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Designing a Worshipful Environment

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*“May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night,
this place of which you said you would put your Name there.”
(2 Chronicles 6:20)*

This presentation and related discussion questions are intended for creative input from the congregation’s design focus groups and task forces. Do this ground work before appointing a building committee or engaging an architect. You may also use this document while working with an architect/designer.

What kind of building?

Planning for the future under God’s grace

At this stage of history many congregations see the need for building programs. But they do not always know how to proceed or what they should build. Appointing a building committee to secure inexpensive construction for basic functional needs is not the first step to take. It is better first to engage and involve intergenerational focus groups to review the congregation’s history, ministries, and space needs for its future journey under God’s mission and with his blessing. Long-range planning is essential before becoming serious about a building project. What is going on in your parish area? What are your plans to reach that area with the gospel of Jesus Christ for the next years? What do you think your congregation will look like in five or ten years?

- What kind of **people** and how many might you be serving? What is happening in the neighborhood?
- What kind of **ministries around Word and Sacraments** will you be offering?
- What kind of and how many **staff** (full-time, part-time, volunteers, pastors, teachers, staff ministers) positions will you need to carry out your ministry?
- What kind of **facilities** will help you carry out your plans?

If you follow this pattern, it will become clear that the **form** of what you build **will** follow and **serve** the ministries of the Word which you will offer. To pursue this you begin with your—

- **Theology**—the basis and foundation in Jesus for all you do (Ephesians 2:19-22)
- **Purpose**—the reason why your church exists (up—to glorify God, inward—to grow in his Word, outward—to go with the Word to neighbors and the world)
- **Mindset**—your attitude and approach; the way you do things (pessimistic or optimistic, cautious or aggressive, people-oriented or task-oriented, concerned only about your church or the church at large as well?), how you carry out church and ministry, how you utilize the universal priesthood
- **Long range plans**—where you want to go and what you want to do with God’s grace and blessings in Christ
- **Strategies**—how you will carry out your plans (specifics of who does what, when, where, and how much)
- **Ministry**—actually doing what God has called you to do, doing theology, being Church in the world, bringing Jesus to people as you love, serve, and witness

A common purpose and direction displays unity and gives focus to the congregation’s ministries. It shows that all coordinators, boards, task forces, classes, sermons, and **even buildings** are there to reach hearts with God’s saving and motivating message. It is essential to work at this before entering a building program. Architects and design/build firms expect that this kind of planning with supporting documents precedes any building design meetings, fund raising, or construction plans. Even fund-raising becomes more meaningful when people realize how the planned facility will help them carry out their ministries as they learn, live, work, serve, and witness in the world.

I. God as center

- “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple.... And the Lamb is its lamp” (Revelation 21:22, 23). Whether on earth or in heaven, saints stand before the throne of the Lamb and worship in the royal splendor of God’s holiness. Though unnecessary in heaven, a worship space is a necessity for the saints on earth where they have but a mere taste of the ultimate worship they will experience in heaven.
- “How many **square feet** can we have? How much will it **cost**?” Practicality and the best use of funds, yes. But these are not the only considerations. If practicality becomes the entire determining factor, the building will become human-centered, not centered in God’s splendor. A worship center is to be a building that assists the saints in their meaningful worship. For such a facility we need to consider quality and love and care in what we build, genuineness in the materials used, and an effort to produce a harmonious whole.

- “**You** are God; we praise you!” (**TE** Deum) God is subject and object in worship.
- **God has given us his best in Christ:** 1 Peter 2:9
 - Chosen people
 - Royal priesthood
 - Holy nation
 - People belonging to God
 - New creation in Baptism (2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - Leads us in triumphal procession (2 Corinthians 2:14)
- **God’s people will strive to give their best to God:** Philippians 4:8. They will concentrate on whatever is:
 - **True**—what we do, say, or sing in worship needs to find its source in God’s truth.
 - **Noble**—majestic and awe-inspiring; opposite of frivolity; “We’re in the presence of God!”
 - **Right**—reflecting the righteousness that God gives in Christ
 - **Pure**—not self-serving or human-oriented, but forgiven, chaste, and God-oriented; authentic
 - **Lovely**—breathing love from God and inclining the heart to affection; so that we say with David, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Ps. 122:1).
 - **Admirable**—appealing, well-sounding; even a good impression for guests and non-church guests and visitors
- “Best” includes worship/nurture/hospitality-welcome center where God’s people wear Christ and demonstrate his love for souls.
- Worship center reflects and serves congregation’s Word/Sacramental theology.

Discussion

- *What is our congregation’s name? Identity? How will our worship center display our theology? External cross, logo, other symbol/logo, shape?*
- *How will our building portray excellence?*

- *What will it say to those passing by? To the member? To the curious searcher? To the neighborhood?*
- *What will it say to God?*
- The congregation and its design group must know and communicate to the designer:
 - Its theology
 - Lutheran worship history, focus, meaning, and practice
 - Bible study patterns, plans, and frequency
 - Needs for Christian education space, not overlooking a specific area for adult spiritual growth
 - Needs for special ministries (pre-school, sports evangelism, care ministries, youth ministries—what is needed in the parish area?) to build bridges to people for gospel proclamation
 - Opportunities and space for relationships/fellowship/hospitality to occur (important today!)
 - Where it is headed under God’s guidance (ministry plans)
- **God expects excellence** and first fruits. (Haggai 2:8, Mark 14:3-9, 2 Corinthians 9:6-9) **People expect excellence** in their surroundings today. Excellence is not the same as extravagance.
- Think of a theater. Paint is peeling. Eaves are broken or missing. Entrance doors are dirty and hard to open. Flies zoom in and out and around the popcorn. The theater seats have holes. The floor is sticky. The screen is old and yellow. The sound system crackles. Will today’s people go there or to a multiplex theater that is neat and clean and offers comfortable seating and great sound? (Illustration by Pastor James Huebner at the 1999 National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts)
- In worship and the worship center all of the God-given **human senses** are embraced and involved:
 - **sight** (windows, banners, paraments, works of art, vestments, architecture, books, people)
 - **touch** (water, book, handshake, embrace)
 - **taste** (bread, wine, coffee, potlucks)
 - **smell** (flowers, candles, wine, neighbor)
 - **hearing** (sermon, lessons, prayers, music, choir, instruments, congregational singing, psalms, crying infants)

- “No church building is ecclesiologically innocent: it expresses—and forever thereafter impresses—a sense of what it means to belong to the church....” (Walter Huffmann, *Where We Worship*, p.6).

Observations from others

“History suggests that times of transition...are often accompanied by an atmosphere of uncertainty that can foster a renewed search for the sacred.... Still reeling from reactions to Modernism (Post-Modernism, Neo-Vernacular, Neo-Classicism, and High-Tech or Late Modern), many congregations are looking for spaces that are both more stimulating and, in some ways, familiar. Therefore, the ‘anything goes’ architectural plan is no longer a satisfying template for most houses of prayer.... The greatest influence today appears to be rooted in the recovery of time honored components of sacred spaces.... In other words, architects, designers, and congregations are searching for ways to ‘capture’ a sense of the sacred in their buildings. While the appearance of flying buttresses and gargoyles may be relics of a bygone era, advanced technology in all of the building trades has made it possible to utilize new materials and structural systems to create forms that are just as spiritually rewarding.... I am convinced that a worship space by its nature is a place of memory.... They derive meaning from the faith and traditions of the congregation and they nourish the same community to grow and develop into new generations of believers. Worship spaces can be resonators when the stories of the faith community are apparent in the very design of the building. The use of color, light, scale, and art, as well as the incorporation of pathways, portals, and centers can contribute to the religious experience.” (by Richard S. Vosko in the Introduction to the following book: Michael J. Crosbie. *Architecture for the Gods*. New York:Watson-Guptill Publications. 2000.)

“Yet through it all, I have found that the scriptures we read, the songs we sing, the sanctuaries we visit, and the evidences left by people who designed and built such sanctuaries ‘for years to come’ capture the sense of divine hope. For some, like me, they also represent the familiar, a return to roots.” (Marty, Martin and Micah. *Our Hope for Years to Come—The Search for Spiritual Sanctuary*. Minneapolis:Augsburg. 1995. Author’s Introduction, pp. 6-7)

“Church architecture serves to frame and enhance our worship in a way that honors the One we worship.... But as works of art, they also speak to the larger culture around them.... We must proclaim the gospel in the public square and show the world how it transforms life, including culture and architecture.” (From an interview with Architect Daniel Lee, Virginia, in an article “Is There a Christian Architecture?”)

