



PAUL DENNIS ETIENNE
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND
THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
ARCHBISHOP OF SEATTLE

DECREE ON POLICIES REGARDING LITURGICAL CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION

To our Brothers and Sisters in the Archdiocese of Seattle

The celebration of the Eucharist is both source and summit of the Christian life (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). It is from the altar where we gather to celebrate the Eucharist that the life and ministry of the Church flows. It is to the altar that we bring our joys and triumphs, our sorrows and our shortcomings, all that we have and are, to offer them humbly to the Lord that he might transform them – transform us. At the altar, we are formed more and more into that “spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5).

These revised policies on the building, renovation, and decoration of churches and chapels will supplement the policies for the celebration of the Eucharist in the Archdiocese of Seattle, which I promulgated on April 29, 2020, at the beginning of an Archdiocesan Year of the Eucharist. As parishes contemplate additions or renovations to their church buildings, these policies will help communities to navigate the process, and to approach such projects in a broad and collaborative way.

Our local Church has undertaken a major restructuring and re-envisioning effort, *Partners in the Gospel*, which will have an impact on every one of our parishes and faith communities. I have not placed a moratorium on building and renovation projects as *Partners in the Gospel* unfolds; however, in some cases, it may be necessary to wait until the process is complete to proceed with a particular project. Nevertheless, it is essential that we continue to maintain all of our parish facilities during *Partners in the Gospel*. And, as indicated in the attached guidelines, it is important always to seek approval before putting resources into a proposal for a project.

In 2021, I formed a new Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee for the Archdiocese. Consisting of pastors as well as professionals in design, architecture, liturgy, and the arts, this group will review projects large and small and advise me on matters of liturgical design and construction.

These policies replace the corresponding paragraphs in the Administration and Finance section of *Many Gifts, One Spirit*, AF 123 through AF 134, as well as appendix A and B.

Please review these policies and use them when considering any building or renovation projects of our churches.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Archdiocese of Seattle
this 29th day of July,
Memorial of Saints Martha,
Mary and Lazarus,
in the year of our Lord, 2023.



Handwritten signature of Paul D. Etienne in blue ink.

Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle

Handwritten signature of Benjamin Altenhofen in blue ink.

Benjamin Altenhofen
Chancellor

LITURGICAL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

The church building is above all a place of prayer, a sacred space where the Christian community gathers to celebrate and praise God for his saving deeds. The church is to be designed and ordered, first and foremost, for the celebration of the liturgical rites. It must facilitate the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful, and be of such beauty and design that it lifts the mind and heart to God. For it is in the Church's liturgical celebrations, through word and sacrament, that we encounter the living God and are sent forth as disciples into the world to love and serve our neighbor and to proclaim the Good News.

Church buildings are of great importance in the community of believers, as the place where they meet God in the sacraments, celebrate, and mourn. Churches are beloved places of worship, and for this reason, changes to the worship space should not be undertaken lightly, nor should they be made simply to reflect the taste or style of the pastor or of one group of parishioners. Those who build or renovate churches should do so in a consultative process involving members of the parish community. And they should remember that "the Church has not adopted any particular style of art as its very own but has admitted styles from every period, according to the proper genius and circumstances of peoples and the requirements of the many different rites in the Church" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 123).

AF 123. All liturgical construction, renovation and/or any permanent alterations to the design, art or furnishing of churches must be submitted to the Archbishop for approval prior to construction. Pastors or pastoral coordinators (with approval of their moderator) are responsible for ensuring that proposals are submitted and that work is not begun until the design has been approved by the Archbishop or his delegate. The arrangement of churches and chapels shall follow the norms of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal for the arrangement of churches (*GIRM*, Chapter V, 288-318), and all other applicable liturgical books.

Review and Approval of design and alterations to Churches and Chapels

AF 124. All building and renovation projects shall follow the procedures provided by the Archdiocesan Building Commission for approval of liturgical design or alterations.

