A SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL ROMAN CATHOLIC CENTER
FOR ST. MEL'S PARISH, FLUSHING, NEW YORK

(An architectural study for the Roman Catholic
Diocese of Brooklyn, New York)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
on May 13, 1957

by
Raymond DeLucia Jr.

/  

to
Lawrence B. Anderson
Head of Department
ABSTRACT

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Submitted by Raymond DeLucia Jr.
for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
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The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the search of giving visual and kinesthetic expression to the spiritual and educational needs of the Roman Catholic parish through the thoughts and ideals of the Roman Catholic Church, and in addition to investigate the desirability of centralizing all church functions on a single site, opposing the present solution of building on separate sites.

The community of St. Mel's parish is singled out for study. It is bounded by 146th Street, Bayside Avenue, Francis Lewis Boulevard and the Cross Island Parkway in Flushing, New York.

Research is made into the sacraments of the Church, the overall composition of the community and surrounding landscape, and the educational needs of the neighborhood that the church will serve.

Respectfully submitted,
Dear Dean Belluschi:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture, I hereby submit this thesis,

A SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL ROMAN CATHOLIC CENTER FOR ST. MEL'S PARISH, FLUSHING, NEW YORK.

Sincerely yours,

Raymond DeLucia Jr.
THIS THESIS I DEDICATE
TO ONE JUST GONE BY . . .
FOR HER I SAY
GOD BLESS HER
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I. INTRODUCTION OF PROBLEM

A. The Area

Flushing, New York, since the closing of the 1939 World's Fair and the ensuing Flushing Meadow Park redevelopment program has been an increasingly populated suburb of New York City. The housing density is approximately 10 families per acres, of which 2000 families are in St. Mel's parish.

The houses average $20,000-$25000 and the community is comprised of professional and middle income groups with average income of $7000 per year.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn has proposed to increase the number of its parish school subdivisions in this area, thereby decreasing the burden on the existing ones.

Two parish schools exist in the Flushing and Whitestone areas at present.

St. Mel's parish house and auditorium church is located in the center of these.

It is proposed to develop a building program which will include a school, convent, new church, and rectory.
II. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

A. Sacraments

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that there is one infinite and almighty God in whom there are three divine persons (Holy Trinity) and that He created all things: the heavens, the earth, and man. Man He created in the person of Adam, in His Own image and likeness, endowing him with body and soul, intellect and free will, and above all else with supernatural life, making him a sharer in His Own nature. However, Adam, prompted by the power of evil and impelled by pride in his own excellence, deliberately disobeyed the mandates of his Creator and by so doing lost his divine kinship (original sin). God through His mercy promised him redemption through Jesus Christ, His Son, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who, born of the Virgin Mary, came to earth to effectuate by His life, teaching, and resurrection the return to supernatural life, and by His Crucifixion redeemed mankind.

To fulfill His mission Christ lived for 33 years upon the earth and during that time established His Church. To insure its existence He delegated His authority to twelve apostles, Peter being the first Pope. The apostolic successors, or bishops, by laying on of hands confer upon candidates the powers to perform the priestly functions in continuous succession.

The Catholic Church holds that the life of the soul is eternal and man is rewarded for good (Heaven) and pun-
ished for evil (Hell) as a result of his earthly conduct. As a means of grace to achieve everlasting life Christ instituted seven sacraments, namely:

**Baptism.** The sacrament of initiation by which a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, becoming a sharer in the divine nature and an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. "Jesus answered, Amen, amen, I say to thee unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." (John III, 5)

**Confirmation.** The sacrament of adulthood in the Christian life. It emanates from Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire to make them perfect Christians.

**Holy Eucharist.** The sacrament-sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ (Mass).

**Penance.** The sacrament by which the priest, as the representative of God, forgives the sins committed after Baptism of those who sincerely confess their sins and are truly penitent.

**Extreme Unction.** The sacrament administered to a person in danger of death from sickness or accident. It gives health to the soul and sometimes to the body. Extreme unction is an immediate preparation for entrance into eternal glory.
**Holy Orders.** The sacrament by which Christ's priesthood is continued on earth. It is that Sacrament whereby the priestly power to offer sacrifice and forgive sins, etc., together with the grace to use it faithfully is conferred. This sacrament is administered by a Bishop.

**Matrimony.** The sacrament by which a man and woman bind themselves for life in lawful marriage for the propagation of the human race.

