

## Honoring Past, Present, and Future

James Hundt, AIA

Photos by Randall Perry

The ambulatory of the worship space. Columns on either side of the stained glass windows support the building's arches.

**C**hrist the King parish in Guilderland, a suburban area of upstate New York, needed a new church. The pastor was determined that it not be yet another example of what he called “living rooms for worship,” but rather a worship space that would be capable of creating long-lasting memories for the children of the parish while

acknowledging the importance of the architectural heritage of the Catholic church for the older members. For his part of this creation, he set about securing worthwhile artifacts from closed churches in the diocese, including eleven beautiful Chartres-style stained glass windows. He wanted a space that would bring the mystery back to the liturgy while still serving successfully as a place for contemporary worship. He had asked us to question every part of “traditional” church architecture to see how it served the worship experience and to reinterpret these elements in a manner appropriate for a contemporary congregation.

The incorporation of the artifacts became a significant driving force in the design. It was important that these artifacts look as if they were an inherent part of the building design and not decorative elements added later. The salvaged stained glass windows turned eleven of the corners of the sixteen-sided building. Salvaged entry doors became the new entry doors for the worship space. Columns and arches from an old balcony

were transformed into a baldacchino over the baptismal font. Woodwork from confessional boxes defined the entry to the reservation chapel and added architectural interest to the reredos. Marble carvings and statues from an old high altar found new homes in the baptistry and the worship space. An old Gothic pulpit was transformed



into four separate pieces of liturgical furniture: an altar, a pulpit, a tabernacle setting, and a reception table in the gathering space.

The design of the new church (which is an addition to the former church) also reflects the liturgical and social needs of the parish community. A large gathering space, designed as a piazza with glass walls and a hearth, gathers parishioners from the parking lots on either side of the building for interaction before

and after services. A replica of the Chartres labyrinth set in the floor tile creates an opportunity for meditative prayer when the space is not being used for social purposes.

Worshippers pass through the baptistry on their way into the worship space, encountering the baptismal waters that remind

pattern was selected by the committee so that the farthest pew was ten feet closer to the altar than in the old church. The irregular shape of the altar platform uses the altar and the ambo as center points for the radii of the platform, providing each with equal



The worship space is crowned by a radial wooden ceiling.

them of their own baptism. The baptismal font is designed to focus on the water, not the container. The water flows freely and naturally from its source to two baptismal basins, one for infants and one for adults, made of local bluestone. The baptismal waters also flow from bluestone panels on one wall of the baptistry to the other wall, where they create another pool of water at the base of the ambry, where the holy oils are prominently displayed. Bluestone benches invite people to linger in this space and contemplate the artwork and the baptismal waters.

The design of the worship space was intended to maintain or improve the intimacy of the original 325-seat church in a new space with twice the seating capacity. A radial

