ZION LUTHERAN CENTER

BUILDING FOR THE CHURCH

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Architectural Thesis 1987
This year of study is lovingly dedicated to my parents, Nancy and Arlan, and to my future wife, Cheryl. For without your support and comfort, none of this would have been possible. Thank you very much.
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"Four things in any land must dwell,
If it endures and prospers well;
One is manhood true and good;
One is noble womanhood;
One is child life, clean and bright;
And one an altar kept alight."

Author Unknown

Being brought up in a Christian Spirit, I realize the importance of God and the church through all stages of a person’s life. At the present time, I have a deep concern for the state of Christianity in the world today. I feel that Christianity is tremendously popular, but at the same time, lacking in any meaningful strength. The church (which is not the building itself, but rather the people within) needs to develop and become more concrete, and becoming more concrete it will certainly reach even a greater number of people.

Although I strongly believe that the strength of Christianity is rooted within the church or the people themselves, the actual building for the church plays an extremely important part in the
role of Christianity. It houses the needs of the people and should be a social meeting place for all to be welcome. It is a permanent example of how the people deal with Christianity and demonstrates their attitudes in a built form. The building is one of many different aspects that we must deal with in our Christian lives and not to be taken for granted.

The following pages are an approach toward church architecture. Basic but extremely relevant questions are brought up which we often take for granted. This study is an important way in which I can examine my beliefs and possibly stimulate others in raising questions of their own. The issues are brought up not to produce confusion, but hopefully force us to become more sensitive to our beliefs and our attitude toward life. Although the thrust of this year was to design an appropriate building for the Church, ultimately I believe it was a chance of growth toward a better life in Christ.
I feel that in the past years our doctrines have changed but our buildings for the church have not reflected this new attitude. I believe that if we design church buildings, through re-examining the true way of life we are to live in Christ and reflect it into the structure, our church buildings will take on new shapes, forms, and meanings. E.A. Sovik feels that:

"It isn't buildings that need change but the people, and the renewal of buildings is only a means to help people understand the church and their faith as it ought to be understood."

First of all, we need to carefully analyze our theological beliefs. Second, we need to carry this notion through in everything we do, including our buildings of worship, to better state our religion. We should do this so that we not only have this attitude in our minds, but we can actually physically experience our beliefs as well. Maybe if we indeed experience this in our church architecture, we can better understand, reinforce, and strengthen what our beliefs are. And if we better understand what we believe, we will better be able to live our beliefs in our daily lives.

I am simply going to start by asking a few extremely basic questions and I will try to elaborate as to what my thinking is at this time. This will allow me to better understand what I feel the church building should be as well as to stimulate others in thinking about their beliefs.
Religion is an extremely personal and delicate issue. It involves the individual's attitude toward their faith which is a combination of their past, present, and ideas of or the goals for the future. In general, Christian's beliefs should be carried through in everything they do, in every minute of everyday. If we are Christians through and through, which we are to be, our notions will be seen in architecture as well. Not simply religious architecture but all architecture, although the focus of this thesis is on a building for the Church.

"Why do we need Church buildings?" and "What purpose do they serve?" are a few of many good questions that definitely need to be answered or at least attempted to be answered before designing a structure for the church. These simple questions will start ideas flowing and growth will start to flourish. Whether we have the "ultimate right" answer to specific questions is not the point here. The point is simply this; we did indeed question what the structure means to us and how it relates to our faith. To do a church building that resembles the past is only taking the function for granted. I believe we can indeed produce better religious architecture by being aware of what we want it to be and want it to do for us.

Many of the following questions and answers will start to blend together. This is good because it represents a consistency in the thinking process.
What is 'Church'

A church building is a place for the church or Body of Christ to come together for various functions. First of all, the absolute most important reason for the church building is that it is a place where people can gather to worship the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Three in One are why people gather in the first place. The second reason for the church building was also stated in the first reason. It is a place where people, God's people, gather together to worship with each other. The notion that it is a coming together with fellow Christians should play a vital part of the building. Because it is a gathering, it gives that congregation an identity. The building becomes a distinct visual entity that should be carefully thought out. The church building is a symbol that reflects the attitudes of what the congregation stands for. The outside, as well as the inside, should mean a lot in respect to what the church believes. Because the actual building stands even when the church is not in it, why should our attitudes not be applied to our building and let it extend these attitudes to all people at all times.

