

Gathering Between Walls
A Catholic Church in 12 Mile, Kentucky

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Abstract

The following is a design for a new Catholic church for the Sts. Peter and Paul parish in rural 12 Mile, Kentucky. The existing church building is set into a hillside, mostly underground. It was originally intended to be the basement but had to be used as the church once funding ran low during construction. Through my design I wanted to create a space that would be both welcoming for the parishioners to gather each Sunday yet feel spiritual even when mass is not taking place. To achieve this I wanted to make a space used for nothing but the functions of the Liturgy, any circulation, bathrooms, mechanical services or even confessionals should not detract from the space. By using two massive double concrete walls that would encompass all of the non-essential functions of the church, the space between the walls was freed up to be used as the body of the church where nothing but the Liturgy of the Eucharist would take place.

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Parish History

The Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Parish was founded in 1853 by German immigrants near the small Northern Kentucky community of Gubser's Mill on a hill above a bend in the 12 Mile Creek. In the late 1920's the existing church was built to replace a brick structure that had structural problems with its foundation. Funding ran low during construction and what was meant to be used as the basement had to become the main sanctuary. The church was renovated after Vatican Council II and has been mostly unchanged since.

Today roughly 200 families are members of the parish which also has a K-8 grade school. The members of the parish continue to have a strong German heritage and many continue to farm the rolling hills that surround the church.