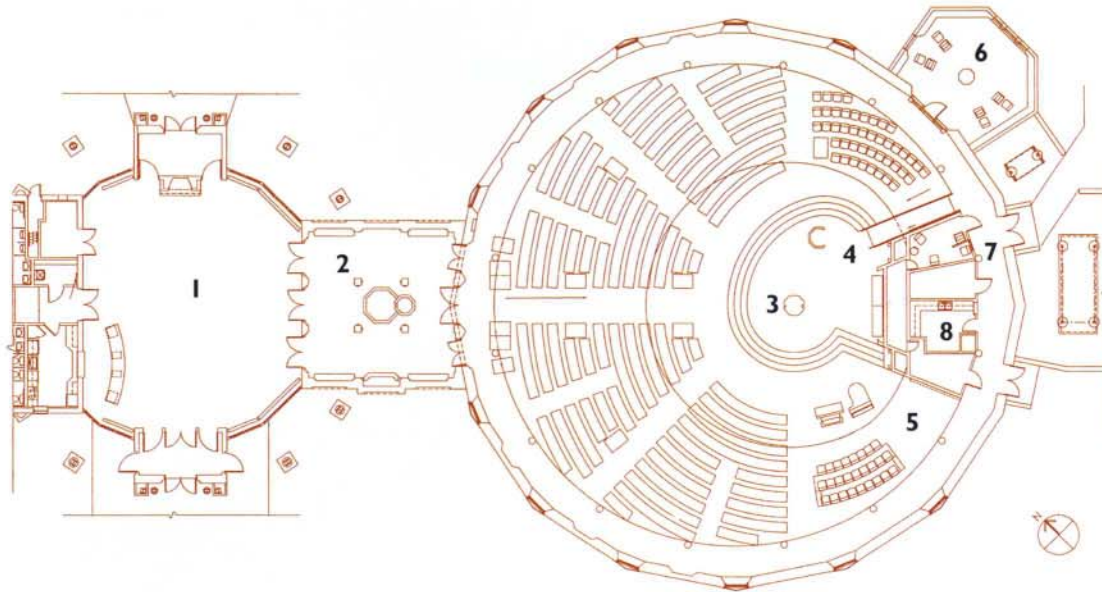


The new church (right) connects to the original worship space, which has been renovated for other parish uses.

weight liturgically. A gently sloped floor improves sightlines for all the parishioners.

Over the years, several parish artists had created a series of seasonal fabric backdrops for the altar platform. Incorporation of this

The altar and ambo are the points from which the irregularly shaped platform radiates.



- 1 Gathering space
- 2 Baptistry
- 3 Altar
- 4 Ambo
- 5 Music ministry area
- 6 Reservation chapel
- 7 Reconciliation chapel
- 8 Sacristy

artwork was an essential part of the design. The committee requested that these backdrops (which measure 10' x 20') be easily moved and stored. A separate room was provided directly behind the reredos for storing these backdrops in a hanging position: A system of pulleys and trap doors

makes it possible for two people easily to change the artwork at any time without the need for a ladder.

Six niches were set into the thick walls for devotional art. Five of these niches are currently used: two for salvaged marble statues of

Saints Peter and Paul, one for the display of the Book of the Gospels, one for a hand-carved crucifix, and the other for an oil painting of the Madonna and Child. The remaining niche is left unoccupied for a future work of art.

An irregular hexagonal chapel houses the tabernacle and features the only stained glass window from the original church. The placement of this chapel allows visitors easily to find the tabernacle for private devotion. Flexible seating in front of this chapel allows for communal adoration of the blessed sacrament when there is not enough room inside the chapel. The tabernacle from the old church is enshrined in a new tower topped with the pinnacle from the salvaged pulpit.

Construction materials consist primarily of masonry and wood. Split-face and smooth-face concrete masonry units were used for all the exterior walls. Smooth-face units were field cut to create the arches at the baptistry and the gathering space. The walls are accented with precast units around



nated beams and arches. The straight beams rest on arches supported by concrete columns that frame the stained glass windows. The purlins are set at angles to add interest to the structure and to refer to the Gothic style of the woodwork and furnishings. Portions of the exposed deck were covered with matching fir boards in a herringbone pattern to hide sprinkler piping. Light fixtures hidden in the column capitals and in the soffits highlight the wood structure and add to the overall ambiance of the space.

The concrete columns, which are actually concrete pipes filled with concrete and steel, were left unfinished except for a coat of paint to express the material. Hand-cast plaster was used to create the column capitals and the plinths for the cast bronze Stations of the Cross. The drywall walls were finished with a special paint to add texture and variation in color. Porcelain tile in various patterns was used as the flooring material throughout the addition and in many areas of the renovated building.

The total cost of this project, including all renovation work and sitework but not including furnishings, was \$237 per square foot. The project consists of 13,650 square feet of new construction and 3,700 square feet of renovation. Construction began in December of 1999 and the renovated



the windows and as an accent band. Clay brick was also used at the tops of the walls to create a modified dentil course. The same materials were used inside the gathering space, including for the fireplace. Inside the baptistry, hand-cut ground-face concrete masonry units were used for all the columns, pilasters, and arches. Concrete plaster over block was used for the walls, with marble plaques set directly into the walls.

The dominant material inside the worship space is wood. The sixteen sides of the building allowed us to use a radial pattern of lami-

