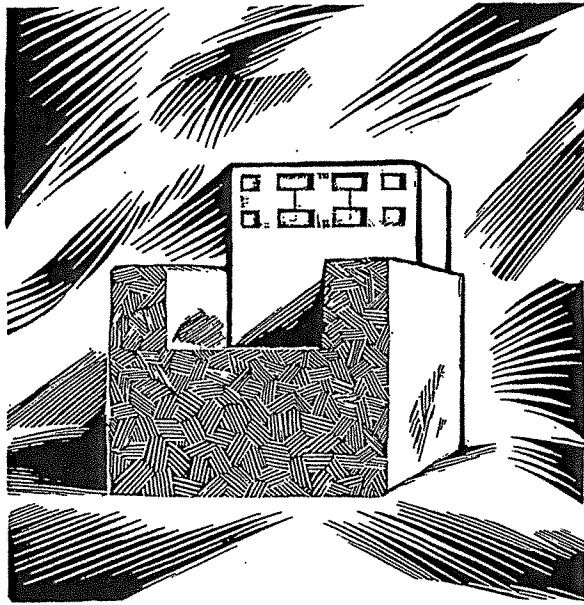




The Chair

The ancient Latin word *cathedra*, used to designate the chair of a high-ranking civic official, was adopted by the early Christian church to refer to the cathedra or chair of the bishop. It was from the cathedra that the bishop presided at the liturgy and preached on the scriptures. Other chairs (*sedilia*) for attending priests and deacons were placed to the side. Later developments of church architecture saw the cathedra of the bishop elevated on a podium, and more throne-like in design. As parishes developed in the fourth century, a less ornate chair was used in the local church by the priest. The presider's or presidential chair soon became superfluous as the priest stood at the altar for most of the liturgical action.

The liturgical reform of this century has sought to recover the function of the chair of the presider. The materials and design of the chair should identify it as part of the particular place of worship. Its style should speak of the ministry of presiding, not of remoteness or prestige. Since we now have a fuller understanding of Christ's presence in the assembly of all the faithful, the presider's chair cannot signify privilege, but rather a sense of leadership in prayer, as well as the dignity and service that are inherent in Christian ministry.



From this chair, the presider calls the people of God to prayer, joins them in attentiveness to the word, keeps with them moments of silence, leads them in petitions of forgiveness, invites them to profess their faith, lifts up their intercessions for every need and sends them forth with God's blessing. And although rarely done by anyone other than a bishop, the rubrics allow preaching from the chair, too.

Copyright © 1997 Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago IL 60622-1101; 1-800-933-1800. Text by Philip Horrigan. Art by Chuck Ludeke.