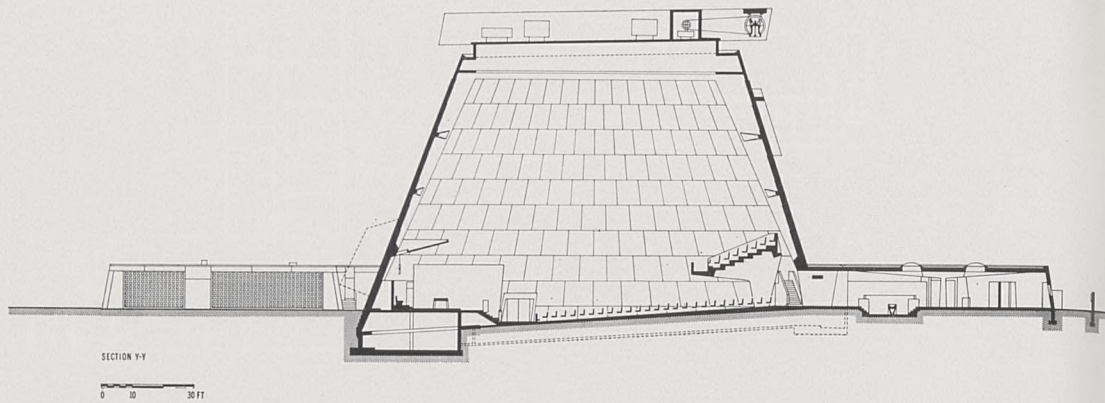


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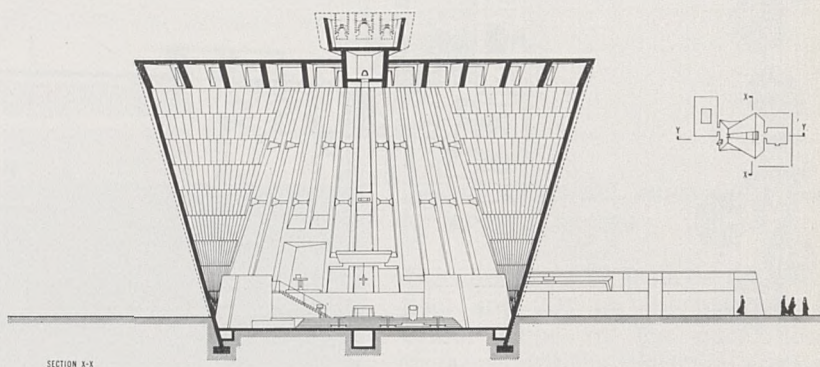
**St. Francis de Sales Church,
Muskegon, Michigan**

