

# Environment for Catholic Worship

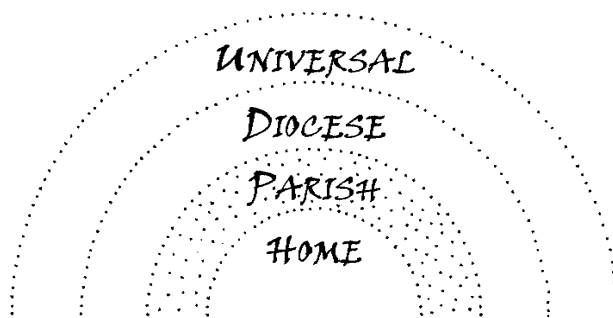
## About this series

In November 2000, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Built of Living Stones*, guidelines for the design and furnishing of Roman Catholic worship spaces. This present series of twelve bulletin inserts intends to explore the major issues and themes and quotes extensively from the document.

## Part 1

# The Living Church

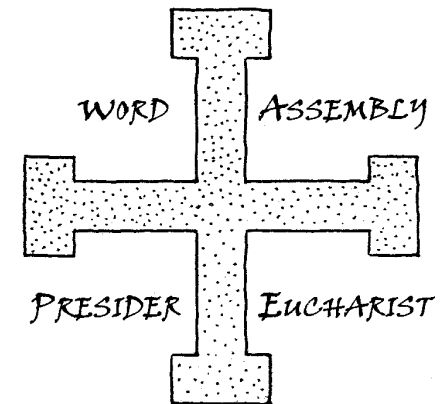
We begin our look at spaces for Roman Catholic worship by recognizing that the word we often use to describe a building—church—is best understood first as a word to describe a people, a community of believers in union with Christ. And even when describing a people it can mean the smallest grouping—the domestic church, to the largest—the universal church. The focus of our attention in this series will be the place where the local church celebrates the mysteries of our faith as a parish.



Orans or “praying figure” in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Via Latina catacomb

The church building provides a place for the community of faith to respond to Jesus’ invitation to become one with him in the praise and thanksgiving of God, whom he called “Abba.” Here, we recognize Christ in “the breaking of the bread,” in the proclamation of our sacred stories, and in the very assembly gathered here to remember how God has claimed us as a chosen people.

In this place, the church remembers the blessings and covenants of the past. It unites itself with Christ in the New Covenant and responds to Christ’s command to “Do this in memory of me.” And so this building must serve the action of the assembly as it celebrates the mystery of redemption. It is the place where the presence of Christ is experienced in all of its manifestations—the gathered assembly, the proclamation of the Word, the sharing and the reservation of the Eucharist, and in the person of the presiding priest.



The liturgy that we celebrate here is the source and summit of our Christian life, a life marked by daily acts of self-sacrifice and concern for the poor and alienated, the sick and imprisoned, both within and beyond our circle of family and friends. The hospitality and care that must characterize the daily life of a Christian should also be present in the place where Christians gather.

This climate of hospitality makes it possible for the church to be a school where children and adults learn how to love one another. The respect and dignity shown to each person who crosses the threshold of the church—whether stranger or friend, young or old, able or disabled—is the same hospitality and openness that characterized Jesus' ministry. The design of the entrance and the interior and exterior gathering spaces can be an expression of that hospitality.

Churches have long been understood as places of sanctuary or safety. In our own day, churches can be a second home for the households who come together each week to celebrate the Eucharist, and who come to mark the significant moments of the lives of each of its members.