1. **Procedure for new churches and renovations:** As an initial step before any design work begins, the pastor (priest administrator or moderator) of a faith community or institution shall write to the Archbishop, giving a general outline of the proposed project and the rationale for it. If the Archbishop approves proceeding with the project, the Archbishop will notify the pastor, the Liturgy Office, and the Director of Property and Construction. The Liturgy Office will then contact the pastor so that an approved Archdiocesan consultant can be assigned to review the liturgical policies and consult concerning the initial plans.

When the design is 50-75% complete, the design shall be submitted to the Liturgy Office to be presented to the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee appointed by the Archbishop. The Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee will provide feedback to the architect, pastor and parish building committee. The design is then to be revised, taking into account the feedback.

After revision, the final design is to be submitted to the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee, which will make written recommendations to the Archbishop.

The Archbishop may then approve project as is, approve with recommendations, approve with mandatory changes, or reject the proposal.

2. **Procedures for smaller projects or liturgical art installations (e.g. a new statue, tabernacle, stained glass window, major changes to color scheme, etc.)** The pastor (priest administrator or moderator) of a faith community or institution must submit the proposed design or alteration to the Archbishop.

The Archbishop may choose to approve at once, or refer these to the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee.

The Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee will then review and make recommendations to the Archbishop.

The Archbishop may then approve project as is, approve with recommendations, or approve with mandatory changes, or reject the proposal.

3. All building and renovation projects must be consistent with the current master plan for the parish or faith community.
4. If the parish wishes to use a liturgical consultant in addition to the Liturgy Office, it must be an approved liturgical consultant. The Liturgy Office must approve the consultant before the parish or institution offers a contract to the consultant. The liturgical consultant must agree to abide by the norms of the liturgical books and all archdiocesan policies and procedures. The liturgical consultant for a given project may not provide architectural services on the same project.

Altar Design and Material

AF 125. The altar is to be located in the most prominent position in the church and shall be placed in the center of the altar platform. The altar of parish churches must be permanently fixed to the floor. However, institutions, chapels, and temporary churches are not required to have a fixed altar. The altar is to be made of stone or other solid natural material native to this region (*GIRM 296-303*).

Location of the Tabernacle

AF 126. The tabernacle is to be located in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, not excluding on an old altar not used for celebration; or, if circumstances warrant, in a chapel of reservation suitable for the private adoration and prayer of the faithful. When the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a chapel of reservation, it must be located near the sanctuary, visible to all upon entrance into the main body of the church, directly accessible from the main body of the church, and to be of a size appropriate to the community. (*GIRM, 314-317*)

The Baptismal Font

AF 127. The baptismal font should be located near the door of the church or in another location easily seen by the faithful. It should be of an appropriate size to the church, and be able to accommodate the baptism of children and adults, without being too large. (*RCIA, General Introduction, 25*)

The Arrangement of the Sanctuary and the Nave

AF 128. The arrangement of the sanctuary and the nave must be designed to provide sufficient space for the liturgical rites to take place. Care should be taken that the sanctuary should be sufficiently large to celebrate all the liturgical rites with ease. The seats for the assembly are to be arranged to facilitate the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in the sacred liturgy. The architect must strike a balance between proximity and remoteness when arranging the sanctuary and nave. (*GIRM, 295, 311*)

1. 128.a. The design of the seats must allow sufficient space to accommodate all postures called for in the rites. Provisions for kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer must be made by providing kneelers attached to the pews or chairs. In exceptional circumstances, kneeling may be accommodated by providing kneeling cushions at each place.
2. 128.b. In order to provide flexibility, some movable seating is recommended to accommodate the various rites of the church.
3. 128.c. The floor may not be sloped unless specific permission is given.

Accessibility

AF 129. Parishes are to carefully discern how to provide for the full, conscious, and active participation of differently-abled parishioners, presiders, and visitors. The principles of universal design are to be utilized throughout the church to accommodate persons with disabilities, who are not to be segregated in a “special” place in the assembly.

