



# Prairie Cathedral



*In this modestly-scaled house of  
worship, Moore/Andersson  
capture the regional spirit of the  
northern Great Plains.*

*Getsemane Episcopal Cathedral  
Fargo, North Dakota  
Moore/Andersson Architects,  
Architect  
Yeater Hennings Ruff Shultz Rolke  
Welch Architects & Planners,  
Associate Architect*



**G**ethsemane Episcopal Church, the cathedral church of North Dakota, burned to the ground in the fall of 1989. The trauma this inflicted on the congregation led many of its members to a critical self-examination on how to rebuild, and caused those members to take an active and healing part in the process of building a new church. The site of the original church in downtown Fargo was an L-shaped landlocked one-acre lot with little chance for flexibility or expansion. Several liked the site because of its central location; others argued for moving to the open prairie south of town, a move that would signal a new beginning as well as serve expanding needs.

During a series of workshops, in which Charles Moore, Arthur Andersson and the design team played a vital role (the team was selected in part because of its experience with hands-on client workshops), the cathedral chapter, supported by the congregation, decided in favor of a 9-acre site on the open side of town at the edge of an expanding neighborhood. Over the next few months, there then emerged, under the architects' guidance, a new vision for the rebuilt church that took the form of a whitewashed board-and-batten cathedral on the prairie.

The sanctuary seats 350, and by using the Great Hall, double that number can attend special services, diocesan conventions, and occasional concerts. The scale of the other elements of the interconnected one-story floor plan is in harmony with the modest scale of the whole. There's a small chapel seating 40 that faces a cloistered courtyard; it's a more intimate place of worship away from the main sanctuary. After it is landscaped, the court will evolve into a metaphor of the Garden of Gethsemane from which the cathedral draws its name. The core is protected on the cold north side by a series of classrooms, library, youth facilities, and offices that serve the cathedral parish as well as providing for the diocesan needs of the Bishop. They are also a link to an expanding neighborhood.

Chief entry is from the south, through a white wooden portico surmounted by the bell tower (opposite). The entry is on the crossaxis, which joins the main axis at the narthex. Ahead is the cloister and small chapel; to the left the Great Hall, used for fellowship gatherings, and to the right the main sanctuary, arranged on a traditional central nave-and-transept plan.

Interior materials too are simple in line with the austere history of the region. Walls are concrete block; the sanctuary floor is lightly colored and scored poured concrete with carpet inserts; the ceiling is made of prefabricated wooden scissors trusses spanning 34 feet that serve as backdrops for a series of large inverted ceiling "trays". These are made of painted gypsum wallboard and serve to reflect sound and define the space of the sanctuary.

A special feature Moore brought to the building is the Memory Palace at the west end of the Fellowship Hall. The memory palace is a device he has used to great effect in the past to establish continuity from past to future. Here, it consists of various pieces salvaged from the burned church and used in the new church. For example, the lower half of the triptych window comes from the old church and was restored with new stained glass to form a Memory Palace at the west end of the Great Hall. Other pieces saved and reused are the altar, the 1971 butcher-block pews, the bishop's and dean's chairs, and the eagle lectern, which serves the small chapel (overleaf).

To a small Episcopal enclave in what is at heart Lutheran country, Moore/Andersson have brought identity, tradition, continuity, and grace. *Stephen A. Kliment*

