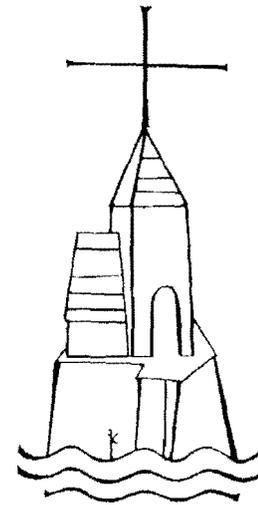


# Environment and Art in Catholic Worship



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Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy  
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## V. FURNISHINGS FOR LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

63. Because the Sunday eucharistic assembly is the most fundamental ecclesial symbol, the requirements of that celebration will have the strongest claim in the provision of furnishings for liturgy. Consequently, any liturgical space must take into consideration not only the general requirements of the assembly but also the need for a feeling of contact with altar, ambo and celebrant's chair.

64. This primacy of the eucharistic assembly, however, should not discourage a liturgical life of greater richness and variety in the local Church. In planning construction, renovation or refurnishing of liturgical spaces, baptism and the other sacraments, morning and evening prayer, services of the word, prayer meetings and other community events should be kept in mind.

65. When multi-functional use of the space is indicated by the needs either of the faith community or of the surrounding city, town or rural area which the faith community services, a certain flexibility or movability should be considered even for the essential furnishings. Great care, however, should be taken in the design and care of movable furnishings that none of the dignity, noble and simple beauty proper to such objects is sacrificed. There is no

reason why a movable altar or ambo need have a flimsy, cheap or disposable appearance.

66. Normally the furnishings used in a liturgical celebration of any kind should be placed before the celebration begins and remain stationary during the celebration. Ritual action is not enhanced by the moving of furniture during a rite. A careful arrangement of furnishings is an integral part of liturgical planning.

### DIGNITY AND BEAUTY

67. Consultation with persons who are experts, at least one in liturgy and one in the arts, is not a luxury but a necessity for those responsible for furnishing the liturgical space. Each piece of furniture has its own requirements, but at least two criteria are applicable to all of them, in fact, to any object used in any way in liturgy: 1) None should be made in such a way that it is far removed from the print of the human hand and human craft. When mass-produced items are chosen, care must be taken that they are truly suitable. Dignity and beauty in materials used, in design and form, in color and texture — these are concerns of artists for their work, for the furniture they build, and are not, unfortunately, the evident concerns of many mass manufacturers and merchandisers. 2) All furnishings taken together should possess a unity and harmony with each other and with the architecture of the place.

#### BENCHES OR CHAIRS

68. Benches or chairs for seating the assembly should be so constructed and arranged that they maximize feelings of community and involvement.<sup>12</sup> The arrangement should facilitate a clear view not only of the one who presides and the multiple focal points of reading, preaching, praying, music and movement during the rite, but also of other members of the congregation. This means striving for a seating pattern and furniture that do not constrict people, but encourage them to move about when it is appropriate.

69. Benches or chairs for the seating of those engaged in the ministry of music, instrumental or choral, should be so constructed and arranged that they have the advantages described above for congregational seating and also that they are clearly part of the assembly.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the ministers of music should be able to sing and play facing the rest of the assembly in order to elicit the participation of the community without distracting from the central action of the liturgy. The same should be said of an individual cantor or song leader.

#### THE CHAIR

70. Chairs or benches for the presiding minister and other ministers, should be so constructed and arranged that they too are clearly part of the one assembly, yet conveniently situated for the exercise of their

respective offices. The importance of the personal symbol and function of the one who presides in liturgical celebration should not be underrated or underplayed, because it is essential for good celebration. The chair of that person should be clearly in a presiding position, although it should not suggest either domination or remoteness.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE ALTAR

71. The altar, the holy table, should be the most noble, the most beautifully designed and constructed table the community can provide.<sup>15</sup> It is the common table of the assembly, a symbol of the Lord, at which the presiding minister stands and upon which are placed the bread and wine and their vessels and the book. It is holy and sacred to this assembly's action and sharing, so it is never used as a table of convenience or as a resting place for papers, notes, cruets, or anything else. It stands free, approachable from every side, capable of being encircled. It is desirable that candles, cross, any flowers or other decoration in the area should not be so close to the altar as to constitute impediments to anyone's approach or movement around the common table.

72. The altar is designed and constructed for the action of a community and the functioning of a single priest — not for concelebrants. The holy table, therefore, should not be elongated, but square or slightly rectangular,

an attractive, impressive, dignified, noble table, constructed with solid and beautiful materials, in pure and simple proportions. Its symbolic function, of course, is rendered negligible when there are other altars in sight. The liturgical space has room for but one.

73. The location of the altar will be central in any eucharistic celebration, but this does not mean it must be spatially in the center or on a central axis. In fact, an off-center location may be a good solution in many cases. Focus and importance in any celebration move with the movement of the rite. Placement and elevation must take into account the necessity of visibility and audibility for all.

#### THE AMBO

74. The ambo or lectern is a standing desk for reading and preaching (although preaching can be done from the chair or elsewhere).<sup>16</sup> One main ambo should be reserved for these functions and therefore not used by commentators, song leaders, etc. Like the altar, it should be beautifully designed, constructed of fine materials, and proportioned carefully and simply for its function. The ambo represents the dignity and uniqueness of the Word of God and of reflection upon that Word.

