

The Chapel Tapestry

BRONZE PLAQUES

Throughout the building there are no bronze plaques bearing the names of the “prominent” families or even the names of donors to large memorial gifts. There is a simple memorial book, listing the names of all workers in all the crafts as well as the names of those members and friends who have made financial contributions to the Building Fund, the Landscape or the Furnishing Funds.



The Labyrinth Behind the Church

Sticks and Stones

An Introduction to the Architecture and
Building of the First United Church

“With sticks and stones, with words, with wedding rings and church spires and poetry man tries to hold intact and to project his experience, his feelings, his religion, beyond his time. The danger, of course, is that the symbols become idols; the words and stones turn into golden calves and sacred cows, and become more important than the experiences they stand for. When this happens we worship the church, its sticks and stones and creeds. In the end, we worship religion instead of God.”

W.D.R.

First United Church

Bloomington, Indiana

Founded 1825

Rebuilt 1956

Renovated and modified 2003



E. A. SOVIK AIA

Edward Anders Sovik, the architect and designer of the church, born in 1918, the son of Lutheran missionaries, graduated with the B.A. degree from St. Olaf College in 1939.

He studied painting at the Art Students League and theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

In 1949 he graduated from the School of Architecture of Yale University.

At the time of construction he had designed church and college buildings which had been constructed in nine different states.

Most of the original material in Sticks and Stones is drawn directly from a sermon on the subject of the new church, delivered by the minister, W. Douglas Rae, on June 23, 1957.

Money

The cost of the project, including the price of property and the furnishings, was \$550,000. Of the families of the congregation, 286 participated in the financial program. For many of these families this meant giving at the level of personal sacrifice; for some it meant giving a double tithe. One nine-year-old boy, for example, gave up comic books for three years. Many families postponed the purchase of new cars and drove old cars well beyond the 100,000-mile mark. There was one large gift of \$25,000. Most of the three-year pledges ranged between \$500 and \$2,000. The mortgage assumed by the congregation was for \$140,000, financed over a fifteen year period.

Working Together

Over 200 members of the congregation actually worked on the construction of the church. Men, women and children participated. Friends and even families with small children worked together. Indiana University students from several states also helped to complete the building. These volunteer workers, in addition to doing other jobs, laid all the floor tile in the church and church school, 14,000 square feet of tile. They also painted the interior walls of the entire project. The men assembled and anchored the pews. The grading, and the sowing of the grass was a work project of the fathers and sons of the church.

In summing up, this contribution of skills and semi-skilled work brought a new sense of Christian community which was of far greater value than the actual money saved by the free labor.

Democracy in Action

One of the chief characteristics of the entire building program was the unusual use of the broad, democratic process. The architects were at first dubious about the possibilities of allowing an entire congregation to make so many decisions. The best results in their judgment were achieved by turning the program over to a small committee.

In the building of the church all major decisions were made at congregation meetings and not by the executive committee — the method of raising the funds, the choosing of the location, the selection of the architect, the acceptance of the contemporary design, the purchase price, the amount of the mortgage, the letting of the contract. Moreover, these decisions were all made after prolonged discussion followed by a vote of the congregation. All these decisions were carried by a large and significant majority.

In an effort to broaden the democratic process the architect spent a week in Bloomington meeting and talking with individual members, church officers, church boards and committees, church related organizations and groups, etc.

In addition, each of the working committees—Finance, Structure, Grounds, Furnishings and Memorial Gifts—were composed of ten members providing an honest cross section of the church—men, women, young and old. Each of these committees had four non-office-holding members plus a representative from the following boards: Deacons, Deaconesses, Trustees, Education, Youth Work and Student Work. The executive committee was composed of two women and three men.

Sticks and Stones

A Word of Introduction

For eight years before the building contracts were awarded several committees from the congregation worked to formulate a statement of the philosophy and purpose of the Christian church and our particular congregation and its work, in the last half of the twentieth century.

It was our hope to secure an architect who would be able to express our religious convictions in wood and stone as honestly and as distinctively as the men who expressed the faith of the early American settlers by designing the New England churches.

After interviewing architects from different sections of the country the congregation voted to secure the services of E. A. Sovik of Northfield, Minnesota. The general contractor for the construction of the church was Gwaltney Brothers Corporation of Indianapolis. The new building, which was then the First Baptist Church, was completed in 1957.

