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## Tabernacle

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presider. Relocating the reservation tabernacle is deemed necessary to give appropriate prominence to the eucharistic liturgy's key symbols: the altar, the ambo (pulpit) and the presider's chair.

Where does that leave the tabernacle? Church documents since the council generally have instructed that it be placed in a separate chapel or to the side of the sanctuary, in a place worthy of private devotion.

Some saw relocating the tabernacle as "the person they love the dearest is moving," said Father Horan, who also is pastor of St. Andrew Parish, Rochester. "His home, the tabernacle, is moving ... But he still abides with us."

### Back in time

The reality is that tabernacles have moved around quite a bit.

"The place and manner of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament have differed at various periods and in different places," notes the Catholic Encyclopedia. In the early church, consecrated hosts often were reserved in a sacristy cabinet, a sacrament house — a tower-like projection from a wall — or in a pyx (originally a box-shaped wooden vessel) often in the shape of dove, suspended over the high altar. Movable caskets also were used.

The original and primary reason for reserving the Eucharist outside Mass was for distribution to the sick and dying, notes the 1973 church document, "On Holy Communion and the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass." This tradition began as early as the second century.

Tabernacle citations in the Catholic Encyclopedia only go back as far as the Middle Ages. Even then, the encyclopedia noted, "Although the Blessed Sacrament was sometimes reserved for the sick, it was not reserved in a tabernacle for adoration."

"Not until the 12th century were we beginning to get devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which was different and apart from the celebration of the Eucharist," noted Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy. Anything akin to a tabernacle prior to the 12th century would have been a rather insignificant type of vessel.



Tabernacles are often made of precious metals, marble and wood, and should be opaque, fireproof and burglarproof. They can take any shape, but should be designed in keeping with the style of the altar and the church in which it resides. The Catholic Encyclopedia says tabernacle design "should in some measure represent a real dwelling of God among men."

In the 16th century, a tabernacle placed on the main altar became the typical manner of reserving the Blessed Sacrament, later formalized by general prescription of the Roman Ritual of 1614. By 1863, other tabernacle locations were forbidden.

In 1983, however, the Roman Ritual eliminated any mention of an altar as a place for the tabernacle, although this location remained a provision in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Further, the Ceremonial of Bishops recommends the tabernacle "in accordance with a very ancient tradition in cathedral churches" should be in a chapel separate from the main body of the church.

"It stands to reason if you have an altar facing people, you wouldn't have a tabernacle on the altar," said Father McNamara, who headed a diocesan commission that was charged from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s with revising church interiors to fit modern liturgy.

"The whole reform of liturgy is geared to the idea it calls for the participation of everybody," he said. Nevertheless, he admitted, "We old-timers weren't used to having everyone participate."

The most recent Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, stipulates that the tabernacle should be in a distinguished, conspicuous place in the church.

And the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal, as yet unofficial and still not formally translated into English, directs the tabernacle be placed "either in the sanctu-

ary, apart from the altar of celebration" or "in another chapel suitable for adoration and the private prayer of the faithful."

The previous General Instruction stated that "Every encouragement should be given to the practice of eucharistic reservation in a chapel suited to the faithful's private adoration and prayer."

"Built of Living Stones," a U.S. bishops' document issued last November, states it remains the prerogative of the diocesan bishop to determine where the tabernacle should be placed, whether in the sanctuary apart from the altar of celebration or in a separate chapel suitable for adoration and private prayer.

It's no wonder people can be impatient and confused, Father McNamara commented, given the treatment of tabernacles over time.

### Secondary issue

Today it is increasingly common to place the tabernacle in a prominent place near — not in — the sanctuary, where it is visible and easy to locate, according to Nathan Mitchell, associate director for research at the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy. Another option often used and preferred in a number of church documents is creation of a separate reservation chapel. But the placement of tabernacles is a "secondary issue," he said.

"I admit reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is an important tradition," Mitchell said. "But the question of where to place it is secondary to the primary question of how we accommodate the worshipping assembly."

Father Horan understands what Mitchell is saying.

"I liked the old way, I just did; I didn't see there was any need to change," Father Horan said. But when it came time to renovate St. Andrew's Church over the past couple of years, the priest acceded to diocesan rules that the tabernacle be placed in a separate chapel or, if that isn't possible, on the side of the sanctuary. In February he oversaw moving of the tabernacle from its 75-year home behind the main altar to a marble altar in a niche on the side, where a statue of St. Joseph once stood. The statue also has been relocated within the church, and being before the Blessed Sacrament is seating arranged for adoration.

Although Father Horan at first was reluctant to accept the diocesan building commission's advice to move the tabernacle, he said he acceded after receiving a letter of clarification from Bishop Matthew H. Clark. "He made it clear in the letter the building commission and its recommendations speak on behalf of him," the pastor said.

"However, now that (the tabernacle) has been moved, it makes the sanctuary a clean space with complete attention given to the eucharistic sacrifice," Father Horan acknowledged. "I didn't realize the effect it would have until it was moved. Whoever made that decision — Bishop Clark — my hat's off to you."

"Plus, there's a wonderful visual we have in the church," Father Horan said, pointing out that the new arrangement illustrates John 1:14, "And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." As one looks at the sanctuary from the pews, the pulpit from which the Word is read is on the left; to the right of that is the altar, where the Word is made flesh, he said. "You move further (right) to the chapel of reservation," and the image completes the verse — the Blessed Sacrament, "dwelling among us," he said.

Bishop Clark has been consistent in his directives regarding location of the tabernacle. His desire has been implicit, Workmaster said, from the time diocesan building and renovation guidelines were written in the 1980s.

In a 1984 "Along the Way" column in the *Catholic Courier*, he wrote: "... how does one determine where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the church building? ... There are excellent reasons, clearly expressed by the Church why a practice different from the one we grew up with has been adopted. When understood, the new arrangement can bring a more enriching understanding of both the Eucharistic Liturgy and our tradition of reservation. When it is not well-understood, it can seem like a lessening of devotion for the Blessed Sacrament."

Father Robert Kennedy, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish and adjunct professor at St. Bernard's Institute, said "lights go on with people" when they read the various church statements.

"I think people at least need to read the church documents," he said.

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