

St. John Francis Regis Church, Kansas City MO

“Because the church is a visible building, this house is a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and an image of the Church dwelling in heaven” (Order for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar II:2).

St. John Francis Regis Church in Kansas City, Missouri, was designed to foster the participation of the people in the celebration of the Mass and to help parishioners strengthen the bonds of faith and friendship.

The altar standing directly in the center of the room spreads the congregation on two facing sides. This ensures that worshipers encourage one another in the songs, dialogues and postures of the Mass. There is no back pew where someone may withdraw. The presence of each person matters.

“The altar should occupy a place where it is truly the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns” (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal* 299). St. Regis Church precisely achieves this aim with its altar at the very center of the space.

The floor plan puts the three principle furnishings necessary for the Mass along the central axis: the altar, the ambo, and the presider’s chair. By grouping the faithful on either side, St. Regis Church keeps every worshiper close to something that happens during the course of the liturgy. This engages each person directly in some part of every Mass.

Participation is the “right and duty” of the Christian people (*GIRM* 18). “In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 14).

The same two-sided seating arrangement can be found in other places of worship. Monasteries frequently choose such “antiphonal seating” so that monks alternating sides while praying the psalms can both sing and listen, verse by verse. Other Catholic churches with a design similar to St. Regis include St. Vincent de Paul in Andover KS, St. Thomas the Apostle in Minneapolis MN, St. Anne in Barrington IL, Saint-François de Molitor in Paris, France, and the Cathedral of St. Patrick in Parramatta, Australia.