

#### Spotlight on Crestwood Sanctuary: Sailing through Life

On Christmas Eve, I sat with my family in the sanctuary with all my senses in play. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the space that I once knew so well and have gotten reacquainted with during the past two years. The brilliance of the poinsettias, the beauty of the uniquely dressed Christmas tree, and the music of different voices and instruments washed over us. It was the first time my Navy son had been back in the church in thirty-six years.



Before the service we whispered about memories, and afterwards wandered through the empty halls as he and his brother reminisced about what happened where. I learned where the communion cups used to sit before the service and where a little friend snuck a drink from one of the waiting glasses. I learned where there used to be black tile instead of carpeting.

They remembered so much more than I did, but, like me, they didn't remember a thing about the sanctuary being built to look like a ship! We lived across the street on Bellefonte for several years, seeing the sanctuary many times each day, and never thought about it as a ship.

But there the story is, on the Crestwood website, with direct quotes from the original architect. I had read it earlier and was surprised, but haven't spotlighted the sanctuary because I thought others must know all about it. But asking around, I have found I'm not the only one who doesn't know the story of the ship.

It is all written out for us to read on the Crestwood website. It is not clear who wrote this interesting piece, but I will find out after the holidays and give credit where credit is due in a later Spotlight.

The sanctuary was designed in the late 1960s by the late Byron F. Romanowitz, a long-time Crestwood member. In exploring information about Mr. Romanowitz on-line, I found he recently passed away this November 28 at the age of 93. This Spotlight serves as a tribute to him and his contributions to us.

Romanowitz was a graduate of Princeton University School of Architecture. He designed many well-known local structures, including the Singletary Center for the Arts, the Patterson Office Tower, and the Radisson Hotel-Vine Center. He was also a professional jazz musician, playing the tenor saxophone in the group Men of Note. How fortunate to have such a talented man in our midst.

There is no reason to rewrite something that is already written perfectly, so here is an excerpt that appears on our website explaining the inspiration behind the design of our sanctuary:

*"History tells us that the traditional nave with seating on either side of a central aisle symbolizes, among other things, a ship (The part of the Sanctuary where pews, pulpit, chancel, altar, etc. are located is the 'nave.' It is so named because nave is derived from the Latin 'navis,' meaning ship) The worshipers on either side of the aisle are positioned as slaves in a galley. Consider that in the early Christian era, the only possible device in which large groups of persons could be transported together was a ship, and we begin to see how this association was formed.*

*"The windows represent the openings where the oars were placed into the water. The*

skylight or opening above suggests that there was need for light to enter the vessel to give illumination to things beneath. Thus, the skylight lets in God's illumination from above.

*"As a matter of fact', says the architect, 'the visual thrust of the front design depends on this association being felt and understood subconsciously. The concrete wall around the front planting area is literally a symbolic ship's bow.'*

*"Thus it was the intent and design that the Sanctuary be thought of as a ship: with its long, slender hull...its opening on the sides for the oars to move it through the water...its opening above to let in light and fresh air...and the bow on the exterior front to divide the water and assist its movement through the sea. (Parenthetically, the bow of the symbolic ship has been unintentionally covered up with shrubbery – or submerged as it were ...)"*

The article goes on to discuss the windows, whether the old or new ones, I'm not sure.

*"With thoughts of a ship and sea in mind, one can notice the patterns and movement of colors at the top and bottom of each window. In addition to the predominance of soft blues and purples, there are also streaks of white resembling breakers in the lower portions and lavender across the tops. They suggest different patterns of the sea at varying distances."*

It has been suggested that I shine the spotlight on the windows sometime (which are new since my time here years before). I have not done that yet because there is a description on the website of each window. Apparently, Rev. David Blondell did a series of sermons years ago, focusing individually on each beautiful window. If you would like to learn more about the sanctuary and the windows, you can visit the Crestwood website. Or you can stay tuned for another Spotlight article where I may try to fill in a few blanks about them.

What an unusual sanctuary. How beautiful it is. Next time you are there, if you haven't before, try to picture yourself in a ship, traveling safely together through life's tumultuous seas. I find it ironic that Mr. Romanowitz died just a few weeks ago as we are looking more closely at his inspired work. It seems a tribute to his life, and a lesson to us all, that gifts of talent continue to inspire and benefit others even after we are gone.

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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