OPEN ACCESS

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: 30-09-2026
Accepted: 01-11-2026
Published: 06-11-2026

Journal Access By QR

Journal homepage: https://ssarpublishers.com/ssarjahss
Abbreviated Key Title: SSAR J Arts Humanit Soc Sci
Volume 3, Issue 6, (Nov-Dec) 2026, Page 398-401 (Total PP.04)
E-mail: ssarpublishers@gmail.com

LET US STOP RENOVATING CHURCH BUILDINGS AND RENOVATE CHURCH AS A PEOPLE

By
Author: Rev. Fr. Dr. Peter Danjuma Uchu
Department of Sacred Liturgy Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), PH.

ABSTRACT: Worship offered by a Christian community is the sole reason why a church building exists. The building is not an end itself but a means to an end. It is the offering of worship to God manifest in Jesus Christ. The error often made is the misunderstanding that everything about church building must be shaped by its function as the place where Christians worship. The method is to begin with worship, reviewing those things that every Christian assembly does when it comes together. Then we proceed to show how suitable space can enhance these activities and how improper space can impede them. Our purpose is to encourage congregations to examine their own life together and to use this as their point of departure. Then they will be prepared to consider how well the building they have, or the building they project will serve that worship. The people and their worship are primary. The church building or architecture is meant to serve that worship, and not to be a monument to itself. Unless we keep emphasising on the people and their worship, a building can get out of hand and acquire an identity that may not match that of the community it is intended to serve.

KEYWORDS: Church, Building, Architecture, Renovation, Worship, Assembly, Congregation.

INTRODUCTION

On 4th December, 1963, at the end of its second session, the Second Vatican Council promulgated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Since then we have been living through the most profound, the most intensive and the most rapid liturgical changes our church has ever known. The Vatican II did not simply institute a program for the renewal of the church's rites, but it also asks us constantly to take stock of our achievements even as we live them so that we might shape the future more critical and more imaginatively. The Liturgy however, has reformed not just for the sake of novelty or to exchange new fabrics for old, but so that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebration which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and is their right and duty by reason of their baptism (SC14). The purpose of the Sacraments, the Constitution said, is to sanctify men, to build the Body of Christ and finally, to give Worship to God (SC59). We would naturally expect then, that a massive Programme of reform and renewal with these objectives should bring about a radical and profound revitalization of Christian life. If the test of the Liturgy is the life of the people who celebrate it, we would expect renewal in liturgy to effect renewal in life or at at least create a vibrantly new appreciation of the role of liturgy in life. But has our expectation been fulfilled?

This calls to mind the long history of Catholic and the church's recent attempts to reform the style and setting of its corporate worship. For centuries, of course, the church through her edifices has tried to distinguish the respective places of priestly and lay activities. Chancel arches, rood screens, altar rails, parapets, processional staircases – all contributed to

License: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). Published by SSAR Publishers.

the perceptible boundary that stood between the ordered stillness of the sanctuary and the popular commotion of the rave.[1] Among the achievements of the Vatican II, however, was an invitation to lay Catholics to cross freely the thresholds barring them from full participation at their eucharistic tables and to receive with greater understanding the Sacramental tools of redemption maintained there.

The nature of liturgy, the Council Fathers made clear, demands that all members of Christ's ecclesial body be able to see, hear, and act without obstruction, and the places reserved for liturgical prayer must be laid out accordingly. While much has been done to modify the forms and decorative complexion of our church buildings, comparatively little energy has gone to educating the faithful they serve. It is not inappropriate, then, to propose that in most dioceses around the Catholic world, the church should stop renovating and building places of worship and educate the faithful so that the aim of the Vatican II to achieve excellence in Sacred Liturgy and art may be achieved.

Liturgy and Technology

Technology is not a new term. Paul Tilhch argues that technology, along with language is a fundamental dimension of the human person in every age, one of the essential pre-condition for our self-actualization. This is because, *homo sapiens* is also *homo faber*, and questions surrounding the role of technology in human life are as old as philosophy itself.[2]

In this article, technology is needed here to refer to the artifacts resulting from a process of manufacture. This can be anything from a simple tool to a complex information- management system. This definition also refers in computer terms, to hardware, to anything that by its existence extends the range of human capabilities beyond their natural limitations.

