate dimensions of the Temple were ninety feet long by thirty feet wide by forty-five feet tall or roughly the proportions of 3:1:2, again giving proportion in whole numbers and proportions designated by God to be pleasing to Him. This would be a construction of moderate size, since the primary purpose of the Temple was to house the Ark. The congregation that assembled for worship would spill out onto the adjoining structure, the vestibule (20 cubits in length) that ran the entire length of the house and projected ten cubits in front of the house (1 Kgs 6:3).

The Old Testament scriptures reveal that God uses earthly things as a means of communicating with man, whether it be a boat, a container, or a temple. Each example reminds the reader that God is Creator of all things. It is God who provides for humans and directs them to their ultimate fulfillment which is everlasting life with God Himself. But just as God is Creator of all on earth, He is also is the Maker of the heavens, and God will use the various images of the heavens, i.e. stars, moon, sun, etc, to manifest Himself. Additionally, by obeying the will of God and revealing His glory, these cosmic elements have long been

¹⁴ *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 185. Hereafter referred to as *ICB*.

understood to “praise” Him, forming what has long been called the “cosmic liturgy.”

The psalmist declares that God is truly mighty and that this might is manifested in the creation of all that man sees. The works of God are so tremendous it is possible for man to feel insignificant when man compares himself with many of God’s creations, yet, with God there is always hope. Psalm 8 states: “When I look up at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars set in their place by thee, what is man that thou shouldst remember him, mortal man that thou shouldst care for him?” (Ps 8:3-4) This familiar psalm speaks of the great wonders God has worked, placing each star in its own place with His own creative hand, shaping the heavenly bodies one by one with his fingers and fastening them in the vast dome of the sky (*ICB*, 264). But as much as God has done all these things, God still cares for man above all else. It is as man beholds the wonders of the night sky that he contemplates the greatness of God and the insignificance of his own humanity. He wonders why God should take the time to pay attention to man and even more, care to for him. Yet, God crowns man with great dignity, for man has received from God the gift of dominion over the creatures of the earth (*ICB*, 264). As man contemplates these things he comes to the realization that creation is the manifestation of God and that man himself is made in the “image of God” (Gn 1:26).

When humans create they manifest not only the high calling of God, but they manifest the beauty of God Himself. When building or renovating a church,

the beauty of God is revealed in visible forms because each church manifests the reality that human beings are not the center of the universe, but rather all is focused on God. Therefore, when building or renovating a church first and foremost all architecture must be theocentric. Those involved with such a project as building or renovating a church must be conscious that the church building is not just a building among other buildings, as along a strip mall. The church has the unique purpose of bringing human beings into the presence of God. God declares and from chaos comes order, God created all things “with number, weight, and measure.”¹⁵

Images of Heaven

The heavens, the sun, moon and the stars, manifest God’s handiwork and thus are an image of God Himself. The heavens manifest God Himself and His great goodness and compassion as being the “treasure house” of blessings. But the heavens are also the home of the celestial choirs, the place where the holy ones sing the praises of God: “The heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, and the council of the holy ones exalts thy faithfulness (Ps 89:5).

Because God has created the heavens with its sun, stars, moon and planets with number, weight, and measure when churches are constructed the pastor, architects, and all the faithful should construct churches that are made in the image according to the evidence of God found in nature and scriptural revelation. Though

¹⁵ Evdokimov, 147.

this seems to have been forgotten over recent years scriptural prototypes, Noah's ark, the Ark of the Covenant, and Solomon's Temple reveal the divine mind has guided architects through the ages. The most important biblical prototype is the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, which is the fulfillment of other biblical prototypes.

Image of Heaven in the Book of Revelation

The most important prototype for church architecture through the ages is the image of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation. Revelation describes the Heavenly City as the dwelling place of the faithful who are gathered around the throne of God, singing His praises (Rv 21-22).

Revelation recalls that the old order has passed away, the final time the eschaton,¹⁶ is fulfilled, and what is presented are a new creation, a new heaven, a new earth, and a new community of the faithful (Rv 21:1). In this city the blood of the Lamb has redeemed the Church, the bride of Christ. Nothing remains of the old order of sin: no more pain, suffering, mourning or death; everything has been stripped away to reveal the magnificence of the eternal kingdom of God (*JBC*, 491). God and redeemed humanity are intimately united because now humanity shares directly in God's very life. This vision of God is no longer woven from signs and symbols as in earth's material existence, but rather, God is directly experienced. The new Jerusalem descends from the heavens. It is of divine origin

¹⁶ "Eschaton" comes from the Greek, meaning "last." Regarding "eschaton" or "last days" in Christian terms one speaks of Christ's second coming at the end of time. For the Christian eschatology deals with death, judgment, heaven and hell or in other words, with human destiny.

(*JBC*, 491), and this new and holy city is the eternal dwelling place of God with His people (Rv 21:2-4).

This image of the new Jerusalem is another image of God as the divine architect and builder (*JBC*, 491), “for he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city with firm foundation, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). The new Jerusalem becomes the model for every Catholic church to be built or undergoing renovation, for this biblical prototype can guide the architect today, giving guidance as to the whole number proportions for new buildings. For this reason it is important in designing a church that its architecture mirrors this heavenly city for not only will they be imitators of the divine architect, but they will also reveal God’s divine beauty. Because the role of the church building is to represent this heavenly future for us now on earth, every church is intended to be an image of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Since the architect must design a church modeled on the Heavenly Jerusalem, it is worth asking the question, what does this new and holy city of Jerusalem “look like”? Scripture tells us that the heavenly Jerusalem is adorned with precious jewels of every kind. Gold, a precious ore that expresses the high status of the dwelling place of God, and the site of the wedding banquet of the Lamb, is used to line the streets. A river runs through the city, which is the “river of life” (Rv 22: 1), an image for the Holy Spirit:

The symbolism of water signifies the Holy Spirit’s action in Baptism, since after the invocation of the Holy Spirit it becomes the efficacious sacramental sign of new birth: just

as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, so the water of Baptism truly signifies that our birth into the divine life is given to us in the Holy Spirit. Thus the Spirit is also personally the living water welling up from Christ crucified as its source and welling up in us to eternal life (*CCC*, 694).

Thus, heaven is a place of abundance, and joy, in which all created beings are in direct communion with God, seeing His face (Rv 22:4).

Just as the church building is an image of heaven, so the earthly liturgical action is a sacrament of the liturgy in heaven. Revelation tells us what that liturgy looks like. All are worshipping God and singing the praises of God who has prepared the great banquet of the Lamb. It shines with the glory of God Himself (Rv 21:11), because this city is filled with the presence of God, which transforms the spouse of Christ, the Church, to be like a jewel, clear as crystal (Rv 21:11). The city is walled, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (always an image of the Church) written above the arches or gates (Rv 21: 12), and on the walls of the foundations are written the names of the twelve apostles (Rv 21: 14). The city is shaped like an enormous cube, it measuring 144 cubits square (Rv 21: 17), after the Holy of Holies (*JBC*, 492), and is adorned with precious jewels. The wall is constructed of jasper, and the city is made of translucent gold, and the foundations of the wall are compared with twelve different precious stones, and the twelve gates are made out of pearl, and the streets are of gold (Rv 21:16-21). The image presented by the author of Revelation gives the starting point for churches being built today, grand in size, distinguished in the high quality of materials incorporated

into its structure, and unmatched in holiness, for it is the dwelling place of the divine Architect, God.

Today's architects need to be aware that the Heavenly City is the dwelling place of God among men, constructed by God Himself, shining forth in all its holiness and splendor for the glory of God Himself is its light (Rv 21: 23). The churches being built today need to be well-lighted places, filled with light, and color, for the church shines forth into the darkened world to be its radiance with the light of Christ. It is the place where the heavenly wedding banquet, between Christ and His bride, the Church, is taking place. The description found in the Book of Revelation indicates that the glory of the Church is one and the same to her spouse, which is the glory of God (*JBC*, 492). Figural imagery inside a church can be thought of as properly liturgical, making present the members present in the heavenly liturgy.

Gathered around the throne of God are the faithful, including the twenty-four elders (Rv 4:4); the four living creatures, one like a lion, one like an ox, one having the head of a man, and one like an eagle (Rv 4:5). Gathered around the throne are countless angels (Rv 5:11), every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea (Rv 5:13), the four angels stationed at the four corners of the earth (Rv 7:1), and finally a huge crowd of beings so great that no one could count them (Rv 7:9). These images of the man, ox, lion, and eagle are traditionally the symbols for the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and could easily be incorporated into the construction of the ambo or perhaps

placed in four corners of the church to fulfill the command of Jesus to His apostle to go preach the Gospel to the whole (the four corners of the) world (Mk 16: 15).

