

# Tradition in Continuity

*Considerations for the Development of Catholic Sacred Architecture*



## Questions, Confidence, and Providence | Posted on April 12, 2011

To a greater or lesser degree, one fundamental quality is lacking in every Parish Building Committee: and that is Confidence. And not without good reason.

Considering the importance and relative complexity of the task - whether the project is a renovation, an addition, an expansion, or a new building – it can be difficult to muster any great measure of confidence that a church construction project will avoid some potentially serious obstacles between conception and completion. The questions and concerns abound...

Fundraising – Will our parishioners themselves have enough confidence in the project to financially support it? What should we do if they don't? Do they see and feel the need for this project? How long will it take to raise the funds?

Project Costs – Do we have an adequate cost estimate? Do we have enough of a contingency allowance for unforeseen conditions? Are we considering the right level of investment? What are the opportunity costs involved with doing more/less at this time vs. later? What about the new Altar, beautiful sacred art, and the stained glass windows?

The Project Schedule – How long will the Planning process take? And Design? And Construction? Can we count on the project to be complete by Easter? by the Patronal Feast Day? by Christmas? etc. What if the City approval process holds us up? What about weather delays? How can we phase the construction appropriately? Can we remain in our current church while expansion/addition work is ongoing? Can we find temporary space in which to worship for ten months?

The Design Team – Do we have a qualified Architect who knows and loves the Church, the structure and beauty of the holy Liturgy, our different ministries, and the specific needs of this particular Parish? Can we trust them as a true partner, instead of simply as a consultant? Have they earned that trust, i.e. are we confident that they have listened well and truly desire what is best for our Parish? Or even, When should we decide on the carpet?

The Construction Team - How should we select a General Contractor? How can we know what is a fair cost for the work? Does the builder need to be 'on board' with the mission of the Parish and the Church, or just well qualified in executing successful projects? What if they underperform? How are their subcontractors selected? Who is observing and inspecting their work? What kinds of warranties should we be asking for?

Parish Responsibilities – For what types of things is the Parish responsible, outside of the contract with the builder? What is the role of the Parish in working with an Architect? How much design input should be sought from the Parish at large, outside of the Building Committee? Who will represent the Parish during the course of construction? How much of the total project cost is 'up front,' prior to breaking ground? What is the role of the Diocese, and how can they assist? Have we performed adequate needs assessment and master planning for the future?

...The list goes on and on.

It is understandable that most building committees, faced with such a daunting number of questions and unknowns would be less than completely confident in their ability to navigate successfully from start to finish – a time period which could last anywhere from two to six years or longer.

At times however, this crisis of confidence might be indicative of a less than complete trust in the ways and means of Providence. Scripture is very clear about the fact that the task of building up the Church is the work of the Lord carried out through the action of the Holy Spirit.

*"If the LORD does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour. Unless the LORD guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch." Psalm 127:1*

*"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22*

For any church construction project to be successful it must be understood first and foremost as the work of God – and as the work of men only in the second order. As anyone can attest, confidence in knowing and carrying out the will of the Father can only come through prayer and much discernment from the mind and heart of the Church. And in an apparent paradox such confidence only comes when the project is entrusted (one might even say surrendered) to the Father as an offering, essentially as an act of worship in its own right.

If the Parish and the Architect and the Builder can maintain this understanding – striving under grace, to craft the noble human labor and the material goods of Creation

into a worthy offering in the eyes of the Lord – then our projects are placed into hands far more trustworthy than our own. Our confidence in their success and ultimate benefit is then well founded.

For with the eyes of faith, we can comprehend the act of church building not only as a momentous undertaking in the life of a Parish, but also as one of many interwoven movements of the Holy Spirit in building up the People of God into the Holy Temple of Christ's own Body – a process that continues in our own time. And rarely in the life of a Parish is the multitude of charisms, skills, and abilities in the Body so immediately necessary and so readily visible as in the process of construction.

And the result? Perhaps it could be described as a Parish, and the Design Team, and the Construction Team working in the model of our Blessed Mother and through our Baptismal Priesthood. For such a project would be conceived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, nurtured and developed within the heart of the Church, and brought forth through the work of human hands to be humbly offered back to the Father.

—

\* \* \* Lord we are not worthy to receive you under our roof, and yet you continue to come and make your dwelling among us. Accept our work that it might draw others closer to your life-giving love, which you pour out for all men in the eternal heavenly liturgy.