75. A very simple lectern, in no way competing or conflicting with the main ambo, and placed for the necessary visibility and

audibility, can be used by a cantor, song leader, commentator, and reader of the announcements. It should be located for easy communication with both musicians and congregation.

#### BAPTISTRY

76. To speak of symbols and of sacramental signification is to indicate that immersion is the fuller and more appropriate symbolic action in baptism.<sup>17</sup> New baptismal fonts, therefore, should be constructed to allow for the immersion of infants, at least, and to allow for the pouring of water over the entire body of a child or adult. Where fonts are not so constructed, the use of a portable one is recommended.

77. The place of the font, whether it is an area near the main entrance of the liturgical space or one in the midst of the congregation, should facilitate full congregational participation, regularly in the Easter Vigil.<sup>18</sup> If the baptismal space is in a gathering place or entry way, it can have living, moving water, and include provision for warming the water for immersion. When a portable font is used, it should be placed for maximum visibility and audibility, without crowding or obscuring the altar, ambo and chair.

#### EUCCHARISTIC CHAPEL

78. The *celebration* of the eucharist is the focus

87. A second common problem in the use of symbolic objects is a tendency to "make up" for weak primary symbols by secondary ones. It is not uncommon for example, to make extensive and expensive efforts to enrich and enliven a Sunday eucharistic celebration without paying any attention to the bread that is used or to the sharing of the cup. Bread and wine are primary eucharistic symbols, yet peripheral elements frequently get more attention. It is important to focus on central symbols and to allow them to be expressed with the full depth of their vision. This may mean solutions which are less efficient and pragmatic.

#### THE CROSS

88. A cross is a basic symbol in any Christian liturgical celebration. The advantage of a processional cross with a floor standard, in contrast to one that is permanently hung or affixed to a wall, is that it can be placed differently according to the celebration and the other environmental factors.<sup>23</sup> While it is permissible for the cross to rest on the altar, it is preferable that it be elsewhere, not only for non-eucharistic liturgies but also so that in eucharistic celebrations the altar is used only for bread and wine and book.

#### CANDLESTICKS AND CANDLES

89. The same can be said of candlesticks and candles. When they are floor-standing, they

can be arranged differently from time to time. The number can be varied according to the season and feast and the solemnity of the celebration. Like the cross, the candles should be visible without impeding the sight of the altar, ambo, chair and action.<sup>24</sup>

90. The Easter Candle and its standard call for very special dimensions and design. They occupy a central location in the assembly during the Easter season and a place at the baptismal font thereafter.<sup>25</sup>

#### BOOKS

91. Any book which is used by an officiating minister in a liturgical celebration should be of a large (public, noble) size, good paper, strong design, handsome typography and binding.<sup>26</sup> The Book of the Gospels or lectionary, of course, is central and should be handled and carried in a special way. The other liturgical books of the Church, which contain the rites of our public worship tradition, are also worthy of venerable treatment and are a significant part of the liturgical environment. Each should be visually attractive and impressive. The use of pamphlets and leaflets detracts from the visual integrity of the total liturgical action. This applies not only to books used by ministers at the altar, chair and font, but also to those used in any other public or semipublic rite.

the importance of the ritual action. Pitchers, vessels for holy oils, bowls, cruets, sprinklers, censers, baskets for collection, etc. — all are presented to the assembly in one way or another and speak well or ill of the deed in which the assembly is engaged.

#### IMAGES

98. Images in painting or sculpture, as well as tapestries, cloth hangings, banners and other permanent or seasonal decorations should be introduced into the liturgical space upon consultation with an art consultant.<sup>32</sup> Like the furniture and other objects used in worship, they become part of the environment and are subject to its criteria of quality and appropriateness. In addition, their appropriateness must take into account the current renewed emphasis on the action of the assembly. If instead of serving and aiding that action, they threaten it or compete with it, then they are unsuitable.

99. In a period of Church and liturgical renewal, the attempt to recover a solid grasp of Church and faith and rites involves the rejection of certain embellishments which have in the course of history become hindrances. In many areas of religious practice, this means a simplifying and a refocusing on primary symbols. In building, this effort has resulted in more austere interiors, with fewer objects on the walls and in the corners.

#### DECORATIONS

100. Many new or renovated liturgical spaces, therefore, invite temporary decoration for particular celebrations, feasts and seasons. Banners and hangings of various sorts are both popular and appropriate, as long as the nature of these art forms is respected. They are creations of forms, colors, and textures, rather than signboards to which words must be attached. Their purpose is to appeal to the senses and thereby create an atmosphere and a mood, rather than to impress a slogan upon the minds of observers or deliver a verbal message.

101. Although the art and decoration of the liturgical space will be that of the local culture, identifying symbols of particular cultures, groups, or nations are not appropriate as permanent parts of the liturgical environment. While such symbols might be used for a particular occasion or holiday, they should not regularly constitute a part of the environment of common prayer.

102. Flowers, plants and trees — genuine, of course — are particularly apt for the decoration of liturgical space, since they are of nature, always discreet in their message, never cheap or tawdry or ill-made. Decoration should never impede the approach to or the encircling of the altar or any of the ritual movement and action, but there are places in most liturgical spaces