Heaven is where God dwells in the midst of His people not in the medium of signs and symbols, but experienced directly. Those who are gathered to glorify God include Jesus Christ who is seated at the Father's right hand in glory, the Holy Spirit who has been poured out onto the faithful and who brings the work of salvation to its completion, the prophets of the Old Covenant, the saints who have lived their lives as images of Christ, the Blessed Mother, who was the first to accept Jesus as the Messiah, and the angels and all created beings. Also in this grouping of faithful will be all people who have been faithful to God in living holy lives, lives that mirror that of Christ Himself. This image of heaven can easily be revealed in the sacred images a church uses to remind the faithful they are in the presence of the saints and angels who constantly sing the praises of God. The Cathedral of the Madeleine in Salt Lake City, Utah, and St. Joseph in Wheeling, West Virginia contain murals which express this notion of sacramentally representing all who gather around the throne of God.

The Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis in the Archdiocese of St. Louis exemplifies how architecture can incorporate this liturgical theology in built form. Pictured in mosaic in the area of the south dome (the Dome of Local History) are several saints who have a connection with the diocese either directly or indirectly. Pictured in the pendentives or the triangular piece of vaulting between the arches supporting the dome of this dome, are: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Philippine

Duchesne, St. Isaac Jogues, the Jesuit martyr, and St. Frances Xavier Cabrini. Here the church's imagery makes present to the faithful the presence of the saints in the liturgy. This use of imagery is not a justification for careless insertion of sacred images in a church building (*SC*, 125), but in an ordered way these images make present to the faithful in the liturgy those who have gone before them in faith to glorify God.

The image of heaven found in the Book of Revelation, an image of the heavenly liturgy taking place as all creation is gathered around the throne of God, is not off in the future for us. Members of the Church on earth experience through sign and symbol the heavenly liturgy described in the Book of Revelation. The earthly liturgy is a foretaste of that which is to come in the fulfillment of time (*SC*, 8), and this sacramental celebration is communicated to man through sensible and perceivable signs (*CCC*, 1145). An important element of liturgical catechesis then is to assist the faithful in coming to a fuller understanding that the liturgy, through the use of signs and symbols, initiates one into the mystery of Christ by “proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, and from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (*CCC*, 1075).

Signs and Symbols

Human beings is that a person communicates through the mediation of signs and symbols. The *Catechism* states that as “a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through gestures, and actions. The same

holds true for his relationship with God.” In addition, “In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and soul, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols” (CCC, 1146).

God communicates His life, His grace to man through the mediation of signs and symbols, present in creation:

God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man’s intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator. Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness (CCC,1147).

The world was made for the glory of God, the Creator, and creation is a mediator of knowledge about its Creator. All things come from God and all things will ultimately return to God (Jn 6:37-39).

God also communicates this grace to us through the events of human culture such as a meal, which not only nourishes us, but also provides communion for us with other human beings. However, God communicates His life to us most fully in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, by means of the Incarnation. In the Gospel account Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus responds by saying, “Philip, if you have seen me then you have seen the Father” (Jn 14:8). Pastors and architects bear a responsibility when building or renovating a church to visually present the faithful that it is only through Jesus, as the only mediator, that one will enter the kingdom of God (Jn 14:6).

The words sign and symbol are often equated in modern usage, however, they are distinct and they are defined differently (SC, 122). Sign and symbol both communicate something but the manner in which this is done is accomplished by different modes of expression. All signs convey information, but they fall into several categories. Some signs that exist on their own naturally, without human origins, and occur when the conditions are in place, as smoke indicates fire. Conventional signs have human origins and people choose to organize them into a code, for example “the Gateway Arch” is a sign of the city of St. Louis, or the flag of the United States of America is composed of stars and strips or a triangular-shaped sign with the word “Yield” carries a specific message for drivers. Finally there is symbol, or sacramental sign, which makes present and active the very reality it signifies. It has no other way to be perceived. A symbol not only points to a reality, but it actually makes that reality present and active becoming the means by which an otherwise invisible reality is made present and known. For example, a mother’s love for her child is made visible as the mother holds that child in her arms and reads to the child a bedtime story.

St. Augustine wrote that sacraments are sacred signs pointing to a divine reality (sign), but they actually contain that divine reality (symbol). Sacraments not only signify a hidden, divine reality, but because they contain the power of Christ, sacraments can actually effect grace, or the union of men with God, in a person (CCC, 775). Sacraments are *efficacious* signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us (CCC, 1131). In

other words, the sacraments impart the grace they signify *ex opere operantis* (from the work worked). However, the fruitfulness of the sacrament relies upon the one receiving the sacrament to cooperate with God's grace. When symbols are used to speak and express man's relationship with God they are referred to as sacramentals, which are similar to the sacraments in that they signify effects which are obtained through the intercession of the Church (SC, 60), but do not make present the reality they signify.

In God's sacramental plan of salvation for man He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the primary sacrament of redemption. God's plan of salvation for man and for all of creation, would be manifested in the person of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:9; 3:5,10), yet it would not be fully revealed until all is completed in the kingdom of God (1 Cor 2:7). By the incarnation of Jesus Christ the invisible God is made visible, the mystery of God is revealed. Throughout His public ministry, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as a way for people to turn away from their sins, and thus, be reconciled with His heavenly Father. Jesus used perceptible signs familiar to the people as a means to communicate this new life with God. In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) Jesus speaks of God's forgiving love for each disciple, in the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:3-7) Jesus illustrates God's interest in each one of the disciples, especially if the disciple gets lost along the way.

As a sign, the church building must serve as a reminder for the faithful that they are to turn away from their old way of sin and embrace the new life of grace.

By the use of a significant entrance, the faithful pass from the things of this world to be children of the kingdom of God, for arches are symbols of passage. The use of stained glass windows can depict the events in the life of Christ and that He and His saints, by obedience to God's will, let the light of God's life shine through them making them appear radiant, jewel-like stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Also, placement of the Stations of the Cross not only aid the faithful in their devotional prayer but also, remind the faithful they are called to be the sign of contradiction in this world.

But Jesus also used items or objects like the mustard seed (Mt 13:31), or yeast (Mt 13:33) to explain to His disciples about the kingdom of God. Jesus would make use water, to be used in baptism, to tell Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, with water and the spirit, into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). In His words, actions, and use of objects Jesus revealed the invisible realities of heaven to His disciples, and Jesus as the primary sacrament of God continues to do so with contemporary man through His Body, the Church. . Even the church built in the form of a cross is a symbol of the central truth of the faith – that by Christ's death on the cross salvation is won for the faithful, and the faithful are shaped by the building itself into the Body of Christ, and the dwelling of God.

The Church as the Historical Presence of Christ

Jesus continues to glorify God and to offer His sacrifice for the salvation of human beings through His Church, which is the visible and historical presence of

Christ in the today's world. It is the Church, as the Body of Christ, that Christ has entrusted to continue proclaiming His saving message of redemption (*SC*, 6).

Shortly before Jesus ascended back to His Father in heaven He commanded His disciple to go out to all the nations for the purpose of preaching the Gospel message of salvation (Mk 16:15). Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles went forth to baptize all who believed in Jesus as the Son of God so that all believers might enter into the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and be saved (Acts 26:18).

From its very beginnings the Church, as the root sacrament of Jesus Christ, has but a singular purpose for its existence - it is to continue the saving work of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Thus through the Church the contemporary Christian can encounter the living reality of the presence of Christ in the world. As Vatican II states concerning the nature of the Church; "Christ sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through this Spirit has established His body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation."¹⁸ This knowledge will assist architects in designing churches for church building are not just a cover for the faithful to gather under to be protected from the weather, but the architecture of a church has the theological purpose to represent the sacramental manifestation of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, (Dec. 7, 1990), 9.

¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott, S.J. trans. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Herder and Herder Association Press, 1966), page 48. Hereafter referred to as *LG*.

The Liturgy

Nowhere is this image of the heavenly banquet more perfectly accomplished than when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, which, as stated in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that the liturgy is neither matched in its efficacy nor in degree (*SC*, 7). On the importance of the Eucharist John Paul II states: “The Eucharist, as Christ’s saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history.”¹⁹ Because of the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the faithful, some basic elements of the Eucharist that the architect must be aware of so to make the church building a suitable place for the eucharistic liturgy.

