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Lighting Systems for Houses of Worship

M. W. Terkel, President
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The changes which have appeared in technology and architecture, in the understanding of men and human communities, and in the concepts of worship have stimulated the need for lighting techniques and designs to fulfill the required functions of the lighting system. One cannot prescribe the direction which an architect's imagination may take in concept and design, and this often creates a challenge to the engineer as well as to the architect to develop a lighting system that will satisfy the basic requirements of the project.

The shape of the structure might be conventional in square or rectangular configuration; it might be circular or it might be sections of a hexagon or octagon—many styles are emerging from the drawing boards. There is still the need to complement and reveal the numerous architectural features of the interior with highlights and shadows, to provide ample light for seeing and reading, and to create an atmosphere of warmth, dignity and solemnity conducive both to group prayer and to quiet meditation.
The public has become increasingly "light conscious" during the past 15 or 20 years as a result of the increasing lighting standards, which represent the advances made in the field of illuminating engineering. As lighting standards and levels increase in school, office, factory, etc., so must the lighting standards and levels of illumination in homes of worship provide for the wide variety of activities offered by churches and temples today. Lighting appropriate for one project may be inappropriate for another. The problems of each structure must be considered independently to determine the type of lighting system and style of fixture design that will best serve the need of the individual congregation.

Let us consider a specific project—any design concept—and analyze some of the basic requirements involved:

**EXTERIOR LIGHTING**

As one approaches a church, temple or synagogue, the entrance way should glow with the light of welcome. Architectural features of the building can be emphasized by exterior flood lighting concealed in the shrubbery, on the building, etc. The doorways and stairs can be adequately illuminated, with either a lantern over the doorway or with a pair of lanterns on either side of the door, mounted high enough to illuminate the stairs even when the doors are open. If the building is set well back from the street, additional light from lanterns on posts should also be considered. In many instances, flood lighting can be incorporated into post lanterns to illuminate the face of the building, or possibly to illuminate a special feature of the front entrance. Desirable effects can be introduced with the new lamps available today in design techniques which can accomplish multi-functions from one lighting source.

**INTERIOR LIGHTING**

As one enters the narthex, adequate lighting sources can be used either by means of recessed lighting, or by pendant fixtures to provide a bright, cheerful atmosphere with a light measurement of approximately 30 to 40 foot candles for this area.

Lighting in the nave or auditorium requires an interesting solution to satisfy both the architectural and illumination requirements. For many years, the major consideration given to nave lighting was the aesthetic effect—the design of the lanterns blending with the architectural design and spirit of the interior. This is just as important today, but in addition, modern church lighting must provide lighting efficiency. Church lighting differs from other types of lighting in that it must also consider the greater interest and awareness of how light is used to create a psychological mood, to provide aesthetic pleasure, and to draw attention to what we want to see.

In the selection of lighting for the nave of the church, one must constantly keep in mind the following objectives:

1. Soft light, next to music, is the best means of creating an atmosphere of warmth and solemnity, which one seeks and anticipates upon entering a House of Prayer. The twentieth century church must meet the spiritual and religious needs of the individual as he makes the transition from the turbulence of the outside world to the calm of the church interior. There is also the factor of a clear and growing consciousness among worshipping congregations that the events of worship are corporate, not private events; objective rather than subjective; active not passive; and appropriately joyfully serious rather than somber.

2. Lighting systems must be functional and flexible to meet the various needs of the church services and uses of the church building. Engineered lighting should be conditioned to conform to today's illumination standards, while maintaining glare-free comfortable brightness levels.

3. If hanging lanterns or lighting equipment are used, they should complement the architectural style of the building, harmonize with the details of the interior design, and contribute to its beauty and dignity. Lanterns should be located on or very close to the center line of each section of pews for appearance purposes. It is suggested that the lantern selected be of a physical size proportionate to the area in which it is going to be suspended. The width of the nave and the height of the ceiling must also be taken into consideration in the church which has an unusually high ceiling or is exceptionally wide. The lanterns may be scaled to incorporate both a horizontal as well as a vertical element in its over-all design. The mounting height is determined by the spacing between outlets to assure an even distribution of illumination throughout the pew areas. For a quick, rough calculation, it is comparatively safe to figure approximately 4 to 5 watts per square foot of the area to be illuminated to provide approximately 15 to 20 foot candles as an average level of illumination at pew height.

