

Worship Area Renovations

Following the report of the Future Facility Committee in May 2008, additional work was done by the architect in the fall of 2008 and early 2009 to produce computer-generated images of what a renovated worship area for St. Laurence might look like.

Work started with an image of the existing worship space as follows:



One option for renovating the space would be the following:



Another, slightly more dramatic option would be the following:



Note that both of these computer-generated images are “concept” images and would require a number of other “finishing elements” (including furniture such as a lectern, an ambry, a credence table, perhaps some kneeling rails, etc) before they could be considered as a “final product”. These images are only intended to give an indication as to what might be considered in a renovation project – they are not complete definitions or specifications of a proposed renovation project.

The images for both of these options were initially shown at the special meeting of parishioners in early March 2009 and then were on display in the basement of the church for a number of weeks. On Sunday May 24, 2009, they were discussed during the Conversations session after the service and a number of questions about the proposals were raised. The rest of this article attempts to provide answers to those questions according to the information that is available at this time (summer 2009).

WHY DOES THE PROPOSED CONCEPT REMOVE THE CROSS FROM THE WALL BEHIND THE ALTAR?

To some, it may be very important to keep the existing cross on the wall behind the altar both as a very definite statement of the Parish of St. Laurence as a Christian community and as a reminder of the community’s past. Others may prefer the proposal to have the cross incorporated right into wall behind the altar. The important thing to remember is that *both* crosses are “symbolic” – neither one of them is a “replica” of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Both are meant to tell the observer that this is a Christian community and, with the use of recessed lighting or some other technique to highlight it, the cross incorporated into the wall could be made to be just as bold and dramatic as the current cross.

One long-time member of St. Laurence has suggested that the cross that is incorporated into the wall behind the altar reminds her of a Christian faith that is incorporated into the daily lives of the members of the community. In other words, our Christianity is not something that is “bolted on” to our lives by participating in a service once a week on Sunday morning but, as members of an *intentional* community, our Christianity is something that is part of “the fabric of our being” – it stays with us through the week and just like the proposed cross is an integral part of the wall, our faith becomes an integral part of who we are as Christians and as members of St. Laurence congregation.

Some have also suggested that the height of the existing cross is important because it draws the eye upward as one enters the worship space. Others will recognize that by emphasizing the vertical beams and “hiding” the horizontal beams the proposed concept will also draw the eye upward towards the light entering from above as one enters the worship area.

WHY DOES THE PROPOSED CONCEPT ELIMINATE THE ALTAR RAILS?

The proposed concept image eliminates the altar rails because it focuses on the “architectural changes” to the existing worship space. If this concept were to be developed further there is nothing to prevent adding additional pieces of furniture such as a non-fixed altar rail for portions of the perimeter around the altar.

For example, one or two “double-width” prayer desks (such as the one pictured to the right) could be added to each side of the altar platform that is in the concept drawing. In this way, those members of the congregation who wanted to kneel to receive communion would be able to comfortably do so while those members of the congregation who wanted to stand to receive communion would also be comfortably accommodated.



WON'T IT BE DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE AT THE BACK TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE FRONT OF THE CHURCH IF THE PLATFORM THAT THE ALTAR SITS ON IS LOWERED (OR REMOVED)?

The first answer to this question is that the proposed architecture of the space is designed so that it does not encourage people to sit at the back and *watch* what's going on in the distance. Rather, to assist us in becoming a practicing congregation, the proposed design encourages people to sit at the front and *participate* in the worship service both in terms of what is happening at the front and in terms of interacting with other members of the congregation.

The second answer is that while the proposed concept shows a much reduced platform under the altar, in actual fact the best solution might be to have no *permanent* platform at all. Then, if a raised altar is needed for some “large” services, a removable platform (or two) can be added to the space underneath the altar. In other situations where a smaller, more intimate atmosphere is desired, the removable platform(s) can be taken away and the altar can be on the same level as the congregation with no obstructions to separate them. Some experimentation may be necessary to determine which platform or combination of platforms would be required for each type of service.

HOW WILL THE ACOUSTICS IN THE WORSHIP SPACE BE AFFECTED? WHERE ARE THE ORGAN SPEAKERS?