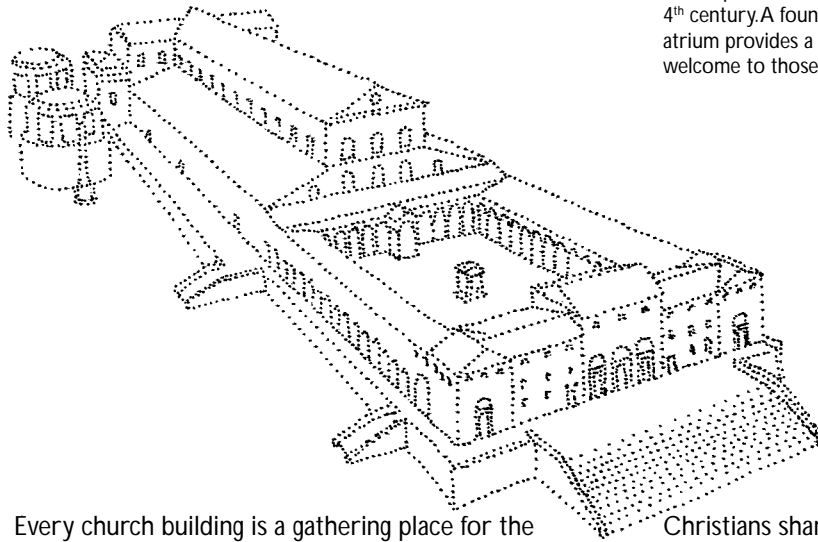
### Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

[The following abbreviations designate the sources quoted by *Built of Living Stones*: BB-Book of Blessings; CCC-Catechism of the Catholic Church; CIC-Code of Canon Law; GILM-General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass; GIRM-General Instruction of the Roman Missal; LMT-Liturgical Music Today (US Bishops Statement); MCW-Music In Catholic Worship (US Bishops Statement); N-Notitiae (Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments); OCF-Order of Christian Funerals; OP-Ordo Penitentiae Rite of Penance; PCEF-Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation of the Easter Feasts; RDCA-Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar; SC-The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.]

Just as the term *Church* refers to the *living temple*, God's People, the term *church* also has been used to describe "the building in which the Christian community gathers to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, and celebrate the Eucharist." (RCDA, ch 2, no 1) [16]

...the building itself becomes "a sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and reflects the Church dwelling in heaven." (RCDA, ch 1, no 2)

The pilgrimage church, Ste. Foy in Conques, France was begun in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and has been visited by countless pilgrims on a journey toward Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain.



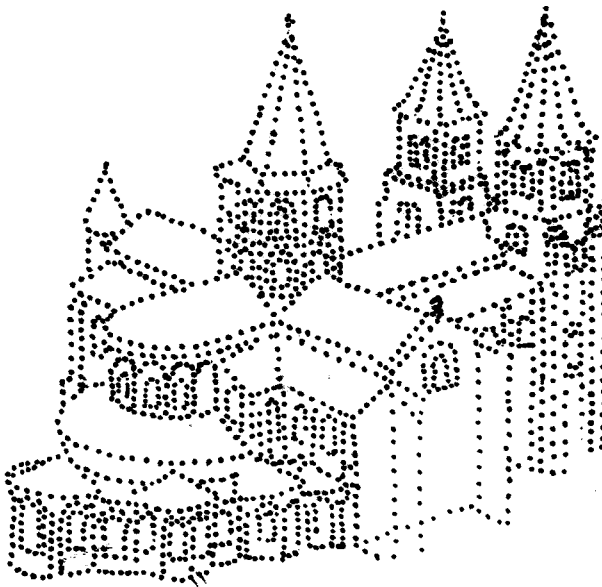
Old St. Peter's Church, built by the emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. A fountain in the atrium provides a refreshing welcome to those arriving.

Every church building is a gathering place for the assembly, a resting place, a place of encounter with God, as well as a point of departure on the Church's unfinished journey toward the reign of God. [17]

In the New Testament, the term *liturgy* is intimately connected with the proclamation of the Good News and with active charity. Through baptism and confirmation,

Christians share in Christ's priesthood which they exercise through their worship of God and their vocation of service to others. At the Eucharist, Christ calls his members to conversion in the proclamation of the word; he invites them to join with him in offering his perfect sacrifice to the Father; and he sends them forth from liturgy to serve the community in charity. [21]

The church building houses the community of the baptized as it gathers to celebrate the sacred liturgy. By its practical design and beauty it fosters the full, dignified, and graceful celebration of these rites. The primary concern in the building or renovation of a space for worship must be its suitability for the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical rites of the Church. Consequently, the fundamental prerequisite for those engaged in the building or renovation of a church is familiarity with the rites to be celebrated there. [46]



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