The Church, as a continuation of Christ on earth, has maintained these sacraments and surrounded them with significant rituals and circumstances.
B. Temporal Cycle Calendar

**Paschal Season** (Spring and Summer)

I Septuagesima---------Remote--------V 18th Sunday after Pentecost
(Jan.-Mar.) Preparation
Septuagesima Sunday
Sexagesima Sunday
Quinquagesima Sunday

II Lent (Quadragesima)-------Proximate------VI Advent
(Feb.-April) Preparation
Ash Wednesday
1st Sunday Violet Vestments
Ember Days (Spring)
2nd Sunday
3rd Sunday
Laetare Sunday
Passion Sunday
Holy Week
Palm Sunday
Maundy Thursday Sacred
Good Friday Triduum
Holy Saturday

III Paschaltide---------Celebration----VII Christmastide
(Mar.-June)
Holy Saturday White and Red Vestments
Easter Sunday Vigil
Low Sunday Joy
2nd Sunday
3rd Sunday
4th Sunday
5th Sunday Climax
Rogation Days
Ascension Thursday
Sunday within Octave of Ascension
Whitsunday (Pentecost) Epiphany (Jan.6)
 Ember Days (Summer) Octave Day

IV Time after Pentecost--Prolongation---VIII Time after Epiphany
(May-Nov.) (Jan.-Feb.)
Trinity Sunday Green Vestments 2nd Sunday
17th Sunday after Pentecost 3rd Sunday
Pentecost Purification
Ember Days (Fall) (Feb.2)

--- Churches and Temples ---
III. THE CHURCH PROGRAM

(Based on approximate capacity of 750 seats)

A. The Components of the Church

The Church Proper is the area in which the clergy and the people gather for the celebration of the Mass and for prayer. It, in turn, is divided into three basic units: the Sanctuary, Choir, and the Body of the Church (Nave). The elements of the church proper are dedicated principally to the celebration of the Eucharistic mysteries and should be devoid of distracting objects and unrelated subjects.

The Sanctuary is the area wherein the ministers function during the Mass. There is no set plan for the sanctuary; however, it should be somewhat formal and symmetrical. It should be elevated above the body of the church and be sufficiently distinct from it, as becomes the dignity of the "Holy of Holies." The sanctuary also must be large enough to permit easy performance of the ceremonies without curtailing the movements of the ministers and attendant servers. Sanctuaries are seldom, if ever, too large, but they are frequently too small. Space should allow for its proper furnishing and for the introduction of a Bishop's Throne and Falstool as occasion requires. Its floor area should be uninterrupted by steps other than those required at the altar. The sanctuary and the altar should be the focal point. It is advisable to elevate the floor of the sanctuary for greater visibility and audibility.
Within the sanctuary, which is divided from the nave by the communion rail, are placed the altar and its appurtenances: the credence table, sedilia, stools for the acolytes, etc. It has also been customary to include within this area space for the schola cantorum or vested male choir.

The Altar is the table on which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered. As such it deserves first consideration in the design of a church. In the Roman Rite the permanent altar is required to be of natural stone and immovable. The table and its support is considered as one and connected as a whole. The top (mensa) must be of a single slab of stone. The foundations of the altar must bear directly on the earth. While it is not uncommon to locate the altar against a wall, wherever possible it should be free standing because the latter arrangement emphasizes itself as being distinct from its surroundings. A free standing altar also facilitates an orderly procedure for such ceremonies as the consecration of the altar and its incensation at the Mass and at Vespers. Finally, maintenance and care of the altar is facilitated when access is provided from all sides. A number of altars may be placed in a church; however, it is proper to have only one in the sanctuary.

The predella is the foot pace in front of the altar, on which the celebrant stands when celebrating Mass. In addition to this foot pace, two more steps should be added
for a high altar. These steps should not be more than five inches high and should be 16 to 18 inches wide. If the steps are less than 16 inches wide, they are not wide enough for the deacon to act on, whereas if they are more than 18 inches, they are too wide to mount in a normal stride. The foot pace should be about flush with the ends of the altar to enable the deacon, sub-deacon, or server to approach the altar from the side standing on the second step (number of steps, three, five, seven).

The communion or altar rail is designed to separate the sanctuary from the body of the church. The faithful kneel at the altar rail to receive Communion (Holy Eucharist). It may be considered as an extension of the altar (banquet table). This railing may be a solid bulkhead or merely a shelf supported on posts or grillwork. It should not be more than one step above the floor of the church proper.

The Choir may be in one of several places within the church including the sanctuary. Despite the fact that mixed choirs (male and female voices) are common, the correct choir should be composed of men and boys. This male choir, properly vested, may be located within the sanctuary or to one side or the rear of it. Insofar as women are not permitted to appear in the sanctuary a mixed choir would not be permitted within the sanctuary, and if in the immediate vicinity, should be screened. It is not uncommon to place mixed choirs at the rear of the church.
The position of the choir would more or less dictate the type of furnishings to be employed.