Architects: **Marcel Breuer and
Herbert Beckhard.**

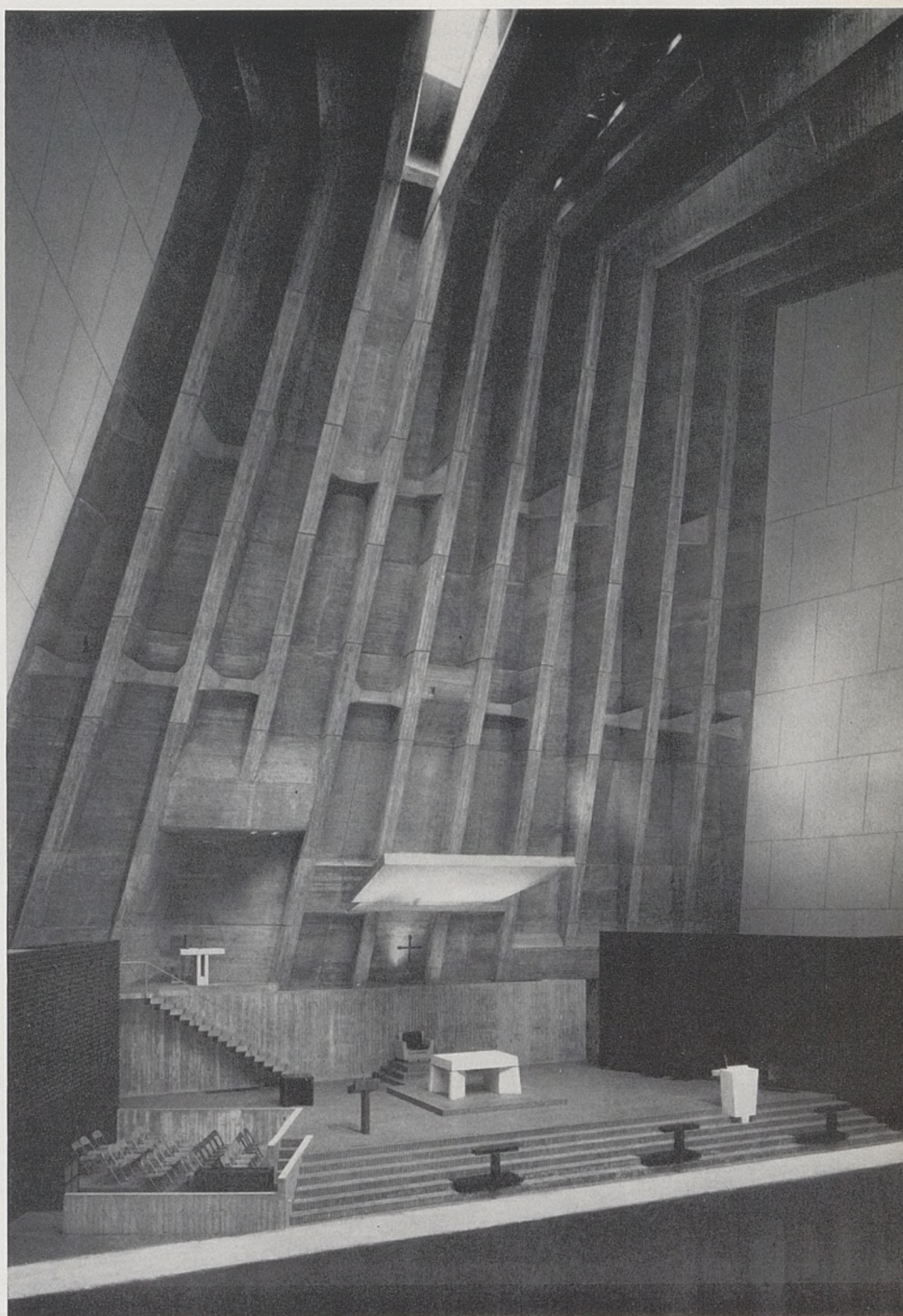


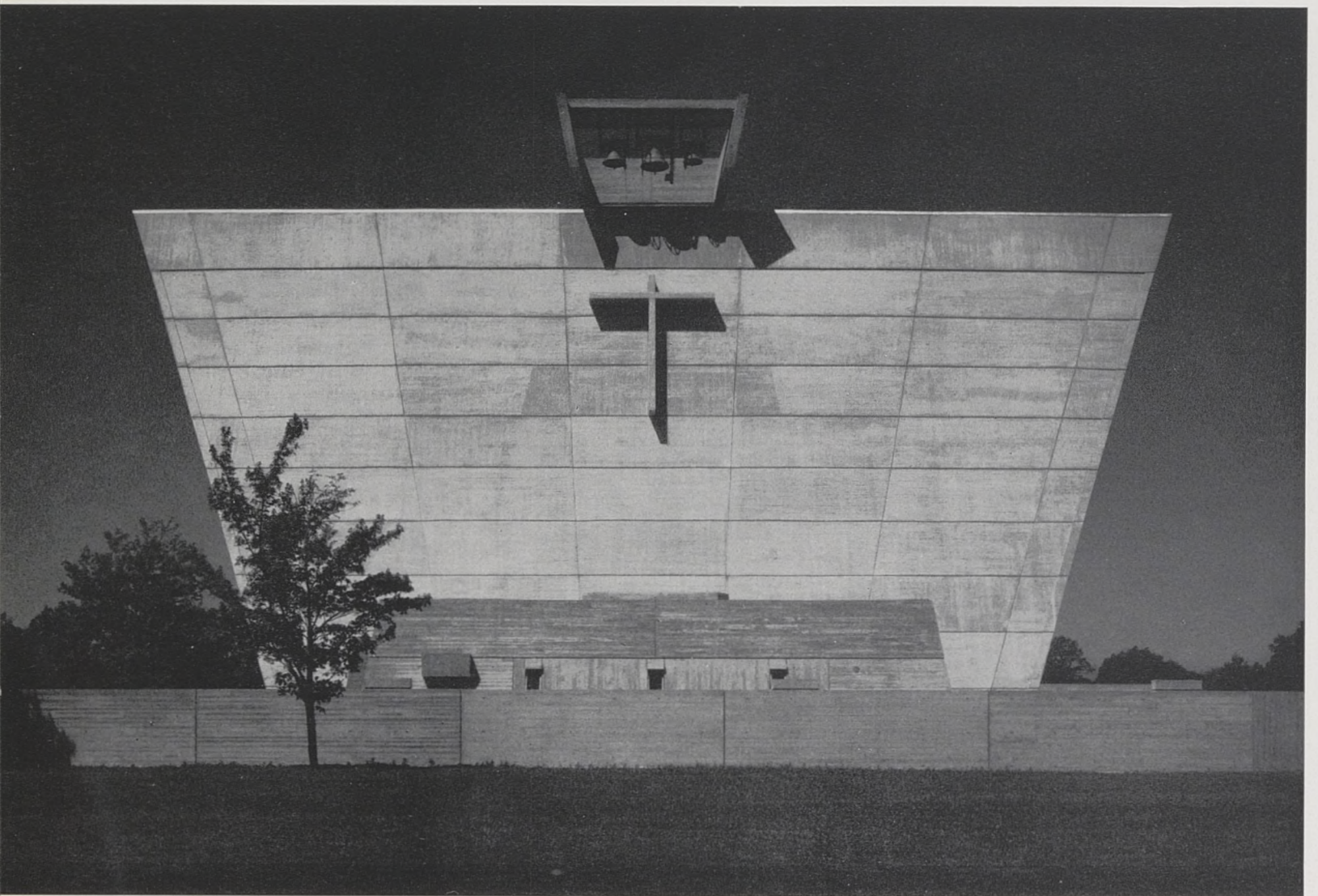
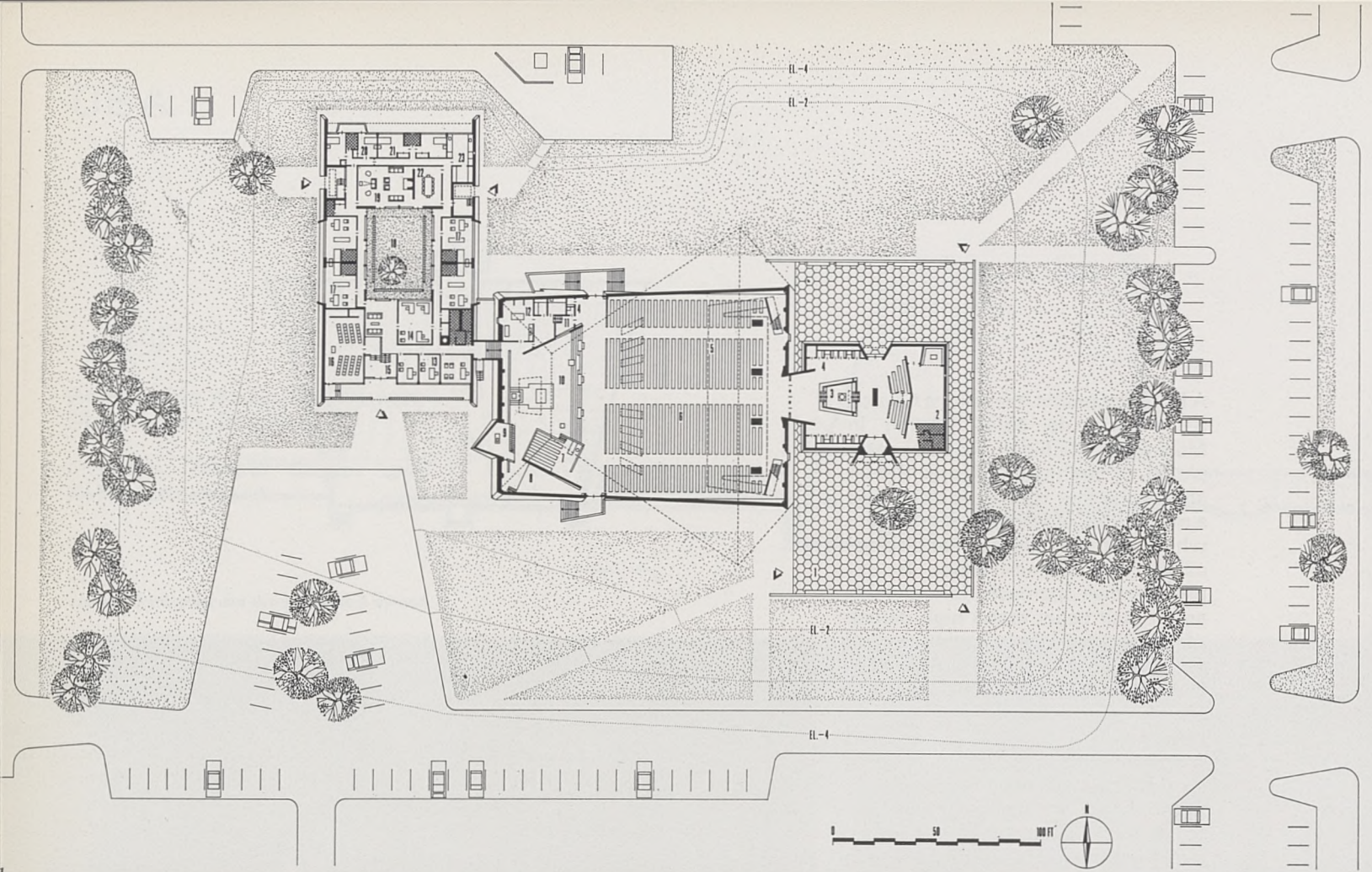
A Bold Geometric Image for a Church St. Francis de Sales Church in Muskegon, Michigan, recently completed by architects Marcel Breuer and his partner Herbert Beckhard, is a major work of religious architecture which exhibits great technological daring and expressiveness. In explaining their approach, the architects assert their belief that a high degree of architectural imagination is still appropriate to religious forms. Says Breuer: 'How much this building affects those who see and enter it, how much it signifies its reverent purpose, will depend on the courage its designers manifest in facing the age-old task: to defeat gravity and to lift the material to great heights, over great spans—to render the enclosed space a part of infinite space. There the structure stands—defined by the eternal laws of geometry, gravity and space.' To achieve their aim Breuer and Beckhard chose a geometry of hyperbolic paraboloid side walls, parallel at their base to the long axis of the nave. As these planes complete their rotation they resolve into backward tilting trapezoidal end walls, perpendicular to the nave axis. The broader of the two, shown in the photograph at the right, occurs at the juncture of the nave and the low mastaba-like narthex. Designed to receive the side walls, it is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. At the sanctuary end, shown on the cover, the reverse occurs. There the trapezoid is smaller, and appropriately narrow at the top to sharpen the focus on the altar.

