

CONCEPT STATEMENTS

A discussion of those things which will preserve what we treasure about our Catholic tradition, address the pressing needs before us and make our values tangible to the next generations of faithful people – our children and grandchildren.

Introduction

Members of St. Juan Diego Parish were invited by their pastor to gather together on September 8 and 9, 2007 for prayer and discussion. The invitation to this process of reflection and visioning was extended to all parishioners and in a specific way to those who participate in and lead the various ministries of our parish. About 75 of us accepted this invitation. We see ourselves as a cross section of parishioners voicing the concerns, issues, challenges, aspirations and spiritualities of this diverse community of faith.

The purpose of our gathering was to continue the ongoing discussion about a vision for our parish in the 21st century. This discussion not only seeks a vision but contemplates the master planning and specifics of a parish worship space. Our discussion focused on those things which will preserve what we treasure about our Catholic tradition, address the pressing needs before us and make our values tangible to the next generations of faithful people – our children and grandchildren. The following reflects our collective wisdom and our recommendations. It is offered for the prayerful and thoughtful consideration of our fellow parishioners.

Our Discussion

Our conversation has been framed with the idea that in many ways to be founding members of a parish is a blessing and a great responsibility. In the midst of our everyday cares and struggles we are mindful that what we do regarding the future of our parish will have a long-term impact. We acknowledge that our decisions must be measured by the test of seven generations. As a community we deal not only with today's needs and concerns. We will be also measured by our respect and care for the legacy of faith we have inherited from the three generations before us. Our actions today must also be visionary enough and trusting enough in God's providence that the three generations which follow us will realize that our present struggles, courage and vision have been a generous gift to them. We will be judged as wise by how carefully we balance the many facets before us.

Why We are Doing What We're Doing

Our starting point in all we do as St. Juan Diego Catholic Parish is to live our mission. Therefore, we are mindful of the centrality of the Eucharistic Gathering and Celebration. The Eucharist makes us Church. Flowing from the Eucharist is our call to ongoing faith formation and outreach to the world with a sense of justice and compassion. These concept statements have meaning only in the context of our parish mission statement:

*We are St. Juan Diego Parish,
a welcoming Roman Catholic community
empowered by the Holy Spirit, who worship, serve and
evangelize as we gather a vibrant, diverse, multi-cultural
People of God dedicated to proclaiming
the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Overarching Concepts: A Dedicated Worship Space, Sustainability and Accessibility

Our conversation produced many and varied ideas, but the three concepts of a dedicated worship space, sustainability and accessibility anchored the overall discussion. Everything else must be seen within this larger context.



A Dedicated Worship Space

There was strong consensus that the centerpiece of our architectural planning is a space dedicated exclusively to worship and the liturgy of the Church. This is in contrast to some planning strategies of the recent past where a single, multipurpose space was developed for liturgy as well as all the other large space needs of a community. This solution often led to spaces not conducive to an atmosphere for worship and prayer.

A worship space is made up of a whole array of focal points whose arrangement indicates their importance and relationship to the liturgy. Chief among these are altar, ambo, baptismal font, the place of the assembly, the place of the presider, the place for music, Eucharistic reservation and Children's Liturgy of the Word. Also key to this arrangement is the place of gathering and hospitality.

Flexibility within this dedicated worship space will be considered in order to increase liturgical options. Another reason to consider flexibility is to allow for related gatherings such as concerts of sacred music or other artistic presentations.

The liturgy of the Church is a musical liturgy and St. Juan Diego Parish is blessed by an extensive and vibrant music ministry. Therefore quality in the general acoustics and sound reinforcement is essential. The overall design of the music space needs to be attentive to its integration with the assembly and the liturgical focal points, as well as the variety of musical expressions used in worship and their future growth.

Projecting congregational responses and music onto a screen is the current practice of the parish. This method of participation seems to enjoy wide acceptance. It also leads to a more general discussion of the use of technology within the liturgy. The presence of so many who are expert in all forms of computer technologies makes this a good parish to explore its expanded use. The design challenge is to integrate these systems into a successful aesthetic which does not overwhelm or distract from the liturgy.

Seating is another issue often mentioned. There was enthusiasm for exploring a concept of multi-tiered seating which would increase visibility. The discussion of seating also involves the types of seating (pews/chairs) and the inclusion of kneelers in accordance with local or diocesan guidelines.

Places of Devotion

Places of devotion also figure large in Catholic worship spaces. Central among these is Eucharistic devotion whether within the main space or an adjacent chapel. Devotion is shown by shrines to Mary and the saints, the cross/crucifix, Stations of the Cross, and the Reconciliation Room. This sense of devotion and contemplative prayer finds opportunities for expression throughout the complex and exterior spaces.

Adjacent Spaces and Places for Ministry

The space adjacent to the worship space should be characterized as spaces that are multifunctional, flexible and expandable so as to provide maximum use. In addition to Children's Liturgy of the Word, these spaces will be invaluable for the whole range of faith formation and parish meetings.

Hospitality is an essential component for all ministries. A kitchen and serving area central to the worship space and meeting spaces is a strong recommendation.

The spaces necessary for ministerial outreach of the community are also part of our vision. Besides administrative and office spaces other specific space needs mentioned were a pantry, a place for a washer and dryer, adequate storage and a bathroom with shower.

Comprehensive Faith Formation

Ongoing growth in faith is a need for every member of our parish. From our beginning we have stressed faith formation from "cradle to grave." This building project will allow us to more adequately provide for faith development as well as to think creatively about its growth in the future.