In many of the new church design concepts being created by architects, lantern equipment cannot be used. It is then necessary to design an engineered lighting system which will provide adequate down lighting for comfortable reading at pew levels, and a side distribution of illumination—or possibly indirect lighting—to reveal and accentuate the details of the interior. Whatever the lighting scheme, it should harmonize with the interior architectural styling of the church, thereby becoming an integral part of the whole.

Many churches today are using both suspended units and indirect or direct downlight units with pleasing and attractive effects.

The calculation of wattage per square foot indicated above is based upon a lighting system where the source of light is approximately 14 to 16 feet above the floor. Where higher ceilings are involved, and indirect or direct downlight systems are used, the relationship of wattage required per square foot can increase substantially. The type of lighting system selected will, of course, affect the initial installation costs as well as the operational costs over the many years for which it will be used.

Because of the many functions which occur in the nave of the church, it is recommended that the wiring be on at least two circuits so that the main source of illumination can be turned off during a sermon or during ceremonies where a high intensity of illumination over the pews is not required. A dimmer system could also be considered to help create the flexibility which is so desirable in the church lighting system. Advantage should be taken of new lamp developments. There have been many advances in design and performance for wider distribution from the lamp with greater intensity and longer lamp life.

Maintenance and relamping are also problems which must be considered. In many cases, it is necessary that the custodian climb stairs, ladders and catwalks to reach the fixtures for relamping. Quite often this climb is equivalent to three or four stories, and experience has shown that over the course of a few years such a lighting system often becomes ineffective due to the reluctance of the caretaker (generally an elderly man) to make the tedious climb aloft until three or four stories have accumulated.

(Continued on Page 18)
Church Complex

PROGRAM

To design a Church Complex for the Episcopalian Community of a small Louisiana town. The Church Building to accommodate 300 parishioners. The Parish House to provide space for social functions, Church School for Sunday instructions, and Day School for nursery use.

The site is located on a pine covered hill, the apex of which is the intersection of two streets. The slope of the site is from this intersection 18 feet down to the opposite rear corner of the lot. The lot size is approximately 280' x 720'.

The buildings were so located on the site that the longitudinal axis is parallel to the sloping contours resulting in a minimum loss of trees and the best advantage of vista from within the buildings. This faced the buildings toward the apex of the hill and facilitated a level approach from the two streets to the parking area, drive and entry platform.

DATA

The building is raised on continuous concrete masonry walls on concrete footings with wood sills, floor joists, laminated wood arches and wood deck, wood roof joists and composition shingles. The exterior finishes are redwood siding, painted metal window frames and glass. Interiors are finished in redwood, gypsum board and walnut, with painted metal windows and glass. Year-round air conditioning has been provided.
Church @ full ........ 3,750 Sq. Ft. 76,145 Cu. Ft.
Parish House
  @ full ........ 4,800 Sq. Ft. 55,200 Cu. Ft.
Entry Platform
  @ ⅛ ........ 475 Sq. Ft.
Total ........ 9,025 Sq. Ft. 131,345 Cu. Ft.

Total Cost — $138,620.00
Cost ........ $15.36/Sq. Ft. $1.06/Cu. Ft.
Irish Channel
Baroque

In the heart of New Orleans' nineteenth Century Irish Channel, one comes unexpectedly across this moving structure—a virtuoso performance in brick baroque. One of a series of brick churches erected in New Orleans, this one, St. Mary's Assumption, was completed in 1858. All exterior details are executed in this one material—molded, corbelled, arched, domed, or otherwise. Of particular interest structurally are the upside down relieving aches just above grade line and visible here.

As I tried to enter this building an ancient parishioner passed and told me sadly that "the church had been condemned after Hurricane Betsy, but that it was beautiful inside." Her judgment was confirmed by a glance through an unsealed window. Even in its deserted and deteriorating present condition one could sense the powerful architectonics and a Piranesque-like play of space, light and dark — that would have pleased Bernini or Vignola. One wonders at the fascinating story that must lie behind this transmittal of the Baroque style to New Orleans—and the history of this now doomed structure. Tempting facets of this story reveal themselves on a walk around this complex—the name of Father Seelos, of the Redemptorist fathers, the existence of a somewhat similar almost contemporary church building exactly across the street.

In a densely built area now distinguished by its urban squalor, this complex lends a green corner and two or three landscaped closes to its neighborhood—the type of breathing spaces which make urban life tolerable.

It is apparent that this was a structure beloved by its parishioners and that the architect and his structure have served their century well in this tempestuous neighborhood.
Program
Design a Student Center and Chapel to serve the needs of a local Parish and Lutheran Students attending Southeastern Louisiana College. Primary consideration must be for the students.