Forty-three years later, after extensive consideration of long range plans for the church, of the need for renovation and of how the church was fulfilling its mission, the congregation voted on August 6, 2000 to “remain in this location” and start the needed repairs to the building. On September 17, 2000 they authorized the sale of up to three acres on the east side of the property. Subsequently, Bynum Fanyo & Associates, Inc. was engaged to provide architectural and engineering services for the project. Dillard & Dillard Construction, Inc. was contracted to install a new standing seam roof. Removal of hazardous asbestos from the old heating system was handled by Air Co. of Indianapolis, and Simanton Mechanical, Inc. was awarded the contract for the new heating and air conditioning system. J. H. Miller & Assoc. of Mechanicsburg, PA was consulted for the capital campaign to fund the renovation.

The Problem and the Need

In 1955, the Structure Committee, one of six major working groups of the congregation, submitted the following statement for the approval of the congregation, and after being approved, it was submitted to the architect as a working statement describing the function and purpose of the church building. (The following is taken from the 32 page report of the committee.)

“Provide a ‘place of worship’ so challenging in its conception that the worship will not be sterile, but will issue in individual commitment and Christian social action which seeks first: ‘The Kingdom of God’... a place of Christian worship so designed that in its symbols, the worshipper will draw strength from the history of the whole church and from that of the Free Churches in particular.... a place so simple and meaningful and honest, that no one will be made afraid by lavish appointments or pretension in any form.”

“Provide a preaching center for the communication of the Gospel through both the spoken and written word, of such a character that the sermon shall not only be part of the worship service but shall bring both the community and the church under the judgment of the Word, all of which shall be supported by the design and character of the church building.”

“Provide in the stone and wood of the building a Christian symbol which will speak of man’s search for God in the forms and with the materials of our time, using the engineering and craft skills of our time, thus creating a religious symbol in the form of a building to symbolize the non-authoritarian, Free Protestant Church in the twentieth century.”

The Beams

Most visitors want to pin a label on the curve of the roof and call it oriental. The fact is that the long bow-arch made it possible to span a wide area without using heavy steel or resorting to supporting columns behind which some worshippers would have to sit. The long sweeping curve suggests great strength and the upturned ends, which give a sense of lightness like the upturned wings of a bird in flight, make it possible to eliminate gutters. (The upturned curve of the roof becomes the rain trough.)

In addition, and without intent, the profile of the beams suggests the ancient yoke of the New Testament, the yoke of which Jesus spoke: “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.”

The Choir Balcony

The walkway along which the members of the choir usually enter leads to the choir balcony in the rear nave. The placing of the choir in this position was dictated by one primary consideration, namely, to minimize the “performance,” “special number” character of the choir, thereby heightening the sense of the total Christian community at worship including the choir members, rather than creating the setting and atmosphere of an audience listening to a musical performance.

Fellowship Hall and Roger Williams Hall

There are two multi-purpose halls, Fellowship Hall for large gatherings and dinners, and after church visiting, and Roger Williams Hall for smaller groups. The latter, named for the first citizen and member of the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, suggests the great and vigorous tradition of the people called Baptists and all the free churches of both the old and new worlds.

The Simplicity and Size

One of the requests made of the architect by the congregation was for a design that would not frighten people away, either by its size or the plush character of its appointments. From the highway there is nothing austere or impressive about the church building. In fact, it is not until visitors have walked through the church that they are aware of its generous dimensions.

A Symbol of the Christian Controversy

The first thing that strikes most people when they see the church is that it is different. The design is not only different but it is controversial. This, we think, is in keeping with the history of Christianity. When Christian religion has been alive and growing it has been controversial. It has made people talk and think and act differently. The simple lines of this church are not as startling in the 21st century as they were when the building was constructed, but we hope that the thinking and living of the congregation will always strike the note of controversy, and never be completely at home in the world.

The Cornerstone

The Cornerstone contains a copper certificate for \$1000 contributed by members of the congregation in denominations of \$10 or less. This was done to emphasize the missionary note of the church and to add a sense of a mission into time.

A new Cornerstone Fund in the amount of \$10,000 is being raised in 2007 as an investment for future renovations. Two thousand dollars of that has been designated for new church growth.

“ This is to certify that on December 9th, 1956 at the laying of the cornerstone, the members of the congregation placed in the care of the trustees of the First Baptist Church and their successors the sum of \$1,000 to be invested by a mutual shares investment company for the lifetime of this building as our church. This small sum represents an effort over and above the indebtedness we are incurring in its construction.

