

COLONIAL CHURCH of EDINA EAST PROPERTY

Not long after I moved to Minneapolis in 1986, I asked a new friend about finding a church to attend. She said she attended Colonial Church of Edina, I recall she told me Colonial was a new congregational church, and she described the pastor as being a very impassioned and charismatic person. Knowing the business I was in, she described Colonial as having been given an American Institute of Architect's National Honor Award for Achievement of Excellence in Architectural Design, and she thought I should try it. She gave me directions, and soon I was attending every Sunday.

My very first visit to Colonial Church introduced to me a very pristine contemporary New England saltbox style building complex, pure in form, uncomplicated though intricate, modest in its own humility. This complex orchestrates several gabled roof structures sheathed in light gray stained wood clapboard siding, now a dark chocolate, with a bold white painted fascia and corner trim, and large white double-hung windows, architecturally balanced as though part of a symphony of music, each measure and each score grouped within sets of painted white frames. Nine gabled roof structures, the two-story Meeting House being the largest, has been integrated into a well organized whole by a single-story common flat roof and glass enclosed two-dimensional montage containing classrooms, corridors, and recessed entry vestibules with white double entry doors, each directly accessible from three large opposing parking lots.

The 2-foot wide white painted fascia wraps continuously along the outer edges of each roof eave and gable end, thus connecting the flat roof edges around the building's entirety, interrupted only by dark face brick fireplace chimneys in five locations, and as though the white fascia band is gently embracing these separate elements all together, reinforcing the cohesiveness of the whole.

As these forms functionally coalesced, the freestanding 125' high bell tower, majestically juxtaposed in a serene central courtyard adjacent to the Meeting House, was tolling its call to worship, while visually anchoring this award winning design to its magnificent site.

In subsequent visits, it became readily apparent that the site's master plan and its execution had been playing a major role in determining the visual and functional success of this entire campus experience.

The American Institute of Architects 25 Year Award was given to Colonial Church this past November 30, 2007 "for its overall aesthetic and thoughtful execution, strong relationship to its site, and timeless design". Its strong relationship to its site and timeless design recognizes the intrinsic value of a restrained campus development, environmental preservation, landscape improvements, storm-water retention in the form of reflecting ponds, earthen berms, and identification of its campus boundaries. Campus boundaries are defined by a periphery of landscapes and often unimproved property that physically, acoustically and visually separate the campus from its environs. These pe-

ripheral elements soften what would otherwise be transitions that evolve too abruptly coming from comparatively dense residential developments entering the serenity of a campus intended for reflection and prayer.

Campus boundaries are further distinguished by their edges and entries' visual definitions that require clarity that remain uncluttered or unconfused by competing and unrelated elements. These entries become visual gateways that articulate vehicular and pedestrian approaches to the campus parking and various landing areas.

An awareness experience begins as we approach Colonial's campus when a glimpse of the bell tower can be seen teasingly above the dense tree-lined perimeter. From the Crosstown, a snapshot view of the bell tower and campus can be seen briefly at some distance away, then immediately becomes hidden again behind another tree-lined boundary. Colonial Church's presence, a Holy place, remains hidden and sometimes veiled by its forest green and jade necklace of hardwood and softwood trees, high and low earthen berms, and dense vegetation discretely and comfortably nestled within its community.

There are two points of entry - - gateways - - created in the campus' border, - its irregular necklace of forested foliage that extend gracious invitations to its surrounding community through quiet spaces of physical and visual - - sensory transition, - a pause in time and space, between our secular life and our spiritual life, undistracted by dissonant forms or structures along the way, - making ready for what we then are about to partake.

At the start of the Capital Campaign a couple of years ago, there was a desire mentioned to explore installing a new drive and extended shelter at the building's main north entrance. That spawned the idea of changing the existing entrance drive to an exit drive only, treating the planter aisles as a center boulevard, and introducing a new ingress drive. This early master planning influenced the final placement of the new north parking lot lighting now completed, and also implied that two rows of existing north parking would have to be absorbed by the existing south parking lot.

Some of you might recall, many years ago, when there were so many worshipers who came here to Colonial Church on Sunday mornings that all three parking lots were filled to overflowing, that volunteers had to direct traffic at every entry and parking lot, and traffic had to be redirected to neighboring schools, so that Colonial vans and borrowed school buses could shuttle people back and forth. Very much unlike today!

Those of us, who use the east parking lot, although unlighted at night, have found the convenience of parking quickly and within an easy walk directly across from the east entrance on Sunday mornings. Inasmuch as the City of Edina owns that property and we have had the pleasure of its use, if the City would want to use their property for any other use, such as for recreation, we would immediately realize a significant loss of parking, and an immediate burden on our remaining parking capacity.

