

Renovating
Our
Sacred Space



A Catechesis on Liturgical
Art and Architecture

Dear fellow parishioners,

As we witness daily the progress of our historic addition of a chapel and meeting spaces to our church and office buildings, we anticipate the opportunities that will soon be available to enhance our parish's ability to worship God, hand on our faith and serve those in need in our community.

The present moment also provides a unique opportunity to consider renovations to our current church which reflect the faith and the spirituality of our parishioners and those whom we welcome to our celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, the Lord's Day, and on the most significant days in our liturgical year.

Throughout my tenure as pastor of Good Shepherd, parishioners have expressed, in informal ways, their hopes and dreams for what our church might look like and, in recent months, in meetings to which all parishioners have been invited to attend, we have had robust discussions of the values we wish to see reflected in the architecture of our church.

Having listened carefully and attentively to all who have wished to express their thoughts, and having spent much time prayerfully considering the spiritual needs of all of the members of our parish, I offer the following reflections on changes which we will undertake in the near future which honor our shared faith in the Eucharist and the context of our past and present experience as members of Good Shepherd parish.

Always grateful for your commitment to growing together in faith, hope and love, I am

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Thomas P. Ferguson

Father Tom Ferguson



The Sanctuary

Although there has always been a uniqueness to the asymmetrical layout of the principal elements in the sanctuary of our church – i.e., the altar, tabernacle, ambo, crucifix, presider’s chair – there is also value to an architectural focus which reflects the unity and integrity of these elements, especially as they relate to the Sacrifice of the Mass and the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. For this reason, the movement of key elements of the sanctuary furnishings will establish lines of sight that will clearly connect the altar of sacrifice, the image of Jesus Christ crucified and the tabernacle where we find the real presence of the crucified and risen Lord. We will also make more visible and accessible for devotion the statue of our Lady which has long been present but in less accessible or visible places in our church. The elements of brick and woodwork which connect our sanctuary to the architecture of our local community will also be retained.



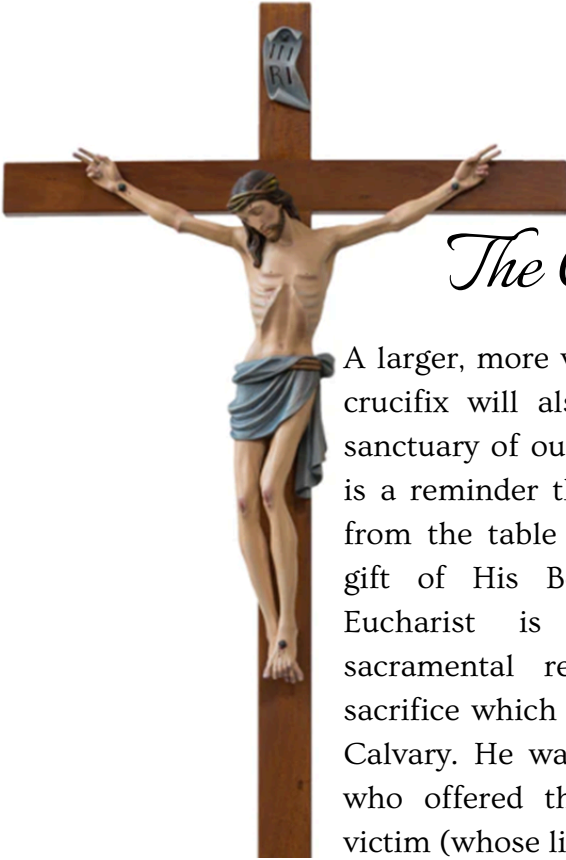
The Altar

The altar is the central element in the sanctuary of every Catholic church. It is the place where the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. It is the table of the Lord from which the people of God are fed. It is the place from which we go forth to serve our neighbor in need. For centuries, stone or marble has been considered the traditional material out of which an altar is made. The new altar for our church will include elements of marble as well as the wood decoration found in our current sanctuary furnishings which is taken from the decoration of a local landmark, George Washington's Mount Vernon. The image of loaves and fish on the front of the altar recalls Jesus' miracle which inaugurated His Bread of Life Discourse in John, chapter 6, as well as Jesus' invitation to go forth from the altar to do the works of mercy, especially feeding those who are hungry.



The Ambo

The ambo is the place from which the Word of God is proclaimed, with preeminence given to the proclamation of the gospel. The materials from which the ambo are made – marble and wood – are the same as those from which the altar is made, indicating how in the celebration of the Mass we are fed from two tables, the table of God’s Word and the table of the Eucharist. The symbols which decorate the ambo are those we associate with the four evangelists: Matthew - a man – symbolic of Matthew’s gospel beginning with the genealogy of Jesus’ human ancestors; Mark -the lion – symbolic of Mark’s gospel beginning with John the Baptist preaching like a roaring lion in the desert; Luke - the ox – symbolic of Luke’s gospel beginning with the service of Zechariah fulfilling his ministry as a priest offering sacrifices in the temple; and John - the eagle – symbolic of John’s gospel beginning with the mystery of Jesus’ eternal existence as the Word of God present always with the Father in His heavenly kingdom.