When the faithful gather to celebrate the liturgy they are first and always offering glory to God for the gift of salvation won for them in the person of Jesus Christ through His Paschal Mystery. Pope John Paul II states: “The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord's passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental re-presentation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages.”²⁰ The second aspect of this participation in the liturgy is the sanctification of man. The *Catechism* states: “It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit” (*CCC*, 1325). By giving glory to God man is at the same time uniting the sacrifice of his or her own self to the

¹⁹John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2003), 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus participating in the very act of salvation. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states: “For it is through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that the ‘work of our redemption is exercised’ (SC, 2).” It continues: “From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a fountain, grace is channeled into us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God...” (SC, 10).

The salvation of man is always mediated in and through a real person, the person of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and contemporary people continue to encounter this risen Jesus in and through the liturgy, most perfectly in the holy Eucharist. When the liturgy is celebrated one must be conscious that the earthly liturgy is not a simple copy of the heavenly liturgy, but makes the heavenly liturgy is manifested into history.

When the faithful enter a church, they enter into the upper room where they will celebrate with Jesus the giving of His Body and Blood under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine. When the liturgy is celebrated it is not as if God is once again descending from the heavens and coming into man’s world, rather it is man who ascends into God’s kingdom to be in communion with God in the heavenly banquet. God is not coming down to man, but it is man who by God’s grace is entering into the Paschal Mystery of Christ who offers Himself, Head and Body, to the Father in an act of perfect praise. The liturgy is a way of seeing deeper into the reality of the world as the world was created and intended to be by God. The liturgy presents the world as transformed by God’s into the kingdom of God.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann states: “Liturgy is an action in which the essence of what is taking place is simultaneously revealed and fulfilled.”²¹

The Eucharist, as a liturgical celebration, is the place above all else to encounter the risen Christ. At the Last Supper Jesus, gathered with His apostles in the upper room, took bread and said, “Take this and eat; this is my body, (Mt 26:26),” and taking the cup filled with wine He said, “Drink from it all of you. For this is my blood...” (Mt 26:28). Then Jesus commanded His apostles “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24). Since that time the Church has taken this command of Jesus very seriously, and has celebrated the Eucharist as the most perfect way of bringing the faithful to encounter the risen Lord. Jesus’ love for His disciples, sealed in the new covenant by His death on the cross, is not only in the past but is for modern man to experience as well. In a sacramental way Christ continues to be present in His Church to offer glory to the Father through His sacrifice on the cross. The Eucharist perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross for contemporary man until the Lord shall come again. It is a sacramental sign of Christ’s love for man, a bond of unity and a pledge of future glory as man shares in the Banquet of the Lamb (*SC*, 47). It is through the faithful’s participation in this banquet in the kingdom of God that God will share fully with man His life, love and grace:

...this image of the banquet remains, throughout the whole Bible, the central image of life. It is the image at its creation and also the image of life at its end and fulfillment: “...that

²¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1965), 165.

you may eat and drink at my table in heaven.”²²

At each Eucharist all the faithful, as members of the Body of Christ, unite their offering with the perfect offering of Jesus to God the Father. Thus the faithful are being built into the spiritual dwelling of God with Jesus as its foundation. Not only are the faithful being transformed into the image of Christ, but, they are at the same time being nourished and strengthened so they may go out to the whole world and there proclaim the message of God’s kingdom (*SC*, 2, and Eph 2:21). Because Christ is present in the Eucharist, in the Word of God, in the ordained minister acting in the person of Christ the Head, in the assembly gathered, and especially in the His Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine (*SC*, 7), celebrating the Eucharist becomes the richest symbol of man uniting with Christ in the act of worshipping the Father in heaven. The faithful, like the church architecture, must be transparent to radiate the presence of God.

The Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri reminds the faithful that they are intimately connected with Christ as soon as they walk into the church. In the vestibule Christ is pictured at the center of the arched ceiling, and coming out from Christ are vines that run the length of the vestibule and continue within the nave itself. This is one way in which the faithful are reminded of the centrality of Christ in their own life, and if they are to produce a rich harvest in the Banquet of the Lamb it is necessary for the branches to remain attached to the vine that is Christ (Jn 15:5).

²² Schmemmann, 11.

Christ's Presence in Sacramental Signs

The Gospel account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:ff) is a good example of how faith is mediated through symbols. In this particular Gospel account two disciples of Jesus are on their way back to Emmaus following the events of Jesus' passion and death on the cross in Jerusalem. While they are discussing these events Jesus suddenly appears to them. However, they are stopped from recognizing the risen Lord, something kept them from seeing whom it was who was standing with them. Jesus asked them what they were discussing and they, in sadness, replied that they were discussing all the events that had just happened with Jesus. They express that all their hopes were resting on Him and that He was the promised Messiah, "a prophet who was both powerful in speech and action" (Lk24:19). They reveal to this "stranger" that their hopes were that He would be the one who was free Israel. But now news arrived, on the third day after these things happened, that some women went to the tomb but they failed to find His body.

Jesus walks with them and as the trio walk along the road Jesus begins to explain to them the passages from Scripture, which speak about the Messiah having to suffer before entering into His glory. Jesus speaks to these two disciples about what Moses and all the prophets had to say about the Messiah. As evening draws near the two disciples reach their destination but Jesus acts as if He is continuing His journey. The two disciples persuade Jesus to stay with them and take

something to eat with them. When they sit down at table together, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and offered it to them. With this the eyes of the two disciples were opened and they recognized that they had been in the company of the risen Lord. They discussed how their hearts were on fire as Jesus discussed Scripture with them, and without further of hesitation they make their way back to Jerusalem where the apostles and others are staying. Once the two disciples are in their company they announce with great joy that the risen Lord has truly been raised, walked with them, and how they recognized Him in the breaking of bread.

The Eucharist is man's response in faith to God's gift of love manifested to each individual in and through the person of the risen Lord. Jesus Himself is the best example of faith needed to participate in doing God's will, and so to share in God's eternal life. This is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal by Judas (Lk 22:42). As the faithful read the account of Jesus in the Garden He says a prayer of total abandonment, giving Himself completely into the hands of His loving Father. Deep down within Jesus this act of faith was possible because of the great love Jesus knew the Father had shown Him. The Eucharist is man's response to God's unconditional love for him or her. To participate in the Eucharist is to acknowledge that all the person has they owe to God, their family, job, health, and their very being is dependent upon the Father, in imitation of Jesus. That is the reason why the faithful should always pray not so as to remember God, but that God does not forget the person, for if God stops thinking about the person, that person ceases to exist. Therefore, Eucharist is first and always an act of

praising God for all His blessings toward the faithful, and the faithful, along with all creation, bless the name of God: “Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord. Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord. You heavens, bless the Lord. Every shower and dew, bless the Lord. Light and darkness, bless the Lord. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord, Holy men of humble heart, bless the Lord...” (Dn 3:57-88, 56). Architects will want to work images of creation into their plans for church design, symbols that all created being are called to glorify God. The Eucharist is significant not only for human beings but for all creation, and again it will be the work of architects to portray this through symbols has part of the liturgical celebration.

The liturgy is the primary manner in which the faithful share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. All the faithful because of their baptism into Christ have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the spiritual house and holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifice to the Father (CCC, 1141). As sharers in the priesthood of Jesus the faithful are called upon to offer their prayers and the sacrifice of self in union with the perfect sacrifice offered by Jesus on the cross to the Father. As

Lumen Gentium states:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Everywhere

on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (*LG*, 21).

Jesus would tell His disciples, as His time of crucifixion approached, that His approaching suffering and death on the cross is not something to be avoided as if to bring shame upon Him. It would be just the opposite. Jesus would tell His disciples that it was for this very hour He was sent, and that His death on the cross would bring glory to His Father (Jn 12:27). Not only would this self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross bring glory to the Father, but as Louis-Marie Chauvet states: “God is never better recognized than in the disfigured human being on the cross.”²³ God who is all powerful, almighty, and Creator of all is most perfectly manifested in the humble obedience of Jesus and His death on the cross. In the second reading in Mass taken from the Palm Sunday readings St. Paul says:

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6-11)

Consequently, at each Eucharist the faithful are called upon to imitate this pouring out of self as Jesus did thus giving glory to the Father. This is accomplished by the faithful’s participation at the liturgy for “more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebration. It is the duty of pastors to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and

²³ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 163.

fruitfully” (*SC*, 11). The active and conscious participation Vatican II speaks of is the faithful entering into the sacrifice of Christ. As Christ would tell His disciple: “Unless you pick up your cross daily you cannot be my disciple (Lk 9:23).