“It is the wish of the present congregation that at the time of the demolition of this building or its abandonment as our place of Christian worship , this sum and the income earned therefrom shall not be set aside as an endowment fund but shall be used in its entirety in the name of Christ for one or more purposes: to assist the refugee or the oppressed, to minister to the sick or poor, to provide for the teaching and preaching ministry of the church, or to assist in building another church or hospital or a school, or for whatever purpose the members of the congregation shall then deem most worthy and urgent in their best judgment under God.

“This we do to the glory of God and his Kingdom as a symbol of our belief in the eternal elements of our Christian faith, and as a symbol of our hope in man’s ability under God to meet the challenge of survival in the atomic age.”

The Orientation of the Building

The axis of the church is not at a right angle to the highway. The axis of the church rather than being north and south or east and west, is northeast and southwest. The church is, therefore, oriented to the sun in such a fashion that the warm morning sunlight reaches the wide side aisle but not the pews, and the aisle in turn reflects the light to the ceiling of the nave. The late afternoon sun is limited to the very high horizontal windows on the northwest, again limiting direct sunlight on the pews to a very small area. It is this asymmetrical orientation to the sun which dictates the asymmetrical pattern of the chancel and the nave with the aisle off center.

We would like people to see in this relationship of the building to the sun the need for man to relate his life to God, to “the Light of the world.”

The Windows

The clear windows which provide daylight for the hour of worship stand in contrast to the familiar “dim religious light” of the ancient cathedrals.

These clear panes of glass have been used to emphasize

- (1) the central place of light as a Christian symbol and the place of enlightenment and knowledge in the Protestant churches;
- (2) the fact that the worship service, while it is a time set apart for meditation, is not a retreat or an escape from the world outside and its needs.

The Baptistry

The baptismal pool, located under the cross, is placed to one side of the chancel area. Typically, the candidate walks across the chancel, as an additional sign and witness to the congregation of their Christian decision. A pitcher and bowl, placed on the communion table, are used for baptisms when immersion is not selected.

The Tower

The free-standing 75-foot tower and cross which catches the first light of day reaching the city, completes the northeast quadrangle of the church plan. Equipped with 25 electronic carillon bells, the tower provides the ancient vertical line of religious symbolism, suggesting both the “upward look” and the infinite, man’s need to stretch his mind with the wonder and mystery which lie beyond his little life.

The tower also stands as a symbol of the continuity of four church buildings with materials of each worked into the north wall. There are bricks from the “Old School” Presbyterian Church which was bought by the congregation in 1861, and from the First Baptist “Meeting House” built on the same site (4th and Washington Streets) in 1874. The tower also contains a large stone taken from the tower of the First Baptist Church built on the same site in 1901.

The Chapel

The Chapel is without windows except for a door with windows above it. The windows are offset from direct line-of-sight for worshippers. The original skylights were covered when the new roof was constructed in 2003. The chapel, therefore, is “shut-off” — a place of retreat and a place of prayer for individuals and small groups of worshippers.

The tapestry hanging behind the chapel communion table was created by Jane Olson Glidden and dedicated in 1985. It depicts the Greek letters chi and rho, symbols for Christ. The cross on the table was originally on the roof of the portico.

The chapel suggests the Christian need to return to solitude. With us a sense of Christian community is of first importance, but we believe that there cannot be a strong Christian witness without personal, religious discipline.

The Pulpit

The simple, solid, walnut pulpit used for both the reading and preaching of the Word has a space at the front for tapestries or other symbolic presentations in keeping with themes of the Christian message such as: The Sword of Truth, the Christian message of hope, the Word of God, etc.

The Communion Table

Across from the pulpit which highlights the place of the spoken word is the long communion table which highlights the “Living Word,” suggesting that the sense of Christian community is at the center of our church life.

The table is free-standing and set away from the wall to make it obvious to everyone that it is not an altar. On the table are the brass pitcher and bowl bringing to mind the importance of the first shared supper. The pitcher and bowl are not “decorator’s items”; they are used in the serving of communion.

The Offering Stones

At each end of the chancel steps are two stones at which the offering is presented by the ushers on behalf of the congregation. This is an integral part of the service of worship. The inscription on the stones is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. The words on the first stone read “*First Be Reconciled To Your Brother.*” Those on the second stone, “*Then Come and Offer Your Gift.*”



The Plantings

The large potted plants at the Fellowship Hall entrance and the plantings in the courtyard are symbols of life and the growing, changing qualities of the Christian faith.