Discussion

- ***What are our thoughts as we plan our worship environment for God and God’s people?***
- ***How is this more than a topic about acres, walls, dollars, or square footage?***
- ***What can we do to help our members grow in appreciation of their worship heritage and what the worship space represents?***

- *How can we celebrate the past as we plan for the present and the future?*

II. Physical space for worship/nurture/hospitality

A. A special place for the gathered congregation

The worship center is a place where believers gather under the cross of Jesus in a hospitable and participatory atmosphere to be strengthened and nourished by the cherished prize of Christ. They understand worship as proclamation—God proclaims who he is and what he has done in Christ the Savior. Here God makes people his own in the splashing waters of baptism. Here people come from all walks of life, lined up and leveled at the Lord’s altar, all spiritual beggars, all receiving a more than generous portion from God’s silver chalice. Worship is life-central for brothers and sisters in Christ who walk in the certain hope of standing beside Jesus in eternity.

Believers also come to receive their **consoling** and **missional blessing** for their life and witness in the growing postmodern world of despair and chaos. Members of the “one holy Christian and apostolic Church” will understand that ongoing relational witnessing is necessary if Christianity is to infiltrate and reenter the culture that surrounds it. Christians often talk about going TO church to worship. They also need to know that they ARE Church (disciples) whom God has called to himself in Christ. As such they will strive to BE church 24 hours a day by living in joyful thanksgiving to the Savior, by bringing the witness of the Word to bear upon sinful hearts, and by inviting the unshepherded into the splendor of worship and fellowship in the safe arms of God. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

Christians (God’s church—people) gather in a building called a **church**. This serves as a **worship** center, a **nurture** center, and a **welcome/hospitality** center where God’s people are nurtured for their mission in life and where they welcome others into the presence of God.

The emphasis in this presentation is primarily the **worship environment**. It will also focus on areas for fellowship and hospitality. It will not deal as much with education/nurture or office space all of which are increasingly important. The entire project, however, must be designed to fit together in a **unity of space** that helps members focus on the Savior and serving others in the world he still loves.

Discussion

- *How will the designed worship center and its purposefully placed art and symbolism remind God's people that they are his church as they go out, serve, and witness in their vocation in their part of the world?*
- *In what ways is the life of a Christian a journey? How can a worship center reflect and assist the spiritual journey that begins with baptism?*
- *How much space will we require for spiritual nurture (Sunday school for all ages, adult spiritual growth area, youth ministries, welcome center)?*
- *What technologies are needed for presentations and teaching tools? How can our facility be wired for these? Who will research this?*

B. A house for the believers' liturgical celebrations (worship)

A worship environment is a physical space in which **style** and **shapes** and **sounds** display the Trinity's splendor and incorporate the various aspects of the congregation's worship. It assists in the invitation to prayer and the encouragement to participate in worship. It houses the gathering of believers for Word and Sacraments, for prayer, and praise, and song, and encouragement, and fellowship. It does not overpower. Rather it blends in with and facilitates the actions of the people in their humble yet joyous worship. This is its primary work.

The worship space with its design and symbols points with awe to the saving grace of God in Christ. As such it is **noticeable** and **bold** and **distinctive** and **statement-making**, but **not shocking**. It enables the congregation to experience the transcendence of God as well as to practice a spirit of hospitality among believers and guests who come to hear and learn salvation's truth and freedom at the feet of the living Jesus.

Discussion

- *How will your worship space become an environment for Holy Baptism, the Common Service, Service of Word and Sacrament, Service of the Word, Morning Praise, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of Day, Christian Marriage, Christian Funeral, and youth worship? Discuss each one.*
- *How will it assist Christians in their acts of hospitality to one another in their human relationships and in their welcoming role for those who seek God's truth and rescue at the cross?*
- *To better understand our worship needs, when will we make arrangements for the study of the course, "Come, Worship Christ" (Tiefel, Geiger) and "Christian Worship: Manual"?*

C. Tension between the need for transcendence and facilitating the hospitality of the communion of saints

Our worship center's style, shapes, and sounds will display and herald the Trinity's splendor and the immensity of God's magnificence. It will invite spiritually desperate people into the presence of him who gives himself in Word, water, bread and wine. It will say to all, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Worship is more than a pastor inviting people into his living room. It is the holy God welcoming Christ's holy people into a **holy place** set apart to honor him. It also directs attention to the Christ in glory, the One with a golden sash around his chest, his eyes like blazing fire, a sharp and double-edged sword coming out of his mouth, his face shining in all its brilliance like the sun (Revelation 1:12-16). The Revelation to St. John has some insights for worship in the splendor of the majesty of God.

In an effort to emphasize the priesthood of all believers, church designs and redesigns of recent decades may have downplayed the portrayal of God's transcendence, even removing Christian symbolism. Chumminess and chattiness in design and worship can replace a sense of awe. "Holiness without love incites terror; love without holiness invites libertinism. Worship that focuses on God's transcendence without God's immanence becomes austere and inaccessible; worship that stresses God's immanence without God's transcendence leads to irreverent coziness" (Page 96, M. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995). While it is uplifting to be able to meditate on the greatness and splendor of God, it is also encouraging to see and be among the communion of saints gathered near and around the altar. How to keep a happy balance is a huge challenge for the design and building committees.

Professor James Tiefel also addresses this subject. "A church building is for worship, for the intellectual and emotional interaction between the Bridegroom and his bride, between Christ and his Church. The church comes to worship to serve God, and God is at worship to serve the church.... The worship space needs to allow believers to do what they do at worship, and it needs to provide space for God to do what he does at worship" (Page 68, *Christian Worship: Manual*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993).

Discussion

- *How will the worship environment portray a sense of awe at God's holiness and at the same time serve as a place of refuge for the wounded in the arms of Christ the Good Shepherd and among the encouraging flock which he has gathered?*
- *What does it mean that there is a need and longing for an architecture of transcendence today?*
- *Does our architect understand the Lutheran liturgy and liturgical components? Or is he willing to work toward understanding it?*

Just as the worship space is a place of **corporate prayer**, so it is also a place of **private prayer**. The doors should be open or accessible to serve as a place of **personal meditation** and prayer for God's people, a place of quiet for one to be alone with God in an area that portrays God's presence. When touring chapels on college campuses, it is not uncommon to see students sitting in prayer and meditation. A revitalized prayer life may bring God's people into his house more than once a week.

A worship center is a place where **sorrow** invariably breaks into a cry or lament (sin, confession, suffering, death, counseling): "Miserere! Kyrie!"

A worship center is also a place where **joy** invariably breaks into song (forgiveness, baptism, Lord's Supper, resurrection): "Alleluia! Thank the Lord and sing his praise!"

Discussion

- *How will the design of our worship space portray God's presence?*
- *How will it display Christian specificity?*
- *How will it evoke joy?*
- *How will it carry sorrow?*
- *How will it evoke a spirit of serenity for personal meditation and a spirit of congeniality for hospitality opportunities?*
- *How will beauty in music, art, and architecture echo the eternal and whet our appetite for heavenly splendor?*

- *How will the environment welcome and house a thirsty people who drink the satisfying Water of Life from God's silver chalice?*
- *How will our members be trained to explain specific Christian symbols to those who are searching for meaning in life?*

III. Location/setting

The detail work for choosing a **location** for a congregation is beyond the scope of this presentation. Guidelines for this important decision are available in the Board for Home Missions *Handbook* and in its *Step by Step through a Building Project*. Choosing a strategic location has long-range implications and requires careful thought and research. It is beneficial to make early contact with city officials and planners to understand their concerns and to learn the growth patterns of the area.

If your congregation is relocating, you will have questions concerning the **number of acres** to purchase. In recent years WELS congregation have purchased sites from three to 100 acres, with several of them choosing 40-acre sites. Long range planning on what you will do with the acreage helps determine the size of the proposed location. Many cities also have guidelines for the size of church sites.

Generally, larger sites give more options for the present and future ministries. Larger sites are also needed for mandated **holding ponds** to collect water from buildings and parking lots. Larger sites permit congregations to display their Christianity outdoors and publicly. Larger sites are needed for schools, gymnasiums, places for elder care, athletic fields, walking paths, wedding photo areas, firepit fellowship events, and present and future parking needs. Some churches are located next to a school, a park, or an athletic field, and sign agreements for joint use of parking space.