Changing the interior configuration of the worship space and, especially, the materials used for some of the surfaces will definitely have an effect on the acoustics of the worship space. To determine both the positive and the negative effects of these changes before actually making them would require a substantial cost to hire an acoustical consulting firm to take measurements and perform mathematical calculations to determine with some level of accuracy what the impact would be on the acoustics. However, even that will not guarantee that further steps won't be required to deal with acoustical issues after the changes. The possible need to deal with acoustical issues (either anticipated or unanticipated) in the future does not mean that the worship space needs to stay exactly as it is now (i.e. that there can never be any changes). The parish has dealt with acoustical issues in the past (e.g. by adding a sound system, or an assisted listening system) and any acoustical issues that may arise in the future will also be handled.

To answer the question about the organ speakers, they are hidden behind the wall in the image with the curved back wall. In the images with the full height back wall (as it is now), the organ speakers would have to stay where they are currently (though they could be re-configured into two larger openings on the wall behind the altar rather than the four smaller openings that are used now).

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT THE PILLARS WILL LOOK LIKE WHEN THE PAINT IS REMOVED?

At the moment, it is an educated guess as to what the pillars will look like when the paint is removed. Some testing will have to be done (in an inconspicuous place!) to ensure that the paint can be removed cleanly and that the pillars will look as they are depicted in the images.

WILL THERE BE KNEELERS IN THE CHAIRS OR ONLY IN THE PEWS?

Kneelers are an “extra-cost option” for the chairs. It is anticipated that some of the chairs will be ordered with kneelers.

FOR WHAT OTHER PURPOSES WILL THE WORSHIP SPACE BE USED THAT “FLEXIBILITY” WOULD BE HELPFUL? WILL THERE BE CHANGES TO THE CHOIR LOFT? WHERE IS THE CHAPEL?

There are many purposes that the worship space could be used for if it was designed to be flexible in order to accommodate different activities. From meetings, conferences, and concerts to different styles and types of worship services, to other activities that would only become apparent after the space is in use, there is a wide variety of possible uses of the space.

The changes to the worship space are independent of any changes to the choir loft (which, depending on the desired changes, may require a substantial addition with a new narthex).

The chapel is not needed in the proposed worship space layout as the main altar can be used for different sizes of congregation and different styles of worship.

CAN THE PROJECTION SYSTEM DISPLAY IMAGES ON A CURVED WALL? CAN THE SIZE OF THE TYPE USED BE INCREASED TO ACCOMMODATE THOSE WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY SEEING?

Images from the projection system cannot be displayed on a curved wall without visual distortion of the image. If the wall is curved, there would have to be a large enough area that is flat if LCD display technology is to be used. It may be possible to have a curved wall and use different technology to display images (e.g. high definition television rather than LCD projection).

The size of the letters used in an image can be increased but that means less information can be included in each image. One advantage of using high definition television technology (rather than LCD display technology) is that the television(s) could be located closer to the seating area so that people who have difficulty seeing can sit closer to the image.

WHAT IS THE OVERALL FINANCIAL PICTURE FOR THE CHANGES TO THE WORSHIP SPACE? DOES IT INCLUDE THE COST OF REPLACING THE PEWS WITH CHAIRS?

A financial plan (with detailed cost projections and revenue sources) needs to be developed for the changes to the worship space. Such a financial plan would include the cost of changes to the physical structure as well as the cost of replacing some pews with chairs, lighting changes, possible changes to windows, the cost of an image display system, the cost of changes to organ speakers, professional fees, etc.

In conclusion, an important point to remember is that the computer-generated images of the renovated worship space are concept drawings that require a number of other “finishing elements” to be incorporated into them before they could be considered as “final” solutions. The purpose of the concept image is to provide an “illustration” of a worship area that meets the vision statements for the worship space that were adopted by the congregation in January 2007:

The Worship Space

1. Our worship space is a place to experience the majesty of God as well as God among us.
2. Our worship space is a place where all feel the welcome and support of the community.
3. Our worship space allows us to gather as an intimate and connected community, to worship together in the Eucharist.
4. Our worship space reflects our belief that all are participants in the liturgy and there is no separation between worship leaders and the congregation.
5. Our worship space is open and light with a simple beauty and dignity.
6. Our worship space reflects the story of God’s unconditional love for our community.
7. Our worship space is adaptable for different worship formats, as we become more deliberate in the practice of our Christianity.

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August, 2009*