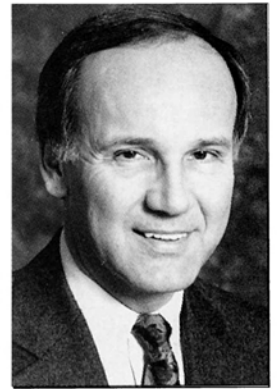


LITURGICAL DESIGN CONSULTANTS

Who They Are and What They Do

By Richard S. Vosko



A Jesuit theologian at Fordham University once remarked to me, "No one of us knows more than all of us." This axiom is relevant to the building professions where experts and consultants are constantly called upon to collaborate with architects and others. In the field of religious art and architecture, "liturgical" design consultants are now considered key members of the professional team along with lighting and acoustical specialists.

Who Are They?

Liturgical designers and artists are not really new to the work of building or renovating religious edifices. Acute interest in religious art and architecture was stimulated in part by the liturgical art movement, which began in the United States in the late 1930s. Over the years, organizations like the Liturgical Arts Society, the Guild for Religious Architecture, the American Society for Church Architecture, and now the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture (the RAA PIA of the AIA) all have promoted interfaith conversations concerned with the quality of religious buildings. The work of the liturgical designer and artist has been instrumental in fulfilling this important mission—the design and adornment of inspiring and functional sacred spaces.

The consultant brings a unique dimension to a religious building project because of his or her knowledge of how worship spaces function and what role they play in the socio-religious land-

scape. However, their practice is not regulated and their qualifications are quite diverse. At a minimum, a good consultant possesses a solid background in the arts and a thorough knowledge of liturgy (a word used to describe the worship practices of a congregation). Some may be licensed architects or interior designers but most are not. Some may belong to professional organizations like the American Institute of Architects or the newly founded Association of Consultants for Liturgical Spaces but most do not.

Although the backgrounds of liturgical consultants are different and they do not all have the same training, some of the credentials important to the practice are:

- A degree in theology or the study of liturgy
- A degree in the fine arts or architecture
- A degree in the history of religious architecture and art
- A degree or certification in adult education methods and techniques
- The ability to read architectural plans
- The ability to draw.

While professional degrees and certifications are important it should be noted that many consultants are very good at what they do because of their natural talents and lengthy experience. Therefore, a resume full of degrees is not a guarantee that the consultant is fully qualified any more than a license to practice architecture is a guarantee that the architect is competent. A good rule of thumb in searching for a qualified consultant is to see if he or she has a proven record and glowing references.

What Do They Do?

Depending on their credentials and experience the services offered will vary. In general, the consultant is someone

who acts as a change-agent without threatening the congregation. He or she must be a good teacher, respecting what the members of the congregation already know. The consultant may have to coach the client (and sometimes the architect) but should always be a team player. The ability to be creative is as important as the ability to be practical. Finally, expertise in conflict management will be helpful in any project.

Because many of these services are not governed by state regulations or professional licensing requirements, the qualifications of the consultant should be carefully scrutinized. Specifically, a liturgical design consultant should be able to offer the following services:

- *Organizational development.* Frequently, the consultant is retained by the congregation to facilitate the entire process of building or renovating the worship space. As the first professional hired for the project, the consultant would then coordinate preliminary timetables, the creation of committees and the search for other professionals, as needed.

- *Education.* One of the most important roles is that of an educator, helping the congregation learn how to create an appropriate place of worship according to its own traditions. This may include presenting a series of learning experiences that would include the history of religious art and architecture and the examination of the liturgical design options available to the client.

- *Data gathering and programming.* Once the congregation has completed its educational series it is ready to articulate specific needs and expectations. Some consultants are trained to utilize various data collection tools to help the congregation develop a program to document input from the various groups and committees. This information would then be

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Dr. Richard Vosko (right) working with Pritzker Award winner Professor Rafael Moneo on the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles, Los Angeles.

used to create a master plan and stimulate a creative design process with the architects.

- *Selection of other professionals.* If an architect has not been selected the consultant can assist the congregation in searching for one. The participation of the consultant in the search process can help establish an early collaborative spirit. Ideally, the entire professional team is in place at the beginning of the project. However, this may not be possible if the congregation is not sure of what it wants or needs to do.

- *Architectural process.* Throughout the architectural process the consultant works closely with the architects and all other design professionals such as acoustical and lighting experts to assure that the liturgical components of the project are thoroughly considered. During the schematic phase the consultant may also prepare conceptual sketches of what the worship space could look like. Some consultants who are architects will take the project only up through the completion of the schematic phase. A local architect would then finish developing the designs. Other consultants who are architects will guide the project from start to finish.

- *Artwork, furnishings and appointments.* Many consultants are talented artists and may design and/or make some or all of the furnishings and appointments required in the worship space. Other consultants will help the congregation search for and select appropriate artists and artisans.

The consultant usually oversees the design, fabrication and installation of all liturgical art, furnishings and appointments in a collaborative way.

How Can You Find One?

Liturgical design consultants usually work directly for the congregation. However, if the congregation is not aware that such consultants exist, the architect may suggest that one be retained for the project. There are some sources available for finding the right consultant.

- The Religious Art and Architecture PIA of the AIA (a.k.a. IFRAA) has a directory that identifies the professional practices of the members. E-mail: 44673@t-mail.telescan.com.

- The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions has a directory of liturgical consultants. Telephone: 202-635-6990.

- The Institute for Liturgical Consultants, a training program for professionals who wish to become liturgical design consultants, has a list of people who have been certified through their program. Telephone: 773-324-8000.

- The newly founded Association of Consultants for Liturgical Spaces has a membership directory. Telephone: 773-486-8970.

- Most local and regional administrative offices of the various faith traditions keep lists of consultants.

- Finally, although not all consultants may have websites, the internet will soon become another useful source. □