A perfect site for a building location may not always be a perfect setting for a worshipful environment. Traffic noise and movement, unattractive commercial buildings, a treeless landscape, and other items may be disruptive to a meditative and celebrative worship environment. But with careful thought and planning, you can work toward creation of an environment that is conducive to worship no matter what the surroundings are.

You are blessed if there are some **trees** in key locations on your church site. The architect will plan to retain some of them as he positions the building on the lot. City codes may also require a certain amount of landscaping. This shows that natural beauty as a creation of God is important to a city even as it enhances the environment for our worship of the Creator.

A. Rented spaces

On a typical Sunday many home mission groups worship in rented space. The space may be in a school, a commercial building, an office complex, a hotel, or a community building. Rented space does not allow for permanent worship environment solutions. Everything must be carried in and put in place each week, a project in which all core group members are involved. A **master plan** for positioning of signs, banners, furniture, and seats is essential so there is a strategic place for everything. Neatness and a welcoming area that permits cordiality are important, as is the placement of people, young and old, to open doors and to welcome and assist members and guests.

Will a visitor easily know where to park, what door to enter, what hallway to use, where the bathroom is, what materials to pick up, where to sit, and how to go through the stages of worship? Will a visitor know when and where Bible studies occur and when there is a time for fellowship? A welcoming and concerned core group will understand that all these items are conducive to a worshipful environment which begins already on the outside in the parking lot.

Well-placed and quality items (banners, signs, table arrangements, fellowship table, real coffee cups with the logo of the congregation printed on them, altar, ambo, chairs, printed materials) are important for rented spaces. Key places are the parking lot, the entrance and hospitality area, seating, and a central focus for worship movement and activity. It is better to have a few quality items than a proliferation of shoddy castaways that look tacky to a guest.

B. Ministry Centers

Everything said about rented spaces applies also to leased ministry centers. The biggest difference is that there is semi-permanency (two or three years in many cases; much longer, even permanently in high-cost areas) in a ministry center. Items mentioned above can be positioned in set places and do not have to be moved weekly. The danger is that the ministry center becomes a storage house for congregational clutter and only the congregation members are unaware of the mess and distractions they have created.

In designing a worship environment within a ministry center, it may be worthwhile to receive the input of an **architect** to design a focal point, a color scheme, a pattern for seating and traffic, and the discreet hiding of washroom doors and the kitchen area. Many exploratory groups practice with their space and rearrange it several times before they have it right. An architect may help get it right from the start.

C. A Chapel

What has been said about rented space and a ministry center applies also to a chapel. A group can live with mistakes in rented spaces and ministry centers. The group can rearrange the space or move to more appropriate space. A congregation often has to live for a long time, however, with mistakes made in location or in design of its first worship center.

Eager core group members often associate mission work with that of erecting a church building. A chapel may serve as an assist in outreach. But a chapel does not **do** evangelism. **People** do evangelism. Often people are tempted to run from evangelism too soon in order to build a chapel. “Don’t build too soon!” That word of advice from mission boards and counselors sometimes falls on deaf ears. When groups build too soon, they often:

- Locate at the wrong place.
- Think and build too small.
- De-emphasize their work of outreach and evangelism.
- Assume too large a debt for their size.
- Have few funds left for ministry.
- Limit the future options of a larger group.
- Relocate years later.

It is **better to spend useful early years** in the life of the mission to reach and nurture God’s people with the Gospel, to prepare them for works of service, to train evangelists and raise up leaders, to do one’s best at worship and Bible studies in rented quarters, to plan for building when rented space becomes too limited and limiting, to do chapel planning and building with greater numbers of people, and to receive more thank offerings for the down payment. Once constructed, the chapel will most likely be a permanent fixture on the congregation’s property. It will convey a message to the community and the passers-by 24 hours every day.

Discussion

- *Who will make initial contact and establish rapport with city officials?*
- *How will you position your chapel on your property?*
- *What message do you want it to convey to the community?*
- *How will it be seen and known?*
- *How will the design convey the meaning of the congregation’s name?*
- *How will the design convey the meaning of Church?*
- *How will the building portray God’s presence?*
- *How will the church sign be related to the structure and clearly identify the church property and its entrance?*
- *How will the property be easily accessible?*

- *How or will it be seen at night?*
- *How will it blend in with God's nature?*
- *How will it blend in with the neighborhood?*
- *How will it stand out from the neighborhood?*
- *Will it portray a sense of openness or closed-ness?*

D. A gym?

By itself a gym may not portray a strong theology. However, a multi-purpose gym (sometimes called a sanctinasion) may be practical for many forms of bridge-building outreach ministries (child and youth ministries, Power Hour, child care, pre-school, after-school, home-schoolers, summer Bible camps for basketball, soccer, and volleyball, neighborhood seminars, informal classes). Some congregations with strong ministries of outreach transform a multi-use facility quickly to an environment suitable for worship. **This requires care in planning and timing (weddings, funerals, other events).**

It is not easy to use any location for a purpose other than its intended purpose. It is not easy to keep people quiet and attentive in a school gym where the natural inclination is to run and jump and make noise. Some "evangelical" writers today say that weariness from worshipping in auditoriums or lecture halls results in some leaving evangelical churches. "They also find Christian symbols and rituals deeply meaningful, providing refreshing and evocative means of communication" (Gibbs, Eddie. *ChurchNext, Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press. 2000. Pages 155-156). This does not mean that a gym-like structure should be considered off-limits. There are places (such as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary) where a gym can be transformed into a healthy worship environment. There is the need, however, for thorough discussion and planning so that the congregation is ready for all the pros and cons of such a structure.

Discussion

- *If we are building a gym for outreach activity in a neighborhood, how will we design that space to serve also as an environment for worship?*
- *Will our membership be satisfied to worship in this facility for a long period of time? Or will it be a temporary place for worship? If temporary, where will it be placed on our property?*

- *Once constructed, how can we transform the space on short notice so that our environment leads us to focus on worship? How will Christian symbolism be present?*
- *How will this kind of structure display cleanliness and excellence?*
- *What will we expect acoustically in this type of a building?*
- *How will it be lighted and furnished?*

IV. Entrance, driveway, and parking

Planning committees often delay consideration of the entrance, driveway, and parking lot. Suddenly they are confronted with the regulations of the planners at city hall and debate with them to get by with as little expense as possible for the driveway's entrance, the driveway itself, and the parking lot. City planners are concerned with the city's and the congregation's **traffic flow**, **safety** of the people, water retention ponds, and **appearance** of the property when cars are parked there. The congregation should also be concerned about these. Once the building is complete, these places are used every time someone comes to the church property. If this area is not well-planned, it may negatively affect congregational attitudes and the appearance of the church site.

It is good to see automobiles present on a church lot. Vehicles mean people activity. However, when the parking lot is full, it is not good to be able to see **only** automobiles.

When your parking lot is 80% filled, potential visitors will often designate it as full and yield to the temptation to pass by. The appearance and approach of the parking lot can be a huge asset or a huge detriment to the congregation. Plan for more-than-sufficient parking. Member families often bring more than one car to worship.

Discussion

- *What are your city's guidelines for parking lots and entrances? Who will make initial contact with city planners to discuss requirements?*
- *What are your city's regulations for signs? Will your sign be pleasantly noticeable, display the mere essentials, and lead to the entrance?*
- *Is curbside parking allowed on the streets?*
- *How many spaces will be needed for maximum attendance (using the city's car-to-people ratio)?*

- *How will your parking lot handle overlap when you have two services, a Bible hour, and people are leaving and arriving?*
- *Where will the parking lot be placed on your property?*
- *How will the parking lot design move large numbers of cars after worship and Bible hours?*
- *How will the design work for funerals?*
- *How will the design work for weddings?*
- *Will the design allow for trucks (supplies) and buses (choir tours)?*
- *How will the building look from the parking lot?*
- *How will the trash barrels and bins be placed out of sight?*
- *Where will lawn mowers and other equipment be stored?*
- *What is the traffic pattern to arrive at the parking lot?*
- *How will the parking lot be paved?*
- *How will it be striped?*
- *How will it be lighted so as not to upset neighbors? (down-lighting options)*
- *How will it be kept neat and clean?*
- *Where will parking spaces for visitors be located?*
- *From the parking lot will one know where the church entrance is?*
- *Where can flowers/shrubs/banners/flags be placed along/near the driveway?*
- *How can steps be avoided?*
- *How can parking lot attendants/greeters assist when people arrive for worship? When they leave?*
- *How can the handicapped be assisted in and from the lot?*

- *What safety measure might be needed for children leaving the building and running to cars on the lot?*
- *How safely will your people exit the lot and enter the street?*

V. Entrance from the outside world to the worship facility

A. Gathering Focus

*“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”
(Psalm 122:1)*

God gathers his Church. This is so evident on Sundays when Spirit-led people from different neighborhoods, different cultures, and different backgrounds gather for worship. This is the weekly and central activity in the life of the church.