Accessibility is an important value in the design of places of prayer and worship. Sanctuaries are to be accessible in all new churches and in existing churches, where possible. Careful consideration is to be given for making provision for those whose disability is other than one of mobility (e.g., the hearing impaired, sight impaired, etc.). The need for accessibility must be considered in conjunction with other liturgical values (*BLS*, 211).

The place for the Rite of Penance or Reconciliation

AF 130. “The proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or oratory” (CIC, 964.1). The confessional must contain a fixed screen or grille between penitent and confessor to ensure the anonymity of those who wish it (CIC, 964.2; BLS, 103). In the Dioceses of the United States, the place for confession must be clearly visible and fully accessible, and provision must be made for both anonymous confession and face-to-face confession.

Sound Systems

AF 131. In order that all may be able to participate fully, actively, and consciously in the liturgy, Pastors must ensure that the church has a sound system accommodated to the acoustics of the building and the needs of the congregation.

Vessels and Vestments

AF 132. All vessels and vestments are to be well designed, worthy, and reflect the noble simplicity characteristic of the Roman Rite. “It is fitting that the beauty and nobility of each vestment not be sought in an abundance of overlaid ornamentation, but rather in the material used and its design” (*GIRM*, 327-347). They must be carefully chosen and designed specifically for liturgical use.

1. 132.a. Sacred vessels are to be made from precious metal (*GIRM*, 328) or are to follow the norms given for the other materials allowed in the United States (*GIRM* 329-330.)
2. 132.b. Breakable material such as glass and ceramics are not to be used as materials for sacred vessels because of their fragile nature. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 117)
3. 132.c. Sacred vessels are to be blessed before their first use. (*GIRM*, 333)

Disposition of Liturgical Art and Furnishings

AF 133. The church building and all its furnishings are the patrimony of the Church. Therefore, each parish or faith community is to keep records of all liturgical furnishings, vessels, and vestments. These records should include the date of purchase, the identity of the maker and/or purveyor, the purchase price, the purpose for which the object was purchased, and the date of its blessing. An inventory of liturgical furnishings, vessels, and vestments is to be sent to the archdiocesan archives.

1. 133.a. A commission consisting of a representative of the Liturgy Office, the archdiocesan archivist, and an ad-hoc member, will assess liturgical objects no longer

used by parishes or faith communities. This commission will determine whether these objects have any historic value or can be used in other parishes or faith communities in the Archdiocese or in mission dioceses. Parishes or faith communities are to consult the Chancellor for this assessment.

2. 133.b. If an item has no historic value and is no longer appropriate for use in the liturgy, the Liturgy Office or the community will provide for the reverent disposal of the object.
3. 133.c. If an item could be used in service of the liturgy in the future, the Liturgy Office, in conjunction with the community and/or the archives, will provide for the appropriate storage of the object (*BLS*, 166-168, 243).

Chapels for Perpetual or Continuous Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

AF134. Except for a very serious reason, the parish church should be open for at least some hours of the day to allow parishioners to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle (cf. *Eucharisticum Mysterium* 51, *Holy Communion and the Worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass* 8, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 135).

Pastors are also encouraged to provide times for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament to allow the faithful to adore the Lord and contemplate the mystery of Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 25, *RS* 134, 136). Exposition normally happens on the altar according to the norms provided in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Outside of Mass*, 82-100, and the further directives given in the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 143-41.

If a pastor determines that there is a pastoral need, and the conditions exist to support perpetual or continuous Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the pastor is to first seek permission of the Archbishop to establish a chapel for perpetual adoration. An adoration chapel should not be established for the sake of convenience, but only when the parish has demonstrated both the desire and the ability to undertake continual adoration.

In seeking permission of the Archbishop, the pastor is to outline the pastoral need and to provide evidence that the parish will be able to support exposition by providing sufficient adorers such that the exposed Blessed Sacrament is never left unattended (*RS* 138). The pastor is also to provide plans for a suitable chapel to be reviewed according to the process for liturgical construction outlined in these guidelines.

