



# A HOUSE OF PRAYER

Building and Renovation Guidelines  
for Roman Catholic places of Worship



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS  
*Office for Worship*  
CHURCH ART + ARCHITECTURE COMMISSION

## INTRODUCTION

**The mission of the Church Art and Architecture Commission for the Diocese of Grand Rapids is to serve the Church by helping to create appropriate spaces for Catholic worship and the sacraments.**

The construction, renovation or restoration of a church or chapel is a project that belongs not only to the local parish but also to the whole diocesan Church. When a worship space is constructed or renewed, “it is the bishop who, in his role of fostering and governing the liturgy, must assume primary responsibility and authority for the regulation and direction of such projects.” [Built of Living Stones, 34.] This commission assists our bishop in his role as the director, promoter, and guardian of the liturgical life of the local Church.

---

**The Church Art and Architecture Commission [CAAC]** is a committee of Catholic professionals including architects, acoustic specialists, pastoral musicians and pastors. It serves the Diocesan Bishop by helping to create appropriate spaces for Catholic worship.

---

The Church Art and Architecture Commission is the primary review commission and resource for the construction and renovation (including restoration) of churches and chapels in the Diocese, from the early discernment process to the completion of the work. To this end, the diocesan bishop charges the commission with these responsibilities:

- to establish and communicate norms for the construction and renovation of churches and chapels in the diocese
- to ensure a clear liturgical vision is articulated throughout the planning, design and construction process
- to assist with liturgical education
- to review, recommend changes and approve proposed concepts and plans for liturgical and artistic components of a church’s or chapel’s design in renovation and/or new building
- to advise and support the diocesan bishop

Giving shape to a new church or chapel—or making changes to an existing worship space—is a challenging and exciting time for a parish community and the diocesan Church. The smallest project can be an opportunity to enhance worship. The entire process requires careful thought, teamwork, and skillful preparation on the part of all. The involvement of the congregation, designation of a building committee, and compliance with diocesan guidelines are essential.

*Built of Living Stones* is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document that supports the Catholic community as a new worship space is created, or an existing space is renovated. While there are many professional and technical considerations in undertaking such a process, the work is guided by values based on the disciplines of liturgy, theology and ecclesiology. These values give shape to basic principles that guide Catholic communities in forming beautiful spaces worthy of worship. It is the “Church” that gives shape to a “church”.

Diocesan guidelines are intended to support and enable construction and renovation on a local level. They address the key issues related to the construction or renovation of a worship space in light of current Church documents and local customs. These guidelines will assist communities in undertaking and completing the important process of building or renovating a church, their house of prayer.

#### **PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**

How does a project begin? The pastor or administrator forms a building committee that is representative of the pastoral staff, parish leadership and the total community. Opportunities must be provided for widespread consultation with the faith community at large, as well as existing groups and organizations. This establishes collective ownership of the project for the greater good of the community.

The formation of a **long-range, strategic master plan** for the future of the community and its resources is vital. A master plan incorporates the long-range vision and priorities of the faith community, understands current and future needs, and outlines how resources will be allocated. When there are opportunities to make even small changes to a worship space, good stewardship compels us to look first at the larger picture of possibilities and long-range needs.

For a building or renovation project of any size, all areas of the worship space should receive special assessment—even those areas seemingly unaffected by a simple renovation. Treating the many interacting parts of a worship space as an integrated whole can help a community avoid unintended consequences. The local building committee should be familiar with *Built of Living Stones*, *A House of Prayer*, and any other documents

---

**A**s the leader and representative of the local parish, the pastor takes the lead in the building process, keeps the local parish in communication with the bishop and other diocesan officials, and helps draw the parishioners together in the decision-making process.”

*Built of Living Stones*, 35

---

of the Church Art and Architecture Commission, for projects of any size, including:

- ◆ *Taste and See: Guidelines on Eucharistic Reservation in the Diocese of Grand Rapids*
- ◆ *A Place Apart: Guidelines on Auxiliary Spaces that serve the Liturgy*

### **INFORM THE BISHOP EARLY IN THE PROCESS**

Early in the local community's discussion, the pastor is to inform the bishop and the Office for Worship in writing of what is being considered. Based on the size and scope of the project, the bishop will determine the level of consultation needed to continue the process. Additional planning may proceed following the bishop's general approval.

---

One of the most significant and formative experiences in the life of a parish community is the process of building or renovating a church.

*Built of Living Stones, 1*

---

### **LITURGICAL EDUCATION AND VISION**

As much attention and energy should be dedicated to formation of the *people as Church* as the formation of the building. Even the smallest project demands a comprehensive education process. Specific subjects might include:

- the needs of the liturgy as prescribed by the Second Vatican Council
- ritual movement and procession in the environment
- the design and placement of major symbols, furnishings and features in the building
- the importance and role of music in worship
- accessibility for those with physical challenges
- environmental stewardship and sustainability

### **SELECTION OF PROFESSIONALS**

A wide range of expertise is required for any project that affects a community's worship space. To implement this, you should use the services of a liturgical design consultant and an architect. Other professionals will also be able to contribute to the process. They bring unique and essential perspectives to impact the quality, appropriateness and beauty of the worship space.