Nothing better illustrates the congregation’s attitude toward the stranger, the forlorn in pursuit of peace and hope, the members young and old, and the handicapped than the building’s gathering focus that leads to its entrance. Let this not be such an intimidating area that some will not even dare to approach it. This means that the entrance will be visible, inviting, approachable, and without stumbling blocks as a **gathering place** or a **courtyard**. It should be evident where people will enter the building. Are there separate entrances for worship, offices, school? If it is not clear, signs should be posted.

This space, which may be called a **courtyard**, is a place that is not too straight or narrow, that has room for friendly greeting and comfortable visitation, that may be approached from more than one direction, that ought to include well-designed landscaping with plants, bushes, flowers, and decorative trees, and that should be well-lighted in the evening. This is a place with some glass in the walls or doors that will allow the hesitant stranger to get a glimpse of what is inside. This is a place from which brides and grooms will exit and where mourners will walk slowly to their cars and where children will scamper to their parent’s automobiles. This is a place that begs for a bench or two for the personal comfort of those for whom walking is difficult. The benches could double as a place of prayer during the week. Where the climate is appropriate, this is a place that may double in use as fellowship space and an outside classroom.

Discussion

- *How will our entrance serve as a visible gathering focus for our chapel?*
- *How will it blend in with the overall design?*

- *How will it stand out?*
- *How will it accommodate outside greeters? Members? Guests?*
- *How can it be made a gracious, comfortable, and inviting place?*
- *How will it serve before worship? After worship?*
- *How will it serve weddings, funerals, children's ministries?*
- *What impediments will be avoided? (steps, awkward turns and corners, curbs)*

B. Landscaping environment

What will the setting of your building look like from a distance as you head toward the entrance; from close-up? Designers of landscape ask such questions. A planning group or task force will ask similar questions. Well-designed landscaping enhances the environment in which the building is set by emphasizing the wonders of God's creation and meshing them together with the building. Trees provide solidity, shade, and focal interest. Shrubs draw different areas together visually. They grow quickly and add color and texture to the landscape. Lawns, ground covers, and other plantings supply the unifying elements that make it all work. You might consider the installation of a fountain or some running water as well.

The congregation should not do landscape planning by itself, unless a landscape designer is a member of the congregation and volunteers her services. Some nurseries provide free landscape designs provided the shrubs and trees are purchased from their place of business. Expert guidance is essential. City planners may specify the number, size, and types of trees and shrubs. They may require a detailed landscaping design before approving the entire building project or granting the occupancy permit.

Discussion

- *What messages can landscaping give?*
- *What functions should it provide?*
- *Who will interview landscaping designers in your area?*
- *How will the plan assist in the welcoming atmosphere of the congregation?*
- *How will the design enhance the exterior?*

- *Will any of the landscaping be seen from the inside?*
- *Who will take care of the landscaping/lawn?*

C. Environment of hospitality in the welcome area

You want people to know where your chapel is. You want it to be attractive and noticeable. You want a safe entry into the parking lot. You want focal direction to lead people easily toward the identifiable main entrance. You also want an interior design that will provide for a hospitable environment.

In many ways a congregation is an extended family. Members see each other most often at worship, at ministry, or at a time for fellowship. A sizable and comfortable entrance, called *narthex* in the past, is significant for this aspect of congregational life. This is where the assembled believers gather before worship and Bible study or where various groups spend time during the week. It is an **internal gathering space** that also **includes a welcome area**. It is a place where relationships can be established in an era when people crave acceptance and community. Underlying this is the needed faith relationship with Jesus. Think of this area as an atrium, courtyard (if outside), welcome place, or community porch.

A sizable room with a healthy environment makes it easier for the stranger to overcome fright and enter the doors of the church alone or accompanied by an acquaintance or relative. A young person opening the main door to the gathering area creates a positive first impression to members and guests as they arrive. The welcome area is an influential room for postmodern Gen Xers and Millennials looking for meaningful connections and people who are authentic in their beliefs and life. Former non-churched people indicate that the decision to return or not was often made in the comfort of the gathering place. Here is where Christianity will be on display at its finest in demonstration of the caring love of Christ and his call to welcome the stranger and to love one another. Here is where there may be laughter and pleasantries and introductions and conversation and celebration and hospitality and refreshments. Here is a place to connect, a place for human interaction, a place where people come to find out about us and our Savior.

The gathering place is where members greet each other and serve as family hosts to welcome guests and visitors into God's presence. This room should be:

- 1. Sizable:** one-fourth the size of the nave (sitting area for worship) minimum; better, one-third to one-half the size of the nave. Some, in fact, suggest that it be the same size as the nave. This allows for natural ease of movement and conversation. The space can accommodate multiple uses during the week.

2. **Of sufficient height:** Think in terms of nine or ten-foot (or more) ceilings or vaulted or tray ceilings which give the illusion of spaciousness. Height and air space help create a comfortable environment. A well-placed mirror or two may assist in a feeling of spaciousness and serve conveniently those who are concerned about appearance. Recent WELS churches feature higher ceilings and windows in the welcome area. These allow a welcome view into the nave and chancel area.
3. **Acoustically comfortable:** This is the place for some sound-absorbing materials to facilitate conversation.
4. **Well-lighted and colored:** The welcome center will not serve well if it is dark inside. Coming from the bright outdoors into a dark room, one is met with an uncomfortable feeling when everything seems dark and mysterious. Natural light from well-placed windows, skylights, or a tower is helpful for this area. A lighting consultant may specify types of lighting that are not harsh and that are pleasant to help fulfill the purposes of this room. Quiet colors such as blue, burgundy, or cream, with some greenery, may help create the atmosphere of this room.
5. **Free of clutter:** Members may not notice clutter; visitors and guests will. This room should have informational places, but they should not be overfilled with posters and papers with no master plan of where they should be placed. A convenient cloak room in areas set off to a side will help eliminate the appearance of clutter. Several portable cloak racks might be considered and placed in different areas when needed.
6. **An environment for religious art:** Spiritual overtones will assist this room's assigned task as a place for hospitality and the sharing of God's blessings before and after worship. A well-placed piece of **art** or **photography** may help focus on the purpose of the room, the name and logo of the church, or the splendor of the Triune God. Artwork may also be **seasonal** to reflect the emphasis of the church year. **Banners** may be designed to hang from the ceiling or to lead toward the entrance to the nave and blend in with the banners in the nave. In a well-designed welcome center some churches might place the baptismal font where family and members would gather in close for the baptism and then follow the newly baptized (carried by sponsors or parents) into the nave for the baptismal prayer at the altar.
7. **A space with clear directions:** Well-placed signs will guide visitors to the locations of the washrooms and nursery room which should be located close to the place for hospitality. The space should also naturally lead people toward the worship area. If it does not do this because of multiple entrances or necessary turns in a foyer, provisions for directions must be made visible.

8. **A welcome center:** Consider a welcome center in the middle of the welcome area. This is a place that is noticed, that has informed people attending it, that can serve to dispense and gather information. It may be a place for handouts and signup sheets. Consider computer capabilities for this area. Some congregations put wheels under the welcome center so that it can be moved to key places and for different functions in the building.
9. **A place for refreshments:** With a large welcome area designed for multiple uses, congregations can incorporate a refreshment place with small round tables that encourage connections, conversations, and reading. Creativity will suggest names like “Soul Café” or “Holy Grounds.” The congregation’s musical groups might also make planned appearances there.
10. **A prayer or meditation area:** If there is a large welcome area, part of it may be used for prayer and meditation. Another idea is to have a small prayer and meditation room adjacent to the welcome area.
11. **A place for art and/or contemplative worship:** This depends on the size of the welcome area. A special room for these might be included elsewhere in the building if there are space limitations in the entrance.

