

Building on Faith: *Design for congregations' growing needs*

As today's congregations come together in search of spiritual growth, many also face the need to accommodate growth in physical terms — expanding their places of worship both in size and scope.

In response, architects are being challenged to meet this array of new requirements, while retaining the essential spirit of the faith.

For instance, the trend toward larger congregations — some with literally thousands of members — calls for spaces that accommodate the multitudes, without leaving individuals feeling lost.

A dramatic expansion in the range of worship styles that may be used under a single roof — from traditional services to contemporary formats incorporating video,

John Turolog



Designed as an octagon, the sanctuary at Saint Ambrose of Woodbury Catholic Church seats 1,500 people, with individuals no more than 57 feet from the altar, promoting a feeling of participation.

theater and dance — requires considerable flexibility in design. And the growing use of technology means adapting worship spaces for sophisticated sound and lighting systems.

Some congregations have gone as far as expanding their sense of mission, redefining what they are and whom they serve. Their vision may include such amenities

as daycare facilities, coffee shops, housing and bookstores.

While it may seem like *more* and *bigger* rule the day, for some congregations the pendulum is swinging the other way. Embracing the architectural traditions of their faith, they are asking for places of worship with a sense of intimacy and connection to the past.



John Turolog

Like the church building, the baptismal font at Saint Ambrose of Woodbury has eight sides.

Renewing the spirit of tradition

While the venerable parish of St. Ambrose in St. Paul's Railroad Island neighborhood had dwindled steadily over the years, nearby Woodbury was booming with young families ready to fill the pews. At the pastor's suggestion, the parish was closed and the Saint Ambrose name was transferred to a new parish in Woodbury.



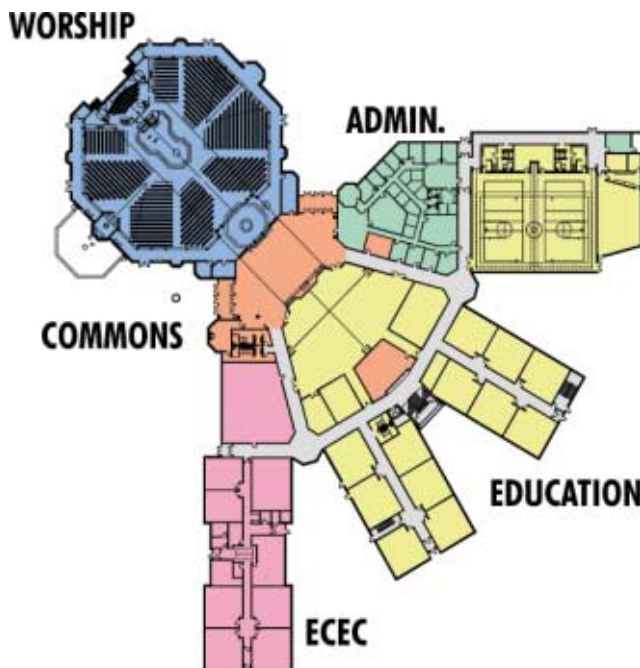
John Turoling

Stained glass windows depicting Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine integrate the tradition of the old church into a new contemporary style.

Built on an 80-acre site, the new Saint Ambrose of Woodbury reflects a youthful, forward-looking spirit, while retaining a sense of connection to the old parish. Stained glass windows from the old St. Ambrose were installed in the new church, alongside newly commissioned ones that provide a transition to a more contemporary style. Fresh interpretations of traditional Catholic symbolism, such as a blue ceiling signifying Heaven, enrich the interior.

An early childhood education center and K-8 school connect visually to the church. Standing in the school hallway, students see straight into the sanctuary, a reminder that their daily lives are grounded in the life of the spirit. With reverence for the past and faith in the future, Saint Ambrose of Woodbury once again embodies the spirit of a thriving parish.