Portico and Walk

One of the objectives of the building committee was to provide opportunities for the fellowship of the congregation as well as “after meeting” visiting. To this end, the two lobbies and the narthex of the church are large. Then, in an effort to extend the facilities for visiting before and after the services we have constructed a 75-foot portico that forms the north border of the court and connects the main entrance with the tower.

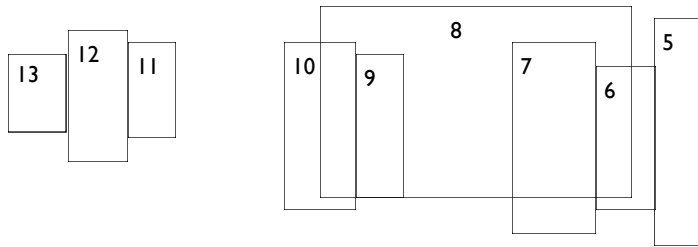
Symbol of Integrity

The building is the same on the inside as on the outside. In fact, one can see “clear thru it.” The ribs of the building are exposed in such a fashion that even the untrained eye can see the carrying and supporting members. There is nothing for show and nothing that cannot be shown.

The Pews

The white oak pews, designed in the fashion of the rural Indiana church bench, do not have boxed-in arm-ends. They are open-ended to suggest on the one hand freedom from the traditional “owned or rented pew,” and on the other the basic freedom of thought and discussion in the Free Church.

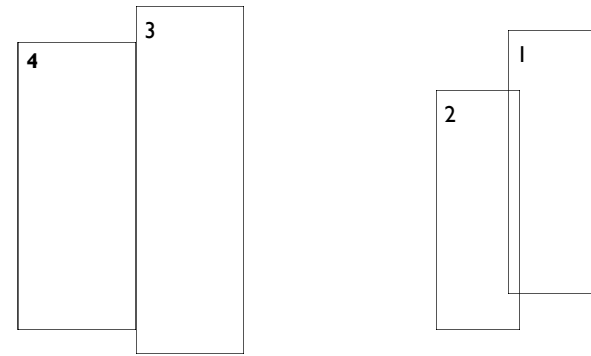
In addition the simple bench pews carry the message of Christian denial and discipline. There is nothing ornate or “plush” about them. Though designed to meet the requirements of good body posture, they speak for the simplicity of the Christian Faith.



The Banners

The banners in the sanctuary of the First United Church were created by Pohlmann Design of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The work is based on the motto in the chancel, “One is Your Master, The Christ, and you are all Brothers and Sisters.” The Pohlmanns also worked from photographs of the church, “Sticks and Stones,” statements of faith and an article in *Modern Church Architecture* by Albert Christ-Janer and Mary Mix Foley.

The banners were dedicated on April 15, 1979. The names of the donors are inscribed in the memorial book.



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| 1. Communion | 8. Christ victorious with welcoming arms |
| 2. Baptism | 9. Doctor |
| 3. & 4. People helping to create the building | 10. Sacred teaching (Bible) Secular Teaching |
| 3. Painting & Laying Tile | 11. Cornerstone |
| 4. Planting Tree | 12. Faith-Hope-Love |
| 5. Nursery (community service) | 13. Alpha & Omega |
| 6. History | |
| 7. Mathematics –Chemistry– Environment | |

The Chancel Cross

The cross is first a symbol of the cross of Christ, suggesting the historic roots of our religion. The sixteen-foot stylized cross made of African mahogany also suggests that the cross is not just a relic, but that the great cross of the 20th Century is centered in the cruelty and sin of our national and racial tensions.

Africa is both a symbol and a fact of what troubles mankind most in our time. This cross, therefore, recalls not only the death and suffering of the Servant Teacher, but also the eternal conflict of good and evil, of man against man, and man against God.

The Scripture Verse

The lettered scriptural interpretation from Matthew XXIII
 “ONE IS YOUR MASTER THE CHRIST.... AND YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS AND SISTERS” carries the double axis message of the Gospel– the love of God and the love of all mankind. In addition it emphasizes the Protestant’s concern for the central place of the scripture and our elimination of distinctions between the laity and the clergy. Even more it speaks for a continued re-examination of all dividing categories of race and class. Week after week it calls us back to our first loyalty and unlimited relationship in and through Christ. The words “AND SISTERS” were added by vote of the congregation in 2007.