Discussion

- *What roles will the welcome area serve in our building?*
- *Where will we place the information or welcome center?*
- *How will this room be related in design and location to the worship area? To the nurture/education/fellowship area? To the church office? To the pastor’s office?*
- *How will this room accommodate the worship crowd?*
- *How will this room accommodate the pastor’s office? The congregation’s office?*
- *How can this room assist in worship preparation?*
- *How will this room lead to the worship area?*
- *How will this room serve for funerals?*
- *How will this room serve for weddings?*

- *How large will this room be?*
- *Where will diaper-changing tables be placed?*
- *Will you furnish a comfortable place for nursing mothers?*
- *What elements go into a comfortable room that is people-friendly?*
- *How will it assist as a hospitable environment for our guests?*
- *How and where will the refreshments/coffee be served?*
- *What style of art is predominant in our cultural area? Is there any way this can be applied to our facility?*
- *Make a list of all the possible uses of the welcome area during the week.*
- *How can a welcome area assist the congregation in carrying out God's mission?*
- *Plan a large welcome area! Has this been said already? Congregations who have done so do not regret it. In fact, some of them wish their welcome area were even larger. It is a new era. Hop into it.*

D. Unity of space

The driveway, parking lot, external gathering area, welcome center, and church offices may be separate areas with special functions. However, they are all designed to serve the entire worship space and to lead into that worship space. The wholeness of the total space should be evident and welcoming. It should say, "This is the gathering place of God's people."

Discussion

- *What unifying factors will knit together the above spaces?*
- *How will these areas convey comfortable openness?*
- *How will these spaces be related to the worship area?*
- *How will a Means of Grace emphasis be evident in the external areas?*

E. Ease of movement

*“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage...They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”
(Psalm 84:5,7)*

We are God’s pilgrim people, journeying with him and one another from the cradle to the grave, looking forward to heaven, and living in the world now as apostolic Christians. Moving from the parking lot through the courtyard and welcome area to the place of Word and prayer and song may remind us of the nomadic past of God’s people. Let the journey invite and intrigue!

Usually church entries are staggered—people do not all enter at once. For weddings there may be last minute crowding near the doors as the people strive to be seated in a short period of time. There should be ample discussion with the designer relative to the subject of people flow and ease of movement, especially at entry points.

Discussion

- *What kind of doors or entry areas will permit ease of movement as people go and come? How many? How wide?*
- *How/where will liturgical processions be gathered and how will they enter?*
- *Where will the ushers stand? Will their standing place impede traffic?*
- *How will greeting take place before and after worship and at which doorways will greeters be active as hosts/hostesses?*
- *How will the space serve as a gathering point and entry for guest choirs?*
- *Where will wedding receiving lines be staged?*

VI. Meaning and arrangement of worship space

The font, altar, and ambo (place of the Word) in the chancel are the special pieces designed to portray the congregation's Word/Sacrament theology. Here the Means of Grace will be in use among the gathered believers as God comes in Word, in water, in bread and wine. Central attention goes to these furnishings and the actions that emanate from their design and placement.

The furniture, though separate in design and placement, ought to have a general unity and harmony. Each will display its uniqueness and its relatedness to the other. Strive for characteristics that make each beautiful, meaningful, and functional.

A. Font

Baptism has a central role in the life of the Christian. Baptism washes away sins and serves as a daily reminder of the membership in God's family which calls for daily contrition and repentance. The daily significance of baptism may be lost if a bowl of water is brought out only on occasions of a baptism. A deepened baptismal piety suggests a visible place for the font:

- In the welcome center or at the entrance to the nave so that everyone passes it enroute to worship and returning from worship; or
- In the central part of the nave to indicate baptism's meaning for life or for use in the Easter Vigil; or
- In front center for the visibility of all throughout worship, yet not crowding or obscuring the altar or ambo; or
- At a place in the chancel opposite the pulpit/ambo.

Placing the font to the side and opposite the ambo is a possibility if there is no lectern. **Placing it in the corner of the nave or out of the sight of the assembly sends a message of a diminished role for this sacrament.**

Some designers supply the font with **running water** for all to see and hear. Other works of art or symbolism may be attached to the font which may be constructed of wood or carved out of marble.

Discussion

- *If Luther said that Baptism is our greatest treasure on earth, how will we demonstrate that importance by its design and placement?*
- *Since the congregation takes part in the Sacrament of Baptism, how important is it that the font be visible?*

- *Will the font's placement allow an ease of approach for parents and sponsors? Will it be visible to the congregation?*

B. Altar

Lutheran design usually positions the altar at or near the center of the chancel because it is the central point of Christian worship. It:

- Symbolizes Christ's perfect sacrifice and forgiveness through the shedding of his blood;
- Is a reminder of his presence in a supernatural way when Word and Sacrament are used;
- Is a place from which the pastor proclaims to God's people the Words of Institution (*Verba*) and the parting blessing;
- Is a place where confession of sins, and prayers, and praise are offered to God;
- Is a place that holds the bread and wine, the vessels, and the altar book.
- It is not a table of convenience for anything else (including flowers and plants).

The altar may be set near the chancel wall with a cross or other Christian symbol above it. In some churches a decorative **reredos** leads up from the back of the altar table. One does not see as much of the reredos today. However, the back wall of the chancel may serve as such.

Today there is a greater movement toward a **freestanding altar** that is placed away from the wall and closer to or among the people and that can be approached from all sides. Its most notable use is speaking the *Verba* from behind the altar and toward the congregation during the Sacrament.

If the altar is freestanding and positioned on a movable platform, it may be moved closer to the congregation for certain orders of worship. The processional cross and candles are positioned to the side of the altar in such a way that liturgical action is not impeded.

The altar may be square or slightly rectangular, made of solid and beautiful materials. It may be embellished with art or vested with cloths usually in the seasonal color, and covered with the fair linen (Some include markings symbolizing the five wounds of Jesus.). It should not have a flimsy, cheap, or disposable appearance. If a table is used in rented space or a worship center, it ought to have sufficient height to resemble an altar and be covered with a white cloth.

If the mission congregation purchases an existing building, it may have to deal with the problem of a chancel area set off deeply from the people. In such cases a communion table may be set on a lower chancel platform and be used as a freestanding altar for the *Verba* and the distribution.

Discussion

- *How will we communicate to members the meaning of the altar?*
- *Will the altar be remote or close to the people so they can hear and see the liturgical action?*
- *Will we be comfortable with the concept of a freestanding altar?*
- *Who will design our altar and chancel furniture?*
- *Who will build it?*
- *How will the altar space serve during the festive meal of Holy Communion?*

C. Pulpit/ambo

In today's literature what we used to call *pulpit* is now called an *ambo*. This is the place for reading and preaching of the Word, the place from which the Word goes out to the congregation. It is usually positioned near the altar, to its side. It may be on its own little platform, but it should not overshadow or hide the altar.

The pastor reads the Lessons and preaches the gospel from the ambo. With the freedom brought by traveling microphones, many pastors wander from the ambo in order to communicate better or emphasize a point. It is distracting, however, to wander too far from the place of the Word or even out of sight of some of those gathered to hear the Word.

It is not necessary to have a special lectern for the reading of the Lessons. Many chancels did not have lecterns until the 1920s or later. The Lessons were read from the horns (sides) of the altar. Though not necessary, a simple and inconspicuous lectern may be supplied for a cantor, lead singer, or for the reading of the announcements.

Discussion

- *How will the design of the ambo stress the importance of the proclamation of the powerful Word?*
- *How will the pulpit/ambo be related to the altar in design? In size? In materials used?*
- *Where will it be placed? Will it hide the presider/pastor or have some openness in its design and entry?*

D. Railing

Recent designs emphasize communicants walking toward the front and around the platform on which the altar stands. The elements are then distributed to people as they move or stand. In such cases a communion rail is not needed. This permits easy access to the sacrament for the people, especially those for whom walking is difficult and steps are an impediment. If the plan calls for a railing, it should be designed with openness so as not to obstruct the view or sound.