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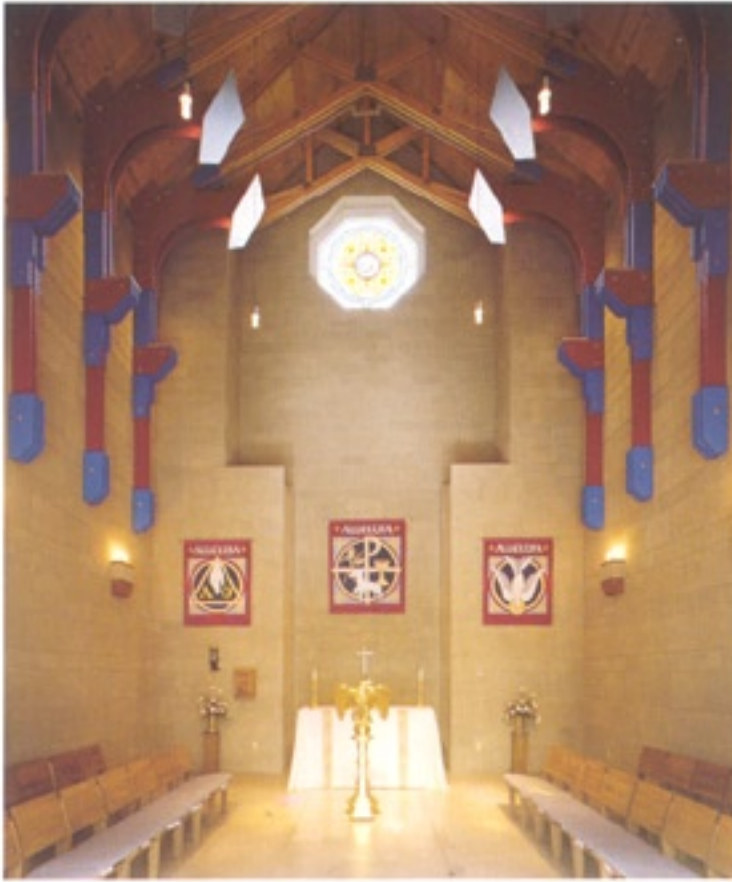


*The Gothic profile and massing of the cathedral (top) has as backdrop the fast-developing neighborhoods on Fargo's south edge. To the right of the east front, with altar behind (above), are offices and classrooms.*

#### **Up Close**

"The cathedral has all of the characteristics of a Gothic building, yet it looks like it belongs on the prairie," says Cathedral Dean Frank Clark. The process followed to arrive at this result is a key to the spirited acceptance of the building by the congregation. It began with the choice of architect. "We selected Moore/Andersson because they were strong designers, yet they didn't come to town with a lot of preconceived ideas," adds Father Clark. "We also valued their past experience with conducting workshops." This intense process spanned four months and allowed the congregation to develop a vision of the church and its role, which is to serve the community, with its strong academic component; provide spiritual uplift; and signal continuity from a tragic event. The vision also covered the choice of site, which symbolically is in the path of a growing residential neighborhood. The altar, pews, and other appointments are all movable; "We realized," says Father Clark, "that the next generation's needs may differ from ours."



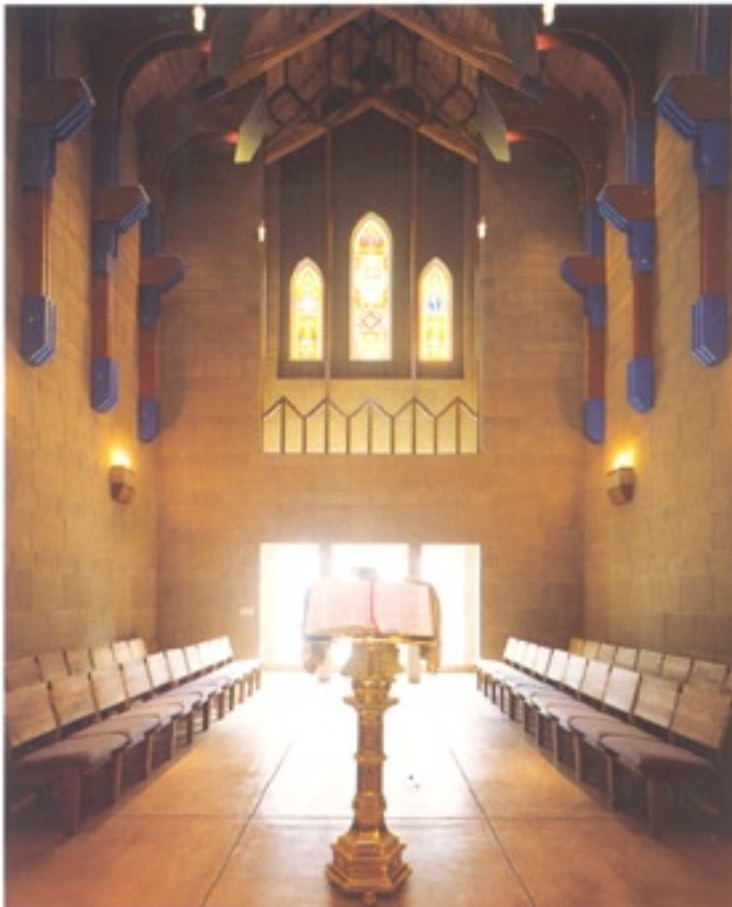


A chapel seating 40 (left) provides an intimate setting for worship. The south end of the chapel (bottom left) faces a cloister that serves as a source of daylight for surrounding spaces. The eagle lectern was rescued from the old cathedral. The view east along the nave towards the cathedral altar (opposite) shows prefabricated wood scissors trusses and ceiling "trays" made of painted gypsum wallboard. Doors can roll out to shut off the sanctuary.