This participation is not limited in the sense of “doing something” at the liturgy as if each of the faithful must be engaged in some activity of the liturgy if the liturgy is to be fruitful for the faithful. Rather, faith is manifested in ritual by the faithful’s actions, gestures, postures, response to the prayers, singing, and even by their silence (*SC*, 30). Genuflection before the tabernacle is a sign of one’s respect for Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament reserved within, kneeling at the words of consecration is a sign of reverence of the mystery taking place before the faithful, silence does not mean nothing is going on, but rather, it is a way to prepare, to reflect, to listen to God as He is made visible in the liturgy, and in the Word of God.

In participating in the liturgy the faithful should be more conscious when they gather to celebrate the liturgy that they are doing so in the company of more than those actually physically present for the liturgy. First and always the liturgy is the action of Christ giving perfect praise to the Father, this is the doxological dimension of the liturgy. M. Francis Mannion states: “Doxology means ‘glory,’ the knowledge of glory, that which gives glory to God, the celebration of divine glory.”²⁴ Christ glorified the Father throughout His earthly life as He taught the people, worked miracles for the people, but forever this glorification of the Father

²⁴ Mannion, 245.

was accomplished by His death on the cross. Now Christ continues to offer praise to the Father through the Church that is the historical presence of Christ in the world.

Because liturgy is not merely a matter of human beings coming together to offer their praise to the Father, but rather, liturgy is the whole Christ praising God, it consists of a heavenly dimension as well. The heavenly dimension means all the faithful who compose the Mystical Body of Christ are present for the celebration of the liturgy. As the *Catechism* states: “Liturgy is an ‘action’ of the *whole Christ* (*Christus totus*). Those who even now celebrate it without signs are already in the heavenly liturgy, where celebration is wholly communion and feast” (*CCC*, 1136).

This is an exceptional concern, one completely consistent with the vision of the Second Vatican Council, which speaks of the Mystical Body of Christ as humans who come together in a corporate act of oneness with the angels, saints and even the souls in purgatory: “in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members” (*SC*, 7). A unity exists among all the faithful, who gather to celebrate the Eucharist, from Adam to the last elect (*LG*, 2), in order to glorify God and sanctify man.

So, how do we determine the imagery of the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the earthly liturgy is an icon? Not only is the Church on earth present in this action of Christ offering the Father glory, but the faithful are united with the Church already gathered around the throne of God. As the *Catechism* continues:

The book of Revelation of St. John, read in the Church's liturgy,

first reveals to us, "A throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne": "the Lord God." It then shows the Lamb, "standing, as though it had been slain": Christ crucified and risen, the one high priest of the true sanctuary, the same one "who offers and is offered, who gives and is given." Finally it presents "the river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb," one of most beautiful symbols of the Holy Spirit (*CCC*, 1137).

Here is the heavenly liturgy of which the faithful need to be conscious. The faithful gather in their parish church every Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, joining with the angels, that saints, the Blessed Mother, Mary, and those who are too numerous to count:

Recapitulated in Christ," these are the ones who take part in the service of the praise of God and the fulfillment of his plan: the heavenly powers, all creation (the four living beings), the servants of the Old and New Covenants (the twenty-four elders), the new People of God (the one hundred and forty-four thousand), especially the martyrs "slain for the word of God," and the all-holy Mother of God (the Woman), the Bride of the Lamb, and finally "a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and tongues (*CCC*, 1138).

Church architecture should reveal this heavenly dimension of the liturgy, and thus remind the faithful that the Church is an entity of not only those physically present, but also of all the faithful who cannot be seen with the physical eye. This reality is present as the faithful pray in the Mass: "Now, with the apostles and all the angels and saints, we praise you for ever..."²⁵ As Denis McNamara states: "The Church

²⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, *The Sacramentary*, (Collegeville, MN; Liturgical Press, 1985), Preface for Peter and Paul, Apostles, P63.

needs to envision the liturgy more fully in sacramental terms, to embrace its cosmic as well as earthly dimensions, and then make architecture embody that reality.”²⁶

Need for Ritual

The liturgy is celebrated with signs, symbols, actions, gestures and words as a way of participating in the ritual of glorifying God and sanctifying man:

In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the Liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members (*SC*, 7).

The liturgy is celebrated with holy water, bells, candles, incense, sacred images, gestures and actions all within a framework called ritual. These sacramental signs make visible the invisible realities being celebrated in the liturgy. Making a sign of the cross with holy water as one enters the church reminds him or her of baptism and the new life of God which is nourished and strengthened with the reception of Holy Communion. This new life was begun when he or she became a child a God in the tomb and womb of baptism. The sound of bells being rung at Mass is to make a joyful noise unto the Lord (Ps 100:2), as well as a call for attention. The sounds of bells at the liturgy speak of joy, attention and response. The candles that are used in the liturgy reveal to the faithful that God sent His Son into the world as its light, a light to dispel the darkness of sin (Jn 8:12). Incense rises upward as a sacramental sign of prayer rising up to God (Ps 141:2). Sacred images of the

²⁶ Denis McNamara, “What is This Awe and Mystery?” *The Priest*, (July 2002): 36.

angels, the saints, and the Blessed Mother are encouraged since these make present sacramentally the celebrants of the heavenly liturgy, the faithfulness of those who have gone before in faith, yet, while they lived on earth they conformed their life in imitation of Christ. The liturgy is celebrated with signs and symbols so that the faithful may enter fully into the Paschal Mystery of Christ. When symbols are placed in a specific order to make visible an invisible reality then there is ritual, for ritual is a cluster of symbols arranged in a specific order and given meaning by man. Rituals used in liturgy dispose the person to the transcendence of divine reality. In other words rituals make visible the invisible God sacramentally. As St. Paul states: “Things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him, these it is that God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9-10).

In addition to the Eucharist²⁷ among the rites, which need to be considered, the preeminent ritual that one should consider is the Triduum, which is the heart of the Church’s liturgical year (*BLS*, 81). For centuries the Church has observed these three days with a renewed sense of wonder and concentration for the heart of these three days is the saving work of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. These three days demand that the faithful change the pace of their daily schedule. These three days, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, in which the faithful celebrate Jesus’ Paschal Mystery demand the faithful break out of the routine of the week, stop rushing around, and make use of this time to walk with Jesus on His

²⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture and Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 100. Hereafter referred to as *BLS*.

way from the Last Supper, to the cross, and finally to the overflowing joy of His resurrection.

But the observance of the Triduum allows these sacred times to spill over into our daily lives with a renewed spirit and commitment of being transformed into the image of Christ for others. Of great importance in celebrating these three days, which are in fact celebrated as if they were one continuous ceremony, is to go beyond the historical retelling of the Gospel account of the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. For the faithful the Triduum, like the liturgy itself, is not simply a matter of remembering some past event or events. It is, rather, a stepping outside of time to make for the present moment the faithful's participation in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

Again, the faithful draw upon the rich sacramental life of the Church, and believe that one can participate in the suffering, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the present through words, actions, gestures, signs, and symbols. What occurred many thousands of years ago is now present to the faithful in the liturgy of the present moment. The faithful step out of time constraints to find themselves seated at table at the Last Supper to hear Jesus' words changing bread and wine into His Body and Blood, and to hear, for themselves, the effective words of Jesus that will change not only bread and wine into His Body and Blood, but this change will also effect those who participate in this Banquet of the Lamb to truly become the Body of Christ. Through sacramental signs the faithful, on Good Friday, stand at the foot of the cross to find themselves along side the Blessed

Mother, and John. Finally, the faithful peer with both wonderment and joy into the empty tomb. Often times one of the faithful will declare that the apostles had it so much easier than those living two thousands years after Jesus because they actually saw Jesus with their own eyes, and heard Jesus speak with their own ears, but in such circumstances the faithful must remember the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as mentioned earlier in this article, and how they came to know Jesus through the sacramental sign of breaking bread. The faithful should also recall the words of Jesus spoken to the apostle, Thomas, after Jesus appeared to Thomas to dispel Thomas' doubt concerning the resurrection: "Because you (Thomas) have seen me you have found faith. Happy are they who never saw me and yet have found faith" (Jn 20:29).

The apostles and other disciples who lived alongside Jesus and walked and talked with Him are not really at an advantage over the contemporary disciple for faith is required of all who believe Jesus to be the Son of God, the Messiah. So sacred ritual celebrates in sacramental signs man's faith of worshipping God along with the other heavenly realities.