Discussion

- *How large will our chancel platform be?*
- *How will its size serve for Holy Communion?*
- *How will people gather for Holy Communion?*
- *Is a railing necessary, or will the communicants receive the elements without kneeling? If this represents a change for us, how will we communicate this to the congregation?*
- *How will the chancel platform serve for marriages, funerals, concerts?*

E. Vesting area and related items (sacristy)

Although a vesting area for the clergy and a place to store vestments, paraments, banners, and sacramental ware may not be related to worship environment, planners should not overlook placement of this space in the overall design. It is uncomfortable and distracting for the pastor to have to don his gown in the hospitality room where it may also be stored. Overlooked items tend to crowd other spaces and add clutter.

Another item to consider is how and where the minister will enter the chancel for the beginning of worship. Will it be an awkward walk or one that displays grace and ease of movement?

Discussion

- *Where will the vesting area fit in relation to the wholeness of the design?*
- *How will the minister enter the chancel from the vesting area?*
- *Where will the minister(s) be seated in the chancel?*
- *Where will the vestments, paraments, banners, and sacramental ware be stored?*

F. Musical area

Positioning the music area for organist, keyboardist, instrumentalists, sound boards, and choirs requires much thought. In Lutheranism the musicians are not thought of in terms of performance or taking center stage. They regard themselves as assisting the congregation in its worship. If musicians are there to serve the liturgy, it is good to locate the musical area in the vicinity of the chancel to the side of the congregation. Another possibility and one that produces good sound is to station the music area in a balcony if the building is not long and narrow. Sometimes a balcony is called a choir loft or an organ gallery.

Lutheran musicians often ask at conferences how they can “hide” while serving the people in their liturgy. They see their primary task as service, not performance. They lead in song where it properly fits, sing *in alternatim* with the congregation, and do what the liturgy says. They can demonstrate the Psalm tone and lead the congregation in Psalm singing. Their objective is to go with the flow of the service and not get in the way through untimely movements or fighting with the architecture as they move.

Bold and vigorous rejoicing based on the resurrection and the Scriptures is the stroke of Lutheran music. It responds to Christ’s victory over sin and death. It includes the song of the royal priesthood, the people of God. Luther advocated the use of all kinds of instruments to join the people’s song.

Discussion

- *How will the music area be positioned so as to assist the saints in their worship?*

- *Who will make a study of Lutheran worship and recommend an organ and other instruments to lead in prayer and praise?*
- *If a balcony is included in the design, how will it be designed and engineered for a possible future installation of a pipe organ?*
- *What type of electronic equipment is needed? Where will it be placed?*

G. Seating for the congregation in the nave

Lutheran worship is participatory and responsorial. There is interaction between presider and people, musicians and people, people and people. The seating space should be designed that all can clearly see the liturgical action and have eye contact with the presider. At the same time, it is good for believers to be aware of each other's presence as the gathering of saints and to see each other as they say "We believe..." and as they sing in unison or *in alternatum* (back and forth, side to side).

Pews have been a part of church culture for many years. Some think that a building without pews is not a church. However, there are some **drawbacks** when stationery pews face the front of the chancel. They do not always serve well when mission congregations worship in small buildings. Pews allow for a type of crowding that may be uncomfortable to strangers. Pews limit flexibility in the use of valuable space. Pews, especially when padded, can interfere with acoustics and deaden the sound of singing. Pews, when placed together too closely (even one inch makes a difference), can interfere with ease of movement as people gather or leave.

Today many congregations opt to purchase attractive chairs for the seating of the gathered congregation. Chairs can be spaced properly for the spatial comfort of everyone, especially visitors. Chairs can be **rearranged** for different types of worship (weddings, funerals, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of Day, concerts, instrumental recitals). Chairs allow for **flexibility** in the use of the seating space (for Bible classes, Sunday school, VBS, seminars, and fellowship). Chairs can be stacked when the space is rearranged for other uses.

In planning the nave it is important to think in terms of **width** (50 feet minimum) rather than length. In long and narrow naves people rarely sit in the front. That is not the case in wide naves. The goal is to gather the people around the central focus (chancel) where the liturgical action will occur. Width also allows for the **slanting of chairs** to view the chancel comfortably, to see faces of the gathered congregation, and to hear other voices in congregational singing.

With flexible seating the congregation might experiment at times with arranging the chairs so that half of the congregation faces the other half. This would be fitting especially for Evening Prayer or Prayer at the Close of Day. These are services primarily

of Psalms and short prayers. Singing hymns or psalms *in alternatum* would be enhanced with this seating arrangement. The altar/ambo area would be at one side of the nave with the *Lucernarium* candle placed in the center floor between the two groups.

Width and the slanted arrangement of the chairs serves well for the worship and Bible study of small groups (Council, committees, women's group, youth group). This arrangement is also good for those who may wish to use the nave and chancel as a quiet place for personal prayer and meditation.

Discussion

- *How will the purposes of our worship life help us to decide on the shape and the size of the nave?*
- *What are all the potential uses for our nave area?*
- *How will we keep the integrity of the nave as a worship area even though we plan to have multiple uses for the space?*
- *What kind of seating will we install?*
- *At what angles will the seats be arranged so that worshipers can have a sense of presence with each other while having a clear view of the chancel?*
- *Will we be able to walk straight ahead into the seats? Or will we go in sideways and do a shuffle? How far apart will we set the rows for ease of movement?*

H. Screens or not?

Is the screen the stained-glass window of our age? Some think so. Some churches show images of historical and contemporary religious art which teach and tell the stories of our faith. Others project hymns on screens for ease of congregational singing. The varying backgrounds of people gathered in a congregation may suggest use of a screen. When weighing suggestions that call for major decisions, the planning committee might use a procedure suggested by Marva Dawn in her book, *A Royal "Waste" of Time* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999). In Chapter 25 she compiles lists of advantages and disadvantages for screen use. After compiling and reviewing such lists, it may be easier for a committee to come to conclusions. Screens, for instance, can stand in the way of architectural integrity and become aesthetic distractions that deflect the worshipers' focus on the altar, the cross, the symbols. Today, however, many are experimenting with screens for ease of singing and PowerPoint announcements or demonstrations for

information. Time will tell if this serves as an aid or a distraction to the meditative nature of the architecture. With careful thought and planning, a church might provide screens that do not interfere with the architectural integrity of a worship space where souls may soar in response to what God has done and still does in Christ.

Discussion

- *How will we come to consensus when there is a difference of opinion relative to design and what is to be included in our worship environment?*

I. Cry rooms

You might consider two types of rooms. One would be a place (without toys!) where parents can go for a time until the child settles down. Another would be a staffed nursery that may be especially beneficial to the seekers or those new in the faith (Some parents told me they would be willing to pay for this service.). It is good for these rooms to have visibility to the worship space and accommodations for sound and video to be brought in from the chancel. For some mission congregations a parents' room doubles as an area for Sunday school or a youth Bible class.

J. Space for contemplative worship

In recent years congregations have experimented with forms of contemplative worship (Taize type of contemplative repetition; Evening Prayer or Prayer at the Close of Day in different settings and locations, often with smaller groups). For some groups and ages, even young people, this is an emerging form of worship that is especially satisfying in evening hours. It calls for a space, often smaller, that exudes serenity and calm, that is darkened or dimmed or lighted only with candles, that has interludes for private meditation, that uses psalms and hymns and scriptures and repetitive responses.

What was said about the benefit of **flexible seating** with chairs under “Seating for the Congregation” (Point G) applies also in a discussion about space for contemplative worship. The refurbished chapel at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, for example, has flexible seating that allows for rearrangement of the worship area. With flexible seating you can arrange your chancel/nave in a way that serves contemplative worship.

If you have a youth ministry or other smaller groups that wish to utilize contemplative worship forms on a regular basis, you might design a **special room** for this (sized like a typical classroom—30' X 30') form of worship. The interior of the room would be bare, with details added by the groups using them (A good place for people interested in art to use their gifts!). Generally, there would be a cross on a stand in the center of the room. Seating would be in the form of a circle or oval spread out and around the cross. Or seating could be arranged with chairs set on either side of the cross and participants facing each other. Candlesticks could be placed at strategic spots around the circle or in the midst of the seats. This is a place for creative imaginations to work.

Some contemplative worship rooms have small booths and displays along the outer walls of the room. These displays can enhance the theme of the service or serve in a general way. For instance, there might be a display on “Jesus the Rock of our Salvation.” Another one might depict Jesus as the water of life. Another one might be a prayer place where slips for prayer requests or passages about prayer are placed. There may be a quiet time in this worship setting where people walk to these places and meditate. Or they might visit these setups prior to or immediately after worship or during the week if the contemplative worship room also serves as a place for meditation.

