

**Congregational Church of San Mateo
December 2010 Congregational Forum
Sacred Space Renewal - Conceptual Design Narrative**

Introduction and Understanding of Objectives

The Congregational Church of San Mateo (CCSM) was founded in 1863 and is located in a California Mission Revival style building. The sanctuary was built in 1928 and was extended towards San Mateo Drive in 1955. Chancel renovations and the creation of a chapel have been discussed since the 1960s and, more recently, the need to improve accessibility has become a greater priority.

Philosophically, CCSM strives to blend tradition and innovation, the historical and the contemporary. A guiding principle of the church is to be “evolving”, which means that rather than resisting change or innovation, the congregation eagerly embraces new ways of expressing our faith and understanding of the divine. In recent years the congregation has grown and is changing. The current layout of narthex, nave and chancel are built around a traditional model for a house of worship. This layout no longer works as well as it once did for clergy, lay and musicians leading worship or for congregants participating in the service. As we prepare for our future, the sanctuary needs to accommodate the changing needs of the congregation and support our focus on transformational worship.

This summary discusses the five primary objectives identified when the Sacred Space Renewal Committee began its work in January 2009. With each objective, we have summarized the related key features incorporated into the design concept proposed by our architect, San Francisco-based Architectural Resources Group. It is our committee’s belief that this design concept, which also incorporates the changes recommended by the Access Committee, achieves all of these objectives and meets additional requirements identified in review and discussions with ministry leaders, congregants and staff.

Five Primary Objectives of the Sacred Space Renewal Project

1. Accessibility

Our facility currently does not provide access to the Sanctuary required by today’s code. Additionally, there is a growing concern that our visitors and members with physical disabilities or mobility limitations do not have equal and barrier free access to the narthex, nave and chancel areas of the sanctuary. As a caring church, our goal is for these areas to be made fully and permanently accessible to all.

The proposed improvements include a significantly more open, inviting and accessible sanctuary, eliminating the current need for wheelchairs to enter through a side door. The architect has also addressed issues of visual accessibility, improving site lines in the chancel and throughout the sanctuary to support a more participatory worship experience.

The narthex will be expanded underneath the balcony to accommodate a ramp from the restroom hallway, immediately across from the steps to the balcony/second floor. This ramp will lead to the space outside the repositioned narthex double doors going into the sanctuary. The wider narthex will provide a less congested welcoming space for use before and after services. It includes glass separation to the sanctuary, resulting in a lighter, more inviting and open entrance to the church. With improved visibility to the chancel, this area can double as an infant room or for overflow

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seating. Additional narthex storage areas provide a convenient place for easily accessible folding chairs when needed.

The Tilton Avenue doors from the narthex will open to a spacious outdoor plaza accessible from Tilton by a wide ramp to the west, sweeping towards San Mateo Drive, and a wider set of steps to the east. This plaza will provide another inviting gathering place before and after worship services, accessible to all. Tilton Avenue will become a more convenient and easy-to-use drop-off location for worshippers requiring assistance or use of a wheelchair to enter the sanctuary.

Inside the sanctuary, a lift will be installed at the west end of the south side aisle (directly left of the current pulpit) to provide accessibility from the nave to the chancel. Currently there is a 21-inch difference between these two elevations. Our recommended design concept includes raising the chancel an additional nine inches, to 30 inches, and removing the current physical separation (built-in pulpit, lectern, hardwood rood screens) between the two spaces.

These changes will improve visibility of worship leaders, choir members, children's moments, performances and concerts for all attendees. The pews will also be repositioned (angled slightly towards center aisle) to support a more participatory and accessible worship experience. As part of this pew repositioning, additional space will be provided for wheelchairs at various locations through the sanctuary (front, mid-center aisle, rear).

The proposed expansion of the narthex will result in the loss of the back two pews on each side of the center aisle. Since we continue to grow and capacity is a concern, we have made every effort to minimize the impact to other seating and improve visibility from every location in the sanctuary. The balcony continues to provide an opportunity for growth. Its access will be more visible from the narthex once the new ramp opens the narthex to the hallway and stairway to second floor.

