The Ritual Experience

by:

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A Terminal Project

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_ Professor James Potter

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Project Abstract

What initially attracted me to this project was a combination of several factors. The first being that I have had a growing interest in the design of religious structures, wondering why are churches designed the way that they are? How do a religious affiliation’s beliefs affect the design of a place of worship, and how are they reflected in the place of worship?

Regarding the site that was chosen, Messiah Lutheran Church has recently gone through a strategic planning process and, within the last couple weeks, has adopted a new strategic ministry plan document. A vision statement within this document reads:

“Messiah will be located on a large, highly visible campus with state-of-the-art facilities with worship attendance over 3,000 each week and a Christian Day School of 500 plus students… Facilities will provide opportunities for continuous growth for large groups, small groups, and individuals in the Core Values of Messiah….”

While the current site of Messiah may not be as big as the church would require to fulfill this vision, it is not utilized very efficiently in its current state. So, one of the purposes of this project besides my own interest in the subject, is to provide the church with an idea of what could be done to further improve the facilities at the current site.
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Research / Analysis

Who is Messiah Lutheran Church?

Precedent Study

- A History of the Church
- Contemporary Lutheran Churches
- 84th Street Corridor / “Church Row”

Site Analysis

Program
Who is Messiah Lutheran Church?

Messiah Lutheran Church, located at 1800 S. 84th, is a church who has a history of rapid growth and plans to continue growing into the future.

Messiah is a member church of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which is fairly conservative in its theological beliefs, although liturgically Messiah is very non-traditional. Despite what many people believe, Messiah’s is not a true contemporary liturgical style, but rather a “blended” style of worship. This liturgical style of worship is most effective with the Baby-Boomer generation of church-goers, but not so attractive to younger generations.

Many people within the church believe that the current liturgical worship style employed at Messiah will die out with the Baby-Boomer generation. If this is the case, then it is inevitable that the worship style of Messiah change. It may appear that Messiah already has plans for this as it hopes to start a new young adult ministry at Messiah, which in the long term may include an in-house coffee shop along with a new worship service geared toward the younger crowds it hopes to attract.

The following was a study to understand any correlation and draw any parallels between the social and political aspects of the church and how they may have affected the design of religious structures during the last 2 millennia of the church’s history.
Byzantine
Monasticism

Romanesque
Gothic Revival

Modernism
During the period of the Early Church (between the time of Christ and when Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire) individual homes were converted into churches. These often consisted of at least the following:

1) the meeting hall (sanctuary)
2) the fellowship hall
3) the baptistery

Once Christianity became the state religion, many churches were pre-existing structures that were re-dedicated as Christian churches (i.e. – the Pantheon in Rome) and as time went on and new churches were being constructed, the Roman basilica (another pagan design) became the standard for church design.

As the centuries moved on, the basilica plan was adapted to become the basis of cathedral design throughout the Renaissance and the Middle Ages.

In modern times, as churches became larger and started becoming what are known as “mega-churches,” a new standard was required for church design as the basilica plan was inefficient at supporting people in large quantities. Not everyone had a good seat with a good view or could even hear the preacher. This new paradigm was found in that of theatre design.

Today, as churches continue to get bigger, many are also offering more ministries and programs than just Sunday worship. Some churches offer so many peripheral programs that they become “a community within the community.” In fact, some even make that their goal in order to reach more people and become the centerpoint of members’ lives. From this, however, two questions arise:

Can the church be all things to all people?

Should the church be all things to all people?
Central Lutheran Church
Portland, Oregon [1951]

Christ Church
St. Paul, Minnesota [1950]
Grace Lutheran Church
Columbus, Indiana

St. John’s Lutheran Church
Midland, Michigan [1955]
“Church Row” is the unofficial moniker of the 84th Street corridor in Lincoln, Nebraska due to the high concentration of religious structures along its length. This was a comparative study of the design of religious structures based on denomination and size.
Indian Hills Community Church  
1000 S. 84th Street  
Built:  1967  
Expanded:  1971, 1980, 200  
Plan:  Amphitheater

