

Scripture

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in scripture: 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,' and 'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

1 Peter 2:4-10

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Prayer

*Father,
all powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere
to give you thanks.*

*Your house is a house of prayer,
and your presence makes it
a place of blessing.*

*You give us grace upon grace
to build the temple of your Spirit,
creating its beauty*

from the holiness of our lives.

*Your house of prayer
is also the promise of
the Church in heaven.*

*Here your love is always at work,
preparing the Church on earth*

*for its heavenly glory
as the sinless bride of Christ,
the joyful mother*

of a great company of saints.

Preface of the Dedication of a Church,
Roman Missal

Consecrated for Worship

The general plan of a church must be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly.

The people of God gathered together at Mass possess a coherent and hierarchical structure, expressed by different ministries and a different action for each part of the celebration.

The general plan should also allow all the participants to take the place most appropriate to them and should encourage the proper carrying out of each one's role.

Celebrating the Mass 93



The Place of the Assembly

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Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,' but especially under the eucharistic elements. By his power he is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptises it is really Christ himself who baptises. He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them'

Sacrosanctum Concilium 7

Designing the space for the liturgical assembly

The layout of the seating should be a reminder that the Christian assembly is a gathered community, celebrating together as the Body of Christ. Seating arrangements which encourage people to sit apart from their brothers and sisters in Christ or which encourages people to watch passively should be avoided. As far as possible, the members of the assembly should be able to see the faces of those others gathered with them. Seating is provided for those in the liturgical assembly not because of their status, importance of power as such, but because of the ministry they perform within and for the assembly.

The Presidential Chair

This chair is a key element in the general design of the sanctuary. Its position and its design should be considered in relationship to the ambo and altar, although it need not be made from the same material. The chair should not be a throne, but a seat for the one whose role is to preside at the Liturgy, whose leadership finds expression especially in a life of service.

Lay ministers

The seating provided for those lay ministers (e.g. servers musicians, cantors, choir) should be placed so that they can carry out their ministry with ease and dignity. Its

positioning should make it clear that these ministers are part of the gathered assembly.

Congregation

The people assembled in the main body of the church should be provided with seating, which may be benches, pews or chairs.

The decision as to which form(s)

of seating should be used may be influenced by many factors: the need for flexible use of the worship space; the age and relative mobility of the congregation; size of the congregation and the total space available; architectural/heritage issues; cost.

Space for the liturgical actions

The church is a place of assembly and celebration. Seating needs to be provided for the assembly but of at least equal importance is the provision of space for the assembly, (not only its principal ministers), to move around the church. There need to be aisles for processions, and places adequate for various liturgical actions which take place outside of the sanctuary – for example, certain rites of welcome and blessing, the presentation of gifts, the reception of Holy Communion.

Full and generous provision needs to be made for these actions. In Christian worship the assembly is performative not passive. In older churches, however, care needs to be taken as pews and other fixed seating may be of considerable quality or contribute positively to the character of the building.

Making provision for celebrations other than Sunday Mass

Weekday Mass will often be celebrated with much smaller numbers than take part in Sunday Mass. The design of the church should allow for this. It should also accommodate other forms of liturgical and devotional prayer, such as the Liturgy of the Hours and the Stations of the Cross.

