

Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship

what is this document and why do we need to know about it?

By Patricia J. Hughes

Editor's Note: As professionals who consistently work with this and other church document, we sometimes forget how to communicate the essence of these powerful documents to the average parishioner. Patricia Hughes' article, adapted from her presentation to a Roman Catholic parish in Indianapolis, offers insight on how to do that.

Your church home may be a nicely-built and well furnished church building that needs no obvious improvement. Or perhaps you've just gotten used to camouflaging the bucket in the sanctuary that catches drips from the roof. Maybe the idea of building or renovating is 1) beyond your wildest imagination, 2) out of your financial reach, as a parish, or 3) something you are afraid to imagine: too much work, or perhaps it might "upset the apple cart" that holds the so-called "parish tradition."

Every parish has its reasons for not needing or wanting new construction or renovation, but there are questions that will inevitably arise in the life-cycle of any parish that urge you to consider the "C-word": CHANGE. *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* is a document written by the U.S. Catholic Bishops and published in 2000, which addresses changes in a parish's worship spaces. *Built of Living Stones* (or BLS for this conversation) contains two distinct goals. One goal is to provide guidelines for building and renovating worship space. The other goal is to give the local bishop a basis for formulating guidelines for his diocese. Most U.S. bishops have accomplished, or are in the process of working toward, these specific local guidelines for diocesan parishes.

BLS is about ninety pages long, and is published in both a soft cover book format and a loose-leaf notebook format. It follows, *and is intended as a*

*replacement for a 1978 document called *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. Why a replacement, you might ask? Apparently the Bishops Committee on Liturgy, through their official office of the National Council of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., received concerns about the original *Environment and Art* document, and its implementation and use by parishes that would build or renovate. So the process began in 1994 to prepare a new document, rather than a revision of *Environment and Art*. The result was a final draft in 1999, and the publishing and promulgation of *Built of Living Stones* in 2000.*

"The primary concern in the building or renovation of a space for worship must be its suitability for the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical rites of the Church. Consequently, the fundamental prerequisite for those engaged in the building or renovation of a church is familiarity with the rites to be celebrated there."

- Built of Living Stones , no. 46

Some dioceses have Liturgical Commissions, and some dioceses have Liturgical Art and Architecture Commissions — in any event, both of these groups should be peopled with volunteers who bring their gifts of art, architecture, music, liturgy, acoustics, lighting, and liturgical space consultation to the advisement and consulting "table". They help the bishop formulate guidelines (most U.S. bishops, as you may know, are educated as canon lawyers, and appreciate the expertise that others contribute to the process of consultation in this area). Our Indianapolis diocese has an Archdiocesan Church Art and Architecture Commission, and there are six members. This group meets regularly to consult with and advise the local bishop, as well as the parishes of the diocese (BLS, preface paragraph 9). Archdiocesan parishes seek advice, based on the rich liturgical and architectural knowledge that the commission

members bring to the process. The commission supports the local guidelines of the Archdiocese, as well as the U.S. guidelines found in BLS.

It might surprise you to know that the new BLS document mandates a "parish education process" before any building or renovation begins (BLS, no. 180, 181). The reason for this is so that people might become like-minded and knowledgeable in focusing on what is being planned, how such plans are to be implemented (in mortar, glass or stone — and in the hearts of the assembly), and most importantly what the project "says" about the faith-full litur-

gical life of the parish. A completely new worship space, a new baptismal font, or a new area for devotion to a local saint or cultural patron all demand liturgical *catechesis*: teaching and encounter that is formative, centered on Jesus Christ, and ultimately transforming for all members of the parish (don't forget groups like the children, the elders, teens, and the disabled). All are vital members of the parish and all need to be "on the same page."

The process of catechizing isn't about *consensus* (everyone agreeing about an issue), but rather about *coming to a degree of knowledge about who we are as church*. Liturgical catechesis asks parishioners to reflect on the meaning of their liturgical experiences within the context of what they have done and shared publicly. It is the work of the community, gently guided by a leader of the community. Liturgi-

“When a parish is determining the need for a new church or for the renovation of an existing church, a thorough self-study and educational program is part of the needs assessment process.”

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cal catechesis has as its goal the *formation of community*: if we can make some assertions as a result of liturgical catechesis, then whatever we build or renovate has a good chance of reflecting who we really are and how we do liturgy.

Another surprise of BLS is that the pastor is designated as the main “shepherd” of the entire process (BLS no.182). That puts the onus of responsibility on the pastor, however the implied responsibility is one that the assembly — through the building committee and other representatives — must assume, so that all may claim enriched faith and energized worship.

Building or renovating projects in a parish demand a firm grasp of the power of prayer. The undertaking of any such project, great or small, calls the parish to *pray its mission statement* — every week and before each meeting. Both *Built of Living Stones* and the local guidelines need to be used. Most importantly though, parishioners need to raise their voices to say who they are, what their experiences at worship are, and what they look like as a parish, now and in the future. Powerful stuff, indeed! But after all, this is the Church. Through the General Intercessions in our liturgy the parish asks God for what is needed. It may be wisdom, it may be a sense of justice, it may even be creativity to find a way to finance the parish’s dreams. Renewal of the space where the parish gathers to do liturgy, regardless of degree of building or renovation, strongly suggests renewal of the faith of the people of God.

Interesting, isn’t it, how a document can help begin a process of parish formation for liturgy that can impact future generations of worshippers. Interesting — and more than a little exciting!