

January 28, 2010

To Father Abe and the parishioners of St. Bede:

Over the past year, it has been a true pleasure working with the Around One Table Committee (AOTC) on the Parish Life and Ministry Center (PLMC). In that time, we have gotten to know the many difficulties the Parish faces in operating on two campuses.

As we begin to describe the design of the proposed building, we must first consider the key challenges that were posed by the site and program:

- Although the 43 acre site appears spacious, there is very little space available for development.
- The programmed space needs for the PLMC is more than what had been anticipated in the original master plan.
- The AOTC has required a direct physical connection between the new building and the existing church.
- The new building needs to complement the architecture of the existing church which is a finely detailed structure – symmetrical and complete as it currently commands the site.

GBRArchitects' approach to creating architecture is highly interactive and collaborative. Early in the process, we engaged the AOTC to understand the priorities and imperatives for the project. Using these imperatives we worked with the AOTC and other stakeholders to refine and reduce the building program to its essential elements. We then studied multiple options for the siting and massing of the new building.

In keeping with the original master plan, we explored the idea of two separate building volumes flanking the front courtyard. Given the space program and adjacency requirements the building volumes would have greatly obstructed the view to the existing entry façade. It was agreed that this strategy would put too much visual emphasis on the PLMC rather than on the church itself (where it belongs).

In considering the alternatives, it became apparent that we would need to locate the PLMC to the southwest of the existing building to maintain the vistas to the church from the entry drive — keeping the existing dome and lantern over the worship space as the dominant center of the composition. The consensus with the AOTC was that this solution provides the most practical and best fit with the existing architecture.

As was done for the original design, we turned to traditional Williamsburg architecture for inspiration – in particular to the Wren Building. In looking at the courtyard face of that building, there is an arched central portico with simple brick flanking wings. In developing the courtyard façade for the PLMC we will create an elegant brick volume with carefully proportioned regularly punched window openings. This volume is balanced by a vertical bell tower element.

To keep the overall footprint to a minimum, portions of the new PLMC will be 2 stories tall. This decision drives the height of the building taller than the existing 1 story Commons. To minimize the overall height (and construction costs), there is a simple “flat” roof over most of the PLMC. A gable roof form designates the main entry to the PLMC while the door detail reflects the side entrances to the existing Commons.

There are four major program elements accommodated in the PLMC. These are the Social Hall, Multi-purpose Classrooms, Parish Offices and, Music Rehearsal. The plan is organized based on the following functional considerations:

- The Social Hall needs to be convenient to the existing Commons while also providing convenient service access to the Kitchen.
- Offices and Multi-purpose Classrooms need to be convenient to new and existing parking.
- The Music Rehearsal Room needs to be convenient to the Worship Space while still being able to function independently of it.

The building is set as far east as possible given conservation easement and set back requirements. The slight skew to the Social Hall helps to facilitate this. The skew also provides a number of other benefits spatially and functionally. It increases the visual separation of the social hall volume in relation to the main dome. It also allows for an enhanced view of the worship space from the Social Hall.

The project is still in the early phases of design. We look forward to working together to refine the design and create a building that becomes central to the life of the Parish.