**The diocesan Office for Worship** and the **Church Art and Architecture Commission** can assist by providing a list of consultants and architects who have worked in the diocese or who have come to our attention as commendable in their field.

## **SCHEMATIC DESIGN**

Initial architect's drawings are presented to the worship community at meetings where the design is interpreted in light of the Church's liturgy. The pastor, the building committee and the architect work toward a design that meets the needs of the liturgy, the local community and the diocese .

## **INITIAL APPROVAL BY THE DIOCESAN CHURCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE COMMISSION**

The pastor schedules the initial meeting with the Church Art and Architecture Commission via the Office for Worship.

Following the meeting, the commission provides a written assessment with requirements and recommendations to the bishop and the presenting community. Any requirements or concerns raised by the Church Art and Architecture Commission must be addressed in writing by the local community to this commission. The project continues to the next phase when these issues are resolved

## **DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

Design development elaborates and refines the design concept to define and resolve all important aspects of the project. All major design decisions should be finalized during design development.

During this phase, the selection and commission of artists for devotional art and liturgical furnishings begins. The Church Art and Architecture Commission can offer ideas concerning liturgical art and encourage creative methods for funding.

## **FINAL APPROVAL BY THE DIOCESAN CHURCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE COMMISSION**

The pastor schedules another meeting with the Church Art and Architecture Commission via the Office for Worship. The meeting entails a presentation by the local representatives and dialogue with the commission. The project continues to the next phase as these issues are resolved to the satisfaction of the bishop and the commission.

---

Since the Church is not wedded to a single architectural or artistic form, it seeks to engage the genius of every time and place, to craft the finest praise of God from what is available.

*Built of Living Stones, 40*

---

---

**M**ay we open  
our hearts and  
minds to receive  
God's word  
with faith.  
Born in the one font  
of baptism and  
sustained at the one  
table of the Lord,  
may we become  
the one temple  
of his Spirit  
as we gather  
around his altar in  
love.

~ Greeting,  
Rite of Dedication of  
Church and Altar

---

### **APPROVAL OF THE DIOCESAN BUILDING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Any plans of the community must also be presented to and approved by the diocesan Building and Planning Committee. The pastor arranges for a meeting time through the diocesan chancellor. Matters concerning finance, contracts, and legal issues are attended to by the chancellor. The construction drawing phase, bidding process, contracts and construction phase are all carried out in observance of diocesan guidelines.

### **THE RITE OF DEDICATION**

The pastor should request a date from the Bishop for the dedication of a new church, altar or for a worship space that has been significantly changed by a renovation. Under normal circumstances, a new worship space is not to be used until dedicated. The Office for Worship is willing to assist the parish with meeting the liturgical requirements for the Rite of Dedication.

### **THE COMMUNITY'S HOUSE OF PRAYER**

Written records describing the rationale behind the design of a new or renovated church or chapel help insure the success of the building project over the long term. With the inevitable changes in the composition of local communities and pastoral staffs, it is useful to place in the parish and diocesan archives a written record of the goals the local building committee set out to achieve in the design of the worship space. Ultimately, the goal of a successful building project must be a renewed, invigorating life for the community that is the Church.

Diocese of Grand Rapids Church Art & Architecture Commission  
July 2010

# SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Church Art and Architecture

### CHURCH DOCUMENTS

“Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship,” National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), Washington, D.C. 2000. <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/livingstonesind.shtml>

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2003. <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/revmissalisromanien.shtml>

Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar, Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, 1977

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II, December 4, 1963.

“Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines,” Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, December 2001. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20020513\\_vers-direttorio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html)

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Mark G. Boyer. “The Liturgical Environment: What the Documents Say (Second Edition) Liturgical Press, 2004. ISBN: 978-0-8146-3027-3

James E. Healy, STL “Building a New Church: A Process Manual for Pastors and Lay Leaders,” Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2009 ISBN: 978-0-8146-3269-7

Thomas G. Simons, “Holy People, Holy Place: Rites for the Church's House,” Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1999, 2007. ISBN 978-1-56854-095-5

Edward Foley. “From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist,” Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8146-3078-5

Thomas Stehle. *Environment for Catholic Worship*. Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, Washington D.C. *Revised 2001*. A series of 12 bulletin inserts on the varied elements of the space in which the church gathers to worship, with documentation from “Built of Living Stones.”

Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS. “The Ministry of the Liturgical Environment,” Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. ISBN: 978-0-8146-2705-1