Site
Flat corner location directly across from baseball field on the College campus. Site heavily wooded with pine trees.

Design Solution
In arriving at a solution for this "TOWN AND GOWN" facility, a simple Greek Cross plan was used, which lent itself to a very functional arrangement of the spaces required. The chapel has a seating capacity of 150, but with the use of sliding glass doors, and large expanse of glass the chapel flows into the Lobby and then into a large fellowship hall, allowing a seating total capacity of 400. The high roofed area unifies the Chapel and Fellowship Hall, and the two low wings are connected by the "H" shaped Lobby, which provides easy access to all parts of the building.

All chancel furniture was designed by the Architect and the pews and other furniture were selected by the Architect.

Construction and Materials
The structural system is an exposed rigid steel frame over the high roof area, covered with 3" x 6" white fir decking. The lower roof areas utilize conventional wood framing on load bearing brick veneer walls. Both end walls are masonry covered with an aggregate plaster composed of washed run pea gravel. The same material is repeated in the Chapel on the Chancel platform, altar and cross over the altar.

Other materials used are vinyl asbestos tile and ceramic tile on the floors; wood deck and acoustical tile on the ceiling; brick, wood paneling, and vinyl wall fabric on gypsum board walls.

The facility has year-round air conditioning with separate units serving the Chapel and student areas. Electrical fixtures were specifically chosen to blend with the overall design and use of the building.
The Church for St. Gabriel the Archangel parish in New Orleans was commissioned shortly after the conclusion of the Ecumenical Council, and its design is a reflection of the new spirit of the Catholic Church as it was announced by that historic Council.

The plan evolved from the traditional cruciform arrangement with nave and transept junctures broadened to express visually the unity of the congregation and to move the congregation into a closer, interacting relationship with the priest.

The main altar occurs at the central cross axis space and is elevated on a series of raised sanctuary platforms, with the highest platform supporting the altar, being circular in contrast to the angularity of the building. All interior color was limited to monochromatic earth tones as a muted backdrop to the vivid color of the priest's vestments.

The Church is situated in the center of an extensive, homogeneous residential community, and its form and siting were developed to harmonize with the scale of the surroundings while aesthetically acknowledging the significance of its role within the community.

The building seats 750 people, and was constructed at a cost of $175,000.
LOWREY - HESS - BOUDREAUX - FARNET (1967), Architects

OGLE & ASSOCIATES
Structural Engineer

EDWARD ALBA & ASSOCIATES
Mechanical & Electrical Engineers

December, 1968

John Messina, Photographer
PROGRAM
A Church designed to express the renewal of Catholic Church Liturgy resulting from the Vatican Council. Church to seat 750 to 800 people and to be within a budget of $225,000.00. The site is a flat treeless nine acres on which exists a small temporary chapel of frame construction. Also on the site is an existing rectory.

TECHNICAL DATA
STRUCTURAL: Drilled concrete shafts with reinforced concrete grade beams and slab. Brick cavity walls with laminated wood beams. Membrane roofing on plywood decking, with a sprayed acoustical ceiling. Oak flooring on wood studs were used for non-structural walls. Floors are carpet and terrazzo.

MECHANICAL: Total air conditioning is provided by forced air systems. The system is divided into four zones to provide flexibility for large and small assemblies.

STATISTICS: The gross area is 12,532 square feet, and the cubic area is 225,576 cubic feet. The total cost was $225,022.00 or $17.90 per square foot or $1.00 per cubic foot.
four fixtures require servicing. This is a specific reference to recessed lighting, when it is used as the only source of illumination in the church. Where hanging fixtures are used, consideration should be given to lamps which have a longer lamp life, 2,000 to 4,000 hours. If the fixtures are suspended much over 14 or 15 feet above the floor, hand-operated or electric power winches for lowering the fixtures, allowing easy access for lamp replacement and cleaning, may offer a solution.

Attempts have been made to use fluorescent lighting in the nave of the church; however, experience has shown that it is not too acceptable because its coldness and consequent color loss are generally unsympathetic to the proper psychological effect desired in church lighting. This is not to say that fluorescent lighting does not serve its own function when properly used, but only to suggest that it is not conducive to the proper atmosphere in church interiors. Occasionally fluorescent lighting can be used as supplementary illumination from side coves. Care should be taken in using coves to avoid bright streaks on the ceiling fading off rapidly. Undesirable shadows can result where the light hits purlins or other protrusions on the ceiling.