2. Flexible use of Sanctuary

The current chancel layout is one of primarily fixed elements with no flexibility. This traditional layout, featuring hardwood rood screens flanking the steps, creates visual and acoustic barriers between the worship leaders, choir and congregation. While this separation of the clergy from the people is a traditional symbol of holiness, the layout has created a hindrance to worship and is inconsistent with our Guiding Principles. Our goal is to unify the chancel with the nave and narthex both visibly and literally, so that the space and resulting worship experience reflect the congregation's values of openness and inclusiveness.

In addition to traditional Sunday morning worship services, the congregation has envisioned programs that could include choral music of all types and sizes, chamber music ensembles, orchestras, jazz ensembles, bell choirs, liturgical dance, and plays. Small intimate worship services such as a Taize or Vespers style service could also take place in the chancel if this space could be reconfigured to work as a small chapel when needed. The current placement of the choir seating on each side of the chancel narrows the available open space and greatly reduces its flexibility.

The proposed improvements to the chancel make much better use of the extensive space provided by its existing footprint. The size of the chancel will essentially not change, but the flexibility of how the space can be used will improve substantially. As mentioned above, the fixed pulpit, lectern and hardwood rood screens will be removed, opening the entire front of the chancel to the congregation.

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A set of steps/risers will arc out into the congregation from one end of the chancel to the other, providing a more spacious and visible area for children's moments, musical performances, and worship leadership.

The entire chancel will be one flat and open surface with a combination of steps and risers connecting it to the nave. All of the chancel furnishings (communion table, lectern, cross, choir risers/seating, piano, organ console) will be portable in order to re-configure the space for worship services, concerts, chapel setting or other purposes. The proposed lighting plan (see below) will enable us to visibly highlight different areas of the chancel, as needed, to support the various layouts and uses of the chancel.

This flexibility requires that we raise the organ console out of the "pit" and update the console's method of communication with the pipes. Rather than the current umbilical cord/connection, the organ console will connect to the pipes by being "plugged in" to a Cat-5 connection at one of several locations on the chancel floor. The organ console will be moveable and more visible, allowing services to run more smoothly as well as give us the opportunity to see the organist's hands and feet in motion during a concert. The sound will not change, but the new connection will provide more pre-set registrations enabling the organist to easily change the organ's "voice" at appropriate times during the service or in concert.

CCSM members have long desired to have a chapel on the campus for quiet reflection and smaller gatherings. With no space for expansion, the most logical and cost effective solution is to create an open and flexible chancel that can serve both purposes. By positioning the new communion table in the center of the open chancel and surrounding it with seating (use of choir risers/chairs on the west, half-circle of seating on the east), we can easily reconfigure the chancel to be an intimate chapel "in the round" with seating for approximately 75 worshippers. The chapel will provide a more appropriately sized worship space for smaller memorial services and reflective prayer time, and the Taize services held each year during Lent. The restored west chancel windows, along with the proposed stage-quality lighting, will allow us to create a special sacred space, visually separated from the rest of the sanctuary.

The first row of pews will be replaced with appropriately styled church chairs, similar to those proposed for the choir and worship leaders. They can be easily removed to allow more space directly below the chancel for wheelchair seating, children's performance or the bell choir, when not performing on the chancel. The chairs can also be moved to the chancel, when needed, for configuring the space as a chapel.

Sufficient storage has been included in the new design to address most, if not all, of the current storage limitations we experience on a frequent basis related to the sanctuary and chancel. In addition, storage has been planned to support the flexible use of the chancel and proposed portable furnishings. As a result, the bell choir, communion preparation/clean-up, liturgical arts banners/fabrics will all be in close proximity to the chancel, freeing up other storage areas in the church and much needed meeting and office space located elsewhere on the campus.

3. Improved Acoustics, Lighting and Multimedia

We consulted with leading experts in the areas of acoustics, lighting and multimedia to assess and recommend respective improvements to the sanctuary. Our intent with each of these changes is that they be discrete as possible, yet significant in impact, to improve the sanctuary's sound, lighting, and multimedia capabilities.