In contemplative worship the musicians or song leaders often are not up front. They station themselves to a side of the room or worshipers so that they themselves do not become the focal point.

Discussion

- *In our planning should we designate a room or area that can serve for contemplative worship?*
- *Will we have flexible seating in the nave so that we can rearrange an area in it to serve for contemplative worship?*
- *Who will lead the research for this form of worship?*

K. Car ports

This is a costly addition to a church building. Yet many feel a car port is essential. I have taken special note of car ports during the last two years and make the following observations:

- If they are built too high, they often interfere with the architectural integrity of the building and seem out of balance with it.
- If they are built too high, this defeats their purpose of keeping rain and snow off people as they head into church.
- If they are built so that the driveway is too close to the door, the driveway pattern can create blind spots and danger for children and pedestrians going in and out of the building.
- The best examples I have seen are car ports located to the side of a building at a secondary entrance. In this way the car port is available in case of inclement weather and the frontal focus of the building is not compromised.

VII. Acoustical Environment

Will singing be heard **from** and **by** the congregation? Will the reading and preaching be understandable? Will the sound for singing be dead or alive? These and similar questions will occupy the attention of the planning committee as it does its research.

In a very small space used by new mission groups this may not be a major concern or question. But it will be considered even before a contract is signed for the leasing of a worship space. As a group grows to the point of constructing its own building, questions of sound will come to the foreground once again. Worshipers in some congregations often complain that their group does not sing well or that the pastor does not preach loud enough. It may be that deadness of sound is not caused by poor singers but by poor acoustical design and materials that absorb sound.

Scott Riedel, Wauwatosa, WI, spoke on this subject at the National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts in 1999. He is the source of most of the information below.

A primary mode of communication in a worship environment is **hearing/sound**. Sound is cyclic motion/vibration made by a source. It travels in waves in a medium (air). It is perceived by a receiver (ear). Sound energy includes frequency (pitch), amplitude (intensity or loudness), wave length (size), and travel (speed). Sound reacts to environment through absorption (drapes, tile), reflection (concrete, marble), or transmission (through glass or speaker cloth).

A worshipful environment will be concerned about **sounds in worship**:

- Speech (sermon, lesson, prayer, liturgy)
- Music (choir, organ, soloists, instruments, hymns, psalms)
- Congregation (hymns, psalms, sung and spoken liturgy—sound **from** the congregation is often overlooked by sound engineers not accustomed to the dynamics of participatory worship—worshipers want to hear more than their own voices in congregational singing)

Acoustical requirements for worship include sound distribution to all locations, sound distribution from all locations, and accommodation of music and speech for clarity and intelligibility.

Architectural elements affect acoustics (size of room—adequate cubic air space), shape of the room (oblong, shoe box, square, round, fan), and location of elements (speaker, congregation, choir, microphone and speaker placement). Low ceilings and domes have not been good for excellent sound requirements.

Below is a sample list which states the **percent of sound energy absorbed** by materials and objects (per square foot of material @ 500 Hz). This will be beneficial to a

committee that takes into consideration the environment of sound for worship and suggests materials to be used.

- Unglazed brick 3%
- Glazed brick 2%
- Unpainted concrete block 31%
- Painted concrete block 6%
- Drywall 5%
- Marble 1%
- Plaster 3%
- Plywood panel 17%
- Plate glass 4%
- **Drapery 55%**
- **Acoustical tile 70%**
- Terrazzo 1%
- Glazed tile 1%
- **Carpeting 60%**
- **Occupied wood pew 75%**

Mr. Riedel encourages **no carpet under the pews** because it kills hymn singing at its source. He also advises no carpet in open spaces like the chancel floor. Finally, he states that loud speakers should not feed the back walls.

A consultation with a sound engineer is money well spent to provide sound advice for creating pleasing and uplifting sound in your worship environment. If your congregation does not “sing well,” it may not be the fault of the singers but of the acoustical design. A sound engineer may also help you avoid a worship environment that is too lively, that creates too much of an echo so that it interferes with speech and song. Ceiling height, wall materials, length, and width of the nave all affect this. Factors for good sound in a church need to be built into the design from the beginning. Money can be wasted on an inadequate sound system. It is cheaper and better to do it right the first time. Good acoustics rarely happen by accident.

VIII. Lighting Environment

Jesus is the Light of the world in a spiritual and significant way for believers. The worship center is a place where the people of God rejoice in the Light of the world and look up to him in faith. Light streaming through glass reminds us of God’s generosity as Creator and of Christ our Light. The lighting in the worship center will help the worshiper see the symbols and liturgical action which portray Christ as the Light of the world.

Visibility is important to the worshiper. **Window placement** and **natural lighting** for focal areas of the nave, chancel, and hospitality space contribute to what the worshiper sees. The way light will reflect on a building and enter a building naturally is a point for consideration early in the planning process and even in the master site plan. This may even determine how a building is set on a property.

Discussion

- *Will the natural light entering the building cause glare or squinting?*
- *Will the light be directed toward the focal points or the gathered people?*
- *What type of glass will be used so that harsh light may be diffused?*
- *How will light enter in the morning?*
- *How will light enter for late afternoon or early evening worship?*

Interior lighting also requires planning for the needs of worshipers. Many types of fixtures, lamps, and bulbs are available in our day in which lighting technology has made big strides. When choosing lighting devices, avoid types of that produce a buzzing sound which may become an impediment to hearing and a meditative environment. The expertise of a lighting consultant should be sought

Discussion

- *What type of fixtures will be purchased (ceiling lights, spotlights, hanging fixtures)? Who will lead this study?*
- *Will the lighting in the nave be adequate for reading?*
- *How will the lighting plan apply to evening worship (Christmas Eve, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of Day)?*
- *If the nave is to have multiple uses, how will the lighting work for small groups, Bible classes, etc.*

IX. Visual Arts

A. Introduction to Beauty

“**Beauty** is the portal to transcendence—it calls us to God” (Edward Sovik, *Environment for Sight, Sound and Action*, p. 276). David desired to dwell in the house of the Lord “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm

27:4). He also encouraged worship this way, “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” (Psalm 29:2). In the Old Testament the worship of God was set in a lavish and artistic setting (Tabernacle, Temple). The priestly robes of Aaron and his clan were made “for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:2 RSV). In the New Testament we see Jesus accepting a gift of expensive perfume (Mark 14:3-9). And St. Paul advances a principle for worship aesthetics: “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:39).

In our worship space God is present in Word and Sacrament. This alone is reason for beauty! Religious art is a way to reflect God’s glory and to glorify him.

A rather plain space may become beautiful for welcome and worship through the judicious placement of beautiful items. On the other hand, a very beautifully designed structure may become architecturally displeasing because there was no planning for the inclusion of art or too many items were scattered everywhere to create the distractions.

Simplicity of surroundings accentuates liturgical action. Simplicity places the central focus on Word, Baptism and Holy Communion. “Noble simplicity involves a kind of understated elegance appropriate to the divine-human encounter which happens in liturgy.... A sense of restraint should keep us from cluttering those areas with too many secondary symbols that confuse and overcharge the primary meanings. There is great beauty in the fabric and texture and color of natural materials, and deep meaning in water and bread, when worshipers are not distracted by too much decoration.... Paraments, vestments, and furnishings need not always be decorated with symbols (and even less with words), for these things themselves are symbols! Cross, torches, and paschal candle certainly have appropriate functions in our liturgical spaces” (Walter Huffman and S. Anita Stauffer. *Where We Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987. P. 37).

B. Donations?

This is not intended to sound snooty or elitist. But it must be said. Often well-intended and motivated individuals or congregations donate used and castoff items as gifts to another congregation or a mission congregation. This can be a valuable resource for a congregation eager to save dollars. But this can also become an impediment to the wholesome design and beauty of the worship environment. In many instances used chancel furniture and pews do not fit the architectural design of the new building and draw attention to themselves rather than to the wholeness and focus of the project. Altar paraments or banners may be faded, old, or worn, and do not fit the design of the altar or pulpit. Gifts should not be forced into a design or a building. They should not jeopardize the integrity of the design.

It is good to have an established approach for this. The congregation may first plan its building and then make a list of items designed for that building. People may

wish to give toward specific items. Other furnishings and artwork will be received only if they fit into the approved master plan.