I feel that we too often misassociate the word "church." We frequently use the term "Go to church." This association to me suggests that the building becomes an extremely important place. Maybe it is, but what makes it important? When the structure is empty, is it any more sacred than our place of work or residence? Should it be? For me the answers lie in its primary use. Its importance is the coming together of Christians for the glorification of God. It basically comes down to which one of the two the congregation believes. Is this particular building the "House of God" or is it the "House of the Church?" Myself, I think if we would consider it the "House of God" that it almost suggests that God resides in that particular place. Apostle Paul in his letters to the Churches of Corinth states:
"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you."

I Cor. 3:16

God's presence rests with the people and this suggests that God's presence cannot and should not be thought of as in one place. God's presence is in us rather than in specific places or objects! The importance of the building is to allow God's presence in us to join together in a specific location to worship God. Thus, the building is not the church. The people are the church. We are the part that is to be holy. The building simply is to house and protect the church to allow for a safe worship of the Trinity. At this time, I think it appropriate to rename the building from the church to something as simple as the "center." This would allow us to better associate with our beliefs without any type of misunderstanding.

Design Consideration

The structure should remain simple to allow the church to become the focus. The church should create the atmosphere within and not the building. Many religious buildings attempt to thrust a feeling or attitude on the people which is absolutely opposite of our beliefs. If we simply allow the center to protect us from the elements and allow the church to become the active ingredient, it would better respond to our theological background.

Dual Lives

Do true Christians try to live two different lives? One being in the sacred world on Sunday and a secular world the other six days? Certainly not! We are to lead one specific type of life. Especially if we believe the presence of God is in us, why
do we perceive and build our centers with the notion of God’s presence built into the structure? It is almost absurd to allow the building to try to accomplish the feeling of the Spirit when it is in the people. If we are to live a life in Christ at all times, why do our gathering centers attempt at this Spiritual separation between building types. Because we are human, and supposing the structure does promote this feeling that God is in that space, we are tempted to place an emphasis on the structure. I feel that the building should refrain from that attitude to allow the people within to promote the atmosphere which is desired. Imagine when a building is specifically produced for the ritual of worship, other places will then be thought of as strictly secular. What if one place becomes both sacred and secular, this would indicate one single representation of a lifestyle. We should do everything possible to reunite this notion of sacred and secular rather than to separate them. Would not this better represent the way we are to be?

Although there should not be a separation between sacred and secular, I feel it is perfectly permissible to allow a physical separation for a time being. We definitely need times of separation both in groups and as individuals as well. This separation allows the people to focus on worship and contemplation. Separation can take place provided we do not forget that it is the church in the space and the purpose that they are there for that is the important ingredient and not the specific separated place. Remember that God’s presence is in us and that we are to take that presence with us when we leave that place. Therefore, the building is no more sacred than our place of work or residence. It simply allows the church to be separated as a group for a short time, and although it is a separation, the attitude or atmosphere is still generated from within the people.
Design Consideration

Once again, the center should not promote an awe inspiring effect such as the Gothic Cathedral or even hint at the notion. If the center is creating the uplifting within us, what happens a day or two later after we leave that place. Just think, if the center becomes secondary or silent to the people and the people promote the uplifted quality, when they leave, they are more apt to carry the beliefs through the doors into their daily lives.