Some years back, the global spread of COVID-19 and its variants exacerbated the church exodus problem that started well before the pandemic. The restraints caused by the pandemic affected church members especially regarding worship. Not having access to the sacrament of the Eucharist and not being able to meet their friends in person has bothered many Catholics.[3]

Millions of people across the globe already use the Internet to connect the co-workers, family and friends, using social media platforms such as Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram and Twitter. It would be an obvious way to stay connected to the congregation.

During the pandemic, many people linked up with old members and met new ones by means of Zoom, Google Meet, Skype and other Communication applications. They prayed, shared spiritual insights, studied the bible and participated in Sunday liturgy. Many parishes created their own websites or apps to live-stream liturgies. Homilies were also posted on blogs and websites.[4]

It seemed, temporary that there was no need to be in a church building to associate with a congregation. Now, many are wondering if a more hybrid form of worship is 'the new normal'. It is also reasonable to ask if the structural place for worship will matter in the future? If the answer is Yes, then physical and technological adaptations to the space will be required. The factors that are challenging the definitions of what a congregation is and does will eventually after the definition and function of a house of worship.[5] Research tells us that social media creates real communities and that younger generations are living and working in that culture.

Church

Christianity is the only religion that so identified within its culture with their building. There is the church, the Christian church or to be specific, the Catholic church, depending on the context which might be referring to a religion organization or a community of people or to a building along the street. The church is used both for the people and the building. They are real and viable, and really called church and serve perfectly. The belief system

1 Michael. E. DeSanctis, *Building From Belief* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) 58

2 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) 73

3 Richard S. Vosko, "Relational Churches of the Future: As the Tide Turns," in Thomas O'Loughlin, ed. *Shaping the Assembly: How our buildings form us in worship* (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2023) 70

4 Vosko, 71

5 DeSanctis, 58

License: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). Published by SSAR Publishers.

of those who gather in them and for the administration system. If you have Christianity, you have churches and vice versa.

Church buildings are visible witnesses to faith, capable of influencing the belief system of Christian and non-Christians alike. The transcendent and imminent aspects of God's nature are central to the Christian faith and thus emerges as important themes to reference in church design. These aspects seem mutually exclusive, but both have been, and always will be true of the nature of God for Christians. This is similar and related to consideration of the two natures of Christ, human and divine. Fagerberg mentioned theological proposition that govern church art and architecture that, hypostatic union determines the utility and value of earthly realities.[6]

More so, everything in Christianity derives from the incarnate Christ. Mersch does not hesitate to say that the hypostatic union does not affect our Lord alone, but that it is somehow prolong in us, the members. The members are the prolongation of the head, and that the hypostatic union renders us divine by reason of our continuity with God Man.[7] The church building is not only a purely human society, but also symbolizes the kingdom. It visualizes the heavenly liturgy as well as potency in the world.

These factors and many more remind us of the transcendence and immanence God in church design. The scale and volume, the control of light, and organization of the space have all been used through various designs to help remind the worship of the nature of God.

Relational Churches

In the last chapter of this book, God's house in our homes; Reimagining the environment for worship, Rechae Vosko dwells on "A vision for the church buildings tomorrow." He opines that there is an undeniable interdependent connect between the Eucharist and social action.[8] The church is center of worship generate a relational model of church, where doors are opened to all people regardless of sex, gender, colour, education and income. The model of a church where people would gather to support one another, celebrate life cycle events, worship and serve the needs of the community especially those who have no food, clothings and housing or support system.

Church buildings are symbols in every society. They signal the presence of partnerships dedicated to making a difference in the community. The edifice itself reveals the identity of a cohort and the ways in which it advocates for peace and justice. It is in this sense that the building, especially the interior space, shapes the people into united whole, sustained by their communion and their intention to serve others.