## Church of Christ the King

Albany, New York

### Architect

James Hundt  
Clifton Park, New York

### Acoustical Consultant

Miller, Beam  
& Paganelli, Inc.  
McLean, Virginia

### Lighting Design

Naomi Miller  
Lighting Design  
Troy, New York

### Liturgical Furnishings

Curt Sharpe, RBC, LLC  
Troy, New York

### Masonry Contractor

Bast Hatfield, Inc.  
Clifton Park, New York

### Tile Contractor

Anthony Mion & Son Inc.  
Schenectady, New York

### Stained Glass Restoration

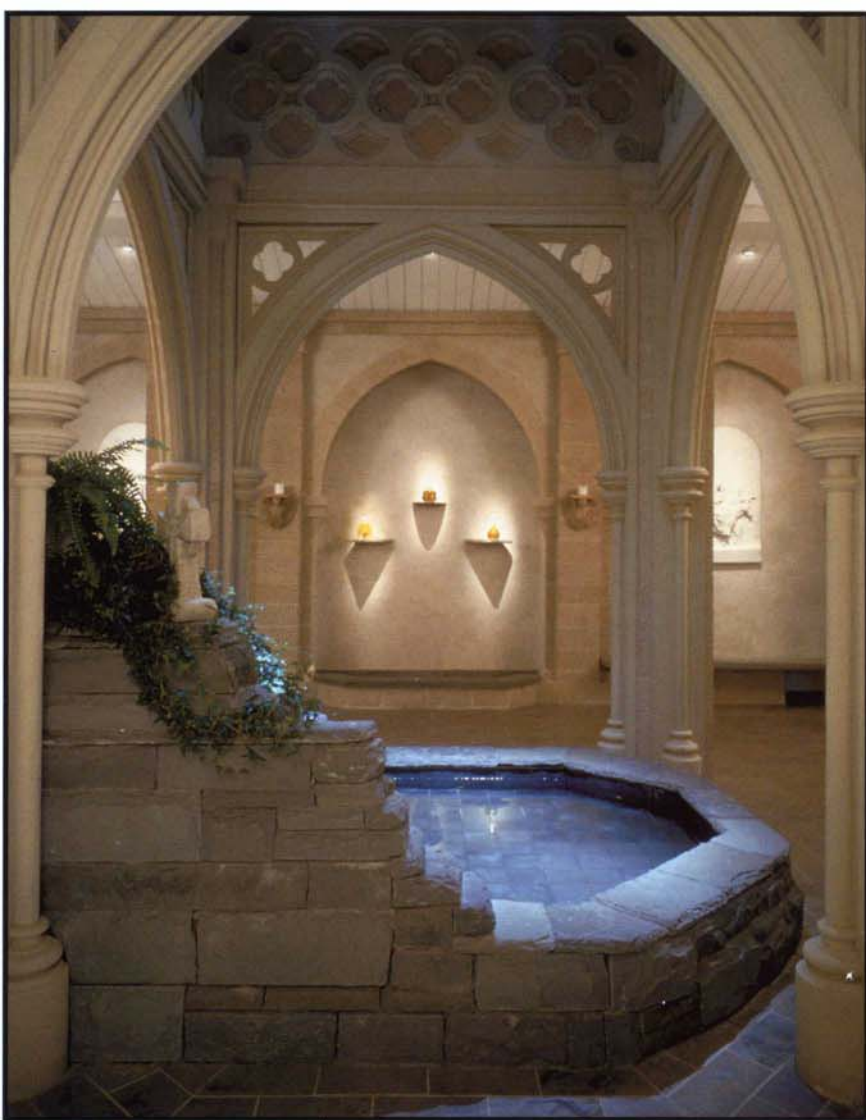
Cohoes Design  
Cohoes, New York

#### Above:

The tabernacle and windows from the original church are incorporated into the reservation chapel.

#### Left:

A replica of the labyrinth at Chartres is set in the tile floor of the gathering space.



Worshippers pass through the baptistry on their way into the worship space. The holy oils are displayed in a special wall niche.

church was dedicated the day after Thanksgiving of 2001.

We began this project by studying the philosophies behind earlier forms of architecture, hoping to recreate the spirit they embodied so that today's young Catholics would have a more complete and fulfilling worship experience. But the only way to know if we succeeded in doing that would be to ask the people who worship in the space.

In January of 2002, the pastor invited all those who had worked on the construction of the building to a special service where the parishioners could tell them face to face how they felt about their new church. Following are a few of the comments we heard that night:

“I love this church. I love the craftsmen who built it.”

“[This space has] a very strong sense of spirituality from the moment [visitors] walk through the door.”

“To me, it's the cathedral in Westmere.”

“This space is going to allow the sense of community we have had to grow.”

“When I first came in here, I felt I was on holy ground.”

“The awesomeness of this church has stopped our 10- and 13-year-old boys from misbehaving in church.”

“Coming to this new church was like coming home; it's new and yet it carries all the tradition.”

“Thank you for the love and care you put into this church.”

More than a year later, we are still hearing the same comments. It appears that our experiment was successful.