

Worship Space Essentials

Sanctuary Committee
West Glenville Reformed Church

After spending some time meeting, the sanctuary committee has developed this document as a way to guide us forward as we look to renew our worship space. The document is built on three essential ways that worship space effects the act of worship itself.

1. Central elements in the act of worship.

Worship is a shared experience by individual members of a community that consists of praise, proclamation, sacrament, and response. So, the worship space should be arranged in a way that is invitational, welcoming, and that encourages communal participation. Visual and spatial focal points should echo these themes and centralize certain elements of worship and worship space. The cross, bible, font, communion table, and banners should be central, visible and presented in a beautiful way that stirs contemplation and reflection without losing the opportunity for flexibility in arrangement.

2. Centralizing The Sacraments

The elements of communion and baptism should be easily visible to all gathered. They should have a sense of centrality, meaning that the congregation feels as though they are gathered in some way around the elements of the sacraments. Also, the elements should have a sense of beauty, as a reflection of the encounter with the divine. There should also be the sense that the sacraments are equally accessible to the whole community, regardless of age or ability. To this end, celebration of the sacraments should have a certain flow that eases participation by all.

3. The Priesthood of All Believers

As a reflection of our Reformed heritage, it is necessary in worship to allow for all to participate. Though proclamation is a central element of worship, as stated above, it is the gathered community together that offers its worship to The Lord. To create a space where all are able to engage their priesthood, it is important to allow for various expressions of movement and flexibility in worship. The space should be arranged in such a way that participation in music, singing, and prayer is encouraged. Lastly, there should be space for all three kinds of worshippers: leader participants, active participants, and passive participants.

With these three elements in mind, we have identified several things that we would like to either emphasize more or maintain given our current structure and

arrangement. There are things we would like to keep about the sanctuary as it currently is. These are elements that have made this space a worshipping home for more than fifty years. There are other things that we would like to emphasize more as we look at making our worship space fit our current worship practices and also the worship practices we hope to support and centralize going forward.

Things we would like to maintain:

- Current windows and natural light.
- Current amount of seating. We would like to maintain or increase the number of seats.
- The window in the balcony. We would like to keep this and if anything make it more of a focus.
- We would like to keep the balcony and use the space more efficiently.

Things we would like to improve or emphasize more:

- We would like to do something with the ceiling. Either to make it more beautiful or add some sort of oculus to emphasize the vertical axis of worship.
- We would like to more efficiently use the space that is our current "front." There is a lot of opportunity here to engage empty space for use in worship.
- We would like to make the Communion Table and Font feel more central, as though the gathered community were "around" these elements of the sacraments.
- We would like to emphasize the banners by potentially having them raised, involved with the ceiling, or otherwise made more visible to the gathered community.
- We are not opposed to some pews being shorter and creating an intimate feel in certain areas of the sanctuary.
- We would like our pews to be comfortable to sit in.
- We would like any designs to have a sense of beauty, not simply for aesthetic value, but in order to allow for contemplation of the divine and a sense of an encounter with the sacred.

After defining some of the details above and agreeing on the elements of worship and some of the things that should be changed, the committee researched some different architecture firms and buildings and even visited some other churches.

At a meeting in September, the committee reported on what they found and offered some ideas for our space. The group looked at some large architecture firms that would be used for major engineering renovations, which are often associated with higher costs. One smaller architect, that works with Schrader and Company, Tim Gallagher of Architex NY, is willing to come and look at our space with no cost on the initial visit. We also discovered that there is a process called Design/Build that is used by many builders to incorporate the architect into the design process. This allows the builder and architect to work together to create a design and building approach. Tim Gallagher and Schrader and Company regularly engage in this process together.

It was noted by one member of the committee that perhaps a good show of faith would be to engage with Schrader and Company on some level as their family is involved with our church in a number of different ways. It was noted by a member of the committee who had a conversation with a pastor of another church that had made some renovations that potential changes or lack of change may affect the sort of pastors that will accept a call to the church in the future. Yet another member of the committee spoke about their conversations with other churches. The general idea was that their church was struggling with finding ways to stay relevant to their community, while staying true to the tradition and central elements of worship. All of these things informed our conversation as we look to do something similar.

After spending some time conversing on these options, ideas were presented. The Pastor presented some possible ideas based on the above notes and conversations with members of the ministry team. These ideas included removing the raised area in the front of the church to include a flexible area for band, choir, worship leadership, and even congregational seating. Also the first three to four pews would be shortened and angled similarly to the first three pews at the 1st Reformed Church in Scotia. This would allow for the desired centrality of the sacraments and proclamation while creating continuity in seating for the whole congregation. The organ could be moved to another location and the piano can be placed wherever it needed to be for a given service. The band and choir setups would be flexible and less "on stage." The seal at the center wall in the front would be removed and given a place of importance in the church. It would be replaced by a commissioned wooden cross. Some simple back-lit stained glass on either side of the cross would emphasize the two sacraments. The current light fixtures would be re-designed to look like old reformed church lights. Perhaps some wall sconces would light the ceiling where banners could be displayed. A stained glass window would replace the window in the balcony. We can use the existing stained glass in the boiler room as a template for the design for this window. The pews would benefit from under-pew storage in the pews after the first row. Some discussion took place for clarification.

A second idea was presented from another member of the committee that would remove the steps at the front of the sanctuary and move them back to eliminate the central outcropping between the organ and the piano. The step at the front wall of the raised platform would be removed so that the communion table could be placed there. The pulpit would be moved to the side nearest the band. It would also be possible to

replace the two front pews with shorter ones to gain more workable space at the front of the sanctuary. This idea was presented as a less expensive way to gain space in the front area of the sanctuary.

This meeting concluded and we held one more meeting to review this report. The sanctuary committee has worked together to hear ideas from one another and to gauge the feelings of a cross-section of the congregation. We submit that the ideas here are simply ideas and that this report includes no specific recommendations. The contents of this report serve as a documentation of our work and the sanctuary committee respectfully turns over the remaining proceedings and analysis to the Consistory of West Glenville Reformed Church.

Respectfully Submitted
West Glenville Reformed Church
Sanctuary Committee