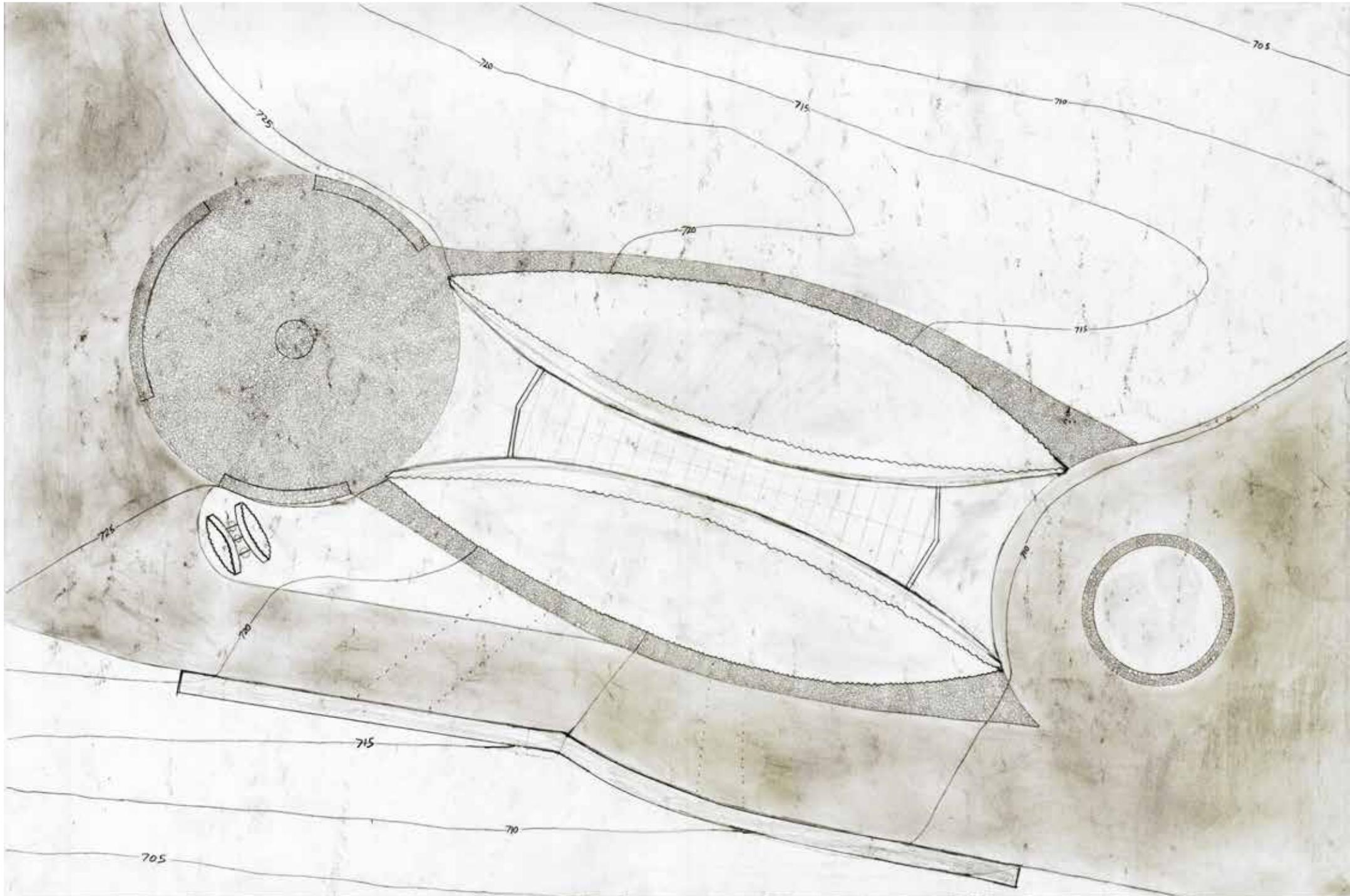


Images (from left): Existing Church, Existing Baptismal Font, Surrounding Landscape 2

Site

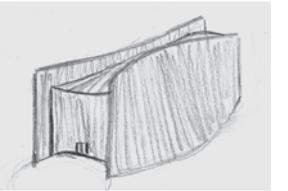
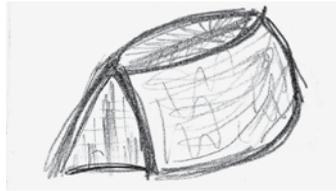
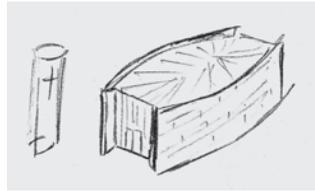
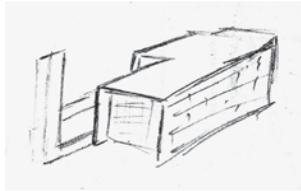
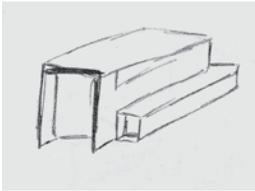
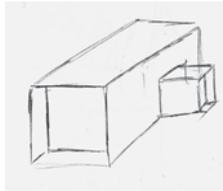
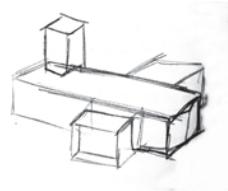
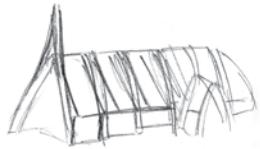
The Site is on a hill above a bend in the 12 Mile Creek, in rural Northern Kentucky. The church sits on a slope that drops 15 feet over a distance of 140 feet with steeper slopes dropping off to the north and south. The Cemetery is located on the northern hillside below the church while the southern facing hill contains a hay field owned by a neighboring farm. The school sits on a level spot to the west with a large parking lot while the rectory and a small parking lot sit to the east of the existing church, 15 feet lower than the school. There are two access points, the first is the existing driveway that winds its way up the hill from the east at a bend and intersection in the road. The second driveway is a proposed new entrance that would be wider and less steep with a safer line of sight where it meets the road. This second new driveway would become the main entrance and would enter the site from the north.