The Body of the Church is the space for the congregation. It should be designed to allow for the maximum participation of the faithful with the celebrant. In theory, at least, the Mass and other liturgical rites involve a constant dialogue between the sanctuary and nave, between clergy and people (and/or choir). The sanctuary and the body of the church should be juxtaposed in such a way that this dialogue can be effected with dignity. This requires that the people (and choir) be near enough to see and hear easily and that their physical position be such that they form a single group to which the priest can direct his attention.

Seating should be arranged to accomplish this purpose. In general it is advisable to have open space in the body of the church, especially in the vicinity of the access doors and at the communion rail and directly in front of it. In the ancient church and in many parts of the world today pews are not used, but rather the congregation is free to move about within the body of the church. While this is not conducive to bodily comfort, it does permit greater mobility of the people and allow a closer participation in the ceremonies.

When the seating is fixed (pews) as is commonly the case, the aisles should be so located, and wide enough, to permit easy access to the sanctuary for processions, and
for the faithful to approach the communion railing and otherwise move about. Seating may be of a semi-movable character or the more common fixed seat or pew.

Aisles should not be less than six feet wide, preferably eight feet, to permit three vested ministers to walk abreast in procession. Aisles also should be wide enough to allow pallbearers to carry a casket into the church and for the attendant services at a funeral. Increased width at turns in passageways or aisles is desirable.

Next to the altar, the Baptistry, is the most important architectural feature of the church. Areas for baptism and penance may be provided within the church proper; or a baptistry may be built separate from the body of the church, which area could also contain the confessionals. There is good reason for locating the baptistry near the narthex or vestibule because, through baptism, the individual receives the first sacrament when he becomes a member of the Church and is then permitted to receive the other sacraments.

The narthex is liturgically important in any case, and is a requisite in the properly designed church. Specifically it is used in the administration of the first part of the sacrament of baptism, before the neophyte enters the baptistry proper. It is also used on Holy Saturday for the blessing of the new fire. It must, therefore, be large enough to allow for these ceremonies as well as the passage of people. In addition, bulletin boards, the poor box, etc.
are usually kept in the narthex and often holy water stoups are placed there.

Because baptism is the first step for the Christian, the baptistry might well be the first thing viewed on approaching or entering the church. The baptistry could be a separate building near the entrance of the church; it could also be a separate room, or a space within the church near the entrance. The baptistry should be large enough, or it should open into a space large enough, to permit the gathering of people present at a baptismal service, or at the blessing of the font during the Easter vigil.

Though no shape or size is prescribed for the baptismal font, it is the prime requisite of the baptistry. It is required that it be constructed of a material that will contain water and be large enough to imply the importance of the sacrament. It should be depressed one step below the level of the baptistry (recalling early Christian immersion) and its rim approximately 3'4" from the floor. The font may take a round, polygonal, elliptical, or similar shape. Its ledge should be wide enough to hold a candle and other objects used in the ceremony. It must be covered with a lid made removable. The font should be divided into two basins, one for the storage of baptismal water, the other to receive and carry away the water that is not used, into a sacrarium in the ground.
A holy water stoup is a small receptacle designed to contain holy water. There is no prescribed design for the holy water stoup. It may be made of any material that holds water, e.g. stone, metal, etc. A stoup is usually provided at each entrance to the church and in the sacristy at the entrance to the sanctuary. Holy water stoups may be pedestals approximately three feet high from the floor, or may be bracketed or hung from a wall.

The confessional is a space in which a penitent confesses privately to the priest in the sacrament or penance. There are a number of forms a confessional may take; however, the one that appears to be most practical is the three-compartment unit, the confessor's station being in the middle. The confessional should be as sound-proof as possible. Because the priest sits in the confessional for long periods of time the space designated to him should be carefully planned to provide for adequate facility, comfort, and warmth. Confessionals should also be well ventilated.

--- Churches and Temples ---
IV. THE RECTORY PROGRAM

The new Rectory will house three priests and two maids.

Requirements

A. Administration and Reception Areas

three (3) small offices with space for desk and two chairs
printing office - for mimeographic equipment and record files
collection counting room
parlor with library alcove for small discussion groups

Larger activities, such as:
teenage social dances
sports program meetings
communion breakfast
will take place in the utility recreation areas in the school building.
toilet

B. Utility Areas

dining room
maids' quarters
2 bedrooms
toilet
common room
garage for four (4) automobiles
(one guest parking space is included.)

