

Dear members of St. Clare Parish,

Over the past several weeks our parish bulletin has contained inserts sharing information gathered and assembled for your review, by the Exploratory Committee. These inserts are posted on the St. Clare website at www.stclareagw.org. A "Town Hall" format meeting for your input will be held on Thursday evening, October 3 in the auditorium of Wrightstown High School as the committee prepares its final report. The Exploratory Committee is comprised of Russ Aerts, Father Dennis, Dick Geurts, Carolyn Green, Julie Rohan, Rick Roundy, and Karla Voss.

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ...For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. (Romans 6: 3, 5)

While the above passage from Paul's letter is familiar to us, each time we enter a Catholic Church we are challenged to renew ourselves at the deepest level regarding life and what it means to enter the font of life. Entering a church building reflects entering Christ. That theological concern is among many that the exploratory committee has reflected upon in looking at our current buildings and what items are needed and where they are placed in Catholic Worship Space.

We are familiar with the expression "form follows function." As we consider the "House for the People of God" or a church building, we consider what we do there and what we need in order to carry out that sacred responsibility. From our approach to the building with its landscaping, signage and first impression to the final good-byes in the parking lot a church is different than a restaurant, gas station or shopping mall. A bell tower, cross mounted high or the doors all speak the message that we are entering sacred space, a dwelling place for the saints.

(49) The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life, both for the universal Church and for local faith communities. The other sacraments, like every other ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and have it as their end. The celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is the appropriate starting point for understanding the demands of space, sound, and visibility made upon a church building. An analysis of these requirements will include attention to the place for the congregation, for the preaching of the word, and for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with special care for the location of the altar, the ambo, and chairs for the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary. Considerations about the narthex and environment for the building flow from the central action of the Eucharist. The celebration of the Easter Vigil and of the Sunday Eucharist are appropriate starting points. In addition, special consideration should be given to the place for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. (Built of Living Stones, [BLS], USCC, c.2000)

On one level we might look at the place of the congregation as simply a question of a place to sit, stand and kneel; yet on the deeper level as primary symbol of Christ's Presence we need to see this symbol of the Body of Christ gathered. On a practical level we ask about sight-lines and acoustics; but on that deeper level we look at each other as phrased in the Eucharistic Prayer: "we may be counted now and until the day of eternity among the members of your Son, in whose Body and Blood we have communion." In our celebration of Eucharist and all sacraments while personal these celebrations are never private, thus traveling together we see our fellow pilgrims on this journey.

296. The altar, on which is effected the Sacrifice of the Cross made present under sacramental signs, is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is convoked to participate in the Mass, and is also the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist.

298. It is desirable that in every church there be a fixed altar, since this more clearly and permanently signifies Christ Jesus, the living stone. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], USCCB, c. 2011)

The altar is a most important symbol of Christ in our place of worship. On this table the Sacrifice of the Cross is brought into the present and our lives are nourished and renewed. In light of this profound theological truth it is clear the altar should reflect the nobility, beauty, strength and simplicity of the One it represents since the Church teaches that "the altar is Christ" (BLS, p/56). Also, recognizing that it

“signifies to the assembly of the faithful the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church” there is to be only one altar in the worship space (BLS, p/56).

Affording the Word of God its due dignity requires a suitable place from which it is proclaimed and toward which the attention of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word. It is appropriate that this be a stationary ambo (GIRM). “Since many people share in the ministry of the word, the ambo should be accessible to everyone, including those with physical disabilities” (BLS, p/61). On certain feasts, the Gospel Procession includes candles and incense and consideration of needed space is to be considered. In celebrating Mass the close relationship between word and Eucharist should be recognized in the design of altar and ambo. An ambo is to be used only for the word of God, the Easter Proclamation and may be used for the Homily and General Intercessions. A separate simple lectern is to be used by a song leader or cantor, commentator, and reader of announcements.

“312. The *schola cantorum* (choir) should be so positioned with respect to the arrangement of each church that its nature may be clearly evident, namely as part of the assembled community of the faithful undertaking a specific function. The positioning should also help the choir to exercise this function more easily and allow each choir member full sacramental participation in the Mass in a convenient manner (GIRM)”. “Music is integral to the liturgy. It is important to recognize that the building must support the music and song of the worshipping assembly. In addition, ‘some members of the community have special gifts for leading the assembly in musical praise and thanksgiving.’ Because the roles of the choirs and cantors are exercised within the liturgical community, the space chosen for the musicians should clearly express that they are part of the assembly of worshipers. In addition, cantors and song leaders need visual contact with the music director while they themselves are visible to the rest of the congregation (BLS, p/88-89).

As an exploratory committee we fully realize this insert is heavy with quotes from official documents. Each of these only skim the surface of the underlying theology of who we are as Catholics and give a glimpse of how we best express ourselves in worship. As a committee we reflected on underlying theology, but in no way have come to complete understandings of these great mysteries. We do invite you to reflect on some of the questions of what we believe and how to express that in bricks and mortar.

In light of what we understand about baptism:

- What should our font look like?
- What is the appropriate size to contain that powerful mystery?
- Where is the appropriate location?
- How does the font connect to our funeral rites?
- Is the altar in each of our churches constructed in such a manner that it can bear the weight of the mystery of Christ’s Sacrifice?
- Does the ambo of each of our churches reflect the dignity of God’s Presence in His Word?
- Does the location of pastoral musicians encourage their leadership role?
- Does the location allow full and active participation for musicians?
- Can they approach the altar for Communion and receive under both forms in a reverential manner?
- If a person has a physical disability are they able to fully and actively participate?
- Is this person able to be a reader in our facilities?
- Is this person able to be a pastoral musician?
- Do we have sufficient “flexible seating” for Masses which include Anointing of the Sick?

This insert dealt only with a couple of the liturgical and theological questions we need to address regarding worship space. Not included but studied was a Chapel of Reservation and how to include space for private prayer outside the liturgy. The committee familiarized itself with the GIRM and Built of Living Stones and as we move forward you may want to read those as well. Since the reform of the liturgy almost fifty years ago we have used buildings designed for another Order of the Mass. We have managed, but as we reflect on what we leave for future generations we need to ask if we can do better.