Concerns about our children and youth are seen within the context of this all encompassing commitment to faith growth. But we do want to highlight our special interest in young people. Many ideas surfaced – some requiring building (a gym or youth center); some with infusing our general spaces and activities with a child friendly atmosphere (outdoor space for children, some art at a child's height). Both space and budget restriction demand in-depth planning for maximizing resources and long-range planning to provide a vision for growth. Much more input is needed here.



Master Planning

The master planning phase of this project is the critical opportunity to consider everything within the mandate of sustainable architecture and environment. In short, we must “get it right” and apply our most concentrated attention to this phase of planning. Five key ideas surfaced in our discussion:

- 1) Sustainability is not just a preferred option but a matter of social justice in the living out of our faith awareness. This is the time to maximize our awareness of the impact our consumption of resources has on our local environment and the health of the planet, as well as provide no undue financial burden for future generations. We hope to see our project as a leader in encouraging greater efforts at achieving more sustainable lifestyles. A practical application of this awareness is that in planning we show preference for the more sustainable option even if it is not the most expedient or most economical in the short run.
- 2) The whole site is sacred. We realize that our purchase of property makes us stewards of that resource. Because our particular site has great visibility in the larger community we have an increased responsibility to be a good neighbor and steward.
- 3) Landscaping, pathways, gardens and outdoor places for prayer and contemplation are just as important as the architecture we design. In the planning phase it is necessary to identify the most critical trees and natural attributes of the site so they may be considered in the overall design. A sense of the land is part of our sense of Spirit.
- 4) The site itself is small considering the many needs it is expected to serve. This is especially true when considering that many times we voiced our wish that the property retains as much natural and garden space as possible. We charge our planning professionals to find innovative ways of layering or combining spaces to minimize the footprint of the building on the site. No area is more critical than the parking requirements of this project. We are open to exploring any option that lessens the impact of the parking required by county codes.
- 5) We see the implications of accessibility in the same way we regard sustainability. Our concern goes beyond mere building code compliance into a moral imperative for our community of faith. A design strategy to consider here is that

accessibility solutions intended for a few actually becomes the means used by all. For instance, ramps normally tucked discretely away now become the main thoroughfare used by all. In the liturgical space, barrier-free access includes access to all the ministerial functions as well.

Aesthetics of Place

While much of the above concerns functionality, we are also keenly aware that the aesthetics of the spaces we plan provides the invitation to Spirit. The feel of what we create leads us deeper into mystery and the intangible aspects of worship.

After much discussion about making sure it “looks Catholic,” we sense that it is not so much a particular style or historical period that holds the key. Rather, we are looking for a certain timeless beauty that transcends the ordinary and leads us to a sense of harmony, reverence and contemplation. The aesthetic we seek does not so much take us out of the world, but provides a suitable oasis we can enter into and return to our daily cares refreshed and refocused. We do not wish to impose on our architects any particular stylistic mandates. In all matters we will rely on the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Portland and the principles set out in document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones*.

Recognizing the wisdom that geography produces its own spirituality, we hope that what we create somehow reflects the Northwest in spirit and materials. The property itself offers a rich source of materials which should be considered for use.

Besides the aesthetics of the architecture, there was discussion that we as Catholics possess a rich tradition of symbols and art that is alive and flourishing into our own day. A wise person has said: “To have roots is to wrap ourselves in a cloak of many colors.” We recommend that the inclusion of the arts touch every aspect of this project and reach every age group. How this is to be accomplished is still an open question. However, a particularly apt connection is the importance of roses to the City of Portland and the story of St. Juan Diego.



Additional Considerations

A conversation as rich as the one we are having is difficult to summarize. It is our hope that these concept statements provide the general outline of our consensus. The following items will help to round out the diversity of the discussion and add to the possibilities under consideration: a courtyard, adoration chapel, bride's room, parish nurse, bells, use of stained glass combined with clear glass, spaces for small children, a sense of the building from the road, adequate security and ample lighting on the site.

Next Steps and Recommendations

- 1) We recommend that the Building Committee and Pastoral Staff of St. Juan Diego Parish review these concepts and adopt them into their planning strategy. We make the same recommendation to the architects and other planning professionals for this project.
- 2) We ask that the Building Committee and the pastoral leadership of our parish continue to gather the Advisors at critical junctures in this design process. The Advisors, while not the primary decision-makers, can continue to be a key source for input, reaction and communication with the parish. We further recommend that the Communication Committee continue to find ways to communicate with the whole parish. This communication is especially important in widening the circle of consensus around these concept statements and in gathering input once the schematic designs are presented to the whole parish.

- 3) We recommend that the building committee consider establishing three taskforces to help in their work: a taskforce on technology and sustainability to investigate the possibilities of incorporating these critical areas more fully into our planning and decision making; a taskforce on the needs of the pastoral and social justice ministries and their impact on the design; and a taskforce on children and youth to investigate creative opportunities for inclusion and outreach. These taskforces will report directly to the Building Committee who will make all final decisions. The taskforces will be extensions of the work of the Building Committee to research and put forth possibilities. Membership on the taskforces can be members of the Building Committee as well as parishioners and others with special interest or expertise. The first item for the technology taskforce is to craft a working definition of sustainability as it applies to this project.

Conclusion

An insight which surfaced in our meetings serves as conclusion and hope. The goal of this project is to give expression to the vision, vitality and energy already present in this parish community. At the same time we challenge ourselves to create a place where we are generous doers of the Word, where the faith is lived, where the earth is revered, burdens are shared and God is praised with gratitude.