Liturgical Role of the Church Building

The church building serves as a sacramental sign and reminder of both the immanence and transcendence of God (*BLS*, 50), and draws the faithful into the Paschal Mystery. The church serves as a constant visual reminder that the faithful are a pilgrim people on this earth traveling to their true home, their ultimate

destination which is union with God joining in the heavenly banquet (*CCC*, 1344). The church is a foretaste of what the faithful hope for and desire as expressed in sacramental signs. As Denis McNamara states: “Architecture is the built form of ideas and the bearer of meaning; it is sacramental. Liturgical architecture, by extension, is the built form of theology.”²⁸

The constructed church is never an end in itself, but must always reveal to the faithful the heavenly city spoken of in the Book of Revelation. It must manifest this reality to the faithful without any confusion so that it may be formative on the people and aid their sanctification. The church must be the visual culmination, here on earth, where the faithful can cross over the threshold from the things of this world into the sacramental presence of that which God has prepared for the believer. As the *Catechism* states:

...the church has an eschatological significance. To enter into the house of God, we must cross a threshold, which symbolizes passing from the world wounded by sin to the world of the new Life to which all men are called. The visible church is a symbol of the Father’s house toward which the People of God is journeying...(*CCC*, 1186).

A culture will construct buildings in such a way that reflect the value of that society. Buildings take their status because of the use to which they are put, and the architecture of the building should reflect that usage. For example, buildings in which a nation or city’s laws are made will be constructed in a manner much different from a gymnasium or bowling alley. The architecture for these buildings

²⁸ Denis McNamara, “Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience,” *Chicago Studies* 41(3) (Fall-Winter 2002): 268.

of government might include domes, Greek or Roman styled columns to indicate their permanence and high purpose. An example of this is the United States Capitol that makes use of dome, rotunda, columns, and statues to reveal its high status among other government buildings. Human images can be used to portray values, as when justice is portrayed as a woman blindfolded and holding a scale in balance to remind all that justice is not prejudiced towards any individual or class of citizens, but disbursed equally among all its citizens. Steven J. Schloeder states: “It can be said of all civilizations and societies that what is ‘ultimately’ valued, what is ‘worshipped,’ is embodied in the products of the culture.”²⁹

Financial institutions, for example will be constructed in prominent places and be built of high quality material such as marble or granite. The architecture for these types of buildings would suggest in its built form the institution is strong, secure, and reliable. An institution whose business of finance is well built, firm, and secure.

This need for a “literate” readable architecture is even greater for church buildings which speak of God and eternity. Church architecture proclaims in visible form that the ritual action taking place within its confines is the most important action of our day, week and life. It has been said of the Eucharist, “The Mass is not part of our day, but rather, it is the heart of our day.” Churches should have prominent locations, be made of high quality materials, and architectural design which reflects this high status. For example, on the campus of Mundelein

²⁹ Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998): 35.

Seminary, the seminary of the Archdiocese of Chicago, the tallest building sitting on the highest parcel of land is the seminary's chapel. The chapel's location and architecture, with its high steeple and the use of Ionic columns on both the exterior and interior of the building, reflects the high status the chapel has among the other university buildings. The intent or purpose of the chapel is to glorify God, and to place God at the very center of the seminarian's life, spiritually, academically, and socially. Paul Evdokimov states: "...the very mystery of the church, and sacred art which is always theocentric in its attempts to express God's descent into his creation."³⁰ God is the center of the seminarian's life and architecturally this is accomplished by placing the seminary's chapel in the center of the campus, and so the invisible reality (worship is central to the life the seminarian) is made visible by making the chapel centrally located on the campus.

For the faithful, the center of their lives will be the parish church in which the Eucharist is celebrated. The significance of the church building in the life of the faithful is unlike any other. Paul Evdokimov quotes Patriarch Germanus saying: "The church is the earthly heaven; in these heavenly spaces, God lives and walks about."³¹ The parish church assists the faithful in giving glory to God, reminds them that they are the living stones of God's temple built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, that they celebrate God's gift of salvation with the "whole Christ" (*CCC*, 1136), and are a pilgrim people moving toward their true and eternal

³⁰ Evdokimov, 143.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

home in heaven. It makes present in sacramental form their future in heaven, making it visible through the media of art and architecture.

The church building has the capacity to make present all of creation in praising God: “The church building reproduces the world, God’s work, and is therefore a vehicle for carrying the presence of the Transcendent One.”³² Walking into a Gothic church, or any tall interior of any style, the eyes of the faithful are drawn upward by the use of vertical lines, but, so too are the hearts, minds, and spirits of the faithful raised from the cares of this world to contemplate those things of heaven. Looking around a church the faithful are reminded of God’s guidance like the light shining through the stained glass window. The faithful take comfort that in their present troubled situations they are not alone as the sacred images of saints join them in prayer before God.

A professor of liturgy in the seminary once remarked that if you want to know what the Church believes listens to how she prays. This is the principle of “lex orandi, lex credendi (the Church prays what it believes).” The following prayer on the feast of Saints Timothy and Titus reminds us of this unity:

God our Father,
 you gave your saints, Timothy and Titus,
 the courage and wisdom of the apostles:
 may their prayers help us to live holy lives
 and lead us to heaven, our true home.³³

³² Ibid., 147.

³³ *The Sacramentary*, Feast of Sts. Timothy and Titus, 558.

The faithful pray that they may live holy lives, yet, while living their earthly life there are many distractions, there are many opportunities for the faithful to become lost. This is one reason why the church, in its architecture, must visually present before the faithful reminders of their home. In its architecture the church visibly makes present those heavenly realities that form the faithful to be citizens of the kingdom of God. The Church is much larger than what the faithful see with the physical eye, its citizens are the angels, saints, apostles, the Blessed Mother, and the souls in Purgatory in addition to the members who compose the Church here on earth. It is this “whole Christ” that is gathered around the throne of God in heaven, the dwelling place of God among men (Rv 21:3) to partake of the Banquet of the Lamb (Rv 19:7).

In the New Testament Jesus speaks of Himself as the temple: “‘Destroy this temple,’ Jesus replied, ‘and in three days I will raise it again.’ But the temple He was speaking of was His body” (Jn 2:19). Those who heard these words of Jesus were confused because they are aware that the temple took many years to complete (from 20/19 B.C. – 64 A.D.), yet, Jesus was telling them He could build it up in three days. Jesus would be rejected by the Pharisees (Mt 21:42), and be put to death, but three days after His death He would be raised up by the Father. Here Jesus speaks not of a temple built of stone but rather the “new” temple of Himself in which He gives perfect praise to the Father by His faithfulness in doing His Father’s will, even to the point of dying.

So too with the faithful who are being built into this new temple with Jesus Christ as the foundation: “What then of the man who hears these words of mine and acts upon them? He is like a man who had the sense to build his house on rock” (Mt 7:24). By the faithful’s obedience to doing the Father’s will they too are being built up into this new temple to be “living stones,” a building project that actually begins with his or her baptism into the Church. St. Paul states: “Surely you know that you are God’s temple, where the Spirit of God dwells...because the temple of God is holy; and that temple you are” (1 Cor 2:16). Again the faithful are told in Sacred Scripture: “So come to him, our living Stone, the stone rejected by men but choice and precious in the sight of God. Come and let yourselves be built, as living stones, into a spiritual temple; become a holy priesthood...(1 Pt 2:4).

The faithful are transfigured into the image of Christ, they are the living stones built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul uses this image of a building in speaking about Peter, James, and John as “pillars of the Church” (Gal 2:9). Architects can therefore use columns, as sacramental elements, symbols of the faithful as the “living stones” being built into the dwelling place of God. The church is a sacramental image of the heavenly realities as M. Francis Mannion states: “Architecture plays neither a sacral nor a merely functional role – but rather a sacramental role – in Catholic worship; the place of worship is neither temple nor ‘meeting house,’ but a sacramental building.”³⁴

³⁴ Mannion, 145.

Thus before building or renovating a church it is of utmost importance to determine its purpose, for as a sacramental sign the church proclaims in architecture a theology that is the message of the Gospel. It is in the local parish church where the faithful are baptized, thus beginning their journey homeward to God's kingdom, it is where the faithful will be nourished and strengthened with the "bread of life" in the Eucharis, it is where the faithful are married uniting man and woman together in the image of Christ and His bride, the Church, and it is where the faithful are prayed for as they depart from this world and be born into the glory of God. M. Francis Mannion states:

The Catholic cathedral, basilica or church, then, is neither mere meeting house nor temple. It is a sacramental building. This means that God is indeed intensely present in the sacramental place of worship, but this presence is of a character that mediates, reveals, and celebrates the holiness and action of God in creation, history and culture.³⁵

Conclusion

Throughout salvation history God has communicated His grace and life with man in ways that are understandable to human beings. This is prefigured in creation itself as well as in the Old Testament seen in and through the events of Noah and his ark, Moses, the law, and the prophets, but especially in the Passover meal. However, the fullness of God's revelation of salvation is to be manifested in the incarnate Word of God, His only Son, Jesus Christ. In His person Jesus Christ

³⁵ Mannion, 146.

is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is the primary sacrament that manifests the reality of God and makes God present to the faithful.

