

The Chapel

A Documentary on The Chapel of The Christ

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In preparation for this documentary we interviewed: Dean Dan Balge, Architecture Sub-Committee for the original chapel; Pastor Jon Balge, Chapel Building Committee member, Pastor John Boeder, Chapel Building Committee member; John Holz, Plunkett-Raysich Architects, Senior Project Designer; Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer, Chapel Building Committee Chariman; Dr. John Nolte, Audio-Visual Sub-Committee; Pastor Nathan Pope, Avignon Art Studios; Dr. Wayne Wagner, Chapel Building Committee Member; Professor Keith Wessel, Chapel Building Committee Member; President Mark Zarling, President of MLC. We also captured footage of the interior and exterior of the chapel.

These interviews offered us great insights into the history of the original project, which began in 1997 but was halted due to the poor economy and expense of the project over and above available funds. After a hiatus of nearly ten year Worship Committee members considered building a new chapel. A proposal to remodel the auditorium was first given to the board, but the board denied the proposal. In reaction to this MLC faculty members conducted a Chapel Feasibility Study to consider the possibility of a new chapel. The board accepted this proposal while stressing the importance of staying within an approximate \$7.5 million budget.

The Chapel Feasibility Committee was morphed into the Chapel Building Committee. They understood the importance of staying within a budget and studied about 12 architectural firms. From those 12 firms, they invited five into a competition for a chance to design the Martin Luther College Chapel. Each of the five firms was given a chance to submit a proposal and preliminary plan. The five proposals were displayed for the students and evaluated based upon a grade card of how well the firms fit expectations in all pertinent categories. After the grading was done, two firms stood out. Finally the committee decided on Plunkett-Raysich Architects and their lead Senior Project Designer John Holz. PRA and John Holz listened to what the Chapel Building Committee was looking for in the chapel. They also showed great passion for the project.

The Chapel Building Committee worked closely with John Holz to ensure that all of their theological, functional and artistic requests were met. With the consultation of Scott Riedel, John Holz made his design so that it would be “acoustically exquisite.” The Chapel Building Committee had a few basic desires for the design. They wanted an octagon shape to reflect the traditional church shape that celebrates the 8th day from Sabbath to Sabbath, along with the resurrection. It was also decided that in order to have greater fellowship as the body of Christ, there would be no balconies. The organ and choir are placed to the side instead of the front of the building.

One of the furnishings the Chapel Building Committee desired was a large baptismal font at the entrance of the chapel. Everyone who enters the chapel must walk by the font to symbolize how a Christian enters into the body of believers. The baptismal font is also shaped like an octagon to reflect the shape of the building. The water in the font continually flows as an auditory reminder of the living water that Christ gives.

The suspended cross and the altar on the chancel were placed in line with the baptismal font in order to form a "sacramental axis." The suspended cross in connection with the great height of the building give a feeling of transcendence. After entering the chapel, a person's focus goes from the large baptismal font to the cross which holds the body of Christ. A different corpus is displayed depending on the season of the church year. "The Suffering Christ" is displayed from Advent to Lent and the "Christus Rex" from Easter to the End Times.

Directly under the cross lies the altar. The altar is designed by Avingon Studios. It is a mixture of both stone and wood. The base is made of twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The top of the altar is filled with symbolism. The four corners each have bloodwood crosses along with a fifth cross that is formed by the legs of the sacrificial lamb in the middle, representing the five wounds of Christ.

Behind the altar resides the triptych which was also designed by Avingon Studios. Within the triptych are three paintings all focusing on Christ the teacher and Christ the light of the world. Each painting is directed toward a different part of the Martin Luther College body. The boy Jesus teaching the religious leaders on the temple steps is pointed towards the faculty. The male students are the focus of Jesus teaching the disciples of Emmaus while the female students are the focus of Jesus with Mary and Martha.

All of these items serve as great teaching tools for those who use the chapel. The chapel has also shaped the students and faculty by giving them a building that is reserved only for worship. Chapel attendance has gone up. Because of the great acoustics in the building, the large area for the choir, and the new organ the musical arts have excelled.

While the Martin Luther College student and faculty have benefited greatly from the building, the community has also taken notice. The New Ulm Chamber of Commerce has added MLC and the new chapel on its tour route. People have taken notice not only because of the very fact that it exists but also because of its great size and the care that was put into especially during a down time in the economy. Faculty and students have noticed the many opportunities they now have to witness because of the chapel. Through the beautiful artwork law and gospel has been shared simply, vividly and to the heart, in ways that were never expected.

Finally, the Chapel Building Committee and the students have shown great thanks for the gifts that God's people have given to build this chapel. The gifts have shown their love and thanks for Christ. It has also been a great encouragement to young students who are beginning their career in the public ministry.