



TWICE IN THE SAME DAY people expressed confusion as to why the altar in the church’s re-design is located so close to the baptismal font. Plans drawn on paper can sometimes be more confusing than helpful, and since the matter of font and altar are central to what’s being done and why, some clarification clearly is in order.

The location of the baptismal font is obvious. It is where it is, which is not to say that some folks haven’t questioned whether it couldn’t be relocated or removed. As to the first point, the cost and logistics of moving the font or lowering it, so as to eliminate the need for steps, would be challenging both in terms of engineering and cost. I’ve usually addressed the second question with another question: *Why* would we remove our font?

The baptismal font is arguably the church’s most eloquent and distinctive feature. I use the word *eloquent* because the dramatic size and design of the font speak to the significance of baptism in the life of the Christian community and the people who form that community. That eloquence is most pronounced at the Easter Vigil when those being baptized *go down* into the newly blessed waters and *rise* from the death of sin to new life in Christ. People arriving for Lord’s Day Mass pass that powerful reminder of our shared baptism every

time we gather for Mass: We stop to mark ourselves with the water of the font, and in making the Sign of the Cross with the baptismal waters we remind ourselves of our identity as people who have been claimed for Christ and must live the way of Christ.



This is not what our new church interior will look like, but the photo indicates a powerful linkage of altar and font.

will be located.

In the re-designed church, those who are newly baptized will come out of the waters and move directly — straight-ahead — to the altar. An aisle of tile similar to what surrounds the font will lead the newly initiated Christian directly to the altar, which will be centrally placed in the newly created sanctuary area on the east side of the church, directly across from the baptismal font.

As is stated in *Built of Living Stones*, the U.S. Bishop’s document on church design: “Because the rites of ini-

tiation ... begin with Baptism and are completed by the reception of the Eucharist, the baptismal font and its location reflect the Christian’s journey *through* the waters of Baptism to the altar.” What’s emphasized, as we’ve stated in the public presentations on the new church plan, is an “integral relationship” between the font and the altar, just as there is an integral relationship, or link, between Baptism and Eucharist. In celebrating Baptism – even apart from the Easter Vigil, whether during Mass or not – those who are gathered always move from the font to the altar as a reminder of what awaits the newly baptized Christian.

Isn’t there a relationship or link between the font and altar in our current arrangement? Certainly there is, but it is not obvious, and rather circuitous at best. You can get from one to the other, but it’s not a clear, obvious path. In addition, the profound symbolism of the baptismal font warrants an altar area that is comparably striking. As *Built of Living Stones* states, “The altar is the natural focal point.” The altar should be immediately evident to those entering the church, especially visitors, and be comparable in size and impact to the font.

As I’ve said in our public presentations, the addition of the font in 2000 determined the course for any modifications. Its physical dominance and significance in our sacramental life warrant its integration into the overall design of the church, and what we celebrate within our church. **TL**