The liturgy is ritual composed of signs and symbols: candles, bells, incense, words and gestures to communicate to man, in a human way, the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The church building itself is also an element of this ritual and should not be overlooked or simply ignored. Just as the liturgy is celebrated with *Christus totus*,³⁶ the church, as a sacramental image of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, can manifest the heavenly realities, representing all who gather to celebrate the heavenly liturgy: angels, saints, prophets, apostles, the blessed Mother, and all the countless faithful who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, join with Jesus around the throne of God in offering the heavenly Father glory. To say church architecture plays a sacramental purpose is to confirm that “church architecture enters intrinsically into the action of the liturgy.”³⁷

This sacramental image of the Church expressed in its art and architecture anticipates the heavenly future. The church building must serve the faithful as a visible reminder that their true home that is heaven (union with God) for while on this earth the faithful are a pilgrim people, like the people of Israel of the Old Testament. M. Francis Mannion states: “Representations within the liturgical assembly of Christ, Mary, the saints, and angels, as well as imaginative

³⁶ Mannion: “...liturgy is never about self-expression but is always the action of the whole Body of Christ,” 151. Also CCC, 1136.

³⁷ Mannion, 145.

anticipations of the life of eternity, are critical to sustaining a strong and compelling vision of the Christian reality.”³⁸

Because the church building is a sacramental image of heaven, the faithful’s true destiny, when a parish undertakes the project of building or renovating a church some important questions need to be asked: How can a church building be an image of heaven as it is spoken of in the Book of Revelation? How does imagery serve both liturgical and devotional needs of the faithful? Is there anything in the design of the church that is not sacramental which should be? Is church architecture determined by worship (the sacred rite taking place within) or is the architecture determined by ideas foreign to the liturgy? Is the altar an icon of the Heavenly Banquet table?³⁹ Does the baptistery proclaim the innate and spiritual dignity of one’s entrance into the Mystical Body of Christ (*BLS*, 66-69)? Does the ambo speak of the inherent dignity of proclaiming the Word of God (*GIRM*, 309, and *CCC*, 1184)? Does the tabernacle speak of the importance of the dignity of the abiding presence of Christ in the Church (*GIRM*, 314, and *CCC*, 1183)? Are sacred images noble in style and material, and appropriate in number in venerating the saints (*SC*, 125) revealing the glorified nature of the saints they represent?

³⁸ Mannion, 150.

³⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc., 2003, 296-298. Hereafter referred to as *GIRM*. See also *CCC*, 1182.

The church building is a sacramental image of the “living stones,” the Mystical Body of Christ offering glory to the Father in the heavenly banquet of the Lamb. Because the liturgy is the most sacred action of Christ the Head and Body it is the heart of every parish, for everything the parish does or hopes to accomplish must first begin and end with the liturgy. The church building, as a sacramental image, will give form to the Church’s theology about who God is, who the faithful are as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, and ultimately what is man’s destiny. William J. Whitla states: “A church is a sign – it is a symbol and a promise of what is to come...if the promise is lost because the church does not point to what is beyond it, then the church has failed to express what it is intended to be; it has ceased to be properly incarnational.”⁴⁰ It is for these reasons that a parish and all involved with the project of building or renovating a church must give its utmost attention to what they are doing.

Recently Archbishop Piero Marini, the master of pontifical liturgical ceremonies, wrote a book entitled *Liturgia y bellezza. Nobilis pulchritude*, published by the Vatican Publishing House. In a news article reviewing this book the archbishop is quoted as saying: “the liturgy requires that we give it the most beautiful setting and the best time so that words and gestures become the voice of the Spirit who speaks to us of God.”⁴¹ The church building should “look like” the Church in its eschatological dimensions, glorified and perfected by the indwelling of

⁴⁰ William J. Whitla, “Theology in Sacred Architecture,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* Vol. X (1964): 60.

⁴¹ Translation taken from www.Zenit.org, #ZE06041004, April 10, 2006.

Christ. It is radiant, light filled, and filled with the presence of the heavenly beings. Sir Winston Churchill once said: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”⁴² May the faithful always seek to give their best back to God who has given His best to the faithful.

⁴² Robert E. Webber, “Church Buildings: Shapes of Worship,” *Christianity Today* (August 7, 1981): 18.

Appendices

The following appendices contain helpful questions from five different agencies in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Each agency has a particular input to contribute in the process of building or renovating a church building.

It is hoped that the pastor, the parish building commission, and the architectural firm will feel free to discuss the following questions among themselves not only to stimulate discussion and the thought process, but, more importantly, to come to a common understanding of what the heavenly realities entail that celebrate the liturgy as the glorification of God and the sanctification of man.

In order to express clearly the heavenly realities celebrating the liturgy in the architecture of the church building, one must understand the Church's nature as the historical presence of Jesus Christ in the world. The Church, by divine commission, shares in the nature of Jesus' mission to bring all peoples to the knowledge and experience of salvation. The Church exists to be Christ for others, and a dispenser of grace. In fulfilling this responsibility the Church assists each person to be the image of Christ for his or her neighbor. As Christ said: "You are light for all the world, and like a lamp, you must shed your light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16).

May the Church never be afraid to let her light shine upon all who seek to love God and neighbor, and may it always be the threshold by which all people of good will cross over to enter God's kingdom.

**Theological Questions to be Considered
When Building or Renovating a Church**

Provided by Office of Sacred Worship
Rev. William W. McCumber, Director

- How does the Book of Revelation describe heaven, specifically in chapters 4, 20, and 21?
- How can the church building be an image of heaven?
- What are the sacramental images of the heavenly realities revealed by the exterior architecture of the church?
- What does the church architecture reveal about the Church's doctrine of God?
- Since the church is never simply a meeting place, does the church architecture signify and make visible the true nature of the Church in its earthly and heavenly dimension?
- Does the church reveal the full liturgical assembly in its earthly, heavenly, and cosmic dimensions?
- How can the church architecture best serve both the liturgical *and* devotional needs of the faithful?
- Does the interior architecture of the church allow for the full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful in the celebration of the liturgy, which includes all of its earthly and heavenly dimensions?
- Does the church architecture assist in the celebration of the ritual action taking place within it, especially the Triduum?
- How are the heavenly realities manifested through the sacred art and images with the nave? Is this carried over into the vestibule and even to the outside to involve the landscaping?
- Are sacred images used in an appropriate manner that aids the faithful's praise of God, and make present the heavenly liturgy?
- Is the altar an icon of the Heavenly Banquet table, and Christ Himself?
- Does the baptismal font manifest the dignity of one becoming a child of God and a member of the Church?
- Is the tabernacle in a place of prominence that reflects the Church's belief in the abiding presence of Christ?
- Is the ambo of noble design? Does it proclaim the intrinsic dignity of the Word of God?
- Does the priest-celebrant's chair manifest the dignity of one who leads the faithful in prayer in the person of Christ the Head? Is the chair clearly distinguished from the seating for the other ministers by its design and placement?

- Does the architectural firm being used have a proper understanding of the sacramental image of the church building that conveys the heavenly realities?
- Does the architectural firm know how to engage the tradition of the Church in new architecture? Make it an image of our heavenly, eschatological future?
- Since the artist (and in this case the architectural firm) creates only under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the Holy Spirit being invoked to inspire all involved with this project?

For further information and/or assistance please contact the Office of Sacred Worship in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7230.

**Questions to be Considered When
Designing or Renovating a Church Building**
Provided by the Office of Disability Ministry
Jane Walker, Director

Outside the Church Building:

- Is there enough handicapped accessible parking?
- Would curb cuts, a ramp leading smoothly down from a sidewalk to a street, rather than abruptly ending with a curb and dropping roughly 10-15 cm (4~6 inches), meet our needs?
- Is there an accessible entrance?
- If there were several entrances, which entrance would be the best for an accessible entrance? Is the primary entrance accessible?
- Where is the accessible parking in relation to the accessible entrance?
- Do we need ramps?
- Is there a clear path to the entrance?
- Is there ample lighting for the parking lot? At the entrance ramps? At the doorways?
- Are the doors heavy to pull open?
- Do we need automatic doors?
- What type of door handles should be installed?
- Are the doorways wide enough for wheelchairs? (minimum of 32”)

Inside the Church Building:

- Would an elevator meet our needs?
- Can we make the restrooms accessible?
- Is the incline of the aisle too steep for those using wheelchairs/walkers/canes? Related to this, do we use tile or carpeting for the aisle?
- Do we need to use pews or can we use chairs with kneelers?
- Would putting cushions on certain seats/pews help those that have difficulty sitting on hard surfaces?
- Does the seating offer opportunities/choices for people with disabilities to sit at a place of their choice?