One approaches the church through an atrium surrounded by 5-foot 6-inch-high walls. From the atrium the narthex is entered from either the north or south. Then follows in axial succession the baptistry flanked by four confessionals, the church entry, the center aisle, and the altar. Seating for 56 persons is provided in the narthex for those awaiting confession, or in conjunction with the baptistry which is an open area recessed 2 feet 7 inches into the narthex floor. The parish room in the narthex serves as an ushers' room, reading-room and library, for for-



Interior looking towards sanctuary from balcony.



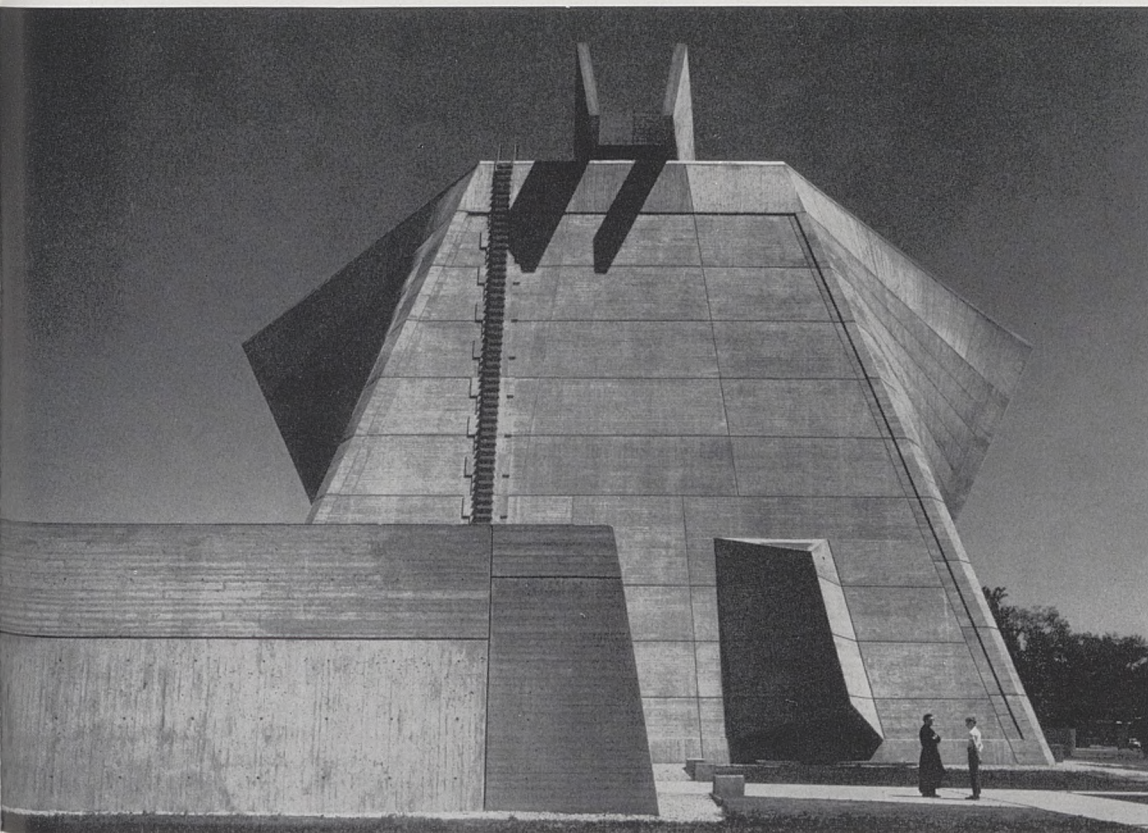


1. East elevation
2. South elevation
3. Partial west elevation

2



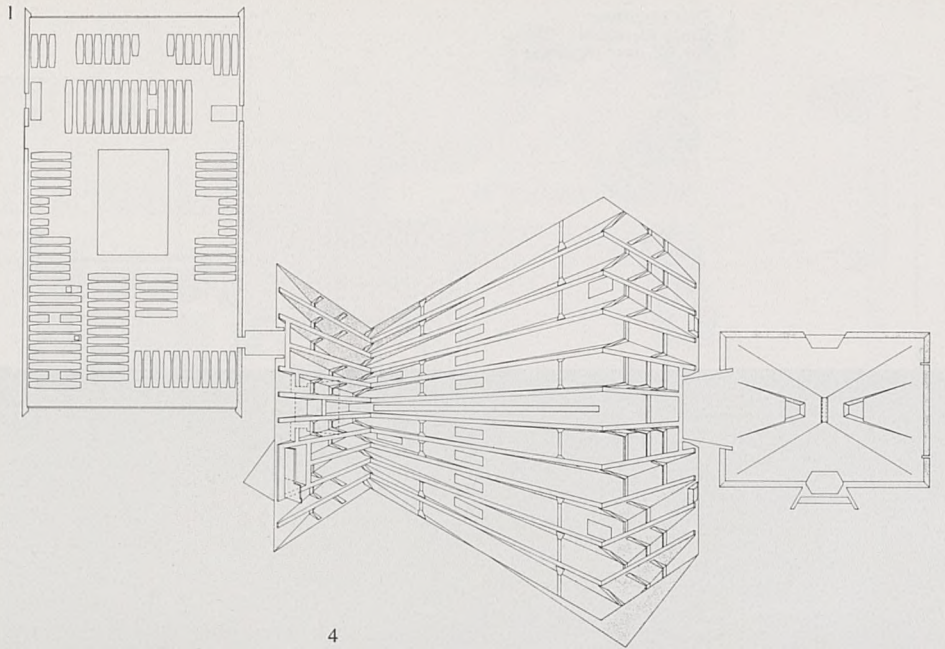
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mation of special processions and for funeral purposes.

The nave has 972 seats on the main floor and 231 on the balcony. A 5-foot slope of the nave floor increases visibility. Reflecting a newer liturgical approach, communion tables rather than a communion rail are used. Adjacent to the sanctuary are spaces for the liturgical choir of 35, the organ console and the organ loft. The rectory is adjacent to the sanctuary.

The 75-foot high structure is topped by a concrete trough which houses the suspended bells. It also contains ventilating equipment. Natural light is introduced to the nave by means of skylights while artificial lighting originates from a special lighting slot running the length of the roof. Indirect lighting from behind the sanctuary screen walls and the back of the balcony augments this system. A rather unusual feature of the sanctuary is the chapel for the Blessed Sacrament. It is elevated from sanctuary level so that it may be seen from all points. The celebrant faces the congregation and his chair is behind the altar. By means of lighting control either the main altar or the chapel becomes the focus of attention. The church space is spanned by means of a system of rigid concrete arches connecting three trapezoidal planes: the front wall, the rear wall and the roof. The hyperbolic paraboloid sidewalls are self-supporting, enclosing the space and stabilizing the structure. The balcony is a free-standing element in the nave supported and cantilevered from four columns located so as not to interfere with the visibility of the sanctuary from any seat. Both narthex and rectory have load-bearing exterior walls.



1. Reflected ceiling plan.
2. East wall of atrium as seen from inside the atrium, showing stations of the Cross.
3. Structural supports of balcony with access stair.
4. Detail of ladder to roof at west façade.
5. View of southeast corner of church from atrium court.