Future Design of Churches

In the spirit of the transformation of the Vatican II, the focus should be on the interior arrangement and furnishing necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist and other Sacrament. what will matter most is that a place of worship be designed as a relational space that treated worshippers as celebrant, not spectators. The church of the future should feature spatial attributes that promotes interdependence and a sense of belonging among members and visitors. Larger fire-comet are used for the reception of people. Baptismal font with living (flowing) water, now part of the main entry area to the church, accommodate Christian initiation by different methods. The Rite of Penance takes place in a chapel not a closet. The tabernacle for reserving the Eucharist is Conspicuous in an accessible chapel.

The most enduring feature of contemporary church design is the location of essential liturgical furnishing. The altar table and the ambo occupy a more central area, with the assembly arranged around these furnishing. Presiders are taking a seat in front row of the congregation rather than in a remote location. The Cathedral of the Bishop is a dignified chair that also not resemble a throne.

Ecclesia dimension of liturgical space while we noted earlier that there are factors that have brought some changes in liturgical settings in the church like Covid 19 and its variants. The new technologies that are affecting not only the way we worship. Although the Internet, AI and advancement in digital technology continues to shape the way we

6 Mark Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Germans Publishing, 2007) 4

7 Vosko, 71

8 Vosko, 71

License: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). Published by SSAR Publishers.

learn and work, the yearning to gather together in real places will not disappear.[9]

That relational places of worship will unite communities and stir a new inter-religious awakening is plausible, especially in a universal context. The human eco-system is not separate from divinely infused multiverses. It is one with them. The same elements and forms comprising the cosmos also exit here on earth in sea life, forests nests of birds, weather system and human features. Theses circular shapes are the most natural forms that we can use to design liturgical spaces. They connect us to everything and everyone else.[10] Inclusive inter-religious places of worship designed to help undeserved communities manifest a relational ecclesiology. They are coordinated expressions of the common ground in a fractured world. They are the churches of tomorrow, both really and virtually.

Conclusion

The argument goes that, design influences human conduct and redesigning its sacred places the church will meritably cause the faithful to act and pray differently. There is the need for pastoral leaders to persist in their attempts to change the style and setting of worship whether the majority of Catholics are prepared for change or not. It has been found out over the same decade that some places of greatest beauty and liturgical propriety have no spell over persons not disposed to such things.

Clearly, the quality of buildings of worship is not about to improve until we are all convinced of worship importance in Catholic life beginning with the priest. But the prospect of reeducating ourselves as well as the entire membership of even a single parish is enough to scare many pastors into inaction. What has been described here is not inconsistent with aspirations expressed in the *Apostolic Letter* of Pope Francis on Liturgy Formation, *Desiderio Desideravi* (2022). In its long process of meetings and discussions leading to the creation of the design brief for the architect, the assembly will consider who it is as a faith-community and how best it wishes to articulate this faith in terms of its liturgical worship in a given space. In this sense, the assembly forms the design in order that they and future generations may be formed by the design. All involved in shaping the assembly must realise that every element of the space. The worship environment of our new church building should itself articulate something of our beliefs as a faith community as well as help us express and celebrate the deepest aspiration of our faith. We believe that the very design will either enhance our faith or work against it. This truth cannot ever be missed. The assembly is significantly formed in its Christian outlook by the space which is helped shape and in which it regularly worships.

REFERENCES

1. DeSanctis, Michael. E., *Building From Belief* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002)
2. Kieckhefer, Richard, *Theology in Stone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
3. McNamara, Denis, R., *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009)
4. Rose, Michael, S., *Ugly As Sin* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2001)
5. Stroik, Duncan G., *The Church Building as a Sacred Place* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2012)
6. Tilich, Paul, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973)
7. Torgerson, Mark, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Germans Publishing, 2007)
8. Vosko, Richard S., "Relational Churches of the Future: As the Tide Turns," in Thomas O'Loughlin, ed. *Shaping the Assembly: How our buildings form us in worship* (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2023)
9. Whelan, Thomas, *Shaping the Assembly: A Process of Formation in Faith* (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2023)
10. White, James F. & White, Susan, J., *Church Architecture: Building and Renovating For Christian Worship* (Akron: OSL Publications, 1998).

9 Thomas Whelan, *Shaping the Assembly: A Process of Formation in Faith* (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2023) 55

10 Whelan, 56

License: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). Published by SSAR Publishers.