The chapel for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament must be distinct and separate from the church itself (cf. *BLS* 78). The chapel should be of a suitable size to allow for several adorers and should be fully accessible to those with mobility limitations. Chairs/pews with kneelers must be provided. There should be access to a restroom. Provision must be made for the security of the Blessed Sacrament: "It is forbidden to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in a place that is not subject in a secure way to the authority of the diocesan Bishop, or where there is a danger of profanation" (*RS* 131). The security of the adorers is also a serious consideration, especially when accessing the chapel after hours.

APPENDIX A: QUICK GUIDE TO THE DESIGN PROCESS FOR PASTORS AND PASTORAL COORDINATORS

This quick guide relates to the design process only. For larger projects, please consult the flowchart for renovation and construction projects, which outlines the role of the Archdiocesan Building Committee and the Archdiocesan Finance Council. https://archseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/5456_flowchart.pdf

Major Design Projects

- Major projects include the building of new churches or chapels, and substantial renovations
- Before any design work begins, write to the Archbishop, giving a general outline of the proposed project
- If the Archbishop gives permission to proceed with the project, the pastor will then contact the Liturgy Office of the Archdiocese. The Liturgy Office will assign a consultant who will assist the pastor and parish with the process. Design proposals can now begin to be developed
- When the design is 50%-75% complete, it is to be submitted to the Liturgy Office for review by the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee, who will provide feedback
- The design is then to be revised, taking feedback into account, and resubmitted to the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee
- The Committee will then submit the design to the Archbishop, with any recommendations
- The Archbishop may then approve the design or ask for further changes

Smaller Design Projects

- Smaller projects that impact the worship space are also subject to an approval process. These projects include, but are not limited to, a new statue or shrine, a new tabernacle, stained glass window, or change to color scheme in the church building
- The proposed alteration is submitted to the Archbishop
- The Archbishop may approve at once, or refer to the Liturgical Art and Architecture Committee
- The Committee will then review and make recommendations to the Archbishop
- The Archbishop may then approve the project as-is, request changes, or reject the proposal

APPENDIX B: ARCHITECT'S QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR THE BUILDING AND RENOVATION OF CHURCHES

Altar Platform

- The size should permit full access around the altar, ambo and the presider's chair.
- The chair is to be placed no closer than 24 inches from a step.
- A handrail is to be provided at a point of easy access to the platform but in such a way that it does not interfere with sightlines or the liturgical action.
- The color or flooring product is to change at the steps.
- The rise of each sanctuary step is to be no more than 6 inches.
- The number of sanctuary steps should usually be 3 or 4 and in no case more than 5.
- The ambo is to be equipped with an adjustable microphone for use by people with disabilities.

Baptistry

- All drains from the baptistry and the equipment room are to drain directly into the ground. If the local plumbing code or inspector deems this inappropriate, contact Property and Construction Services for assistance.
- The floor within the baptistry is to have a non-skid finish.

Pews or Movable Seating

- The architect is to review the final pew placement with the Archdiocesan consultant prior to anchoring of the pews to the floor by the contractor. Care is to be taken with the placement of pews and kneelers to ensure that adequate room is provided for a person's feet when the kneelers are in the down position.
- The pews or seating are to be configured in such a way that wheelchair bound individuals can be seated in the front, middle, and to the back, with a minimum of two wheelchairs per area, and in close proximity to the seating so that the parishioners, friends, or family may sit with the person.
- Each wheelchair area is to be equipped with one 120-volt receptacle in order to allow for a respirator connection.

Sacristy

- One sink (sacrarium) in the working sacristy that drains directly into the ground is to be provided. If the local plumbing code or inspector deems this inappropriate, contact Property and Construction Services for assistance.
- The cabinets for vestments are to have a minimum 30-inch depth.

Sound System

- This system is to be configured with auditory hearing devices and able to provide a minimum of five devices.
- A sound engineer must be employed to assist the architect and contractor on the best available technology for a sound system that meets the demand for full, conscious participation in the liturgy by the presider, assembly, and choir.