**CHANCEL LIGHTING**

The climax of the interior architecture of the church is found in the chancel area, which should be softly illuminated yet highlighted from concealed sources. Accent lighting is given to religious art objects, enhancing their beauty and symbolic meaning in the ceremonies and service. Accent lighting is also given to the altar, the lectern and the pulpit. Approximately 40 to 60 foot candles are recommended for this area, though this may be higher. Approximately double the lighting intensity is recommended for these areas in contrast with the moderate lighting intensity in the nave. This will hold the worshippers' attention and will also bring out the colors and inherent beauty of the altar, chancel furniture, decorations, robes, etc. Adjustable flood lighting reflector fixtures, using both flood lamps and spotlamps can be concealed behind beams or projections to provide controlled illumination for the chancel area. In some cases, color filters can be used with the flood lamps to create the desired effect. Lighting of the pulpit and lectern should be pleasing and attractive rather than theatrical.

Supplementary illumination could also be considered for the choir area, if it is included within the confines of the chancel. In many cases, provision should be made for separate lighting for the choir for practice sessions.

For other areas in the church building, such as the narthex, balcony, under balcony, sacristies, etc., ceiling type fixtures, recessed or pendant lanterns can be selected to match or harmonize in design and detail with the fixtures used in the main areas of the church. These generally can have the same ecclesiastical finish so that there is a continuity of fixture design and appearance throughout the entire building. Similar types of fixtures or fluorescent fixtures should be selected for the Fellowship Hall, classroom areas, etc.

While we have concentrated primarily on new church design up to this point, many of the items referred to apply just as strongly to the church which is remodelled and requires new lighting. Whether one is planning the lighting for a new church or for the remodeling of an older one, consideration must be given to the wiring which is to be used with the new lighting system. Care must be taken to insure adequate wire load capacity with consideration for future expansion of the lighting system. The average life of a church lighting installation should be between 25 and 35 years. We speak in terms of 20 foot candles as being adequate for lighting in the nave today. However, as lighting standards continue to increase, it is conceivable that in ten years the recommended practice for church lighting will call for 30 to 35 foot candles. If the lighting system which has been selected is in keeping with the architectural design of the interior—if it is properly sized for the area in which it is used or suspended—it should be possible merely to increase the lamp wattage or lamp size to increase the level of illumination required in order to have an up-to-date lighting system. It is much less costly for the engineer to specify more wire capacity in the ceiling today to allow for future expansion of the lighting system than it would be to replace the wiring completely 10 or 15 years hence.

All lighting fixtures should bear the Underwriter's Label of Approval. This indicates that the fixture has been manufactured to comply with the high standards of the Fire-Underwriter's Code for the church's protection.

The selection of the finish on lighting fixtures or the color of glass to be used (if hanging fixtures are considered) will depend entirely upon the interior decor of the church. The finish of the fixture should blend with other colors in the building. Proper preparation of the metals, such as electro-copperplating before applying hand-toned ecclesiastical finishes and quality materials used in the finishing process will assure durability and long life. A wide selection of glass is available and consideration should be given to the windows in the church, the colors and lighting effects desired. In many cases churches use colored art glass in the windows; these can be repeated in the lighting fixtures. Where faceted glass is used, fixture designs incorporating faceted glass panels can also be considered. The selection of materials is indeed a very important matter if one thinks in terms of the longevity of a church lighting system. While plastics may have certain decorative values or weight factor considerations, serious consideration should be given to their use 10 and 15 years from now with respect to increased lamp wattages, durability, etc.

There is no limit to the life expectancy of a church structure. Under normal circumstances—with due allowance for population shifts, etc.—it continues from generation to generation. Church architects and lighting engineers have the knowledge and experience to work together to install a church lighting system which will be effective and functional. It can be more than a symbol; it can be a definite part of worship and a significant one. Since lighting is important not only to the architect of the building, but also in its functional aspect of “light for seeing and atmosphere,” every sensible step should be taken to insure a good lighting installation. The architect should review the engineer's recommendations to see that they fulfill his requirements. Consider the lighting system; consider the maintenance problems; and give some thought to 5 or 10 years hence. The ultimate cost is less and the satisfaction is greater when the lighting in the church is designed and engineered objectively. Utilize the knowledge and draw upon the experience of the qualified manufacturers of church lighting equipment to resolve not only the simple, but also the very complex lighting requirements of the church. Lighting manufacturers have had broad experience, have seen a great deal of what is being done, know where the errors have been made, and are skillful, cooperative, and trained co-workers with the architect.
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