C. Quiet Areas
private parlor.
bedrooms with private toilets for each resident priest
guest bedroom with toilet
D. Priests' Sacristy

General Sacristy

The sacristy is the space wherein various effects of the church are stored and wherein the ministers vest for the ceremonies. It is common practice to divide the sacristy into several spaces or into separate rooms, e.g.

1. Priests' sacristy - for storage of vestments and sacred vessels and for vestry.

2. General sacristy - for storage of ceremonial items, maintenance items and supplies for the sanctuary, cassocks, etc. for the choir, altar servers (acolytes) etc. as well as robing space.

--- Churches and Temples ---

Access to the altars without crossing the chancel (area between sanctuary and nave) should be provided.
V. THE SCHOOL PROGRAM

Immediate participation in the school program is certain as there are 600 children of pre-school age in the community now. It is estimated that of these, because of age distribution (1 to 6), approximately 100 will be enrolled per year.

Amount of participation of older children who are now enrolled in the adjacent parochial schools for the present is uncertain.

It is hoped that the school will eventually be able to serve the needs of 1000 children of elementary classification K-8 (kindergarten and grades one through eight).

Father Vincent O'Malley, pastor of St. Mel's, puts just importance in the school. In his own words, "the parish comes to life only when the school is built." He is acutely aware that an immediate building program for 1000 "certain" students is arbitrary and impractical since there is no way, short of experimentation, of defining the school's responsibilities.

It is therefore proposed to build the school in two stages:

First phase - an eight (8) classroom school (to include grades 1 to 4) with administration, kindergarten and recreational areas.

Second phase - a ten (10) classroom addition having capacity for 700 children.
A. **Detail Breakdown of School Program**  
(space requirement for 700 pupils)

**Standard requirements for playground space:**  
approximately 3 acres for 300 pupils plus  
\( \frac{1}{2} \) acre for each additional 100 pupils  
totaling \( \ldots \ldots 5 \) acres

**18 classrooms @ approximately 1200 sq.ft.**  
\( \ldots 21,600 \) sq.ft.

**Recreational space**  
play-lunch room  
cooking space and service pantry  
teachers’ lunchroom  
toilets and locker rooms  
auditorium (500) seats  
stage, dressing room, storage  
music practice rooms  
choir practice rooms  
approx \( \ldots 11,000 \) sq.ft.

**Administration**  
principal office  
reception for students and visitors  
health clinic  
teachers' lounge  
book room  
approx \( \ldots 2,000 \) sq.ft.
building total...34,600 sq.ft.
or 1.04 acres

not including space for:
mechanical equipment
toilet stations
and circulation
VI. THE CONVENT PROGRAM

Preparing for full growth of the school the convent will be designed for maximum capacity of 20 nuns.

Requirements

A. Reception Areas

- parlors (two) for receiving parents or guests
- music room for private individual lessons
  (piano and violin)

B. Utility Areas

- kitchen, serving and storage pantries
- dining room
- laundry room with clothing drop chute
- ironing room with linen storage
- trunk storage room
- cloak room
- printing office with space for desk, record files and mimeographic equipment
- toilets

C. Quiet Areas

- parlor for private use
- community room
- chapel
- vestment storage room
- bedrooms and toilets
  (common toilets between bedrooms are permissible)
VII. SITE SELECTION

Property owned by St. Mel's Parish

Site #1 - existing parish house
Site #2 - existing auditorium church (1.9 acres)
Site #3 - parking lot (.9 acres)
Site #4 - rented home
The present design solution by the Diocese Building office proposes the school and convent building to be built on site #2 using the auditorium (church) building as part of the school, and to build a new church and rectory across 154th Street on site #3.

To achieve a satisfactory design the present parking area (.9 acres approximately) should be maintained and even increased if possible. The parking is maintained in this solution by utilizing the playground area of the school for this purpose during church services. This reduces considerably the usefulness for playground activity as grass areas are reduced considerably or eliminated altogether.

Site #2 is approximately 1.9 acres. After construction of school and convent less than an acre is left for playground use. (Refer back to Detail Breakdown of School Program.)

The desirability of increasing the school site to standard size and eliminating duplication of any function tending to reduce its use leads me to the assumption that a larger site is necessary for this problem.

Assuming it were possible to obtain the entire block of which site #2 is part, the total area of the site would increase to approximately 5 acres, which though not standard could be termed more adequate to the problem.
VIII. DESIGN PROPOSALS
Try to achieve a design which has a life of its own against the standardized surroundings.
Eliminate crowded and confusing moments between services.
Increase usefulness of playground areas.
Reduce or eliminate closeness of playground to traffic.
IX. PRELIMINARY SITE STUDY
X. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Diocese Building Office of Brooklyn, New York
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XI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Schools:


