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## Renovations

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self into the body of Christ, that almost automatically says you have to look at the space and how you use it, how we acknowledge one another and be part of the prayer in a substantial way."

This, she said, is hard to do in our older churches, "where the pews are lined up and we are looking at the altar area and people's backs."

At St. Mary's Parish in Auburn, Father Robert Schrader, pastor, is pleased with his parish's acceptance of its three-year-old sanctuary renovation, particularly of an immersion baptismal font with a pool.

Saying that he first thought he would "have to coax" baptismal candidates into the pool, he added, "They were actually stepping in before their turn. They knelt down, it's heated. I submerge their head forward three times. The choir sings 'A-let-ua' as they step out in a great white towel held by their sponsor. Before, we just had the small bowl there, and only did the baptisms by pouring water on the forehead, which was not as full a symbol."

Also before the renovation, he said, the church's altar "was like a roadblock" between people and the tabernacle behind it. Parishioners made no argument about moving the tabernacle to a new dwelling place to the right of the altar, he said.

Yet, "probably the most controversial element is the eucharistic chapel," according to Kevin Marren of LaBella Associates architects. More than 75 percent of the firm's work is church renovations and other religiously oriented projects.

The tabernacle reserves consecrated hosts for adoration and to be taken to the sick. In many churches it rests on a pre-Vatican II high altar that remains in place behind a newer one that allows the priest to face the congregation.

Since Vatican II, however, the church has encouraged parishes to place the tabernacle in a chapel for private prayer. The revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal, yet to be officially published by the Vatican, states that the local bishop can determine that it be placed in a chapel "integrated with the church." Alternately, he can decide it be in the most suitable place in the sanctuary apart from the altar of celebration, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration.

The Rochester Diocese's guidelines say the tabernacle space should be inside (a new revision) or outside the sanctuary area in a separate chapel. If that is not possible, a wall niche, pillar or tower outside the sanctuary space may be used.

## Controversy continues

"Isn't it time to recognize that the liturgical movement of the past 20-30 years — resulting in the removal of tabernacles,

statues and kneelers — has been an experiment that has been tried and failed?" posed a letter to the *Catholic Courier* signed by Frank Ferris of the Concerned Friends of St. John's Parish of Spencerport and 50 people from a number of parishes. The letter suggests placing all renovations on hold, as are liturgical changes pending the revised General Instruction's official release. Ferris is fighting attempts to renovate his own parish, St. John the Evangelist.

Recent attempts by the *Catholic Courier* to contact Ferris were unsuccessful.

His group has aligned with what was known as Catholics for the Real Presence, according to Father William C. Michatek, St. John's pastor, which is protesting cathedral renovation. Both St. John's and the cathedral expect to begin planning in January for their renovations.

Between the time Father Michatek was assigned to St. John's and his arrival there, parishioners approached him to warn that they would not tolerate a renovated sanctuary, the priest said, adding, "It's very, very contentious."

And although Father Darling recalled similarly tense days when renovating St. Patrick's Church in Owego, he said opponents today are more organized. "Most of the argument in 1992 was from emotion or memory: 'This wasn't the church I was baptized in,'" he said. His response was, "Why would you think it should be?"

But today, he said, people are trying to cite Vatican rules and turning to a new book on how to protest church architecture changes, *The Renovation Manipulation: The Church Counter-Renovation Handbook*, by Michael S. Rose.

## Mistakes, lessons

Mercy Sister Estelle Martin, who has served on the bishop's advisory Diocesan Building Commission since the 1980s, acknowledges that lessons can be drawn from renovations made since the Second Vatican Council. "Mistakes and Lessons" is, in fact, the subtitle of a talk she gives called "Church Renovation 2000: Are We Done Yet?"

"No, we aren't finished yet," she said in answer to her own question. "Not every church in the diocese meets all the (diocesan) guidelines. They certainly should, I believe, be in the process of a desire to give good liturgy. And if we're giving good liturgy, we need a good space to do it in. Those two things I keep tying together — the role of liturgy and space."

Most if not all diocesan churches have made at least basic changes since Vatican II, according to Sister Martin.

The diocese has the following criteria:

- The worship space must evoke a sense of sacredness to the community and reflect a visual prayerfulness that invites the community to praise and worship God.
- Individual art forms must not only represent high artistic values of beauty, but

lead the viewer to contemplate the Creator.

- The art must serve the action and never hinder or interrupt the liturgical ritual.

- Duplicating crosses or more than one statue or image of the same saint minimizes their importance and meaning in the liturgical space. Patterns and decorations that repeat the same object several times are to be avoided. Liturgical symbols reside in action rather than in the object.

Sister Martin said mistakes have included: a lack of natural light, infrequent use of stained glass, too many compromises for the sake of budget, Band-Aid type renovations, and multipurpose spaces created with the thought they'd conserve energy.

