

GUIDELINES FOR

# BUILDING AND REMODELING CHURCHES OR CHAPELS

IN THE DIOCESE OF WINONA

*You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2: 19:22)*

**STEP ONE**

**STUDY  
AND PREPARE**

The process of building or renovating a church is an important component of the experience because **the process engages people in relationships** that will require charity, love, compassion, understanding, and care. The pastor or parish leader acts as a guide for parishioners in the process and reminds them always to treat one another with the same dignity and respect as they would Christ himself. (Acts 3: 42-47). Our Christian behavior evangelizes our youth, our children, and our neighbors.

Parishioners inherit common property (the church). They responsibly care for it for their sake, their children's sake, and that of their children's children. A building or renovation project can be a powerful experience for the whole parish. The health of parish relationships in the process can be more important, at times, than the finished project. The project is the task. **The process is an evangelizing event** both for the parish and the township. A leader will be mindful of the way the local township or city

dwellers experience the Catholic community through this process of building and renovating.

Every action of the universal and local Catholic Church begins with **principles** to guide ministry. In renovating or building a church, we begin with Christ and the People of God, the assembly, who are the Body of Christ for the world. We must be fully aware of who we are, that is, the Church, the baptized, the initiated, the assembly of believers.

The **assembly of believers is one of many symbols** in the liturgy since, "Christ is really present in the very assembly gathered in his name . . ." (GIRM 2000, #27 and BLS, #22). "(Moreover) the celebration of the Eucharist, like the entire Liturgy, is carried out through outward signs that nurture, strengthen, and express faith. Thus, the utmost care must be taken to choose and arrange those forms and elements provided by the Church that, in view of the circumstances of the people and the place, will more effectively **foster active and full participation** and more properly serve the spiritual well-being of the faithful." (GIRM 2000, #20)

**"Christ is really present in the very assembly gathered in his name . . ."**  
GIRM #27

The assembly of believers need room to process, to stand, to sit, to sing, and to gesture. Through these movements, the Church actively prays. Our Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops have told us that the “full and active participation by all the people is the goal to be considered

**“Full and active participation by all the people is the goal to be considered before all else.”** (CSL, #14)

**before all else** (because) it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit . . .” (CSL, #14)

The church building is to be a shelter or a kind of skin for the Church who gathers to proclaim the word of God and to celebrate the sacraments. “Every church building is a gathering place for the assembly, a resting place, a place of encounter with God, as well as a point of departure on the Church’s unfinished journey in the reign of God.” (BLS #17)

A church building must exude quality and appropriateness for the liturgy. The building must be of **quality materials with quality art** and it must be appropriately designed for the liturgy. ( See, BLS, #147,148)

**Furnishings** in the worship space should be arranged to help the assembly be active participants. Our Catholic documents speak about the ways Catholics are nourished at the twin tables of Word and Eucharist. The altar and ambo can be placed on equal axis. The **ambo** can also be placed at one side and projected a little ahead of the altar. A display shelf for the Book of Gospels is recommended for its placement after proclamation. The **altar** may be designed as a table for the Lord’s supper. It is best to place the **presider’s chair** in front of the assembly, facing the assembly and not in front of the tabernacle. The parish can locate the **tabernacle** in an obvious place of reservation where Catholics may go to pray when the church is locked.

Thoughtful placement of altar, ambo, presider’s chair and Eucharistic chapel can promote understanding of the many ways Christ is present. “In the liturgical assembly, Christ’s presence is realized in all the baptized who gather in his name, in the word of God proclaimed in the assembly, in the person of the priest through whom Christ offers himself to the Father and gathers the assembly, in sacramental celebrations, and especially, in the sacrament of his Body and Blood.” (BLS #22 see also #27, GIRM2000)

The pastor and committee members pay careful attention to the **balance of acoustics for the sung liturgy** in the Catholic church. Acoustical design should promote full and active participation of the assembly in the celebration of the liturgy. The building needs some reverberation for the assembly’s effective and supportive singing of the liturgy. The people are the primary choir in the sung liturgy. If amplification is necessary in a worship environment, the committee consults with experts who must understand the demands of a sung liturgy. Their advice should be **sought when the church is full of the singing assembly**. A mixture of flooring materials can help to achieve the needed balance of acoustics. No matter the size of the church, there should be a balance of hard surfaced flooring, wall surfaces and minimal carpeting or soft tiling.

