

Embracing our Inheritance: Appreciating and Maximizing our Environments for Worship and Ministry

Mark A. Torgerson, Ph.D., Judson College
Calvin Symposium on Worship and the Arts
January 2007

Getting started

Some initial assumptions

- God's glory and adoration are central to the existence of church buildings
- The buildings serve as shelters, but they remain tangible, visible symbols
- A whole range of expressions in church design
- No one church design can ever be completely adequate

Goals for receiving and considering change

- Remain appreciative
- Seek God's presence and direction
- Remain inclusive throughout the process
- Transparency and open communication
- Maintain flexibility

The gift of inherited spaces

- Exhibit the generosity of our ancestors
- Affect multiple generations
- Establish a geographical location for corporate worship and ministry
- Provide a public, visible witness to faith
- Shaped by particular theological affirmations
- Reflect the piety of belief

- Influence a range of worship expressions and ministry potential

Some historical insights

Three primary currents = contemporary design

- The Ecumenical Movement; The Liturgical Renewal Movement; The Modern Architecture Movement

The Ecumenical Movement

- Emerged in the early nineteenth century
- Initiated by missionaries who shared concern for evangelism and social ministry around the world
- Sharing of ideas for church planting and growth
- Facilitated cooperation across denominations
- Second Vatican Council (1960-1963) a critical catalyst
- Ultimately, a dramatic exchange of theological and liturgical content

Points of celebration for ecumenicity

- Mutual respect between Christian communities
- A more unified appearance to non-Christians
- Healing of misunderstandings, with knowledge that challenged stereotypes and caricatures
- Sharing of liturgical insights and resources
- Increased effectiveness in ministries to others

The Liturgical Renewal Movement

- Initiated by monastic scholars in the nineteenth century
- Goal of facilitating more lay involvement in active corporate worship
- Concerned with a renewed emphasis on Scripture
- Influenced by an elevation of early church sources
- Cognizant of cultural influences

Points of celebration for liturgical renewal

- Affirmation of God among God's people
- Renewed understanding of Christ in our midst
- Liturgical accessibility and diversity (language, music and the arts)
- Willingness to embrace quality contemporary art forms
- Active congregational involvement
- Cross-denominational dependence on liturgical insights and new church designs

The Modern Architecture Movement

- Early to mid-twentieth century
- Discontent with historical models
- Seeking a unique expression of design
- Developed a "machine aesthetic"
- Focused on simplicity and purity of form
- Incorporated new materials and building techniques
- Increasing plurality in church designs

Overall achievements of modern church design

- Ecumenical gains:
 - A more unified witness among Christian churches through the sharing and appreciation of insights
 - A richer and more complex understanding of worship and worship environments
- Liturgical and theological gains:
 - Affirmation of the whole congregation in active worship
 - Elevation of communal participation
 - Recognition that the church environment can contribute to worship renewal
 - A significant accent on the theological understanding that God is in our midst
- Architectural and artistic gains:
 - Use of contemporary materials and building techniques
 - Enhanced relating of our churches to the context of our time period, geographical locations and cultural diversity
 - Resurgence of the value and significance of the visual arts
 - Use of high quality art installations in many churches
 - Encouraging artists in our faith communities to share their vocational talents with the church

Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels,
Los Angeles, José Raphael Moneo, 2002

Initial process for discernment

Preliminary questions

- Explore the history of the building
 - Date of building
 - Original intentions
 - Process followed
 - Cost and materials
 - Renovations along the way
- What initial impression of God do you sense?
- Identify features that are prominent or treasured

Data gathering

- General condition of the facilities (be specific)
- Impressions of new friends/members
- Activities that are facilitated adequately
- Activities that are inhibited or prohibited

Analysis and synthesis

- Correlation between your findings and present theological beliefs and articulated needs
 - Continuity between beliefs and tangible environment
 - Evaluation in light of present worship and ministries
- Significant features to retain for historical continuity
- Treasured by long-time members
 - Continuity with the current religious tradition
 - Continuity with the larger church
 - Continuity within the community

Identify features to retain for present needs

- Communication of meaning and significance through visual artifacts
- Features that work well for present ministries
- Features that work well for present worship practices
- Theological continuity, past and present

Considerations to enhance future worship and ministry environments

Recognition in the urban landscape

- Changes for the visible, visual testimony

Design and process matters

- Consideration and pursuit of beauty
- Corporate vs. individual perceptions

Additional examples

Renewal potential

- Worship expressions desired but prohibited

Community care and outreach

- Ministries desired but prohibited by physical environment

Continuity and connection

- Consistency with theological affirmations and priorities

Parameters and limitations

- Costs involved for enhance-ments
- Willingness to risk

Sustainable designs

- Appreciation for the natural world
- Healthier environments to inhabit
- Wise stewardship in relation to environ-mental resources
- Economic incentives for long-term energy needs

For additional information

- Torgerson, Mark A. *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

Photograph sources for this presentation

- Crosbie, Michael. *Architecture for the Gods, Volume Two*. Mulgrave: Image Books, 2002.
- Individual church archives
- Individual church websites

Photograph sources for additional ideas

- Crosbie, Michael. *Architecture for the Gods, Volume One*. Mulgrave: Image Books, 1998.
- Crosbie, Michael. *Houses of God*. Mulgrave: Image Books, 2006.
- Heathcote, Edwin, and Iona Spens. *Church Builders*. New York: Academy Editions, 1997.
- Stock, Wolfgang Jean. *Architectural Guide: Christian Sacred Buildings in Europe since 1950*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004.
- Stock, Wolfgang Jean. *European Church Architecture, 1950-2000*. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2002.

Process guides for building and renovation

- Christopherson, D. Foy. *A Place of Encounter: Renewing Worship Spaces*. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2004.
- Giles, Richard. *Re-Pitching the Tent: Reordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission*. Revised, expanded edition. Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical Press, 2000.
- Roberts, Richard W. *Building Type Basics for Places of Worship*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2004.
- Vosko, Richard S. *God's House is Our House: Re-Imagining the Environment for Christian Worship*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006.
- White, James F. and Susan J. *Church Architecture: Building and Renovating for Christian Worship*. Akron: OSL Publications, 1998.