- Does the seating offer the opportunity for a person using a walker or wheelchair to sit with their families?
- Does the seating offer unobstructed line of sight to the altar, ambo?
- Would large print missals be helpful?
- Where do we get missals in large print or Braille?
- What type of lighting fixtures can be used to reduce noise?
- Are the acoustics of the church suitable for those with hearing difficulties?
- Do we need an FM system /listening devices?
- Do we need a person to sign the Mass? Where are they to be stationed?
- What type of signage do we need to let people know we have listening devices?
- How can we make the sanctuary accessible?
- How do we make the sanctuary accessible without damaging the current structure?
- If we make the sanctuary accessible, what other changes should we make? (considerations include: ambo, tabernacle, communion stations, etc.)
- How can we make the confessionals accessible?
- If there is a choir, is the choir area accessible?
- If there is a small chapel used for adoration or daily Mass, is the chapel accessible?
- Do we have a parish advocate, committee or person with a disability that would be able to assist and provide input?

For further information and/or assistance please contact the Office of Disability Ministry in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7150.

Music Space in a Liturgical Setting - The Questions to Ask

Provided by the Office of Music Ministry
John Romeri, Director

Often new church construction is being built in expanding areas of the diocese. The growth of the area will directly correspond to the growth of the parish, and likewise, with a professional church musician at the helm, the growth of the Music Ministry. A common mistake is to be short sided in the amount of space allocated for the Music Ministry. All too often the space is conceived with the present forces in mind with no look to the future and what other musical possibilities lay ahead. The addition of Children's Choirs, Handbell Choirs, expanded instrumental ensembles all require additional space. Be prepared.

While the present budget may not allow it, a sufficient pipe organ should be completely prepared for in the plans, and not just a little box where a console might go, but chambers, pipe facades, motors and blowers, electrical supplies, and conduits linking all parts of the instruments. As so often happens, the parish is finally ready to purchase their pipe organ, only to find that there is insufficient space for the instrument and improper access to the organ chambers. Monies, which could be spent on the organ, are now spent in renovations, which should have been done from the very beginning.

Space for a grand piano should also be planned, with thought to the direction of the lid opening toward the congregation.

With this preface in mind there are a few questions which parishes must ask when considering new construction or the renovation of the Music area:

- Does the music site selected provide opportunities for the music ministers to provide real musical leadership to the Assembly? Is the cantor visible to the entire congregation? The choir? Does the organist have sight of the altar, back door, baptistery?
- Is the music space in close proximity to the organ chambers?
- Is the music site near the Ambo area for the accompaniment of the Psalm from it? Can the cantor or psalmist easily get from the music space to the Ambo?
- Does the music site provide ample space for the "stuff" of music ministry: organ consoles, grand pianos, keyboards, wires, amplifiers, handbell tables, music stands, instrumentalists, conductor podium, etc...
- Are there ample electrical outlets to keep the wires and extension cords from running everywhere?
- Are there proper conduits to the organ chambers and other electrical requirements necessary for an adequate sized pipe organ (even if one is not planned for at this time)?
- Are there additional connections and conduits for the organ to be in different locations for accompanying choral concerts or recitals? A few extra dollars spent now can save hundreds later, as well as a million headaches!

- Is the seating in the choir area flexible and also completely removable?
- Is the adjacent assembly space to the music area also made flexible to allow for combined music forces necessary for the major feasts of the liturgical year?
- Is there any possibility to expand the music space as the program grows?
- Are the acoustics of the building live to allow for a blended sound? The building should be the best sound mixer not an amplifier. Are the walls, ceiling, and floor surfaces hard throughout, without excessive use of carpet, pew cushions, and acoustical treatment? This should be especially true of the choir area, but should be the general principle through the church.
- Is there a quality sound system for the music area, with all controls easily within the musician's reach? Is it "built in" so there are not wires running everywhere? Are there hanging microphones in the choir area? Are there ample jacks for standing microphones, which may be needed? Do the music sound run through the main church system or are there separate speakers with the music sound coming only from the choir area? Are there proper speakers in the music area for the music ministers to monitor the service, as well as stay together with a cantor at the ambo or other location?

These are just a few of the questions facing committees preparing for music space renovation or new church construction. These and many other issues should be discussed with professionals in the field, often provided through the diocesan Office of Worship or Office of Music Ministry. Never assume that your architect alone is equipped to handle the needs of the liturgical requirements of the project, especially in the area of music.

For further information and/or assistance please contact the Office of Music

Ministry in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 533-7662.

**FINANCIAL QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO
CONSTRUCTION OR RENOVATION OF A PARISH CHURCH**

Provided by the Office of Finance
David Fairchild, Finance Manager

ARCHBISHOP APPROVAL

Q. Has the Parish obtained concept approval from the Archbishop?

Comment: The Archbishop's approval is required for each of the following: (1) Concept, (2) a feasibility study to measure the level of parishioner support for the project, (3) conduct of a capital campaign, and (4) borrowing funds from The St. Louis Archdiocesan Fund (SLAF). For convenience, a request to begin a capital campaign and submit a loan application to SLAF may be incorporated into a single request.

SITE

Q. Does the Parish have adequate land for current and future use, e.g. parking? If not, what is the possibility of acquiring additional land contiguous to the Parish site at a reasonable price?

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Q. Based on the size of the project, is a professionally conducted feasibility study beneficial?

Q. What is the cost of a feasibility study?

Comment: For relatively small projects, the cost of a professional feasibility study may not be justified. Waiver of a feasibility study should be obtained from the Archbishop in lieu of his approval to conduct one.

Q. When should a capital campaign begin and how long should it run?

Q. Should the Archdiocesan Annual Catholic Appeal – Serving Others be incorporated in the Campaign, so that one appeal does not detract from the other?

Q. What percentage of the pledges should be considered uncollectible?

Q. How does a Parish reserve for uncollected pledges?

Q. What is the proper accounting on the Parish's financial records for pledges and pledge receipts?

A. Proper accounting is described in Section 4.1 of the Financial Management and Control Manual for Parishes.

Q. What is the benefit of accurate and timely delivery of Parish financial data to the Office of Parish Support?

A. The Property and Financing Committee (PFC) of the Archdiocese judges the capacity of the Parish to repay debt based on historical data submitted to the Office of Parish Support. Inaccuracies, or lack of current data, could result in a delay or denial of the application.

Q. What impact will the Capital Campaign have on the Parish's Archdiocesan Assessment and when will it take effect?

A. Cash received from a capital campaign is reflected as revenue on the Statement of Activity, which is the basis for the Archdiocesan Assessment. The Assessment is determined on total revenue posted one full fiscal year before the Assessment is billed, i.e. the Assessment for FY07 is based on total revenue shown in FY05.

DEBT

Q. What are the Archdiocesan Statutes relative to Parish debt?

A. Two Statutes are relevant to Parish debt. Statute 39 prohibits any borrowing other than from the Archdiocese, and Statute 45 prohibits encumbering property with debt without permission of the Archbishop.

Q. What is the Archdiocesan Policy limitation on the amount of debt carried by a Parish?

A. The amount of debt carried by a Parish is limited by three factors: (1) the capacity of the Parish to make loan payments from Operating Cash Flow, without revenue from a capital campaign or after campaign revenue ceases; (2) 50% of the total project cost (unless waived by the PFC for extenuating circumstances); and (3) the capacity of the Parish to pay interest on the debt from Parish operations, excluding campaign revenue. Donations to a capital campaign are restricted to the project and not available for the interest expense of the Parish, unless the interest cost of debt is explicitly stated in campaign material for full disclosure to the donor.

Q. How can a Parish determine the amount that can be borrowed?

A. The Archdiocesan Finance Office can provide the Parish with a Preliminary Analysis of Debt Service. This is a non-binding indication of the amount of debt that the Finance Office could recommend to the PFC based on analysis of the historical financial data of the Parish. This Preliminary Analysis can be obtained upon request and does not require an application or the supporting detail required when submitting an application.