Faith Lutheran Church [LC-MS]  
8701 Adams Street  
Built:  2003  
Plan:  Linear

Capitol City Christian Church  
7800 Holdrege Street  
Built:  1971  
Plan:  Amphitheater

Mount Olive Lutheran Church [ELCA]  
7979 Holdrege Street  
Built:  1994  
Plan:  Linear

Fellowship Church of God  
8601 Holdrege Street  
Built:  1998  
Plan:  Amphitheater

St. Joseph’s Catholic Church  
1940 S. 77th Street  
Built:  1978  
Expanded:  1990, 2001  
Current Seating Capacity:  700  
Plan:  Amphitheater

Aldersgate United Methodist Church  
8320 South Street  
Built:  1970  
Plan:  Amphitheater

Messiah Lutheran Church [LC-MS]  
1800 S. 84th Street  
Built:  1974  
Expanded:  1996  
Current Seating Capacity:  700  
Plan:  Amphitheater

Faith Lutheran Church [LC-MS]  
8701 Adams Street  
Built:  2003  
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Through this study of each church along the entire run of 84th Street between Cornhusker Highway 6 and Nebraska Highway 2 (with the exceptions of Sheridan Lutheran and Berean Christian churches, both located on 70th Street) it was learned that many of the larger churches were designed with grandiose, bold gestures in mind while many of the smaller churches were much more modest in their design.

Take, for example, First Evangelical Lutheran and Good Shepherd Presbyterian churches located, very literally, directly across the street from one another. While both are fairly simplistic in their respective designs, First Evangelical Lutheran has viewers looking skyward with the cross set atop a large vertical window flanked by other vertical elements, while Good Shepherd Presbyterian on the other hand is very humble in its design, not calling attention to any particular design element except for the cross in the circular window.

Meanwhile, Berean Christian church (arguably the largest worship structure as far as seating capacity in the entire state) emphasizes its entrances with large glass curtain walls, giving a sense of transparency to an otherwise opaque building, while Faith Bible church, on the other hand is a fairly straightforward metal building (using a similar materiality to Berean) with the only indication of it being a church are the sign out front and the large cross window in the center of the front façade.
The site for this terminal design project is a ten-acre site bounded by 84th street on the west with single-family housing developments beyond, more single-family housing developments to the north and south, and open agricultural field to the east. The fields to the east are currently undeveloped due to there not being any sewer or utility lines running to the site. There is currently a sewer line running along 84th Street but, due to the downhill slope to the east, any further developments beyond what is already developed cannot be serviced by the same sewer.

The site of Messiah Lutheran Church (half located within the Lincoln city limits, the other half without) is zoned as an R-1 Residential District. The issue of half the site being outside city limits shouldn’t pose any problem since the entire site is zoned R-1.
The site, as it existed from 1974 to 1996, consisted of a single elementary school building, a gravel parking lot, and open fields to the east for the school children to play during recess.

Currently, Messiah's only vehicular access is off of 84th Street. This poses two issues for the design of Messiah Lutheran Church:

1. Limited vehicular access to the site and,
2. Provides a major public frontage for the church.
In 1996, Messiah Lutheran Church, built its own sanctuary as well as improvements to the school building and grounds. The gravel parking lot was expanded and paved and a secondary lower gravel parking lot was added.

The differences between the site conditions from 1988 to 1996 begin to imply the challenges of working with the 10-acre site as the parking in particular demands a lot of space on the site.

The site is located on a hillside (the crest of the hill being located in the middle of 84th Street) which slopes gently to the east. There is an overall 31-ft difference in elevation along the length of the 725-ft site with a 12-ft (1 story) difference in elevation between the east and west faces of the building.
Messiah Lutheran is a church with a history of rapid growth and plans to continue growing into the future.

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Many people within the church believe that the current liturgical worship style employed at Messiah will die out with the Baby-Boomer generation. If this is the case, then it is inevitable that the worship style of Messiah will change. It may appear that Messiah already has plans for this as it hopes to start a new young adult ministry at Messiah, which in the long term may include an in-house coffee shop along with a new worship service geared toward the younger crowds it hopes to attract.

