

Colors in kaleidoscopic patterns radiate from the sanctuary of the Church of Christ the King in Guilderland. The church is one of a number in the Capi-

tal Region whose designs were created by architect James Hundt, who specializes in houses of worship.

# Architect finds church design to be his calling

*Clifton Park office specializes in structures for various faiths*

By PAM ALLEN  
Gazette Reporter

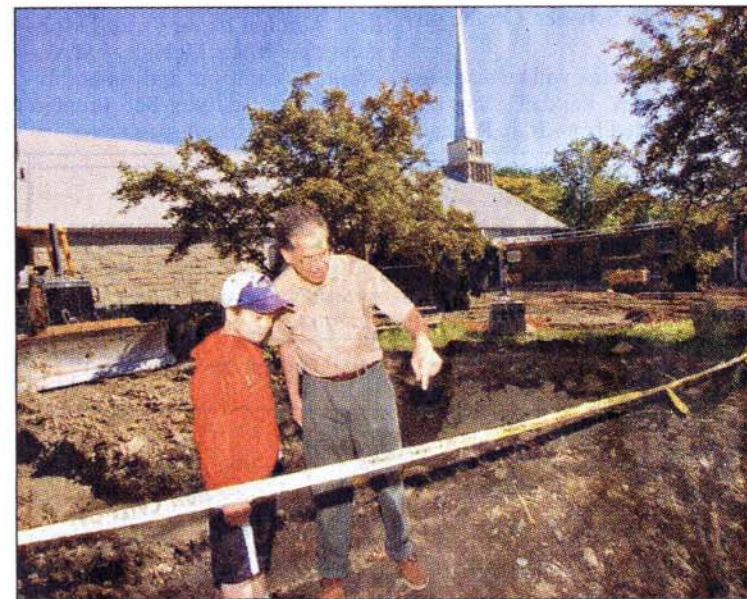
**C**LIFTON PARK — From the day he designed his first church, James Hundt knew he'd found his calling.

It was 1986, and the historic Helderberg Reformed Church in Guilderland Center had been destroyed by fire. Hundt's task was to design a new building

which, in itself, was a challenge because members of the church wanted the new building to capture some of the ages-old essence of its predecessor.

Relying on lots of advice from the congregation, Hundt designed a building that combined a contemporary interior with a quaint village-

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MARC SCHULTZ Gazette Photographer

Architect James Hundt explains recently some of the work under way at the East Glenville Community Church to his son, James, who is working on an architect merit badge with the Boy Scouts.

# Architect does only religious buildings

*Specialty means keeping up with liturgical press*

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style exterior. After that, the church jobs kept coming. Today, he has little time — or desire — to design anything else.

"I love contributing to an experience that ideally transforms lives," said Hundt, who runs his business from Clifton Park and lives in Latham.

His design work involves all faiths, from the recently completed \$4 million project at Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Clifton Park and a \$4.2 million project at Christ The King Catholic Church in Guilderland, to the Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church in Schenectady and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Duaneburg.

His list of approximately 50 religious buildings also includes the Hubbard Interfaith Sanctuary at The College of Saint Rose and the meditation room at Albany International Airport.

Across the country, only a few architects specialize in designing religious buildings, Hundt said.

"I really started because I saw a need in the Capital District," he said.

He takes on the smallest of church projects, even if it's as simple as just making the rest rooms handicapped-accessible.

As part of the planning process, either Hundt, who is a practicing Catholic, or one of his employees attends several worship services at the church before they start designing the project.

The most important part of the process is understanding the community, because the space must reflect who they are, Hundt said.

"I think he's got a good eye for what is aesthetic, and for what is holy," said Frank Herlihy, a deacon at Corpus Christi church.

Hundt arranged the seating at Corpus Christi so that parishioners surround the altar and face one another, as well as the priest.

Much of the wood is mahogany, and panels of stained glass frame a gabled ceiling. An adjustable-height pulpit was custom-made in California from a rich-looking Australian wood called jarrah, which is naturally decay-resistant.

One of the focal points is an interactive baptismal pool.

The bright space is definitely user-friendly, Herlihy said.