The **ministers of music**, musicians (choirs), organist, pianist, and other musical instruments, are an extension of the singing assembly. They should be **placed so they are visible to the assembly**. The people should be able to clearly see the cantor. Each musician needs to have enough room to move, to place books and music, and to set down substantially sized musical instruments. A good architect will design a music space that can be flexible for a mixed choir, a folk ensemble, or simply a cantor. Plan for music storage, instrument storage, and discreet places for microphones and cords during the liturgy.

A **gathering space** for the community provides the opportunity for hospitality and creates a sense of

belonging for all who assemble for worship. The size of the gathering area should be ample. Some have suggested that the gathering area be at least one-third the area of the worship space.

The **shape of the worship space** reveals to the active participant what is required of the baptized in expressing faith. Construction or liturgical renovation should reflect the requirements of liturgical celebrations as outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Sacramental spirituality today requires all people to be involved in the action of sacramental celebrations. The spirituality of the worship area needs to be expressed in an atmosphere that is aesthetically appropriate for the active participation of many people.

Liturgical **renovation must respect** the best qualities of the **original structure**, today's requirements of worship, and the needs of the worshipping community of the future. Therefore, construction or liturgical renovation should create a unified space around the twin tables of Word and Sacrament with the acting assembly as the focal point.

**“the font . . . should have living waters and be ample enough to allow for the pouring of water over an adult.”**

*(Shaping a House for the Church)*

The **baptismal font** with its flowing water is one of the main symbols in our worship space. We now think of the baptismal font not as a piece of furniture but as **a place we call the baptistry**. Therefore, the font has a permanent place in the church and is

not moveable. It should be designed to **accommodate both infants and adults**. The location of the baptistry would preferably be in the center of the worshipping assembly closer to the entry area so the baptized will walk by it regularly and bless themselves. Setting it on an axis with the altar projects the prominence of the font as a visual reminder of the beginning of our life and ministry through Baptism to the nourishment of the Eucharist.

*(BLS, #68,5)* Our common ministry flows from the font to the table. “The water used in baptism should be true water and, both for the sake of authentic sacramental symbolism and for hygienic reasons, should be pure and clean. If the climate requires, provision should be made for the water to be heated. . . .” *(RCIA, #18, 20)* To be formative for the life of the community, “the font . . . **should have living waters** (not still water) and be ample enough to allow for the pouring of water over an adult.” *(Shaping a House for the Church, Marchita Mauch. Chicago: LTP, 1990)*. There should be enough space around the baptistry for the presider, two parents, two adult sponsors and the candidate to move freely. The people should be able to gather around it or participate actively in the baptism liturgy from their places.

The committee should also consider the special needs of those to be baptized. The **dismissal of catechumens** from the Liturgy of the Word requires a **space** to which the group may go for liturgical catechesis. The committee will need to plan a space near the worship space for the catechumens.

Our bishops have also reminded us that, “With the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that culminates in baptism at the Easter Vigil, churches need **private spaces where the newly baptized can go immediately after their baptism to be clothed** in their white garments and to prepare for the completion of initiation in the Eucharist.” *(BLS, #69, 6)*

Special consideration should be given to the arrangement and design of the room or chapel for the celebration of the Sacrament of **Reconciliation**. A special relationship to the baptismal font can help the penitent celebrate the connection between cleansing waters of baptism and the restoration of reconciliation to the community of the baptized.

While the major space of a church is **designed for the action of the eucharistic celebration**, the church has had an ancient tradition of reserving the eucharistic bread. If the **tabernacle** is placed near

the sanctuary, it should not compete with the twin tables of altar and ambo as the main focus of attention. In our document, *Built of Living Stones*, the Bishops say that, "a balance must be sought so that the placement of the tabernacle does not draw the attention of the faithful away from the Eucharistic celebration." (BLS, #250). It says that, "In renovating a church designed in another time period, a parish has an opportunity to consider other locations for the tabernacle. . . the place for Eucharistic reservation and its furnishing should never be temporary, makeshift, or difficult to find." (BLS, #249) Consequently, plan to **locate the tabernacle** in a place where a person will be able to locate it easily and enter a space near it for private prayer. (Cf. GIRM2000, #314-317)

Options for **assembly seating** should include pews with kneelers, chairs with kneelers, or a combination of each. Aisles should be ample to facilitate the movement of people in the entrance procession, procession of gifts, the communion procession, and other processions (funerals, confirmation, marriage, etc.).

