

Iowa State University

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2006

Ethno Merit: Containing the Ritualistic Affairs of a People

Peter P. Goché



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/peter_goché/18/

AWARD

AIA IOWA MERIT AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE
IN ARCHITECTURE

Ethno Merit

CONTAINING THE RITUALISTIC AFFAIRS OF A PEOPLE

JURY COMMENTS: Irreverently bold. The massing of this church on a prairie refers to icons of church and campanile, yet it also refers to the barns and silos of its region. We appreciate the effort to respond to the client's need for function and symbol.

St. Paul Lutheran Church is the faith center for a rapidly expanding congregation made up of approximately 150 families. It is an evangelical structure for worship and prayer. Its mission: Every member a missionary.

Right: A view into the sanctuary through the fellowship hall.

Bottom left: The interior of the intended chapel beneath the tower which is now used as a meeting room.

Originally located in downtown Winterset, St. Paul Lutheran Church now rests on the northern edge of town against the rural horizon of Madison County.

The programmatic research leading up to the construction of this new facility began in 2001. Enjoined by architects Kevin Nordmeyer and Ash Lettow of RDG Planning & Design, the parish council began the effort with a series of informational meetings. Once the base criteria for the necessary spaces and their sequence was defined, the architects began their inquiry into the cultural conditions surrounding the individual spaces (sanctuary, sacristy, chapel, fellowship hall, kitchen, nursery, classrooms and offices), rituals (the sign of the cross, prayer, song, oral lessons and mealtime) and associated artifacts (eternal light, body and blood of Christ, altar, chalice, bread basket, crucifer, baptismal font, lectern, seating, hymnal, musical instruments,



chasuble, alb and stole) specific to this people and their doctrine. This analytic discovering included attending various worship services and participating in several parish functions. These engagements not only aided in furthering the architect's cultural comprehension of St. Paul's fellowship, it established a level of trust from which the architectural solution would stem.

With an accumulated body of insight, the architects began to synthesize their findings. The cataloguing of such data within the architectural discipline tends, almost immediately, toward a solution developed in drawing and model. These results were then taken back to the council and ultimately the congregation via a series of input meetings. These meetings were conducted in an effort to provoke, through discussion, notions relative to established values and meanings particular to the proposition. As a result, affirmations and challenges to initial findings arose.

This methodology culminated in a giving campaign which was orchestrated by the church on the future grounds in the spring of 2002. The derived solution was laid out on the property. Chairs were set up in the sanctuary and a barbecue was positioned in the kitchen. This manner of prototyping the scale and sequence of spaces on site served as a critique of both the plan and its missionate intent. With the recognition that a people gathered together in prayer and meal on the prairie constituted church, the role of the architect was revealed; to make a container for fellowship. This was executed using ordinary types of material to frame a lens that would deepen each member's engagement. The chapel and crucifer would tower out front (more or less) as symbol.

An architecture that emerges from this sort of honest working relationship has merit.



Project: St. Paul Lutheran Church

Location: Winterset, IA

Architect: RDG Planning & Design

General Contractor: Bryan

Crow Construction

Electrical Engineer: ME Group

Mechanical Engineer: RDG Planning & Design

Structural Engineer: Korpela Engineering

Electrical Contractor:

Armstrong Electric

Mechanical Contractor:

Martensdale Plumbing and Heating

Landscape Architect:

Landscape Architecture Consultants

Interior Designer:

RDG Planning & Design

Photographer: Farshid

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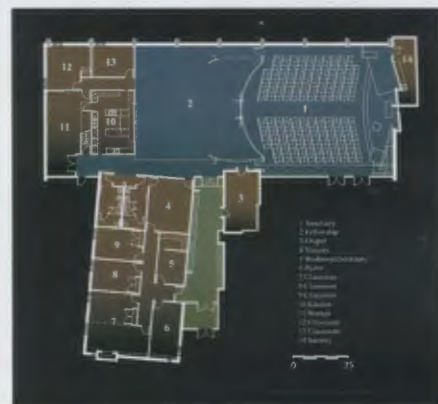
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Left: A view of the expansion armature used for peak load services.

Below: The solution, as derived at through plan and sequence.



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This ethno-specific effort, though limited in scope, is entitled to commendation. St. Paul Lutheran Church stands, then, as testimony to an underlying fellowship that stems from both its mission as well as that of its architect; to participate in and contain the ritualistic affairs of a people.

—Pete Goché is a cultural inclusionist native to rural Iowa.

pro-gram: a design guide developed in the preliminary phases of architectural design. It is the resultant data collected and interpreted by means of a comprehensive method of analysis/ synthesis in effort to: (1) associate or affiliate (oneself) closely with a people; (2) describe by enumerating the characteristics or qualities of a people; (3) convey information about a people with respect to the phenomenological make-up of their customs and values. (Pete Goché, *Place setting: Architect as cultural inclusionist*, Iowa State University, 2005, 4.)

Above: The lens provides aperture to the sanctuary while the tower stands out front as mere symbol.