

HOUSES OF GOD

Religious Architecture for a New Millenium

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Dominican Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary

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This program for this new chapel in Sparkill, New York, included a worship space with flexible seating accommodating up to 300 but one that should feel intimate with half as many; easy access for frail and infirm elderly sisters living in the infirmary on the second floor of the existing motherhouse; a small Eucharistic chapel suitable for quiet prayer and contemplation; a gathering place for social contact before and after liturgy both indoors and out; a reconciliation room; a vesting sacristy; a work sacristy and music storage.

Overall, the guiding principle of the design was the motto "God does not waste a gesture." No effort was spared in paring the design down to the essentials. Another design objective was for the chapel to be an integral part of the existing convent's compound, while at the same time to become its spiritual fulcrum. This is achieved by using materials found in the existing mother house, but in a striking different form.

With a plan of an irregular hexagon, the two-story chapel is attached to the existing motherhouse on the first and second of its three floors. A bridge over the gathering place below links the chapel's balcony with the convent's infirmary, providing direct access for the sisters living there. The balcony, surrounding the entire chapel, provides space for single rows of wheelchairs and armchairs. A glass railing allows unobstructed views of the worship place below, fostering a sense of unity among all members of the community. The seating layout accommodates both large and small gatherings.

The Eucharistic chapel occupies a distinct space in the easternmost part of the main chapel and is in one's direct line of vision upon entering it. It is separated from the main worship space by the second floor balcony bridge that, together with the different ceiling treatment, gives it the sense of a separate entity. The Eucharistic chapel is also clearly expressed on the exterior



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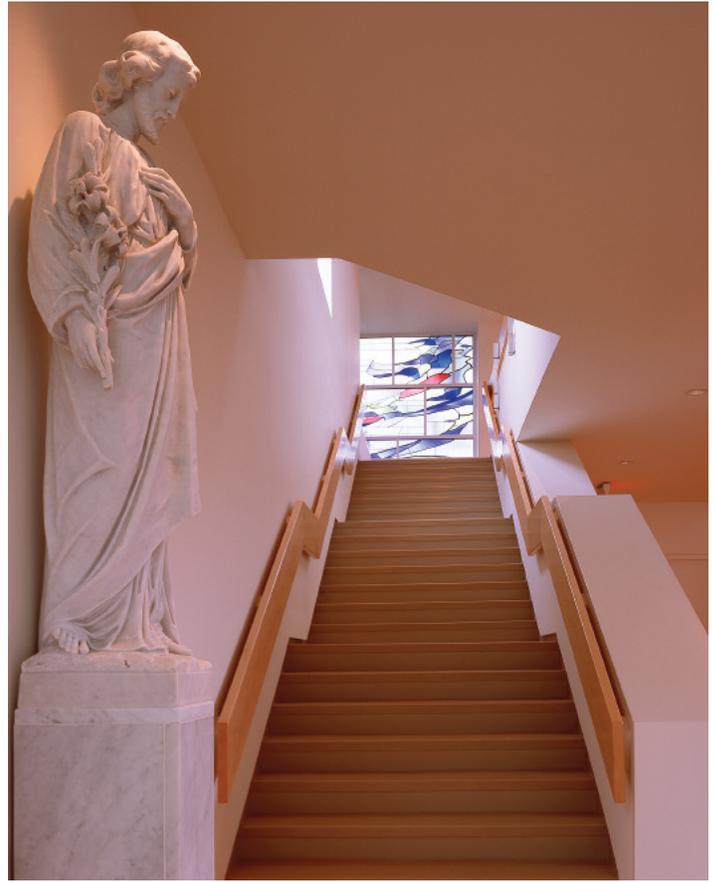
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- 1 Chapel's dynamic forms are elegant yet spare
- 2 Materials echo those of the motherhouse beyond
- 3 Light materials and finishes distinguish interior
- 4 Open stair leads to balcony seating
- 5 Upper level connects directly to infirmary

Photography: Peter Paige



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