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Acoustics - while amplification is used today to improve the sound quality in the sanctuary, our goal is to improve natural sound where economically and aesthetically possible, only augmenting sound with amplification where needed.

With the relocation of the choir and the removal of the hardwood rood screens, we will see some natural improvement in sound. In addition, we have proposed a portable backdrop behind the choir and a slightly angled repositioning of the chancel wood panels that will assist in projecting natural sound into the congregation. For concerts, the backdrop design includes a portable and transparent reflector panel.

The chancel ceiling will also be augmented with thin and slightly angled sound reflective panels, painted to match the current ceiling. Modifications to the balcony railing wall (from plaster to a more acoustically transparent material) and the addition of a second pane (laminated-glass protection on the outside of the large sanctuary windows) have been proposed and are included in the current design concept.

Lighting - while the existing chandeliers will continue to visually dominate the lighting of the nave, lighting of the side aisles and chancel will be greatly improved. Stage-quality lighting with multiple pre-set lighting configurations is proposed for the chancel, allowing us to fully light the chancel as needed, or provide multiple “mood” changes instantaneously.

Multimedia - while not intended for regular use during our 10:30 am Sunday service, it makes sense as we update the space to also update our technology capabilities as requested by several of the ministries. As a result, wiring for a hidden screen and projector are proposed behind the larger rafters (screen above the chancel, projector over the balcony).

4. Aesthetic Considerations

It is our intent that all changes be compatible and complementary to the California Mission Revival architecture of our campus. Our church sanctuary has elements of the traditional church that the congregation respects and would like to retain. Most members like the beauty of the proportions of the nave and wish for them to be maintained. The wooden finishes throughout the sanctuary are generally liked (the ceiling beams, the paneling around much of the nave and chancel) and seen as warm elements to be maintained.

New elements, such as a new communion table, lectern, cross, choir seating, and any other elements of the chancel, will need to respect and work with the architectural style of the sanctuary interior. Recommendations for refinishing pews, replacing carpeting, and other changes resulting in a cohesive and refreshed look are also desired.

Every effort has been made in the proposed design to retain the historic look and feel of the sanctuary. A significant amount of the wood paneling will be repositioned and continue to grace the chancel. The removal of the tall wooden altar panel will expose three refurbished stained glass windows that face San Mateo Drive, restoring the west wall of the chancel to its original design. New lighting and multimedia equipment will bring the sanctuary into the current century, but in a manner that does not visually detract from the historic feeling of the space.

Two small additions are planned to the footprint of the sanctuary. The one on the south side will accommodate the chancel lift and storage area for the bell choir. It is designed to echo the octagon shape of the chancel walls facing San Mateo Drive. The north side addition will be mostly under the roof of the existing outside ramp and provides a visual connection to the proposed memorial garden

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with a small foyer and glass doors from the front of the sanctuary. Accessible from the sanctuary, this storage area will house a new flower/communion room at the west end and a separate storage area for liturgical arts and furnishings.

The communion table, lectern, choir chairs, modesty panel and backdrop will be designed or selected to complement the architecture and final color scheme. The model perspectives give an idea of what is possible. Refinishing of the pews, replacement of the carpet, and a new honed stone surface for the chancel and narthex are planned to tie the space together and provide a safer, less slippery surface for the chancel steps and floor.

5. Issues of Sustainability

In the process of creating a church that meets the changing needs of the congregation, we also wish to make the changes in the most sustainable manner possible. We do not anticipate LEED certification for this project. We do believe it is our responsibility to respect the earth and to undertake this project in the most sustainable manner possible.

We wish to create a space that is energy efficient and uses fewer natural resources to operate and maintain. We also have a goal of re-purposing most of the items we no longer need, either by donating them to other users, or by re-using them in new ways within the church campus. We desire to keep all project waste diverted from landfill.

There is relatively little demolition in this project, but what is no longer being used will be re-purposed or donated to others when possible. This includes repurposing the choir modesty panels, hardwood rood screens at the front of the chancel and wood above the high altar hiding the original three windows. These historic windows, currently visible from San Mateo Drive, will be refurbished and a key feature in the renovated chancel area.

