

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 7

Rites of the Church

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the principal liturgical activity for which spaces for worship are designed. However, the Christian community gathers at many other significant moments in its life. Designing spaces carefully for those rites is also important in a new or renovated church.

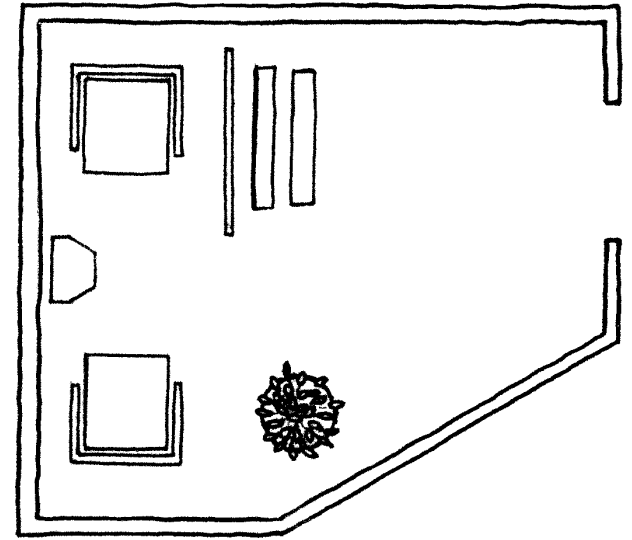
The Sacrament of Penance—Catholics who grew up before 1970 were accustomed to celebrate the sacrament of penance in dark confessional boxes equipped with a kneeler and a screen obscuring their identity from the priest sitting in an adjoining space. Since that time, the reform of the rites has changed the way we celebrate penance.

The celebration of the sacrament of penance focuses on the reconciliation of the penitent with God and the community. While anonymity is still offered, reconciliation chapels or rooms also allow for the penitent to relate to the priest face-to-face. Often the space is brighter, more open and suitably decorated with images of God's reconciling love. A bible is at hand for scripture reading. Because of the relationship of this sacrament to baptism and Eucharist, the place for reconciliation is often located to emphasize this association. When the sacrament is celebrated communally with a large number

of penitents, the entire space for worship may accommodate a number of temporary stations for confessors positioned throughout.

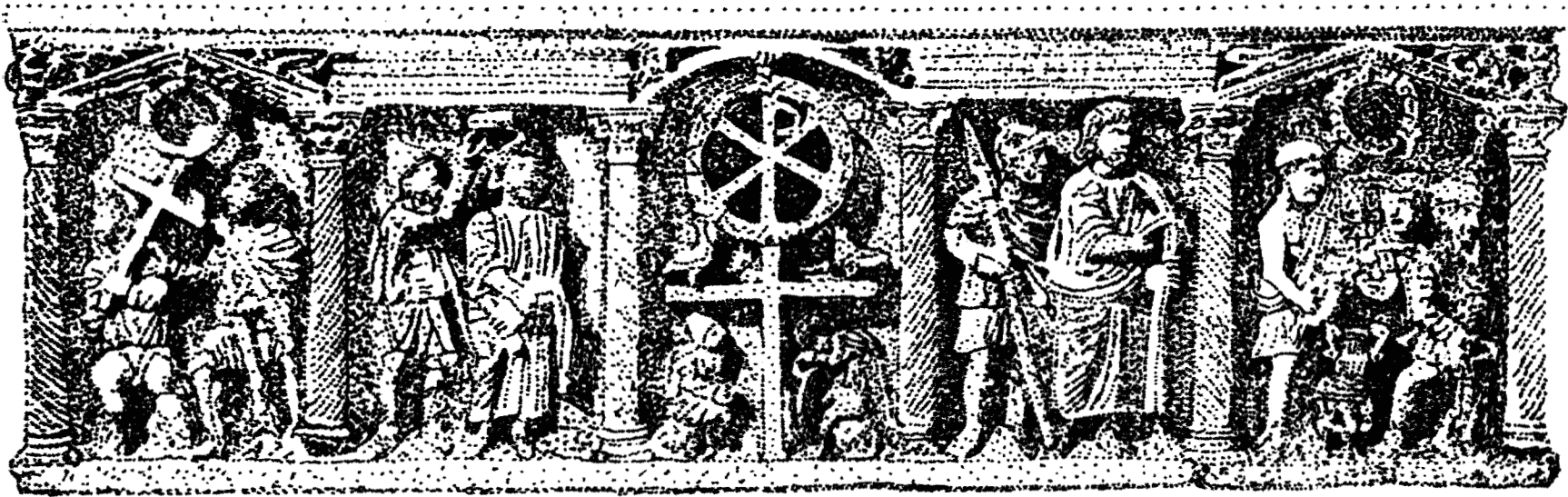
The Death of a Christian—The Eucharist celebrated for a deceased Catholic has many of the same requirements of a Sunday Eucharist. However, the rites at the entrance of the church that speak of the person's incorporation into the Body of Christ through baptism suggest that ample space near a baptismal font could be a goal when considering its design. Sufficient space for the casket near the altar platform must also be considered. Flexible seating in this area is one way to accommodate this desire. Communities that offer vigil services for the deceased may wish to consider providing a room near the entrance for the use of the immediate family as a gesture of hospitality.