One of the most important elements is light, said the 54-year-old Hundt, who spent the dedication service at Corpus Christi in his pew experiment-

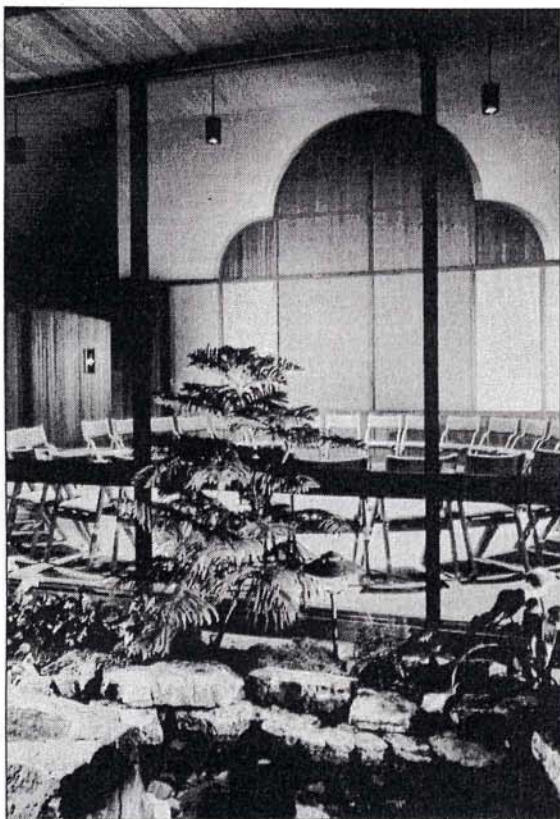


Photo courtesy of The College of Saint Rose

**A water feature in the foreground and plant life enhance the design of the Hubbard Interfaith Sanctuary at the College of Saint Rose in Albany. Architect James Hundt was responsible for the design work.**

ing with lighting levels using a remote control.

Some remotes have the capability for as many as 24 different lighting settings, and are adjusted for day or night services, funerals, baptisms or weddings, Hundt said.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Scotia had its sanctuary remodeled in 1995. To promote a sense of community, Hundt moved the altar to a side wall, then wrapped the seats around the altar, rather than the traditional arrangement of pews in the rear.

"It's great because people are looking at faces. It's just a warm, very bright area," said the Rev. Ron Menty, who was pastor at St. Joseph's until he moved to St. Clare's in Colonie a year and a half ago.

Hundt stayed involved throughout the entire project, choosing textures, carpeting, chair patterns and paint colors, he said.

"He's like a real artist who understands everything, and has to be part of the total project," Menty said.

Hundt incorporated the original stained glass windows from the 1927 church into the new design, and went so far as to design the floor for the tile contractors. It has several smaller crosses forming a bigger cross, he said.

Hundt sometimes calls upon the expertise of the Rev. Richard Vosko, a priest in the Albany Roman Catholic Diocese who serves as a liturgical design consultant for churches throughout North America.

Right now, Vosko, of Clifton Park, is working with Hundt to design a new building for St.

Henry's Catholic Parish in Averill Park. They also worked together on the remodeling of the Assumption-St. Paul Church in Mechanicville, Vosko said.

Hundt, he said, stays on top of his game by attending every possible training class and keeping up with the latest news and liturgical publications. In fact, Hundt will be in Hollywood in August for a three-day conference, and will lead a panel of architects who designed the Los Angeles Cathedral.

"An architect who wants to specialize in religious buildings has to have a kind of innate understanding of what constitutes a house of worship," Vosko said.

A church should go beyond just meeting the basic needs of the congregation, said Hundt, who explained it should offer airs of mystery, warmth and transcendence.

"How it makes you feel is just as important as how it works," he said.

Hundt recently faced a personal hurdle when his own church, Our Lady of the Assumption in Latham, decided to do some minor remodeling.

He spoke at length with his wife, Kathleen, about the prospect of designing the project before deciding to take it on.

"I had to admit that if anyone else did it, I probably would not be happy with it," he said. Hundt has four children ranging in age from 10 to 20.

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