



Worship the Lord

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

No. 24, May 2007

Jeff Seelow, pastor at Redeemer, Rice Lake, WI, describes a church expansion completed in 2006 and the high quality pipe organ installed in the expanded church. See pictures below and more under *Worship the Lord* at wels.net/worship. Pastor Seelow has served this church since 2000. Previous service includes Girard, OH and three Wisconsin communities: Cornell, Ladysmith, and Lake Mills.

Church Architecture: An Expanded House of Worship

By Jeffrey M. Seelow

I still remember the first time I walked into the new worship facility at Redeemer, Rice Lake. It was in 1989, long before I became pastor there. The members of Redeemer had worshiped in a WEF unit since 1984. They were eagerly looking forward to a new church that looked like a church.

Worshiping in a WEF unit had led the members of Redeemer to a greater appreciation and understanding of church architecture. Their appreciation and love for God's Word – spoken and sung – was already evident. They had quickly outgrown their WEF unit. From their early years, they had a small choir. They were more than ready for a larger worship facility.

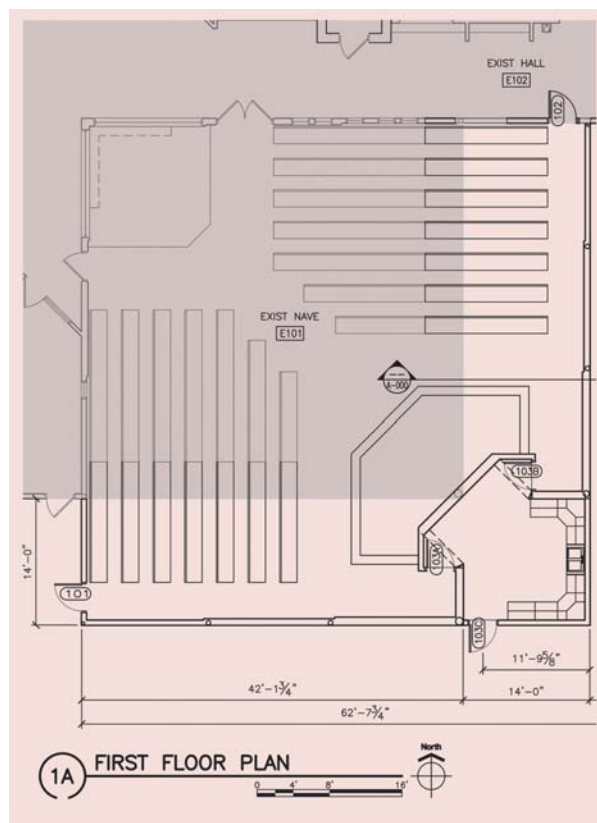
Wise planning was evident in the design of the new church. They built a worship facility that supported the proclamation of the Word in both spoken and sung forms, but it was also pleasing to the eye. Despite limited resources, they built a house of worship with a 35 foot ceiling. The chancel was set in the corner so that the slope of the roof at the tops of the walls naturally drew the eyes of the worshipers heavenward. They used double sheets of dry wall in the ceiling and walls to enhance the acoustics. With the talents of a gifted artist in the congregation, they incorporated seasonal banners over 12 feet high to add to the beauty, banners used to this day.

But their love for worship did not end there. With guidance and encouragement from one of their members, they were able to incorporate a small tracker-action pipe organ. Though it stood barely eight feet tall and was only three and a half ranks, this organ served beautifully for 15 years. Designed and built by

Dan Jaeckel of Duluth, MN, this organ was owned by a member and loaned to the congregation for its years of service.

The original church was designed for future expansion. In 2005 planning began to enhance what Redeemer had begun 15 years earlier. With the aid of the architect who had designed the original church, Redeemer's house of worship was expanded by nearly 2000 square feet. With continuing attention to good acoustics, cork flooring was installed under the pews and in the chancel. While enhancing the visual beauty of the facility, this flooring is a natural amplifier for the pastor as he speaks from the chancel. Even though the square footage has doubled, with seating increased from 130 to 250, it is actually easier to speak without straining the voice. As in the original church, the worshipers – seated in two areas at a right angle with each other – sing and speak to one another (Eph 5:19) and encourage one another (Hb 10:25) with the spoken and sung Word.

The visual beauty of this house of worship has also increased. The altar, like the wall behind it, is constructed of stonework. The top of the altar, of polished Mesabi Black Granite, is inlaid with five crosses representing the wounds of our Savior on the cross. Above the altar, massive in its stonework, the empty cross reminds us of the work of our Savior who defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil, and rose triumphant from the grave.



