

# Tridentine Community News

July 31, 2022 – Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

## *A Reflection on Motherhood and Church Architecture*

For over 10 years, Laura Hurajt Charbonneau has sung in the choirs at various Latin Mass sites in Windsor and metro Detroit. From 2014 – 2020 she also led the music for the Tuesday 7:00 PM Masses at Holy Name of Mary Church, often on her own. (Fun fact: Laura is a mathematician and has taught physics.) Today she offers us an interesting reflection on a subject many of us may not have considered.

I am a parishioner of Windsor's St. Benedict, and God has blessed me with the joys and challenges of mothering an infant. One thing I never expected was the impact church design has had on assisting my participation at Mass.

When it comes to making church a welcoming place for families, most people likely think about changing stations in restrooms or programs geared to children. However, church design is an overlooked factor.



I have found nave-aisles with pews accompanying side altars to be a comfortable place to hear Mass with my baby. They are two areas on either side of the main part of a church, but separated from it by a row of columns. This type of architecture can be found in Windsor's St. Alphonsus [pictured above] and Our Lady of the Assumption Churches. Until I became a mother I considered these spaces overflow seating apart from the regrettably rare occasions Mass was celebrated at a side altar. During the first weeks after my return to church with my baby, my favourite place to be was tucked away in a side aisle with a view of the high altar but hidden from the ambo by a column. From this position, I could watch and unite myself to the sacrificial action taking place. I felt secure and comfortable breastfeeding my child in the semi-private atmosphere created by the colonnades, yet still close to the altar and integrated with the congregation. I had the freedom to stand up, rock, and sooth my boy in my pew without blocking anyone in the rows behind. Instant aisle access was a much appreciated feature of the short pews when leaving for a diaper change was necessary.

Another beneficial architectural component is the transept, arms that reach out past the nave in cruciform churches such as Windsor's Holy Name of Mary [pictured below]. The transepts are at the front and have forward-facing pews. Once again, columns provide a sense of shelter and security. The back wall of the transept is much closer to the altar than the back wall of the nave. Many times I and other young mothers have used this space along the wall during Mass to walk with and comfort our children. My son is intrigued by the statues of the Infant of Prague and St. Joseph the Worker that can be found in a little alcove there. Holy Name of Mary's pews on the back wall of the nave, separated from the main body of pews, also come in handy when roaming around the church with a baby. This could be an easy fix for churches with enough space.



The Tridentine Mass is a contributing factor to my positive experiences in addition to the architectural features. The flow and silence of the EF allow one to switch back and forth between prayer and caring for a child. The ad orientem direction of the priest assists my comfort when nursing my baby.

I was not aware of how architecture supported my engagement until I attended a church that lacked these features. The open-concept design did not offer any semi-private options, and the back pews were taken. I felt exposed. I spent most of Mass darting in and out before ultimately resigning to remain outside to meet the needs of my child. It was challenging to be separated from the sights, chants, and prayerful atmosphere that aid contemplation and the interior life. The lack of alternatives to being fully in or fully out can be a barrier to participation and is an unrecognized drawback of open floor plans. I have also been in a church with transepts containing pews that face across the altar at each other, and quickly realized how undesirable they were for a breastfeeding mother.

In the Diocese of London, Ontario's synod summary report, the main challenge identified was the lack of involvement of young people. Perhaps looking into the design and use of space within churches could be an aspect of addressing this issue.

## *Tridentine Masses This Coming Week*

**Fri. 08/05 7:00 PM:** High Mass at *Old St. Mary's* (Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major) – Celebrant: Fr. Derik Peterman. Reception in the parish hall afterwards.

Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail [info@windsorlatinmass.org](mailto:info@windsorlatinmass.org). Previous columns are available at [www.windsorlatinmass.org](http://www.windsorlatinmass.org).