The church, in its current state is rather disorganized in terms of its spatial layout and is in serious need of more space for all of the various activities that take place within the building throughout the week.

In 1996, when the current sanctuary was built, it was placed behind the pre-existing school building, hiding it behind the existing building and leaving the smallest and most inefficiently used spaces of the building facing 84th street. This has lead many visitors struggling to find the church as they pass by not noticing it to be there in the first place.

One of the various space needs that the church is currently struggling with is fellowship space as the church doesn’t technically have a fellowship hall. The school’s gym (and consequently cafeteria) doubles as the church’s social hall when the church is providing meals on special occasions.
The Pastors do not have a seat on the cancel platform. Rather, they either sit in the front row of the seating or with their families in the congregation.

The pulpit is also seldom used by the pastors except for guest pastors or temporary pastors filling a vacancy who may not be as familiar with Messiah Lutheran Church. Rather, the pastors often stand at the point on the cancel closest to the congregation.

The Pastor’s back is also seldom turned toward the congregation. The pastor will only approach the altar for the Confession, Prayer and preparation for Holy Communion.

The movement of both the pastors and the congregation is a matter of efficiency so as not to take too long with this important aspect of the liturgy.

The first line of communicants will line up in front of the chancel [red line] and as this line is filing in, the pastors will begin distributing the elements.

Once a communicant has received the elements, they will stay for a brief period of reflection then quietly leave to return to their seat. As this is happening, the next line of communicants is already filing into place.

As the elements are being distributed, those in the congregation who have already received and those who have not yet been called forward will sing a series of praise songs to serenade the communicants.
Photo Documentation _Elevations

North Facade

East Facade

South Facade [school]

South Facade [church]

West Facade

Photo Documentation _Site Context

View North - single-family housing

View East - agricultural field

View South - single-family housing

View West - 84th Street with single-family housing beyond.
The following are a few considerations that can be ascertained from the site analysis:

There is a fairly substantial view to the east of the property. The land has been continually used as farmland, however, the owner wishes to sell the property. Messiah has considered the purchase of the land in question, but for the intents of this project, the land is being ignored.

Views to the north and south may need to be screened as those properties are single family houses who may not wish to have gradeschoolers looking in their back window.

84th Street marks the west boundary of the property and is the only access to the site for motor vehicles as well as pedestrians.

As it is now, the 84th street facade of the building does not provide a very substantial public face for Messiah Lutheran Church as the main entrance is roughly centered on the north side of the building, facing the parking lot and the shortest section of the building (at only 13-feet) faces the street.

Also, the topography of the site is a concern for the design as there is a 37-foot change in elevation from the west property line to the east property line. This change in grade is enough for a sub-basement to be added below the existing basement should the building extend far enough to the east.
**Program**

The program for this project was developed to fit within a strategic plan that Messiah Lutheran Church has developed and recently adopted. The strategic plan was developed over the course of the last several months and, so, the program was developed from information collected at various planning meetings at the church.

**Sanctuary**

The Sanctuary may assume many forms due to the demands of site and the architect’s interpretation of the building committee’s stated program needs. The Sanctuary must have dignity and strength to carry out the spirit of worship and logically contain the many elements of the liturgical structure of worship. A center or direct aisle from the seating area is essential to permit weddings and similar activities to function properly. The center aisle should not be less than 5 feet wide. Side aisles should not be less than 3 feet wide. Sculpture, painting, and stained glass may be used, but with good taste and properly placed to enhance the room and to express its special character. Art has always been a basic vehicle of man to express the beauty and logic of the universe and for a moment’s escape from the sometime prosaic reality, and therefore, it is a fitting agent to bring about the awareness of divine truth.

- Seating 7,000 s.f.
- Chancel 500 s.f.
- Choir 700 s.f.
- Audio/Video Room 400 s.f.
- Projection Rooms 500 s.f.
- Mothers’ room 400 s.f.