Parishes also have allowed personal taste to outweigh good liturgical sense, she noted. They've underdecorated, creating stark spaces. They've failed to allow the community time to "own the design plans." They've allowed misinformation and a lack of information to prevail. They've seen the finished building as "functional space" rather than a "place of prayer."

"I haven't seen a perfect church yet," said Sister Martin. "The perfect worship space will probably be when we all die and go to heaven."

## More participation

The reason for renovations, Sister Martin said, is "In the spirit of Vatican II, in the spirit of ritual, it's a community that's gathering. Therefore it's more a family gathering around the altar than in front of the altar to watch. We don't watch liturgy anymore. We participate in it."

For example, she continued, "The whole concept of the community gathering is the key to worship. So you need a place for them to gather. We needed to enlarge our entryways. To gather, come together and go into the liturgy, and to gather afterwards, because that was seen as important."

Prayer of the church is not only communal, she added, but personal, involving small-group or individual devotions. "We're not saying they (worshiping parishioners) shouldn't see the tabernacle, we're saying that what they've got in front of them is bigger than the tabernacle. It's not an either/or, it's a both/and."

"You say you're going to move the tabernacle, they think you're going to take it and throw it out in the alley or something," she continued. "I prefer to use the word 'relocate.' ... We are not going to put it on a moving van and move it down the street or anything."

Placing a tabernacle on the main altar, in fact, did not become a normal manner of reserving the Blessed Sacrament until the sixth century, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

## Lifelong learning

Sister Martin noted that much controversy over renovations stems from the fact that "some of the renovations were done without explaining a thing to the people."

"Education goes a long way," agreed Father Darling. "Patience, understanding go a long way."

But at some point a parish has to come to a decision, he said. "We have to hear and understand what is being said to us by the bishops, the documents of the church. They were not written to take up space on a page, but to guide us toward the future."

This is difficult for some to accept, Workmaster noted. "I don't know how many meetings I have been to in parishes looking at the possibility of renovations, and people find themselves opposed to that, and question 'You mean we have been wrong all these years?' 'No, we prayed in a way consistent with our sense of church at that time and the culture we were in. Now that is changing. Second Vatican Council called us to reexamine that.'"

People look at renovations based on their own expressions of faith and theology; "from what it is that gives us life, the sense of being a follower of Christ," she said. "For some people that's a much more conservative and traditional stance that reflects the pre-Vatican II theology."

## In order to renovate:

Diocesan Building Commission Guidelines state that church renovations are expected to include:

- handicapped accessibility to the total interior if possible;
- a permanent baptismal font with flowing water, large enough for immersion of an infant and partial immersion of an adult if possible; near the main entrance of the liturgical space or in the community's midst;
- a eucharistic reservation space in a separate chapel or wall niche, pillar or tower;
- a reconciliation chapel for face-to-face celebration of the sacrament;
- one altar, one ambo and presider's chair;
- visible and audible music area;
- removal of altar railing and other barriers to community participation;
- upgrading of sound and lighting;
- relocating statues and images outside the sanctuary;
- a single cross that is processional or permanent.

The guidelines are based on "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship," issued by the U.S. bishops' Committee on Liturgy in 1978. This month the bishops adopted "Built of Living Stones" as an official replacement for the 1978 statement. Diocesan officials say it does not change their guidelines.

The guidelines also are based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Code of Canon Law, and such post-Vatican II documents as "Liturgical Music Today," "Music in Catholic Worship," "Dedication of a Church and Altar" and "Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass."

"What happens after the renovation," she continued, "is people realize that what they feared the most has not really taken place, and that God is still very much present in their church space."

Renovations are not optional. The Diocesan Building Commission Guidelines, based on Vatican documents, are mandatory, according to Father Joseph A. Hart, vicar general.

For instance, "It really has been the expectation of the Roman documents since the implementation of the Second Vatican Council that a (reservation) chapel would be created, or if it wouldn't work, a special eucharistic area within the body of the church," he said.

"Our diocese has been quite understanding. Rather than saying everyone must renovate in the next five years, the bishops have been very nice to say, 'When you renovate again, you must bring that into conformity with Second Vatican Council.'"

"It's the whole spirit which is involved here that these are Vatican regulations that ought to be implemented as soon as possible. It's been 32 years — that's a pretty patient kind of thing."

"To say, 'We are just changing the rugs, redoing the windows and painting; we are not really renovating are we?' is to undercut the whole spirit of the bishops of Rochester the last 30 years have enunciated."

Christ is present in the assembly, presider, Word and Eucharist, Father Hart noted. "And the ideal church is one that brings a proper balance of those elements: the altar is prominent, ambo (pulpit from which the Gospel and sermons are delivered) is clearly seen, the presider's chair is there, the baptismal font in plain sight."

Vatican II was a council of remembering, he said, "of what was and ought to be. It restored what was. So when people talk about desecration, ripping apart, it's not. It's really a restoration, of putting elements back into their proper place."

Next week: A look at parish renovations.

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