Seismic Evaluation and Resulting Recommendations

At the recommendation of SFO (Stewardship, Finance and Operations Ministry), a seismic evaluation of the sanctuary and bell tower was approved during the March 28, 2010 Special Congregation Meeting. Tuan and Robinson Structural Engineers of San Francisco prepared a Structural Evaluation and Conceptual Seismic Strengthening Report in August 2010 based on the Life Safety Performance Level of ASCE 31-03 that is defined as:

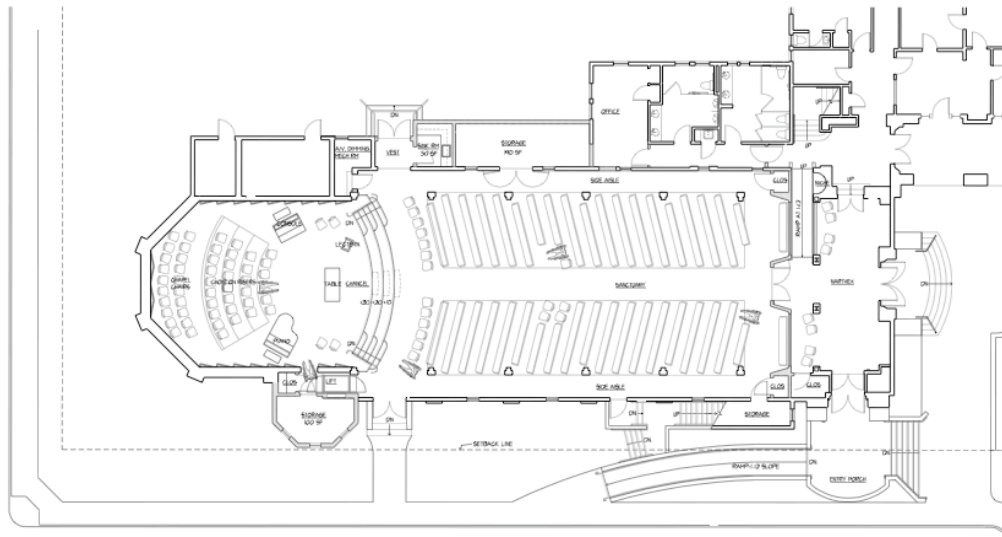
Building performance that includes damage to both structural and nonstructural components during a design earthquake, such that (a) at least some margin against either partial or total structural collapse remains, and (b) injuries may occur, but the overall risk of life-threatening injury as a result of structural damage is expected to be low.

Tuan and Robinson's structural recommendations have been optionally incorporated into ARG's proposed design drawings and include: 1) new wall sheathing on the sanctuary and bell tower walls, 2) new roof sheathing over the existing roof sheathing, 3) four new steel moment frames and concrete grade beams (longitudinal direction under the upper Sanctuary wood framed walls) and 4) either two internal steel moment frames or two external braces on the north side of the sanctuary (in the transverse direction).

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In Summary

CCSM has a strong and vibrant history. We, as current members and friends, benefit from the foresight, dedication and investments made by previous generations of CCSM members. As we prepare to celebrate CCSM's 150th anniversary in 2013, the realization of this Sacred Space Renewal Project will honor this history and enhance our worship experience. It also establishes a legacy benefiting future generations of CCSM worshippers on their spiritual journey.



PLAN OF REMODELED SANCTUARY, NARTHEX AND CHANCEL
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF SAN MATEO, CA
6-13-2010



SSR Committee Members - Jim Berthelsen (chair), Lisa Bottom, June Brown, George Cintel, Bill Daniels, Kay Harris, Mike Harris, Lee Mullery, Genel Morgan, Bahram Mozayeny, Chris Neil, Normandie Ross-Rocans, Jim Schwandt, Louisa Shaul and Mel Thrash.

Access Committee Members - Clayton Lee and Linda Skromme (co-chairs), Edith Alvarenga, George Cintel, Deb Flaherty, Diane Griffith, Mike Harris, Stan Higgs, Mike Mullery, and Betsy Woodward.