Today, then, would you think it might appear that we have an excess of parking in the south parking lot, and that we might consider permanently relinquishing an estimated excess parking of approximately 40 out of 120 spaces for some alternate use? Or would you consider that if we would endeavor to increase our attendance and our membership in the near or distant future, perhaps we might rue the day when we would have given away any of that parking. There just isn't any more available replacement space nearby if it would ever be needed.

Once it's gone, - it's gone!

There is, however, not imagined, a new and imposing structure being constructed, as I speak, at the outside edge of our east border entry! You've seen it! A brand new fire station, larger than the one that was there before!! In a recent conversation I had with Fire Chief Marty Scheerer of the City of Edina Fire Department, I inquired what, if any, testing or sounding of fire or other emergency alarms might there be once the new station is completed. He advised there would be the usual fire alarms sounded whenever the emergency equipment is called into service. I further asked when the equipment is called into service, in what direction will the equipment enter the roadways; he explained there are to be two sets of overhead doors on both the east and west sides of the new building, with the siren alarms being directed toward both the east and the west respectively, in other words, directly toward the east property line of our east property that is being proposed by the Land Use Task Force for development.

I finally asked at what decibel level are these alarms rated. He didn't have the engineering data at hand but he would find out. Chief Scheerer called back in five minutes to report the loudest alarm available is rated at 130 decibels at 10 feet from measurement. For those of you who are not knowledgeable about such sound levels, that is about at the same level as a jet engine. Such audible sound levels, even on an infrequent occasion, would appear to be so intrusive and daunting, that to remove any natural sound attenuation achieved by existing earthen hillsides with dense trees and foliage then to be replaced by any sort of habitable structure seems imprudent at best.

Speaking of imposing structures, in most of the proposals received, residential housing serving a variety of diverse populations has been presented for consideration. In every instance, structures of 3 to 4 stories have been suggested, likely for the purpose of maximizing potential profitability while appeasing the City's interest in affordable housing. If selected, any one of these proposed structures would far exceed the height of every existing one and two story buildings on Colonial's campus, thus dwarfing all but the bell tower, resulting in a profound discrepancy in recognizing the campus' fundamental definition of purpose: a holy place of worship. Such visual confusion and contradiction of stewardship, albeit unintentional, does not achieve our east property's highest and best use, when measured in treasured value, not only in monetary value.

National award winning architecture is part of Colonial Church's excellence, its history, its legacy, and its reputation, as well as its level of commitment to each of its ministries, and its stewardship of its resources, both natural and manmade. If development is in-

evitable, Colonial Church's existing architecture must set the standard of design quality, and must be complimentary with its present design.

Although the discussion presented so far is of ethereal, aesthetic, visual, spiritual, emotional, conceptual, and historical values, there is also a pragmatic welfare to be considered. Colonial Church's campus recognizes its environmental obligations in the collection of its storm water runoff and ground water control in the form of its reflecting ponds serving not only as visual amenities but also serving as depositories and filterers of these waters. Our natural water resources are under constant pressure of contamination from property development's hard surfaces and the reduction of wetlands and natural underground chemical pollutant filtration systems. The consequences of abandoning 3 to 4 acres of our undisturbed woodland property will only further exacerbate the accumulation of additional developed hard surface chemical pollutants and the resulting growth of algae on the surfaces of Colonial's reflecting ponds.

Instead of considering ways of increasing our cash position or cash flow, could we consider ways of increasing our new attendance and new membership flow??? What if we could imagine any possible possibility, - that an interim pastor like the one we recently had the enormous pleasure and success of engaging a couple or three years ago - could be found for a return engagement?! If that were to come to fruition, might that influence where we might more positively place our thoughts and energies today??

Finally, even though the invitations have been sent, responders have responded, the caterer and orchestra have been hired, the rings have been purchased, and the reception hall has been rented, if there were any doubts or concerns whether this might not be the very best marriage that could be, might it be best to postpone, to re-evaluate, and to take as much time as it takes to be sure? Particularly, if there are other sensitive and distracting priorities that are in the process of resolution and healing.

I have attempted to equip you with a potpourri of considerations as well as benchmarks with which to regard our campus as precious, inviolate, to be defended, to be protected, to persevere to the highest level stewardship, to deliberate until there are only compelling reasons to either take action, or to take no action at all at this time.

I, therefore, propose this treasure of stewardship deserves to remain in its entire composition, intact in its purpose of praise and of worship, and that we not interrupt any part of this delicate symphonic balance of boundary, of edges, of spiritual entry, of deliberate transition, and to hold as inviolate this veiled definition of a Holy place with its tranquil forest green foliage necklace that affords us not only physical and spiritual entry to this ecumenical campus, but also to preserve the acoustic attenuation and visual and environmental filters that are irreplaceable values in all of our undeveloped land.

There is very little excitement, I realize, in doing nothing - but consider the satisfaction and contentment of having done the RIGHT thing.

Wilson D. Bryce, Architect