Weddings—As with funerals, the design of the space for Sunday Eucharist accommodates most of the needs for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. The participation of the entire assembly should be encouraged to counter the tendency in our culture for the congregation to see itself as an audience. However, sufficient space near the altar must be planned to allow the exchange to be visible to the assembly.



Reconciliation Chapel with provisions for anonymous and face to face encounters

Liturgy of the Hours—In the recent past, only priests and those in religious life observed the liturgy of the hours or the daily office. Now morning and evening prayer are becoming more and more common in the life of a parish. While they may be celebrated in the main worship space, a smaller chapel may be more suited to the number of participants and allow for greater flexibility of seating configuration to facilitate the antiphonal nature of singing and recitation.



4th century Sarcophagus depicting the Passion of Christ

Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

In planning the reconciliation area, parishes will want to provide for a sound-proof place with a chair for the priest and a kneeler and chair for the penitent. Since the rite includes the reading of Scripture, the space should also include a bible. (OP 17) Appropriate artwork, a crucifix symbolic of Christ's victory over sin and death, icons or images reflective of baptism and the Eucharist, or Scriptural images of God's reconciling love help to enhance the atmosphere of prayer. Warm, inviting lighting welcomes penitents who seek God's help and some form of amplification as well as Braille signs can aid those with hearing or visual disabilities. Additional rooms or spaces will be needed as confessional areas

for communal celebrations of penance, especially in Advent and Lent. [105]

The *Order of Christian Funerals* rites mark the final stage of the journey begun by the Christian in baptism. The structure of the current rites dates back to "Christian Rome where [there were] three 'stages' or 'stations' [during the funeral rite] joined by two processions": the first from the home of the deceased to the church and the second from the church to the place of burial. (OCF 42) [110]

Because the faith journey of the deceased began in baptism, it is appropriate that there be a physical association between the baptismal font and the space for the funeral ritual. [111]

... Although there are no specific spatial requirements for the celebration of the Hours, the focal points of the celebration are the word of God and the praying assembly. An area of flexible seating can facilitate the prayer of a smaller group divided into alternating choirs. The importance of music in public celebrations of the Hours suggests that the place designated for their celebration should provide access to necessary equipment for musicians, particularly cantors and instrumentalists who accompany the singing community. [115]

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Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 8

Gathering Space

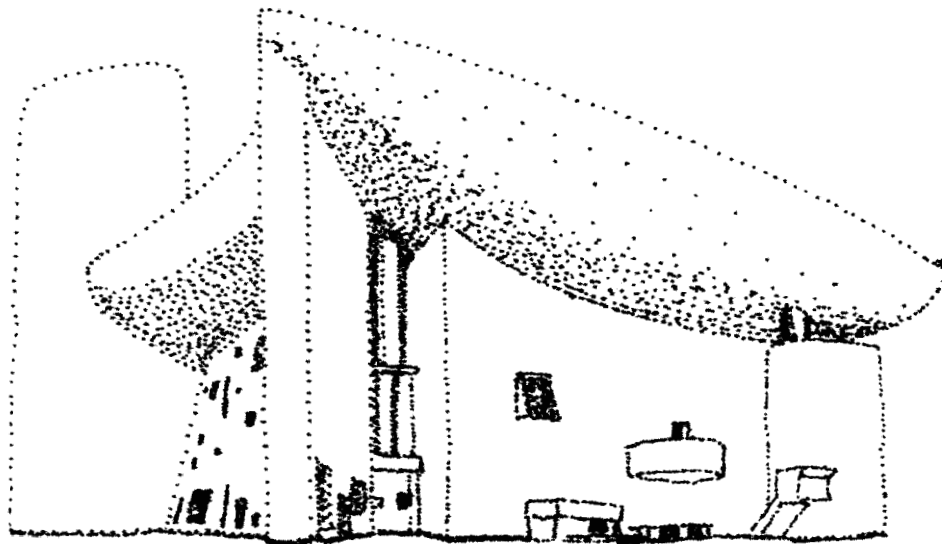
Life is often described as a journey. Even if we rarely leave our own towns or neighborhoods, we are still traveling through time. We often speak of the Christian life as a journey—even a pilgrimage. We set a course, and, though we stumble, we keep our eyes on our destination. Along the way, we recognize Christ traveling with us.

Every Sunday, all over the world, members of Christian households—large and small—begin a journey, a procession from their many homes to the place where they will unite themselves with other believers in the praise and thanksgiving of God. Through a thousand different routines, they prepare to place themselves in the company of friends, neighbors, and even strangers to

respond to God's loving call. The procession may begin calmly in the home of a single person or with all the commotion of a large family running a little late. It may be a short walk or a long drive, but this journey has many stages along the way before we all mark ourselves with the sign of the cross at the greeting of the Mass.