Q. When should a Parish submit an application for a loan?

A. An application should be submitted early in the project. If a Preliminary Analysis of Debt Service is obtained coinciding with a feasibility study, then the Parish has an indication of the total amount of funds available for the project and can scale the project cost accordingly. If a Preliminary Analysis is not requested, loan approval must be obtained before bids are accepted and contracts signed. The PFC is scheduled to meet once each quarter. If a loan application is acceptable to the PFC, a recommendation is forwarded to the Archbishop who grants final approval.

Q. What is a "bridge" loan and how does a Parish determine if they need one?

A. The term "bridge" loan refers to temporary debt extended to a Parish during the period in which campaign pledges are collected. The amount of temporary debt is primarily determined by a projection of the cash flow, in which the sources and uses of funds is estimated each month during the construction period and the pledge collection period.

Q. What determines the amount of "permanent" debt that must be repaid from Parish Operating Cash Flow?

A. The "permanent" portion of debt is the residual amount of debt that is not retired from capital campaign funds. Without campaign revenue, the Parish must make monthly loan payments from its Operating Cash Flow, which is defined as unrestricted revenue less general and ongoing expenses. Capital campaign and other restricted revenue, and non-

recurring expenses, including projected related expenses, are excluded from Operating Cash Flow.

Q. How is the financial subsidy of a Parish school considered in obtaining loan approval?

A. The amount of Parish resources needed to subsidize a Parish school is one of the major expenses of a Parish. The level of subsidy is compared to other schools in the Archdiocese and, depending upon the degree of subsidy, could limit the Parish's ability to borrow funds for Parish needs.

Q. Over what length of time must a debt be repaid?

A. The term of repayment is based on the Parish's capacity to service the loan without detracting from other cash needs. The maximum term for repayment is 200 months by Archdiocesan Policy.

Q. Can debt be paid quicker than scheduled if additional funds are available?

A. The outstanding balance can be prepaid at any time, and in any amount, without penalty. Payments received are applied first to interest due with the remainder to principal reduction. Interest cannot be prepaid; therefore early principal reduction does not permit skipping subsequent scheduled payments. If a substantial reduction in the outstanding balance occurs, the loan may be restructured with a reduced scheduled payment, providing the original terms approved by the Archbishop are not violated.

Q. If a Parish does not use the entire approved loan for the project, can the remainder be used for other improvements?

A. Loan approval is granted for a specific project and not for general or undefined use. When the project is completed, the amount of unused credit is withdrawn and no longer available to the Parish. A Parish should be prudent in retaining adequate cash reserves for unexpected expenditures and not allocate all reserves toward early debt reduction.

Q. What interest rate is charged on loans, and can it change?

A. The interest rate charged on outstanding loan balances is determined by the PFC and may vary during the term of the loan. The rate is based on SLAF's internal cost of funds, and will increase or decrease in approximate correlation to interest paid on deposit balances. SLAF offers to its borrowers a discount of 0.25% from the published rate for any Parish that permits an automatic payment be deducted from any Parish account.

Q. Must the Pastor and Parish representatives personally appear before the Property and Financing Committee to present their application?

A. Due to the infrequency of PFC meetings, personal presentation of an application is limited. A Pastor, along with Parish lay leaders, may be requested to attend a PFC meeting depending upon the size of the loan requested, the financial condition of the Parish, the uniqueness of the project, or other factors which, in the opinion of the PFC, could be better presented in person.

Q. Does the Pastor have to sign a promissory note?

A. A promissory note is required before disbursing any funds to document the Parish obligation. Each Parish is incorporated under the laws of Missouri. Good lending practice requires a Corporate Resolution be signed by the corporate secretary, in which one or more Borrowing Representatives are granted authority to obligate the Parish. Generally this will include the Pastor who will, under the authority of the Resolution, sign a promissory note.

Q. How is the payment amount determined for repaying the loan?

A. During the period of construction, a Parish is required only to pay interest monthly. After construction is completed, a renewal Note is sent to the Parish establishing a fixed monthly payment amount required to retire the outstanding debt within the term approved by the Archbishop, at a rate of 8% per annum. With a payment based on 8% and a variable rate less than 8%, the retirement of the debt will occur sooner than maximum term. If the variable rate charged increases, the Parish payment does not change. Establishing a payment based on 8% avoids the possibility of periods with negative amortization, or terms longer than approved.

Q. What is the process for drawing on a Promissory Note?

A. The general contractor or sub-contractor presents an invoice to the Parish. After the Parish approves the invoice, it is forwarded to the Office of Building and Real Estate who records the payment against the initial project cost sheet, and the Finance Office sends a check directly to the contractor, with a copy of the invoice returned to the Parish verifying payment.

For further information and/or assistance please contact the Office of Finance in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7100.

General Planning Issues
For Building or Renovating a Church
 Provided by the Office of Building and Real Estate
 Tom Richter, Director

In General

- First, have you all read *Built of Living Stones, Art, Architecture and Worship*? Go no further until you have read it. Also the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* on art and architecture, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on sacred art and furnishings, and the *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar*.
- Do you have a thoughtful master plan for your parish campus that accommodates the current needs as well as future growth?
- Do you, the parish leadership and the parish in general, have a consensus of what your needs are? If not, do you have a plan to bring everyone together? Architects and parishioners can usually help pull the details together, but quite often it is the pastor who has to sell it to the parishioners.
- Does the church site have the prominence it requires, or is the church relegated to second class status somewhere else on the campus?
- In cases where the existing church is going to stay, do you have a plan that maximizes how they look and function together?
- Will the seating capacity be at its maximum (in other words the parish residential development is already “mature” and will accommodate very little future growth) or should the church be designed in a way that adding more seating in the future could easily expand it?
- Municipal zoning requirements can vary and usually mandate one parking space for either every 3 or every 4 seats. My experience is that is not adequate and that a more realistic number is 4 spots for every 10 seats. Adequate parking must be included in your master plan.
- Are your parking lots, walkways and driveways adequately lit at night, or will your parishioners feel like they are walking into a dark hole after their leave a late night meeting?
- Does your master plan include a workable traffic plan? You don’t want to end up with easily avoidable traffic jams. (That is probably more important for the drop off and pick up problems of a school, but it is important even for a church.)
- Does your plan accommodate funeral arrangements? Architects like to restrict vehicle access in the front of churches, but you have to be able to get the hearse up close.
- If the lower level of the church is going to be a parish center, do you have an appropriately detailed outside entrance for the lower level that doesn’t make it look and feel like a “church basement”?

- Does your vision match your pocket book? Will you be able to operate your new building (pay the utility bills, custodial, insurance etc), and still be able to pay down the debt service?
- Is the new building inviting to all of your church members? ADA accessibility is the minimum standard, not a maximum! Are your accommodations “senior friendly”, in other words, easily used by even those who don’t consider themselves “handicapped”?

Church planning

- Do you have a liturgical design consultant? If not, why not?
- Does your architect have experience in working on Catholic churches and with a liturgical consultant?
- Has your parish community developed a consensus on their expectations of the architecture for the church? If so, the architect can help them further define it, if not the architect and the liturgical consultant can help them do that.
- Have you involved your music liturgy committee from the very beginning of the planning process? Bad acoustical design can’t be corrected with larger speakers. Good acoustical engineers might be very important to the entire success of the project.
- A Catholic church should convey a meaning of permanence - does your church design convey that message, or does it look trendy and not very permanent?
- Does your church design lift the spirits of the faithful upward to the heavens, or do you feel like you should be reaching for the popcorn?
- Have you considered how to integrate sacred art into your building design from the very first planning meeting, or will you have to just place it into an already designed space?

Practical Considerations

- Have you put together a dedicated building committee? If not please give it serious consideration it can make or break your project.
- Have you established a chain of command for decision making - does it all have to come to the pastor, or is someone else able to decide “what color the tile base in the bathrooms will be?”
- Confirm with your architect what you need for fundraising purposes. That is usually at a minimum, basic program definition, construction estimates, basic floor plans and renderings.
- Has your design team met with the required governmental entities to confirm zoning and code issues?
- Has your design team confirmed whether or not there are any unique situations on your project site, such as floodplains, wetlands, environmental issues (buried tanks), etc.?

- Does your church have any type of historical registration, and if so, how does that impact your plans?
- Have you gotten a confirmation from your local street/highway department about whether your traffic plan is acceptable?
- Have “Project Milestones” been established in a way that allows you to track a whether or not your project is on schedule?
- Less than 10 % of the lifetime cost of operating your heating and air conditioning system is the cost of the up front construction - the rest is the eventual energy cost. Did your design team do a life cycle analysis of the HVAC system?
- Have you considered the ease of maintenance of your building finishes?

For further information and/or assistance please call the Office of Building and Real Estate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7002.