**Great Hall**

The Great Hall is the vestibule or entry into the sanctuary, but also serves as a gathering area for the congregation before and after services. Its shape will be suggested by the basic plan of the church complex. It is recommended that it be at least 10 feet wide to permit facile movement of the congregation and the usual personal greetings to the parishioners by the minister. It is well to locate bathrooms, coat rooms, and similar conveniences discreetly off the Great Hall or in other accessible areas, since there is no rigid rule except convenience to determine their disposition.

- Entry Vestibules 100 s.f. each
- Coat Rooms 500 s.f.
- Welcome Desk 200 s.f.
- Hospitality Room 200 s.f.

**Youth Center**

The Youth Center, as such, should be designed to appeal to the congregation’s middle-school and high-school youth including an area with theater seating for lessons and presentations, an activity area with pool tables, table tennis, air-hockey, etc., and a café area incorporating the booth tables currently located in the basement hallway.

- Theater Seating 1,000 s.f.
- Cafe Seating 2,400 s.f.
- Game Area 4,500 s.f.
- Youth Director’s Office 120 s.f.
- Middle School Youth Director’s Office 120 s.f.
- Storage 500 s.f.

**Fellowship Hall**

The Fellowship Hall should provide seating equal to that of the nave. Dining Capacity should be determined by programmatic needs, but should not exceed average attendance at the larger communal dining functions, since this can be expensive space to build. It should be a pleasant area and well correlated to the exterior landscape features if possible. The ceiling should not be less than 14 feet if possible.

- Social Hall 13,000 s.f.
- Meeting Hall 8,000 s.f.
- Coffee Shop 2,500 s.f.
- Commons 2,500 s.f.
- Nursery 1,000 s.f.
- Theological Library & Resource Center 3,000 s.f.
Church Administration

Administrative rooms are sized to meet the specific requirements of the church’s needs. Special attention should be given to the pastoral offices to give them ecclesiastical character. Each should include closets and be located near toilet facilities. The pastors’ offices and sacristy should have direct access to the altar platform in the sanctuary.

Sacristy 120 s.f.
Senior Pastor Office 200 s.f.
Associate Pastor Offices 2 @ 120 s.f.
Ministry Director Offices 8 @ 120 s.f.

Classrooms

Classrooms should not be less than 800 square feet. Small rooms are too restrictive and are not adaptable to program changes. It is best that adequate natural light be provided, and should not be sacrificed for design effects. Kindergarten rooms should provide at least 30 square feet per pupil because of the nature of kindergarten activities. The architectural treatment should reflect the rhythm and character of the church building.

Kindergarten 3 @ 1,200 s.f.
Grades 1-5 15 @ 900 s.f.
Sp. Ed. Classroom 850 s.f.

Activity Spaces

Activity spaces are sized to meet the specific requirements of the school’s needs as well as being designed to accommodate their respective activities. Acoustics should be factored into the design of the music room. The cafeteria should accommodate half the student population at a time.

Art 1,100 s.f.
Music 1,000 s.f.
Gymnasium / Workroom / Storage 6,450 s.f.
Cafeteria 3,000 s.f.
Media Center 3,200 s.f.

School Administration

Administrative rooms are sized to meet the specific requirements of the school’s needs. Each office should include closets and be located near toilet facilities.

Principal 200 s.f.
Assistant Principal 120 s.f.
Waiting/Reception 200 s.f.
General Office Area 200 s.f.
Workroom 500 s.f.
Conference Room 200 s.f.
Teachers Lounge 500 s.f.
Counseling 120 s.f.
Health Office 500 s.f.
Family / Social Service / Community Room 400 s.f.
Storage 200 s.f.

Support

Building Services 1,000 s.f.
Building Storage 1,500 s.f.
Kitchen 900 s.f.
Restrooms Capacity: 6 people each
Parking 450 parking stalls
I originally came up with eight conceptual layouts for the building to show the diversity of possibilities in designing new structures and listed various pros and cons for each concept.

From these eight concepts, I narrowed the options down to three based on the strengths and weaknesses of each concept.
From the three finalists, I’ve formulated a single schematic design which incorporates elements from each of these concepts, including the courtyard from the first of the final three concepts, the new façade from the second, and the sanctuary orientation from one of the other five concepts.
One of the most challenging aspects of working with this site was what to do about the parking. As this design stands, there are approximately 500 regular parking stalls with 10 additional handicap stalls and 45 staff parking stalls along the south end of the building for a total of approximately 555 total parking stalls on the site.