The liturgy is said to be “the source and summit of Christian life.” Notice how even the words “source” and “summit” imply movement. Through the doors of our churches, we bring ourselves, at times, broken, hungry, alone, or confused, to unite ourselves with Christ who has known our pains. At other times, we pass the threshold with great joy, hope and consolation, celebrating the wonderful works of God in our lives. From many individual households we gather in this house of the church.

With that understanding, the design of new and renovated churches often includes an ample narthex or gathering space for people to visit with one another before and after the liturgy. The gathering space encourages people to linger and come to know each other. There we might also learn about the many activities of the parish as it brings about the reign of God in the community.

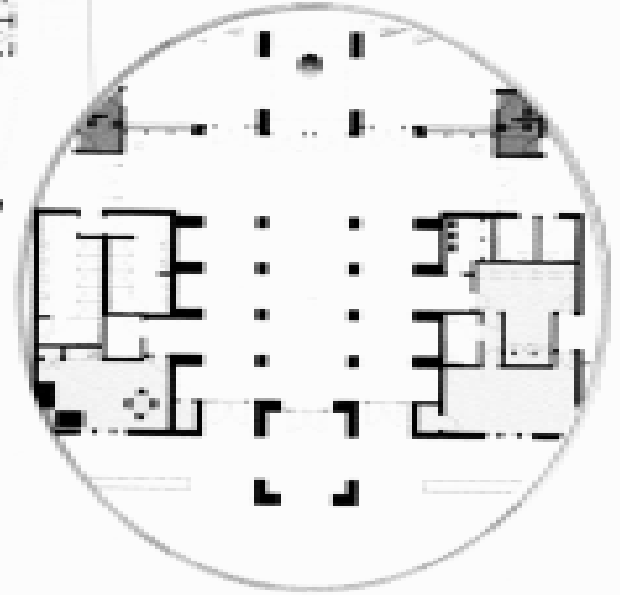
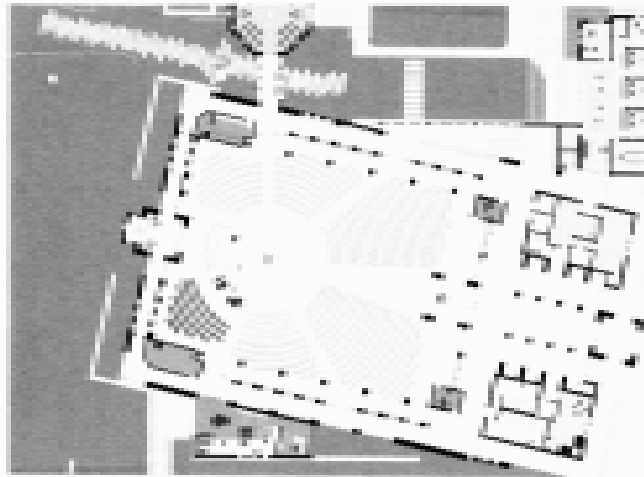


20th century Pilgrim church,
Ronchamp, France.
Architect: Le Corbusier

It also serves liturgically as a place to greet families bringing a child for baptism and for adult candidates for initiation during the Rite of Acceptance. There are moments in the Wedding and Funeral liturgies that are also enhanced by the presence of a significant gathering space. At times throughout the year the entire assembly might process from this space into the hall for the Eucharist.

A vesting sacristy and a room for bereaved families and for brides might also be located nearby. If the narthex provides a view into the main space, this space might also provide a place to walk and comfort an anxious child, as an alternative to a “cry room.” Parishes may also wish to locate an adjacent space for a nursery for use during the liturgy. In colder climates, an opportunity to hang coats nearby is a helpful gesture of hospitality. It also encourages people to be fully present to one another without unnecessary insulation.

The presence of a gathering space will allow those parishioners who wish to visit with one another before and after Mass to do so, while, at the same time, allowing others to pray quietly in the nave.



Gathering area or narthex, with hospitality parlor, vesting sacristy, nursery, ushers room and restrooms in close proximity. *St John the Apostle, Leesburg, VA (Proposed) Morgan Gick and Associates, Architect*

Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The narthex is a place of welcome—a threshold space between the congregation's space and the outside environment. In the early days of the Church, it was a “waiting area” for catechumens and penitents. Today it serves as gathering space as well as the entrance and exit to the building. The gathering space helps believers to make the transition from everyday life to the celebration of the liturgy, and after the liturgy, it helps them return to daily life to live out the mystery that has been celebrated. In the gathering space, people come together to move in procession and to prepare for the celebration of the liturgy. It is in the gathering space that many important liturgical moments occur: men and women participate in the Rite of Becoming a Catechumen as

they move towards later, full initiation into the Church; parents, godparents, and infants are greeted for the celebration of baptism; and Christians are greeted for the last time as their mortal remains are received into the church building for the celebration of the funeral rites. [95]

In addition to its religious functions, the gathering space may provide access to the vesting sacristy, rooms for choir rehearsal, storage areas, restrooms, and rooms for ushers and their equipment. Adequate space for other gatherings will be an important consideration in planning the narthex and other adjoining areas. [96]

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