In many congregations no funds are set aside for works of art to enhance the appearance of the building project. These may come at a later date. Or unspecified funds from friends of the congregation might be used for art and beauty.

Discussion

- *What policy will we establish early in the project toward the reception of gifts of art and furniture?*
- *How will this policy be carefully and evangelically communicated?*

C. Items for Use, Meaning, and Beauty in the Worship Environment

A committee should study books with abundant and useful information on the items listed below and others available. It may develop a definite plan of what will go into the building to serve and enhance the worship environment. This list is not exhaustive. Nor does the listing imply that all of these items are necessary.

- **Crucifix** (central focus, processions) If a crucifix is used in a procession (See *Christian Worship: Altar Book*), a floor stand will have to be provided. (*A word of caution: too many crosses or other symbols of one kind deflect from the meaning of the symbol.*)
- **Books**—for altar, ambo
- **Paraments and tapestries**—with liturgical colors and art work relating to the Gospel in the regular rhythm of the Church Year
- **Vestments for the clergy**—*Christian Worship: Handbook*
- **Torches**—candles fitted to a staff that may be carried in processions
- **Candlesticks and candles**—floor-standing preferred so they can be arranged differently from time to time to suit the worship; visible without impeding the sight or action around the altar, ambo, font, or chair
- **Paschal Candle**—large; occupies a central location near the Gospel side of the altar during the Easter season as a symbol of the presence of the risen Savior; placed and used at the baptismal font and at funerals thereafter as a

sign of dying and rising with Christ (See *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*).

- **Advent Wreath**—fitting for preparatory worshipful environment in the Advent Season of preparedness
- **Symbols**—at various places; not too many to confuse the focus. Whatever symbols are used, they should be explained to the congregation members who can in turn explain them to guests and visitors.
- **Vessels**—for bread and wine; can be engraved or specially designed to reflect the meaning of the Sacrament (various medals, pottery)
- **Stained glass**—ageless and filled with splendor for worship centers; also appropriate for a hospitality room (stained glass window depicting joined hands and a loaf of bread)
- **Banners**—different types of materials and styles used and quality of workmanship are evident as the years pass. Banners can announce a celebration, evoke joy and anticipation, or they can invite silence and contemplation. Some cautions: Too many of them with too much verbiage and with too little quality hung on too many walls draw attention away from the focal points and stands in the way of a worshipful environment. Better to use quality design and materials and fabricate a large banner or two to be hung at high places that elevate thoughts. A banner or two of quality design and materials hanging from the hospitality area's ceiling may be related in design to a larger banner or two visible upon entry to the nave. Know the place for which you are designing the banner. Which areas need attention? Banners and flags in the parking lot? Why not! Some helpful resources are included in the bibliography.
- **Religious art**—useful for a worshipful environment; art from the past as part of our common Christian heritage; art and photography from the present to evoke worship themes and the wonders of creation. Religious art should display a balance of truth (Biblical and hymnic texts), beauty (worship area), and goodness (hospitable attitude of the people). Art helps us remember what God has done and who we are in Christ.
- **Sculpture**—depicting Christian truths and life; stone, bronze, wood
- **Flags**—were not a part of sanctuaries until the World Wars when German congregations in the States wished to display their loyalty. Most resources say that national flags, denominational flags, or the Christian flag should not be placed in the vicinity of the altar, ambo, and font which point to Christ. They are not on the same level as the Means of Grace and do not assist in

establishing a worshipful environment. If desired, flags may be placed in the hospitality area, library, or in the courtyard.

- **Flowers and plants**—color from God’s creation; may design special places for them, not on altar proper; useful also in the welcome center where people can observe the intricacies and profound patterns of God’s creation
- **Trees**—reflection of Eden, Calvary’s cross, and the Tree of Life in heaven (Revelation 22:2,14,19); “And all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).
- **Water**—“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).
- **Church signs**—Vertical to the road to be seen from both directions; only basic information in large print—name of church, logo, time of service, possibly the Web site address; neat, striking, noticeable. Some have large signs with moving messages and special information.

The list above may be expanded. It describes items that could become part of the wholeness of the worship environment. In general, the items listed create an atmosphere or a mood rather than deliver a verbal message.

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*“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’
Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes,
let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).*

+ + +

Presentation by
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(This is an update of my presentation at WELS Home Missions’ “Mobilizing Missions for Millennial Three” Conference in Chicago on July 24-27, 2000. A second update was prepared for WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts at Carthage College, Kenosha, WI, July 21-24, 2002. The present updates are from reading, Internet searches, and especially from observations of completed and ongoing building projects. My prayer is that this will assist congregations in their approach to designing worshipful environments for the glory of God and the forward march of the gospel of Jesus. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions. WIS)

The mission statement of our new church

This church building is to be a declaration of faith by the members of Resurrection Lutheran Church (*Resurrection* is the source of all our hope; *Lutheran* is the public confession on which we stand; *Church* is God's gathering of his holy people around his Word and sacraments). This building is an affirmation in wood and stone, steel and glass, of our steadfast resolve to believe, teach, and confess the saving truth of the Bible and Lutheran Confessions. Therefore we as a body of believers resolve:

To design a sanctuary by which we offer our best to God in displaying our Lutheran heritage by its appearance and architecture and sharing with all people the biblical truths on which our Christian faith, life, and hope are based.

This resolution is to guide us in the entire planning and construction process so that we build a beautiful and deliberately Lutheran Church. May our merciful God bless the house we build, to his glory, so that long after we are gone, our children's children may here encounter the Lord who graciously comes to his people in Word and sacrament.

Sample from Resurrection Lutheran Church, Verona, Wisconsin

Additional Resources

Baumler, Gary, and Moldenhauer, Kermit, editors. *Christian Worship: Manual*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993 (especially pages 67-104, compiled by James Tiefel)

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Bowman, Ray, and Hall, Eddy. *When Not to Build: An Architect's Unconventional Wisdom for the Growing Church*. Baker Book House. 1992

Huffman, Walter and Stauffer, S. Anita. *Where We Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg. 1987

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Caemmerer, Richard, Jr. *Visual Art in the Life of the Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg. 1983

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Morseth, Ellen. *Ritual and the Arts in Spiritual Discernment*. LaVergne, TN: Worshipful-Work. 1999

Dvorak, Todd. *Built Theology: How to Build a New Church or Renew an Existing Church*. Presented at Southeastern Wisconsin District Worship Conference, July 8, 2000. (Todd Dvorak is an architect with Parnassus Architecture-Engineering-Interior Design, Two Rivers, WI.)

Pope, Nathan. *Art and Worship—What Is Appropriate, Edifying, and Beautiful*. Presented at Southeastern Wisconsin District Worship Conference, July 8, 2000.

Pfatteicher, Philip. *Dictionary of Liturgical Terms*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International. 1991

Jay Poppe—WELS artist in the Atlanta area, specializing in large chancel banners.
Email: JayAPoppe@aol.com

Begotten...not Made, Creating Worship Space Together. Seminar by Callahan Studios (December 2001). A process of Synchronized Symmetry: Liturgical Design, Architectural Design, Construction Management, Stewardship Resources. www.callahanstudios.com 800-737-1570 or 317-585-0730

Beyond Banners—a presentation by Peter Schaeewe, staff minister St. John, Jefferson, WI

Theology and Doxology Symbolized—by Pastor Bryan Gerlach, WELS Worship Administrator. This presentation includes a teaching outline, a CD, PowerPoint photos, and a crash course on church architecture by Greg Otterstatter.

WELS Worship Web site: www.wels.net/worship

Building a New Church: Process, Consensus, Results—by Pastor Brent Brutlag, Traverse City, MI

Crosbie, Michael. *Architecture for the Gods*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications. 2000. Great photos.

Marty, Martin and Micah. *Our Hope for Years to Come*. Minneapolis:Augsburg. 1995. Reflections and photographs on the search for spiritual sanctuary—Gothic Architecture emphasis.

Acoustics and Sound Systems in the Contemporary Church—by Jim Brown, Audio Systems Group, Inc., Chicago, Illinois. (found on Web)

The Secret of Architectural Acoustics Revealed—Orpheus Acoustics, Lancaster, PA. www.orpheus-acoustics.com/silence.asp

Myers, Joseph R. *The Search to Belong*. Grand Rapids:Zondervan. 2003. Interesting observations on the four spaces (public, social, personal, intimate) as these relate to space requirements especially in the welcome area of a church building.