Shading shows the original church's size.

Together with the use of stained glass, the sweeping lines of the walls and ceiling naturally draw one's eyes upward, focusing on the power and symbolism of the cross. The worship space evokes awe with its beauty and symbolism, especially for the first-time guest.

Our expanded house of worship would need a new organ. The member who provided the first organ encouraged the congregation to purchase a larger instrument. Dan Jaeckel again designed and built a beautiful instrument that will serve for generations to come.

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Installed six months prior to the start of the building expansion, it was sealed and stored as the work went on around it, only to be uncovered a week before the dedication of our new house of worship.

We would be remiss if we did not express our gratitude and thanks to the Builders for Christ who enabled us to build this house of worship to the glory of our Savior God. Their commitment and dedication in their work of service to their fellow members truly is motivated by their love for Christ, our Savior.

They built a worship facility that supported the proclamation of the Word in both spoken and sung forms, but it was also pleasing to the eye.

Repeatedly, newcomers to our church remark how they enjoy not only the beauty but also the symbolism in our house of worship. The beauty and power of the Word are apparent both when it is spoken and when it is set to music. Thus God's faithful people proclaim the Word in their houses of worship to the glory of his name. May our focus always be on the Word as we continue to proclaim it in all its power – in preaching and teaching, in music, and in architecture.

A Larger Organ

In this day of technology, the beautiful mechanical action (“tracker”) organ by Dan Jaekel is inspired by the quality, durability, and craftsmanship of another age. This instrument also shows deep appreciation for the great Lutheran musicians of that earlier age – the Bach family, Buxtehude*, Pachelbel, Walther, and others. These great musicians, whose music is still very much alive in worship today, played instruments like ours, some of which are still in use. Redeemer Lutheran Church is privileged to have such a fine instrument built by a fine craftsman, an instrument dedicated to the worship of our Lord.

Why this fine instrument rather than a cheaper imitation? Solomon put the best and

finest into the temple. The Bible contains many prominent references to music. Luther ranked music next to theology. Redeemer follows this example by providing an instrument to lead worship, an instrument built to the highest standards of quality. The German inscription on the front of the organ, the title of an old and well-known chorale, summarizes what music is about at Redeemer: “To God on high alone be glory!”

Our new tracker organ, Jaekel's Opus 49, is the end result of God's blessing on fourteen years of planning and thousands of hours of music and worship with the previous organ. Jaekel was Redeemer's acoustics consultant when the original chapel was built in 1989. At that time, Redeemer used an electronic instrument with partial pedals and keyboards. Jaekel worked hard to team with a Redeemer member to provide a one manual plus pedal tracker organ (Opus 18a). This instrument performed superbly in worship until March of 2005. For 14 years it glorified God and assisted in proclaiming his Word. But, perhaps surprising because of its size, this small instrument also taught us what a fine organ is like. It was then sold to help purchase the present organ. The selling price was more than the original purchase price (not even counting inflation!) – a testimony to the enduring value of a well-built instrument.

Organ builders say that the success of an organ depends in part on the character of the room in which it is placed. This is true even with electronic instruments. For example, poor acoustics can require so much volume to fill the room that the organ may sound “too loud” to those seated closest to the instrument or the speakers. Worshipers at Redeemer are thrilled with the sound of an excellent instrument in supportive acoustics – a setting that enhances not only the organ's sound but also the sound of the only instrument “invented” by God himself: the worshipers' singing voices.

We pray that generations to come will use Opus 49 to worship the one true God at Redeemer.

Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr!



Specifications and additional photos of the new 13-rank organ are at the Worship website, along with a photo of the original smaller instrument and other links.

Photography: Opus 49, Boris Wiedenfeld

* The year 2007 marks the 300th anniversary of the life and work of Dietrich Buxtehude.

SCHOOLS OF WORSHIP ENRICHMENT – AT FIVE YEARS

Schools of Worship Enrichment serve clusters of eight or more parishes with a study of worship theology and history, practical new resources, and time for parishes to set goals. SoWE weekends are highly appreciated by pastors, musicians, and lay people alike. In only five years these events have served more than ten percent of WELS parishes, churches of all sizes and situations. A February event (in Indiana, between storms!) set a record of 13 parishes and 115 people attending.

During the initial years we intentionally grew this event slowly. Now it is gaining momentum both in frequency of events and number of parishes attending. Due to this growing interest we have recruited and trained additional presenters. Thirteen people now assist. Parishes interested in hosting a SoWE may contact their district worship coordinator or the Worship office. More information is at the Worship website.

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