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SILENT SERMON; SACRED SPACE: EASTER SEASON

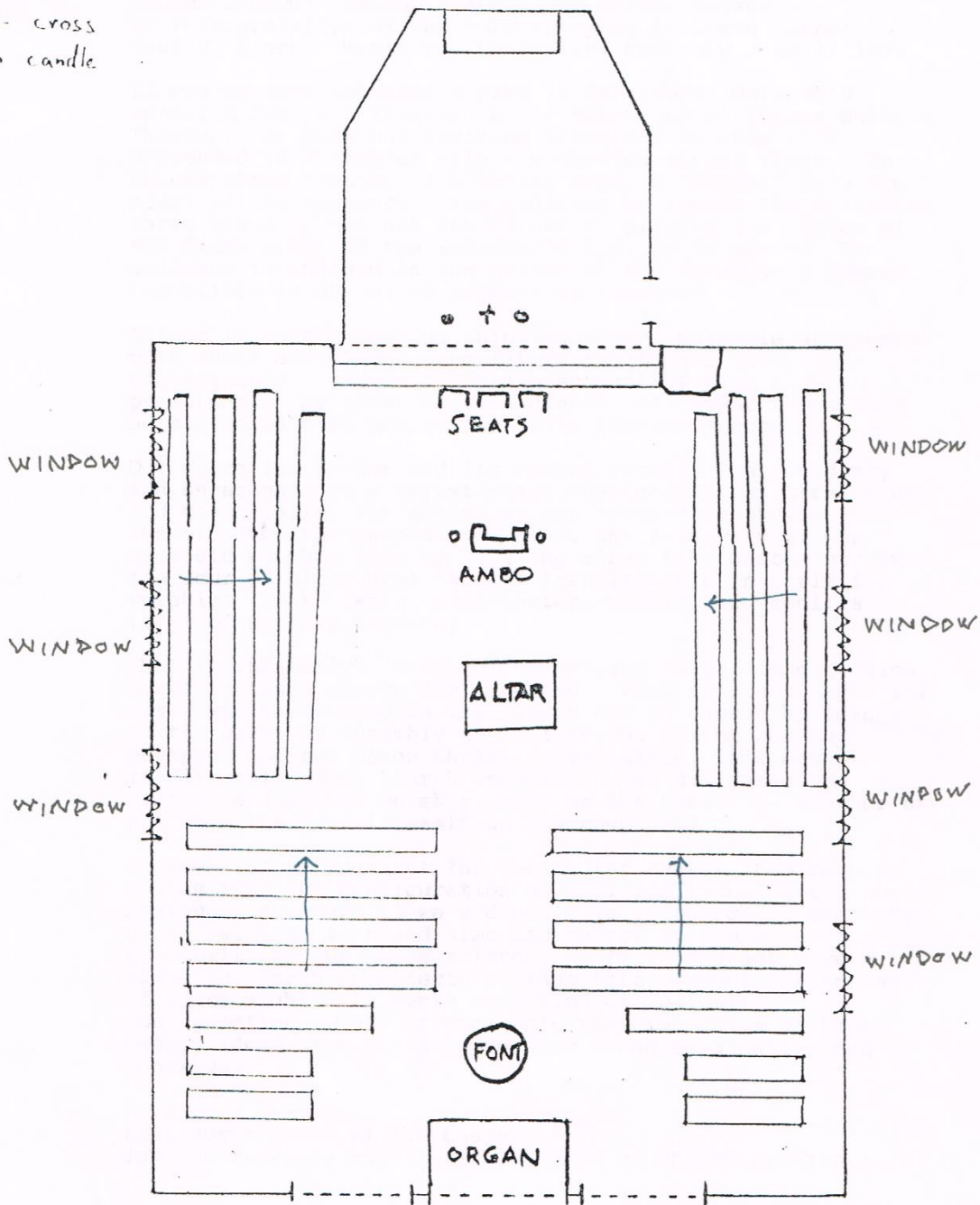
A With this posting I conclude my four part series on re-configuring existing church spaces. This posting is the fourth and last in this series. The first was Essay 252 “Silent Sermon...Advent”. A second was Essay 255 “Silent Sermon... Epiphany Season”. And a third Essay 256 considered “Silent Sermon...Lent”.

B In each case, the space I am using as illustration is Loehe Chapel at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, where I spent an interim academic year as Dean of the Chapel and lecturer in worship, church hymnody, and church architecture.

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EASTER 1996

+ cross
o candle



1 If you've ever attended a play in Stratford, Ontario's splendid Festival Theatre, or in Minneapolis' Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, you know how exciting drama can be when it's presented in a theatre with a so-called "thrust" stage.

2 In thrust-stage theatre, the acting area is "thrust" into the midst of the audience; the audience surrounds the action on three sides. This has the effect of placing the action of the drama right in the audience's lap, so to speak. The audience is engaged in the action of the drama to a degree impossible in so-called proscenium theatre.

3 Actors in such a setting enjoy an almost palpable engagement with their audience; spectators are turned into participants. Anyone who has been part of such a performance, as actor or as audience, can never thereafter be satisfied with proscenium-style theatre spaces.

4 Our space for Easter and its season recalls the immediacy and engagement of a thrust-style theatre. As at Stratford and Minneapolis, the action of our "drama" is thrust into the midst of the people.

5 We honour the integrity of our splendid worship room by locating along its "East-West" axis the four architectural "signs" irreplaceable in Christian worship: Font, Table, Ambo/Lectern/Pulpit, and Sedilia (seat of worship leaders).

6 Not incidentally: I've put "East" and "West" in quotation marks in these Essays for a reason. From earliest days, the Altar was positioned in the East end of church buildings, so the gathered assembly could face the rising sun as a metaphor for the Risen Christ.

7 Ever since, it's been traditional, among church architects, to designate the "Altar" end of the worship space as the "East" – whether or not it's the actual "East" on the compass.

8 Our seating arrangement for the Easter season thus returns to the familiar configuration of last Fall, during the post-Pentecost season.

9 If we did not have an energetic sacristy staff, willing to spend time and muscle in exploring the possibilities our space affords, or if we did not have a class in church architecture, then this present arrangement of space might well serve as a kind of "default" configuration among us.

10 This arrangement, that is, seems to be as nearly ideal, for our purposes at Loehe Chapel, as human imagination can conceive.

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