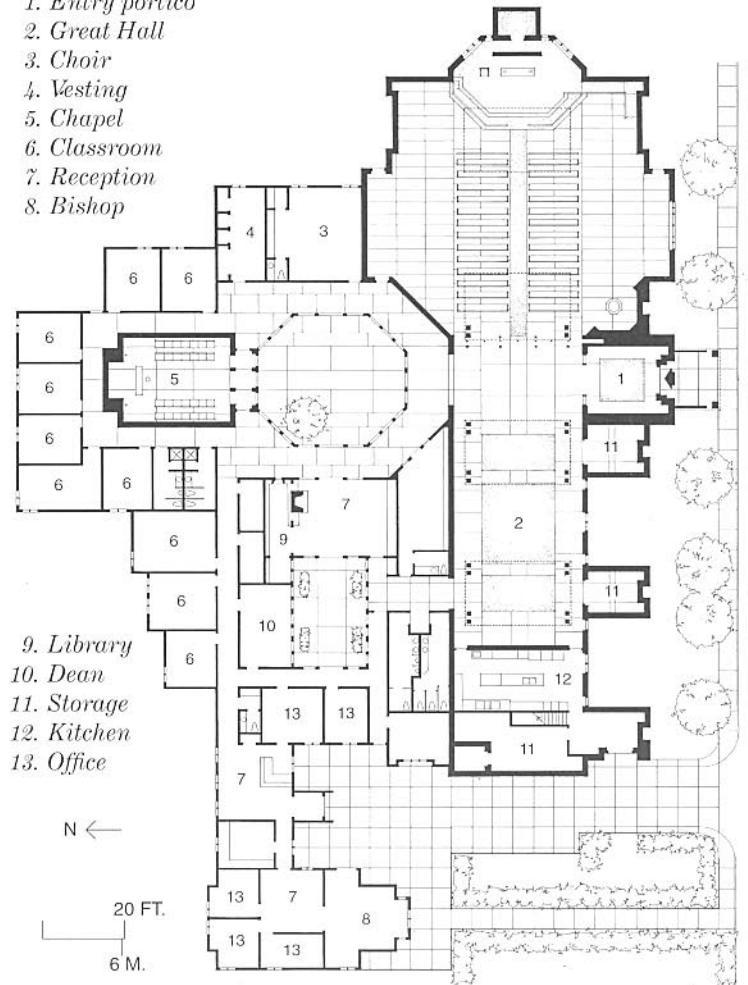
The 21,000-square-foot project cost \$2.2 million. Walls are load-bearing 8-inch reinforced concrete block with 4-inch interior block facing. Exterior board-and-batten is backed up by wood studs. The floor is lightly colored and scored poured concrete. Parking accommodates 150 cars.

**Credits**

*Gethsemane Cathedral  
Fargo, North Dakota*  
**Owner:** Gethsemane Cathedral  
**Architect:** Moore/Andersson Architects—Arthur Andersson, partner-in-charge; Charles Southall, project architect; Mercedes de la Garza, designer  
**Associate Architect:** Yeater Hennings Ruff Shultz Rokke  
**Engineers:** Heyer Engineering (structural); Both Engineering (mechanical); Laughtug Hanson Associates Engineers (electrical)  
**Consultants:** Peters & Myer—Illumination Design Collaborative; Richard C. Peters, Jan P. Myer (lighting); Marion Hatchett (liturgical); Jim Burns (workshop administrator)  
**Construction Manager:** Yeater Hennings Ruff Shultz Rokke Welch (D. Shultz, proj. manager)



1. Entry portico
2. Great Hall
3. Choir
4. Vesting
5. Chapel
6. Classroom
7. Reception
8. Bishop



9. Library
10. Dean
11. Storage
12. Kitchen
13. Office

