



A mission of the many

BY KEITH BENMAN

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Church-building work is different. But it's not just the attention to detail and architectural accoutrements that make church-building unique, according to building contractors.

It's the customer. And that customer can be dozens of people serving on church committees that have ultimate responsibility for devising a building that will win praise.

"For people who work in the kitchen, that's the most important part," said Chester Inc. CEO Pete Peuquet. "For the people who do the music, that's the most important part."

Arriving at final plans for a church project takes much longer than for a commercial or industrial project, Peuquet said. But when asked if it's worth it, he was unequivocal.

"It is," he said. "It's rewarding because at the end you know they put a lot of thought into it."

St. John the Evangelist Catholic parish, in St. John, started talking nine years ago about building a new church for its 2,200 families, according to Mike Muenich, a Highland lawyer serving as owner's representative on the project. The \$12.5 million church building now nearing completion is the result of innumerable discussions by parish committees.

"It does generate support for the project," Muenich said. "The downside is you are dealing with numerous people. And the more people involved, the more difficult decision-making can become."

Items discussed ranged from shouldn't we be doing more for the poor to the arrangement of seating in the nave, Muenich said.

In the end, committees agreed certain basic principles would be observed. Top among those was that no damage would be done to the current church a couple miles north of the new one. Also, the architecture of the new would be based on the old.

JMA Architects, South Holland, kept those goals in mind, according to JMA principal Jim Maciejewski, who also is a parish member.

"It's a long process," Maciejewski said. "There's a lot of involvement by a lot of people. It is a very personal space. You want to make it the best design at every point."

The involvement with multiple parish or congregation members doesn't end with the architect or design-build firm.

Dan Kwiatkowski, owner of Kwiatkowski Masonry, Crown Point, said it's not just a "bid and build" process for his company when it comes to church-building.

What professionals call "value engineering" is a huge part of the job, Kwiatkowski said. That's especially true of stone, an expensive material to begin with, as well as expensive to install.

He has worked on some church projects for three to four years before the first stone or brick is even laid.

With St. John the Evangelist, Kwiatkowski flew up to Minnesota with parish representatives to look over stone at two quarries.

In the end, they went with about half cut stone from the quarries and a stone product called Arris Craft for the other half. More than 700 tons of stone in all went into the church. The multi-shaded stones grace entrance ways and bell towers, creating the effect that the entire church is clad in stone.

"They have certain things they want," Kwiatkowski said. "You tell them what you can do, where you can save them money, and still get them the look they want."

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