The **altar** "should be built freestanding to allow the ministers to walk around it easily and Mass to be celebrated facing the people. . ." (GIRM2000, #299) It is most often made of stone and in some cases, wood. It should resemble a table upon which we celebrate the Lord's Supper. The **ambo**, a place of dignity for the proclamation of the Word, "should be a stationary ambo and not simply a movable lectern." (GIRM2000, #309) There should be enough space around it "to allow a gospel procession with a full complement of ministers bearing candles and incense." (BLS, #61)

The sanctuary should be barrier-free and completely accessible to physically challenged people. Both the altar and ambo should be accessible as should the gathering space and the church space. The church should offer more than one barrier-free option for seating to the physically challenged. The entire church building and extended rooms should be accessible to physically challenged persons.

Marion devotions enrich the spiritual life of the community. Pondering the ministry of Mary in our

tradition before a fine work of art can inspire prayer. The committee should work with a well trained liturgical artist to commission a fitting work for the parish. (BLS, #151 and #153) If the parish is in need of additional work representing a patron saint or other saints, the liturgical consultant can assist the committee with the appropriate design and placement of other devotional art. (See, BLS, #157, 159, and 160).

## STEP TWO

# PROCEDURES

1. **NOTIFY THE DIOCESE** when renovation involves significant redecoration or renovation to the worship space, especially the sanctuary. Please call or email the Office of Liturgy and the Office of Finance when entering into a contract or when a liturgical renovation project is expected to exceed \$10,000.
2. **CONTACT THE OFFICE OF STEWARDSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT.** The director will review with the Finance Council and pastor the current stewardship in the parish along with an analysis of giving patterns. The director will also help the group to apply fund raising principles to assist parish leaders with predictions of a successful fund raising campaign.
3. **SELECT A PARISH BUILDING OR RENOVATION COMMITTEE** comprised of the pastor and other persons who best represent the assembly's interests. This committee is accountable to the pastor and the parish pastoral and finance councils. The committee will select a chair and record keeper.
4. **TEACH THE COMMITTEE HOW TO OPERATE WITH THE CONSENSUS MODEL.** The community's adoption of any plan for building

or renovation is based on consensus of the building or renovation committee. (Decisions are not put up for a vote.) If such consensus is impossible, it falls to the pastor, in consultation with the parish pastoral and finance councils, to recommend how the project will proceed.

5. **THE PASTOR WITH THE COMMITTEE CHAIR SENDS A LETTER OF NOTIFICATION TO THE BISHOP BEFORE hiring a liturgical consultant** informing the bishop that the parish is considering either the building or renovation of its liturgical space.
6. **INTERVIEW LITURGICAL CONSULTANTS AND CHOOSE** one before considering the architect. The consultant will assist the committee through the steps. The Liturgy Office has a list of recommended trained consultants.
7. The chairperson contacts the Office of Liturgy for a **LIST OF READING MATERIALS** for the committee and the pastor to study as a group. The committee must know well, the content of the Bishops' documents, *Built of Living Stones* and *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. These documents give direction as to how to proceed with the project. The committee will **study these materials** so they can outline the values of the Church the parish will use for liturgical worship spaces in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.
8. The committee members **MEET WITH OTHER PARISH COMMITTEES**, the parish pastoral council, the liturgy committee, the finance committee, and other standing committees **TO EDUCATE** members of the contents of the above documents and these guidelines. Share insights gained from the study of present and future needs of the community and inform parish committee members about the initial plans for the project.
9. The committee, with the help of the liturgical consultant, outlines a plan with a time line to **INFORM AND EDUCATE THE ENTIRE PARISH** about the liturgical principles in *Built of Living Stones* and *Environment and Art in Catholic*

*Worship*. In these sessions with the assembly, the committee discusses the present and future needs of the worshiping space and uses quotes from the documents to support their work. In the parish bulletin, report the committee's consensus decisions on the project to keep parishioners informed.

