

BUILDING CHURCH

— *while building a church* —

WORKSHOP REPORT • SESSIONS 3 & 4

“Let us bring the gifts that differ...sing a new church into being,” sang the parish to open the third Building Church workshop on Wednesday, October 5, 2005.

Pennant fever ran high and red. Building Church While Building a Church committee chairperson Andrea Biske said she could not help but draw parallels between the emotion-filled final games at Busch Stadium and her wistful feelings about our church. As one Cardinal (baseball player, that is) had commented, “I have so many wonderful memories, but I look forward to the future.”

Fr. Carl Scherrer led a prayer and called upon our patroness, Mary Immaculate.

Then the lights were dimmed. “Tonight we’re going on tour,” said Bill Brown, AIA, NCARB, ACLS, liturgical design consultant and workshop instructor.

Bill set out to teach people the building guidelines of the Catholic church. However, rather than reciting directives, Bill took the picture-is-worth-a-thousand-words approach and commented on dozens of slides taken at old and new churches from around the world.

“It has been said that the Church since the time of Christ has been the greatest patron of the arts in the Western world,” said Bill. His slides echoed this idea with soaring architecture and inspiring artwork.

With wisdom and humor Bill entertained while he educated. “Design becomes your ‘Amen,’” he said, “when it suits you and thrills your soul. It’s not ‘I like, I don’t like,’ — you need to know. You must build your toolbox and understand the elements that make up a Catholic church.”

Bill explained how all the parts fit together — baptistry, altar, ambo, presider’s chair, Reconciliation Chapel, seating,

music ministry, gathering space, etc. In total, the parts symbolize and encourage the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful.

The evening concluded with a question and answer session. “Hopefully, this has been easier for you than reading the documents,” said Bill.

(Note: You can read the documents if you like. *Built of Living Stones* and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* are available online or can be purchased from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Visit www.usccb.org.)

Workshop instructor Bill Brown explains church design.



October 6 was information night. The group reviewed what Bill called “a horse-choking amount of information.” As no horses were present, Bill was taken at his word.

“The more information you have, the better the decisions you can make,” said Bill.

Sobering realities face U.S. Catholics. Congregations grow yearly while the number of priests falls precipitously. People move to suburbs, leaving urban churches behind.

Despite this, Bill reminded, “the power of the Lord can touch us all, and ever.” He then moved on to issues facing our parish as it plans for the future.

Much of the evening he talked about money.

Bill recalled how a priest once said, “We do not have a money problem in the Church. We have a value problem. We have plenty of money for the things we value.”

What does our parish value? Can Immaculate Conception really afford a new church?

Bill answered in great detail. His company has analyzed our number of households and giving records to estimate the probable results of a major fund-raising campaign.



Workshop participants sang and prayed to open both meetings.

Such a campaign would likely occur over a three-year period. Immediate proceeds...plus future pledges...plus financing...could indeed equal the multi-million-dollar cost of a new facility.

Church planning must allow for different campaign totals. Asking the group to extend their arms like balance beams, Bill stressed the need to measure quantity on the one hand versus quality on the other. In other words, with informed estimates of how much we might spend, we can either plan a smaller, high-quality church, or a larger, lower-quality church, or something in-between — as long as we keep the balance. “We must have a design with slippery boundaries, with a smaller version of itself and a larger version of itself,” said Bill.

Next, Bill presented rough ideas for 800- and 1,000-seat churches, with different square footage and costs per square foot, to show the balance concept in action. “The purpose of this,” he explained, “is not to tell you what you can do or not. It’s to get your arms around what is possible.”

More information came in a homework packet. Attendees were asked for feedback at the next meeting. “Tell us, ‘If I were queen, if I were king,’” smiled Bill, “this is what I would do.”

Join us again on October 19 and 20. “The door is completely open,” said Bill. “Please pray for this parish. Please pray for the intervention of the Spirit in your parish wisdom.”

The final two sessions we will decide what to do — together. ♦

Final workshops: Decisions, decisions

5 Toward Consensus

Wednesday, October 19

Look at the big picture, examine your commitment to this mission and pray for wisdom the next night.

Please attend! All are welcome. Voice your opinions about our parish.

6 Consensus in Peace

Thursday, October 20

The journey begins — we finalize our consensus decisions and begin to prepare detailed plans.

DIDJA MISS A MEETING?

**Workshop videos and handout materials are available through the Parish Office.
Call (618) 281-5105.**

Refreshments courtesy of
The Market Place