General Attitude

Christians are to have a specific general attitude toward life. Warmth, love, kindness, sharing, caring, and many more belong to this particular group. If we are to carry these notions in our lives, then why do our structures not portray the same qualities? Many religious buildings try to be overbearing. They try to dominate over the important aspect which is the people. It is almost an intimidation that is trusted on the people. As a church, we should discourage this notion and try to provoke a warm, friendly welcome to all as well to oursevles. A stranger should feel welcome and invited to come into our buildings. If we do not promote this attitude in our centers it is ultimately going to be more difficult to demonstrate it in ourselves outside of the building. I believe if we walk into or out of a friendly atmosphere we are more likely to carry out the friendly attitude through our actions. Although the people are to produce the action and the attitude within, the center will have a definite influence on peoples' attitudes. In James T. Baker's article titled "A Church in the Wildwood", Baker expresses his view on the topic:

"It's a great pity when a congregation does not shape its own place of worship, for a building can lead people into
moods and practices that might be wrong for them. 'We shape our buildings,' Winston Churchill wrote; 'thereafter they shape us.' But they shape us even when we don't shape them. The less control people have over shaping their buildings, the more likely those buildings are to be misshapen and to misshape."

**Design Consideration**

Remember, if the center is brutal, harsh, pompous, or overbearing, these qualities will have a tendency to creep into our beliefs as well. On the other hand, if the center glows with friendship, love, warmth and open arms, who knows, maybe it will rub off on to us and be an example of our faith.

*Living Faith*

Because we are human, we are constantly changing. Everyday of our lives we try to grow and improve ourselves. If we do not, we have a tendency to become stagnant. As Christians, we try to avoid this. We need to have open arms and open eyes so as to not be stagnant. Should our centers be stagnant? Particularly the largest space which is the sanctuary? Why is it a fixed space? Going back to the importance of what the center is to us is a quote by E.A. Sovik.

In Scotland the custom of locking the church (building) except during services prevailed. When the people were not there, the building was not to be thought of as a place of Divine presence. The church moved with the people to their homes. And everywhere, in innumerable circumstances, Christians have met in ad hoc shelters, knowing that the presence of God was not really associated with particular places or places with a particular architectural character.
I am not saying that once we leave we should lock the doors. Because the people carry God's spirit with them and it is definitely not the center that is sacred, maybe the sanctuary should become a multi-purpose space. This would allow for various activities to happen within the center. Whether it be for worship or not, again what is the difference if the structure is not the sacred element? If other functions were allowed, growth in fellowship in all aspects can indeed be strengthened between Christians and non-Christians as well. Possibly for a non-Christian to experience a Christian in a fellowship atmosphere, (whether it be a religious gathering or a simple get-together) it will slightly open his eyes toward Christianity and the meaning behind it. Besides, why should we as Christians close the door to non-worshipful activities such as plays, dances, recreation, meetings, and many other activities within our building? These activities are important within our lives for growth as well.

Design Consideration

Choose whether the main space will be a fixed sanctuary or if it possibly can indeed become a multi-purpose space. I believe allowing it to become flexible will demote a stagnant atmosphere within the congregation as well. It would definitely be a plus on the image of the church.

Communal vs. Personal

Because we, as Christians, can worship as an individual any place at any time, the center should represent a body or group. The center is a place for people to gather. Besides, an extremely important part of our Christian lives is that of servant-hood. We are to be in service toward are fellow men. This suggests that the building as well should be that, a a service toward other people or in a more general sense,
the public. It should be a community-accessible center. Thus, its principle purpose is that of a communal affair.

Although it should address issues directed toward that of a group, I strongly believe that there needs to be places that the individual can escape to for personal reflection and contemplation whether it be a small group or strictly individual.

Design Considerations

The main space should allow people to move or congregate as a group and not try to divide and split the space. The space should be one continuous flow with little or no hierarchy. The classes can be allowed to be opened for various communal or even closed down for more private use.
Design Project

Site Location

I chose an area that I am familiar with. I did this so as to relate my ideas with the basic overriding ideas and beliefs of that location. I felt if I chose a site too remote from my background culture, my ideas would not as closely be related and I would not touch base with the beliefs of that particular area. It is essential to know who and what one is designing for.