10. **CONTACT THE OFFICE OF LITURGY FOR A LIST OF RECOMMENDED ARCHITECTS** who are knowledgeable about the work of the documents of the Second Vatican Council: the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, and *Built of Living Stones*. The Liturgical Consultant can also assist the committee with this task.
11. The liturgical consultant helps the committee to **INVITE AT LEAST THREE ARCHITECTS TO INTERVIEW** for the project. The committee chooses an architect. That architect meets with the building or renovation committee to hear the perceived needs of the community and its history, culture and traditions.
12. **ENGAGE THE ARCHITECT** to make a complete study of the building site or existing structure, develop a proposal and present it to the committee.
13. The pastor, the renovating or building committee, finance committee, and the parish council continue their consultation with the Office of Stewardship and Development. For building a new church building, the diocese recommends that the committee engage the parish in a **FEASIBILITY STUDY** to research the potential of donors in the parish. This study helps the committee to establish the actual financial capabilities the parish has for the project. The Office of Stewardship can help with detailed information.
14. After working with the liturgical consultant and architect, the committee contacts the Liturgy Office to make **THE FIRST**

**PRESENTATION TO THE COLLEGE OF CONSULTORS** and the Bishop. This presentation includes the parish master plan, vision or needs statement, a time line for the projected completion of the project and the funding plans. The office of liturgy will inform the appropriate diocesan bodies of the project.

### STEP THREE

## BEFORE GROUND BREAKING

**PRESENTATION TO THE PARISH:** The committee oversees the parish's opportunity to reflect upon the proposal, respond to it, discuss it, pray about it, and arrive at a consensus. After consensus has been reached, the committee draws up a detailed written description of the project, including an estimate of its cost and financing, which it presents to the parish pastoral and finance councils.

**FINAL DRAWINGS:** The architect, in collaboration with the liturgical consultant, completes final drawings.

**SECOND PRESENTATION TO THE COLLEGE OF CONSULTORS AND THE BISHOP:** Representatives of the committee present the final drawings together with the written description of the project and the financing plan to the College of Consultors and the Bishop for approval.

**CONTRACTORS:** After the bishop and the diocesan bodies have approved the plan, request bids from the contractors. In accord with the diocesan guidelines for parish finance councils, all acts of extraordinary importance, that is, acts of \$10,000 or more or requests for a loan, are to have the **proxies** of the bishop and vicar general. When the parish receives this required approval from the bishop, contracts are awarded and construction begins. Any contracts

executed without proper authorizations and signatures will be considered civilly invalid.

**CONSIDERATIONS:** Parishes follow state and federal laws regarding asbestos removal in worship space interiors (and for any public space) as the liturgical renovation process proceeds. As an act of justice, the design should include access for the handicapped to the ambo and choir/cantor areas.

### STEP FOUR

## GROUND BREAKING

When the community is ready for ground-breaking, contact the Office of Liturgy for the appropriate **liturgical rite** to mark the ceremony. The pastor should arrange a time with the Bishop to celebrate the Rite of Dedication of a New Church in the parish.

The parish community, the planning committee, the liturgical consultant and architect, and the diocese are united in the process of building or renovating a "house for the Church" which stands as a witness to the worship of God and to the service of humankind.

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## CLARIFICATIONS AND TERMS

**College of Consultors.** The code of Canon law calls for a college of consultors in each diocese. This is a group of priests from the presbyterate council who are appointed by the Bishop to serve as counselors to the Bishop. Our bishop has asked this group to advise him on a number of important issues including renovation and building projects in the diocese. The group, consisting of the Bishop, Vicar General, and pastors, also consult with the directors of the offices of Liturgy and Finance. The College of Consultors reviews renovation and building projects in the diocese and the attention given to liturgical, pastoral, and financial responsibilities.

**Consensus** is not a vote by the committee, parish pastoral council or parish at large. It is rather an affirmation by the parish as to which decision or plan each member, representing the parish, can work with and live with. Consensus to an idea or plan means all members will support the idea or plan publically even though an individual may not necessarily agree totally with all parts.

**Parish assessment.** It is diocesan policy that each parish is assessed 6% on all parish income for diocesan expenses. An exception of this policy is granted for money collected in a parish specifically for projects determined to be liturgical renovation or additions to the worship space, but only with the explicit approval of the bishop. Without this approval, the assessment formula remains the same.

According to diocesan financial policy, the pastor must request a **proxy** from the diocese each time he makes a purchase of \$10,000.00 or more. When expenditures exceed \$100,000.00 or more, the pastor must present the project to the College of Consultors.

**An oratory** is a church building which does not have parish status but may be used for weddings, funerals, private prayer and Masses on feast days proper to the oratory. Upkeep of an oratory which exceeds \$5,000 requires diocesan approval.