

Holy Space and Holy Objects: Principles to Draw On

“The space always wins.”

Some Assumptions

- The worship environment, its configuration, functionality, condition, focus, artwork and furnishings are deeply formative of Christian baptismal identity and purpose.
- The dream of renovating a space is a worthy one AND smaller improvements or experiments in our spaces are also a worthy project. These smaller improvements often do not depend on raising significant funds.

Areas to Assess

1. Functionality

- Can the people, the servers and presider move the way they need to move in the flow of the liturgy?
- Is the presider’s chair/seating situated in a position that allows the presider to see the assembly and any servers, allowing him or her to intercede in the life of the community as necessary? Does the presider’s chair/seating allow the assembly and servers to have a clear sense of who is presiding?
- Is there space for children that supports their participation in the liturgy?

2. Formative Power

- First things First: Do the main things, that is, the focal points for important liturgical actions, stand out in the space and do they communicate the parish’s understanding of each of the following dimensions? Altar (Eucharist), Font (Baptism), Ambo (Word), and Assembly led by a Presider (Prayer)? Are objects or people other than these commanding the attention of the Assembly?
- Baptismal Identity: Is the font of sufficient size and location to communicate the importance of baptism and the importance of the community as a baptizing community? Is it located in a place that communicates that baptism inaugurates the Christian Life?
- Focus and Centering: Is the space free of clutter (stacks of books, tissues, numerous banners, furniture that is not actually used etc.)? Does the space create a clutter-free space that facilitates prayer and avoids the impression that the parish and its people are overwhelmed?
- Beauty as an Experience of God: Is the space beautiful? Is the space able to carry the mystery and awe of the Word made flesh?

3. Beauty and Dignity

- Are “the main things” (altar, font, ambo, and seating for the assembly and presider) of appropriate size, beauty and dignity?
- Are the appurtenances, liturgical books, vestments, hangings, vessels etc. used in the liturgy of appropriate size, quality, beauty and dignity?

- **Artwork:** Is the artwork in the space compatible with the space itself? Is the artwork as high quality as it can be? Does the artwork facilitate, support or inspire a rootedness in Christian life and practice?

4. Audibility

- Do the acoustics of the space support the human voice (spoken and sung)?
- Does the sound system (if the parish has one) appropriately and unobtrusively amplify the human voice?

5. Lighting

- Does the lighting allow for easy reading and sight?
- Does the lighting highlight the positive features and focal points of the liturgical space?

6. Genuineness

- Are objects, flowers, artwork, candles, materials real?
- Where possible, are materials used in the space local materials reflecting the natural world in the parish's environment?

7. Congruence and Integration

- Do all the different elements of the space express an integrated and harmonious whole in terms of style and aesthetic?

8. Accessibility and Hospitality

- Is the space configured in a way that people are gathered gracefully and comfortably into the liturgy?
- Is the space accessible to all, expressing the open-armed hospitality of God?
- Is the space safe for those who are present in the space or move in the space?