



JAMES HUNDT, ARCHITECT

designers of places of worship, fellowship, and religious education

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The main challenge in renovating the Motherhouse Chapel for the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), in Monroe, MI, was to provide an appropriate worship space for a wide variety of worship uses. In addition to being used for private prayer, the Chapel is used on a daily basis for Daily Mass and Evening Prayer. The attendance at these liturgies is typically less than 150. In a space that can hold almost 900 people, it is difficult to achieve any sense of intimacy when there are only 150 people gathered for prayer. On Sundays, the attendance increases to approximately 250. For Professions of Vows, the number often increases to 400 while Jubilee celebrations can draw up to 550. Other users from outside the community fill the space to its capacity.

The architecture of the Chapel, with its dome located at the center of the crossing between the nave and the transepts, seemed to strongly suggest locating the altar directly below the dome, with its image of heaven brought down to earth, and its centrality to the building plan clearly relating to the centrality of the Eucharist in liturgical celebrations.

With the altar located under the dome, the one thing preventing the community from gathering around the altar was the elevated floor of the Sanctuary, which was only eleven feet from the center of the altar. The solution was to raise the entire transept area to the same level as the Sanctuary, thereby creating one large, level area in which the community could gather around the altar. Using flexible seating, this new “Chapel within the Chapel” could accommodate up to 368 people, meaning that it could be used for daily liturgies, Sunday liturgies and funerals, all without having to rearrange any furniture.

On those occasions when the 368 seating capacity of the “Daily Chapel” is insufficient, it is a simple matter of using the pews in the nave to bring the seating capacity up to almost 600. Additional chairs can be brought in to increase the seating capacity to 858. To accomplish this, the trees or panels that divide the Gathering Space from the rest of the Chapel would be moved away to restore the nave to its original size.



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