Cramming this much parking caused another problem: where are the kids in the elementary school going to play during recess? To solve this problem, the southern 2/3 of parking would be a reinforced grass lot to serve as parking on Sundays [highest demand] and as a play field during the week.

Once I had the site designed I shifted my focus on the new sanctuary being proposed in this design, and as such, has changed the most dramatically during the design development.
The Liturgical Center

At the time of the mid-year review in December, the sanctuary was an over sized quarter-circle with the chancel [which was far too small] pushed back in the north-west corner of the sanctuary.

As the design progressed, the chancel was pulled further and further out from the corner of the sanctuary, eventually getting to the point that the chancel became a free-standing element in the center of the sanctuary. This had its benefits: increasing the perceived importance of the chancel by placing it in the center, plus increasing the sense of community by allowing the congregants to see each other. However, this also made the design of the chancel itself much more challenging.

At first the chancel was designed as a circular platform with the altar in the center. This created the problems of where to place the pulpit and baptistry, as well as how will the pastors and congregants move around on the platform. So the chancel was redesigned that each of the three elements on the platform were located in their own node that, again, increased their perceived importance by the congregation as well as giving the platform a clean design allowing the pastors to move about freely to address everyone in the congregation.

Structure

The shape of the sanctuary in plan [as it morphed from the original quarter-circle to the more circular triangle] was cause for another challenging problem in the design of the roof structure sanctuary.

Eventually, I drew my inspiration from the intricate tree-like structure of medieval cathedrals. The structure was originally devised as two overlapping “nets” that came down on twelve points along the periphery of the sanctuary.

The beams for this intricate structural system would be composed of glu-lam wood trusses 12 inches across by 30 inches deep to account for the load they would be required to take.
Final Documentation

Drawings
- site plan
- sections
- floor plans
- detail sections

Renderings
- exterior perspectives
- interior perspectives
- liturgical use of the sanctuary
- light
1. Welcome - At this stage of the liturgy, the congregants are still entering into the sanctuary and taking their seats. As this is happening the music team is often welcoming them in through song. Once this is through, the Pastor will walk up onto the Chancel to officially welcome and open the worship service. [pg. 90]

2. Opening Medley - Once the Pastor has opened the worship service, he will step down from the Chancel and the music team will lead the congregation in song to “set the mood” of the service. [pg. 90]

3. Baptism - During those services that have baptisms the pastors, parents and sponsors would gather around the baptismal font in order to perform this rite. [pg. 91]

4. Scripture Reading - This stage of the liturgy is often performed by a layperson of the congregation and is often the only time the pulpit is used during the service. [pg. 91]

5 / 6 / 7 / 8 Sermon 1 - Typically, the pulpit isn’t used by the Pastor as he is giving the sermon, unless it is a guest- or interim-Pastor. In this design, the chancel is left open for the pastor to move about to address the congregation during sermons. [pgs. 92, 93]

9. Prayer - One of the few times the pastor will approach the altar is for the prayer / Lord’s Prayer after the offering and before Holy Communion. The other times the pastor will approach the altar is for the confession and the preparation of Holy Communion. [pg. 94]

Lighting

The use of light is very important in the design of a sacred space, often being used to represent God himself or, similarly, the mysterious qualities of the spiritual realm.

In the design of any space, light can be used in two ways: 1] the intellectual, and 2] the emotional.

In the intellectual sense, light is often cast evenly throughout the space, bringing a sense of enlightenment and that all has been revealed.

In the emotional sense, light is used to sort of play with the emotions of the participant. Light in the emotional sense could be used through either spot lighting, or the contrast between light and shadow. In either case, the light is used to enhance the participants’ experience of a space.

The following pages will display the use of light [both intellectual and emotional] in this design thesis.
Lighting 3. Indirect lighting - light washing ceiling

Lighting 4. Accent lighting on Chancel platform
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