The site is located in the northern central part of Indiana. The county is Delaware, of which the principle city is Muncie. The site is at Prairie Creek Resevoir, which is in the south eastern portion of the county.
Muncie, with Prairie Creek Reservoir to the southeast.
A brief history of the reservoir is as follows:

- Project initiated: 1954
- Total area (land & water): 2,333 acres
- Water surface area: 1,252 acres
- Capacity of water: 7.2 billion gal.
- Length: 3 1/3 miles
- Max. width (water): 7/8 miles
- Aver. width (water): 6/10 miles
- Aver. depth: 10 feet
- Overall length of dam: 3,000 feet
- Bottom width of dam: 290 feet

The reservoir is an extremely peaceful setting. The overall site is very pleasing with minimal noise due to the various ordinances placed on the area. The specific site is a small piece of land of the northwestern section of the reservoir. The site includes an island just off the mainland.
Site Analysis

Although the site is extremely peaceful and has a bit of a humble quality to it, standing on the mainland reminds me of an exciting area where fun and games can be played. It is lively and full of adventure, a definite place for exploration. The island has many of the same qualities but it somehow is more of a personal place. It has a sense of mystical quality that leads one to personal contemplation. It allows one to reach inside themselves. The water that separates the two helps reinforce this notion of communal versus private space.

Views into the site.
Noise from cars and boats.
Foilage patterns.
Winter winds.
Summer breezes.
Sun path.
Program

The program is to be set up for approximately 220 people to occupy the main space for a worshipful gathering. The center is to be flexible to allow many different functions to take place.

SPACES ALLOCATION

NARTHEX

CENTRUM/MULTI PURPOSE SPACE

LIBRARY

OFFICES
  Pastor
  Secretary/Officers

KITCHEN
CLASSROOMS

- Nursery
- Pre/grade school
- Junior high room
- High school room
- Young adult
- Adult
- Elderly

MEETING
- Listed under young adult classroom

SECONDARY MULTI PURPOSE SPACE
- Listed under elderly classroom

RESTROOMS

UTILITY
- Storage space
- Maintenance
- Custodial
- Mechanical

PARKING
- Approximately 100 spaces: 1 space per 2.5 people
Intuitive Design

The approach to this specific design problem was at first to simply use intuition for a solution. I work with the notion of procession and general site layouts. I quickly realized that this approach needed something more. I personally needed a much more stable base which was the process of studying my beliefs. This enabled me to start at a general level of the design and which carried through to the end.
Progression
Entrance and Multi-Purpose Space Elevation

Entrance and Multi-Purpose Space Section
Multi-Purpose Space Section

Classrooms and Passage Section
Final Design

Once again, the approach toward the design was to examine the questions and answers that arose. I tried to evaluate and rationalize our beliefs and attitudes and then apply them to the design of the center. Hopefully the design will correlate better to our beliefs than the traditional church building. Remember, that this approach led to a rather different solution in religious architecture. Please bare in mind the previously raised questions.
Multi-Purpose Space Section
Meeting Place
South/Multi-Purpose Space  Elevation
Separation Point/Baptismal Font
in Multi-Purpose Space
Multi-Purpose Space
One other decision that I would like to point out is about the island. Although I have made design decisions for the island, I chose not to graphically represent it. I did this because I feel that the island becomes a major place for the individual or small group to participate in a more personal time. Because it ultimately comes down to what the individual believes inside of themselves, I am letting a personal interpretation by the individual be made.

Design Conclusion

The center is to remain an extremely basic structure which allows the people to become the thrust of the space. It is an envelope in which the people occupy the void. Thus, the void becomes important and this is the reason why I chose to render what the people would experience or what would appear to be. To simply poche the actual building (such as the walls in section as it is typically done), without showing the sensation or the attitude of the space would be a wrong approach in the presentation of the design.
Conclusion

This is one particular approach, of many, toward building for the church. I do not claim this to be the ultimate design or even the ultimate design approach. This is, at this particular time, the appropriate design solution for the church in accordance to my Christian beliefs. No matter what approach one takes, the product will always be different which is extremely good. Because if we produce the same architecture, we will become sterile and stop our desired growth.

Whether or not one agrees with all of my design discussions that I made, the questions must be asked. We need to understand what our own attitudes and beliefs are toward church architecture and what we want it to do for us. No matter what one’s personal desires or wishes may be, please, do not ever stop asking and trying to answer the questions for personal growth.
Bibliography


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* Denotes my choice of necessary reading on the subject matter.