The Saint Ambrose floor plan shows the commons area, the main gathering area of the church; the worship space, with seating for 1,500 people; an administrative area; a K-8 school, with room for 355 children; and an early childhood education center for 200 children.



MAKING IT FEEL LIKE WORSHIP

Stained glass. Sculpture. Steeples and bell towers. When asked how elements of religious architecture today differs from those of the past, one veteran designer says that things haven't really changed much. "It's still about manipulating light, form and color to evoke an atmosphere of worship." How do these elements come together to create something that looks like a place for prayer and praise?

LIGHT: Flooding a sanctuary, filtered through colored glass, flickering in candle-lit chapels, light evokes spirituality. But where video, projection and theater are frequently used in worship, it has to be limited and controlled for functional reasons.

FORM: Many congregations find spiritual resonance in building layouts and materials rooted in traditions of their faith. Others are far more concerned with practical considerations, such as economy and flexibility in their worship spaces.

COLOR: Traditional religious symbolism sometimes guides color choices, particularly among orthodox faiths. Other congregations are more likely to choose colors for cultural, emotional or functional reasons.

A new path for seekers

Modeled after the Christian communities of the first century, where worship took place wherever people happened to gather, Shepherd of the Lake Lutheran Church in Prior Lake is building a faith community called Shepherd's Path.



With its clustered, residential character, the Shepherd's Path facility fosters a sense of community.



Site plan for Shepherd's Path

Plans for this faith community, which begins construction next spring, include a

variety of gathering places — bookstore, health clinic, daycare and preschool, education and administration spaces, housing and conference center — on a 60-acre site.

The design of the park-like “celebration center” uses trees, rocks, water, and expansive views to evoke a sense of the holiness in all creation. Subtle images of the cross will appear through cracks and fissures in a large rock wall.



The 20,000 s.f. Celebration Center is the signature component for Shepherd's Path. It is the center of all activity, the place where "all paths meet." Seating 1,000, the facility provides space for all types of worship, concerts, and lectures.



Remodeling goals at Prince of Peace focused on increasing the feeling of "permanence" in the worship space, establishing a fixed location for the chancel and music areas, enhancing members' feelings of inclusion, and supporting their active, varied and dynamic music program.

Changing toward permanence

Designed for maximum flexibility with numerous movable platforms and partitions, the worship space at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church had begun to feel too temporary. The Burnsville congregation still wanted flexibility for its varied, lively programming, but with a greater sense of permanence in the space.

By removing partitions and a suspended ceiling, the sanctuary was opened up, revealing the building's true structure and scale. The new chancel area, illuminated by a skylight, is permanent — but can be reconfigured for different worship service styles and performances. Expanded technological capacity allows the church to make full use of its new video, sound and stage lighting systems.

Faith, fellowship, and fiscal responsibility

What sets religious architecture apart from any other kind of building design?

For most commercial projects, architects work with corporate heads or building managers — people whose interest is more professional than personal. With a church, temple or mosque, it's a volunteer committee, passionately dedicated to enhancing their relationships with one another and with God, in the process of shaping their place of worship.

This is the place where people gather to sanctify the momentous events of their lives — birth, coming of age, marriage, death. And it is where they come for the ordinary activities in the life of a congregation — coffee hour, committee meetings, choir practice. It must serve for solitary contemplation and



A Visual Dialogue session is just one step in the design process. During the session, BWBR staff interact with clients, allowing them to develop a sense of ownership with their input and feedback.

fellowship, administration and prayer. It represents a congregation's greatest hopes and dreams — within the bounds of the funds they can raise.

Designing these places is never easy. Aspirations are high, limitations real, and consensus difficult. But there are few projects more rewarding. Working together to create something of lasting meaning in people's lives is a labor of love, and the product of faith.



Philip Prouse

St. Hubert's Catholic Community, Chanhassen, Minnesota



Phase I of Lord of Life Lutheran Church's new facility in Maple Grove is nearing completion.



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