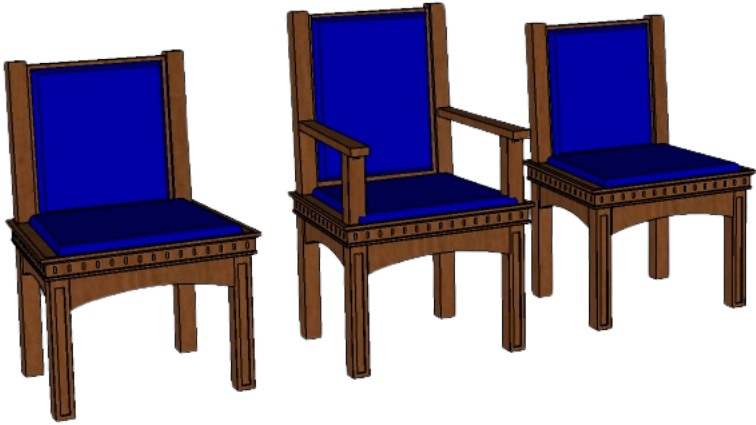
The Crucifix

A larger, more visible and permanent crucifix will also be present in the sanctuary of our church. The crucifix is a reminder that before we are fed from the table of the Lord with the gift of His Body and Blood, the Eucharist is first of all the sacramental representation of the sacrifice which Jesus offered when at Calvary. He was the priest (the one who offered the sacrifice) and the victim (whose life itself was offered in atonement for our sins) on the altar of the Cross. The location of the crucifix on the same architectural axis as the altar and the tabernacle indicates the nature of the Eucharist as the sacrament inaugurated at the Last Supper, deriving its saving power from the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross whose presence as our risen Lord is found in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. A processional cross for use during Mass will be crafted in a style similar to the crucifix which is permanently affixed in the sanctuary.



The Tabernacle

The tabernacle is the place of repose for the Most Blessed Sacrament, the real presence of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of the bread and wine that are consecrated on the altar. Moving the tabernacle to a central location on the sanctuary, on the same architectural axis as the altar and the crucifix, indicates the unity and integrity of these three elements of our Eucharistic theology: the sacrificial nature of the Mass, the reception of Holy Communion from the table of the Lord, and the enduring presence of Jesus in the sacrament to be brought to those who cannot be with us at the Mass and for those who wish to worship in His presence in our church. The central location of the tabernacle in our renovated sanctuary also allows it to be seen people in every section of pews in our church, whereas previously it was not visible at all to people in entire sections of pews.



The Presider's Chair

The presider's chair is an element of the furnishings in the sanctuary of a parish church which is symbolic of the relationship of the local community to its diocesan bishop. Just as in the cathedral church of a diocese the bishop's chair (or cathedra) is symbolic of his role as one who presides over and teaches in the diocesan church, in a parish church the presider's chair reminds us in our local community of our communion with our diocesan bishop and the diocesan church of which we are a part. Here in Good Shepherd church, the presider's chair (and the chairs that are provided for the deacons who assist at the liturgy) match in style the wood elements of the altar and the ambo, providing continuity with those liturgical furnishings and like them incorporating the décor of George Washington's Mount Vernon in a manner that preserves a longstanding parish tradition.

Statue of Our Lady



The bronze statue of our Lady which will be placed in the niche where the tabernacle had previously been located is an element of our parish artistic treasure which in the renovation of our sanctuary will become more visible and accessible to parishioners. In this devotional niche, which will include votive candles to be lit as we offer our prayer intentions, parishioners and visitors may hear in their hearts the

words of Jesus “behold your mother” (John 19:27). We will see in the image of our Lady our Mother who is both an example to us as the first and greatest disciple of Jesus, and also the intercessor who prays for us, “now and at the hour of our death.” Without doubt, persons of all ages, cultures and circumstances will find comfort in the image of our Lady so visible and clearly present in the worship space of our church.



The Baptismal Font

The location of the baptismal font is a physical reminder of our belief that Baptism is the “gateway” to all of the other sacraments. When we bless ourselves with holy water entering the church, we recall that it is through Baptism that we become members of the Body of Christ, united in faith and love, gathered together to offer our prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God in communion with one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord. We will soon enter both our new chapel and the main church from the same narthex space, and so we will reposition the baptismal font into the narthex so that it may be a kind of “gateway” to the celebration of the Eucharist in both sacred spaces. We are blessed to be able to preserve the existing font and also expand it so that it will include a font large enough for the baptism of adults at the Easter Vigil.

A Final Note

Some may wonder what will happen to the liturgical furnishings that have been present and in use in our sanctuary since the construction of our church in 1984 (and in some cases in use when we celebrated Mass as a parish in what is now Creedon Hall). Our altar, ambo, tabernacle, and crucifix which are currently in use in our church will all be transferred to our new chapel, preserving the patrimony of our parish in a new worship space where they are also more proportionate to the size of the sanctuary in which they will be located.

For those who may wish to do further reading on the liturgical principles which are reflected in the construction of our chapel and the renovation of our church sanctuary, please see:

- Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, “Sacrosanctum Concilium” (1963)
- Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “General Instruction of The Roman Missal, Including Adaptations for the Dioceses of the United States of America, 3rd edition” (2003)

While unanimity regarding artistic elements of any building will always be elusive, it has been my sincere intention to listen to all perspectives, respect the traditions of our parish, reflect the diverse spiritualities of all our parishioners, and clearly reflect the richness of our Eucharistic faith in the art and architecture of our church. In that spirit, I pray that our sanctuary renovations will draw us all deeper into the mystery we celebrate, the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity!



Todd Key Photography



*"If the Lord does not build the house, in
vain do its builders labor."*

Psalm 127:1



Good Shepherd Catholic Church - 2024