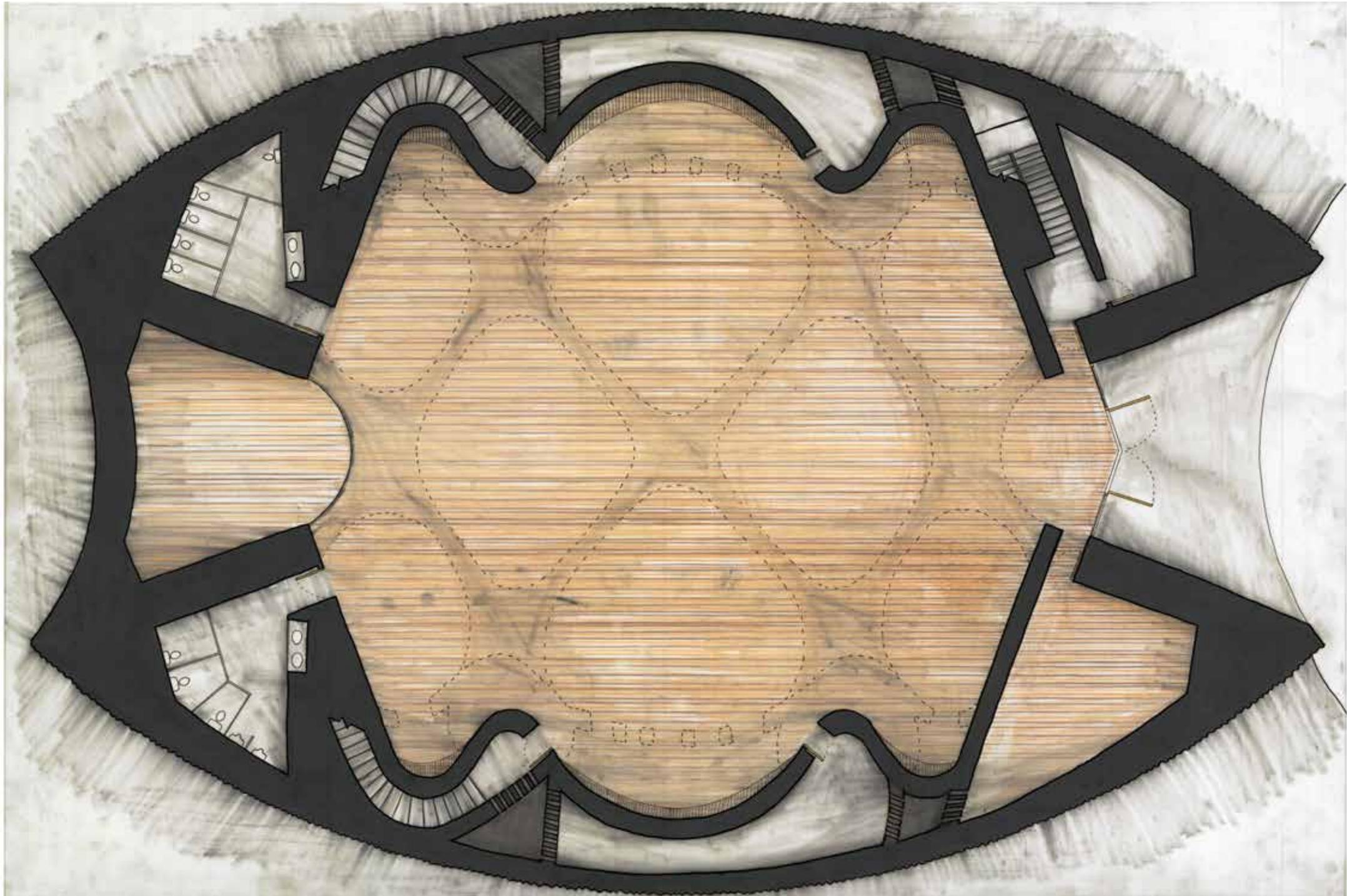


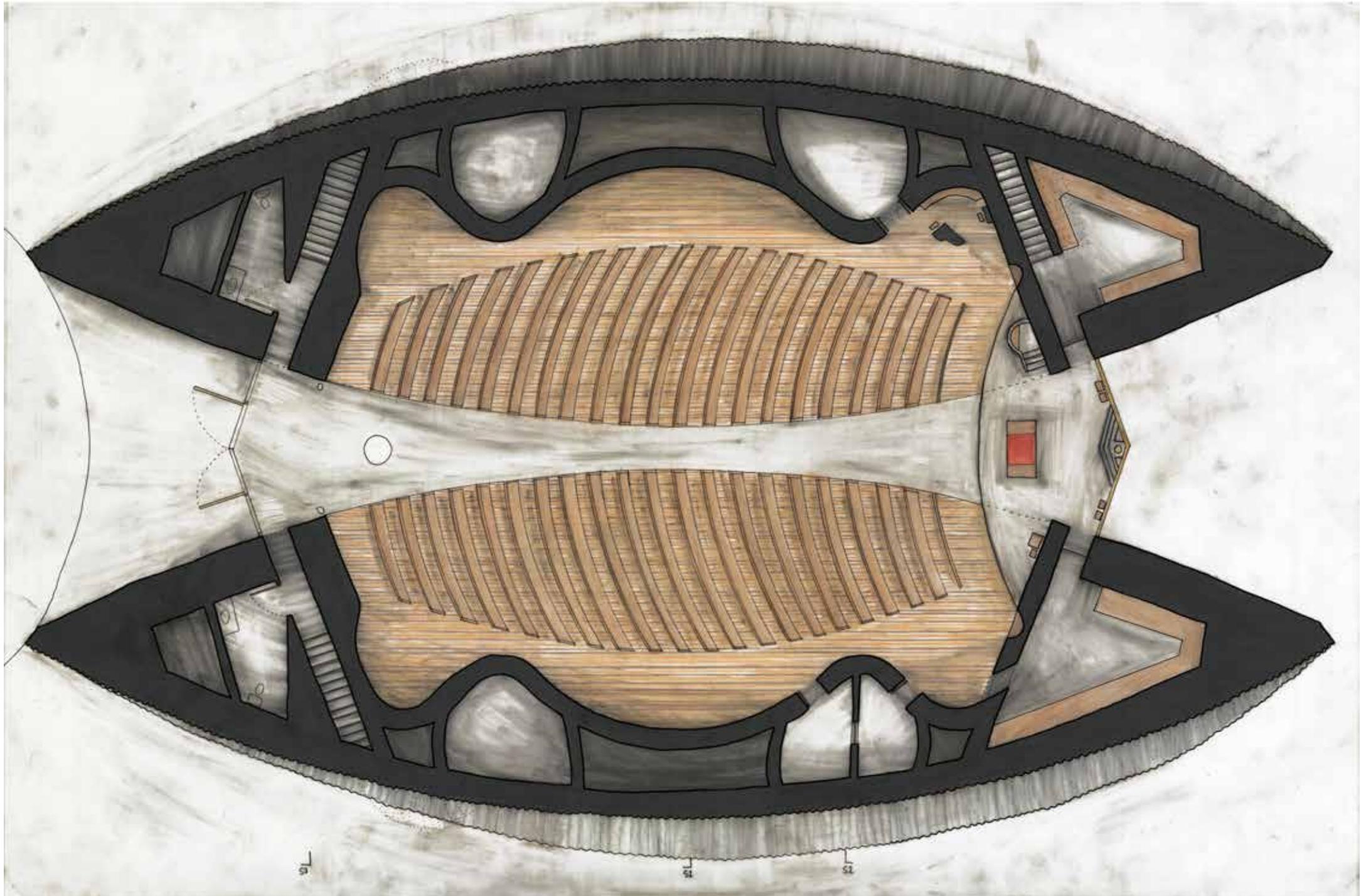


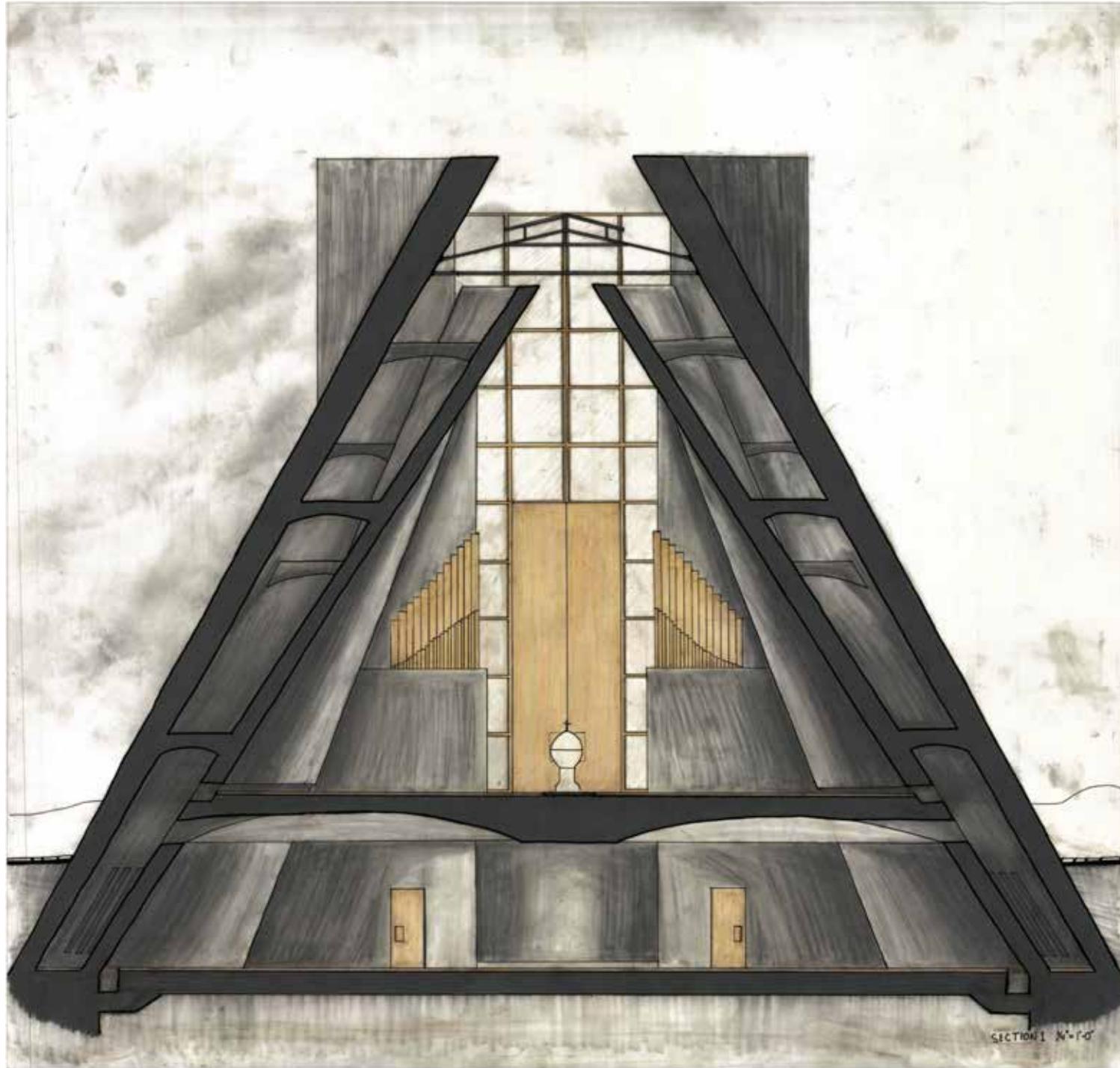
Form

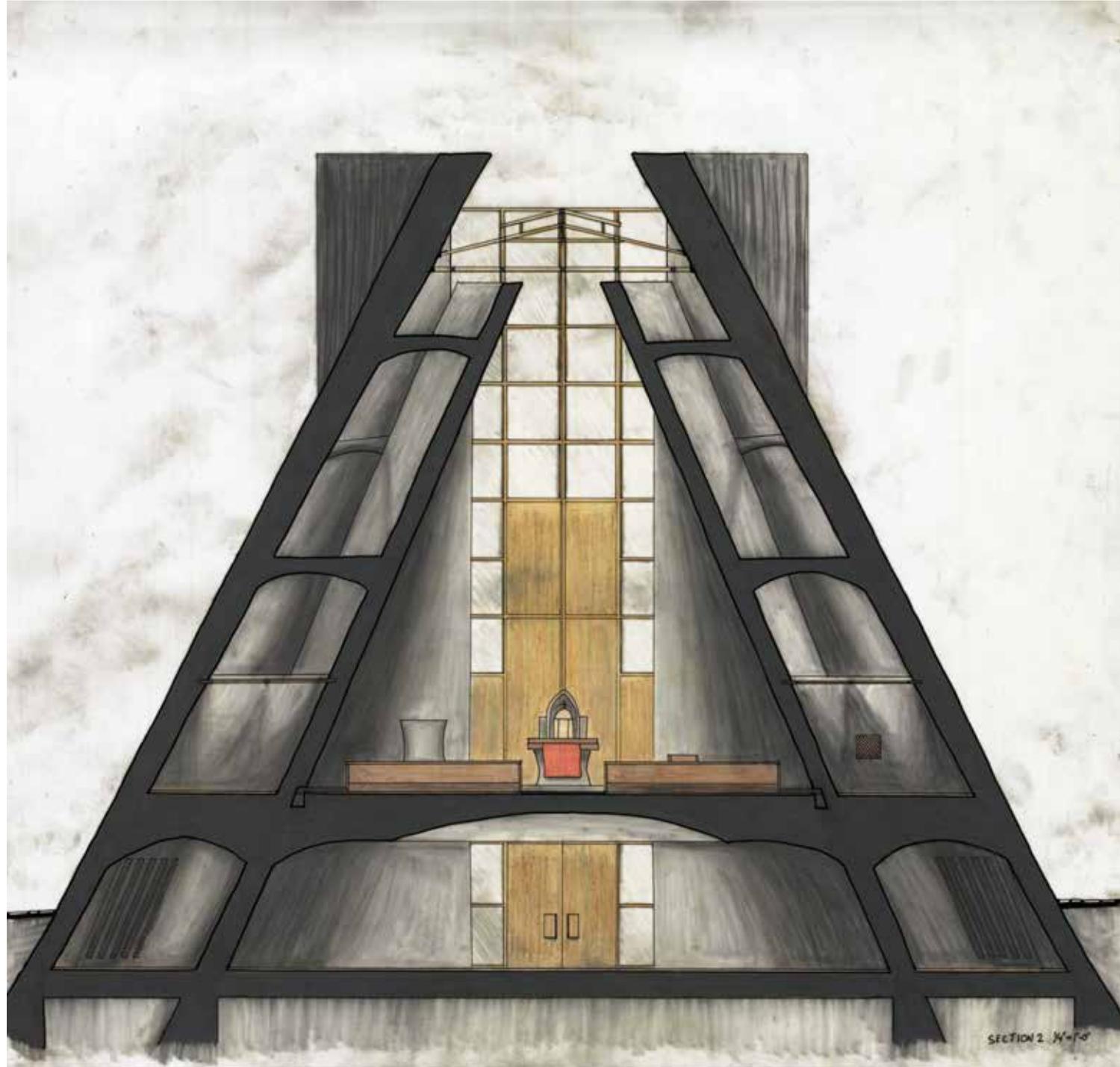
The form of the church is dominated by the two massive concrete double-walls. Each wall has an outer wall 70 feet high with an outward curve at its base and an inner curve at the top and an inner wall 59 feet high that undulates at the base and meets an inner curve at the top similar to that of the outer wall. The inner and outer walls of the double-wall system are connected by buttresses and each have their own vertical sections to give structure. The spaces within these double walls house the secondary functions of the church such as bathrooms, stairs, confessionals, storage and circulation of air. The two double-walls mirror each other and are connected only through the floor structure of the sanctuary which is made of 6 post-tensioned concrete beams 4 feet in height with shallow concrete domes spanning between them to support the sanctuary floor 15 feet above the undercroft floor.













Enclosure

The Sanctuary is flanked to the left and right by the massive concrete walls requiring the front, back and roof of the church to be formed by other means. A system of thin, translucent, white alabaster panels are held together by brass mullions. The roof is a double structure with a ceiling plane of alabaster and brass and a roof plane above made of clear glass and brass mullions to shed rain but allow light to reach the alabaster. The result is a thin, translucent wall the spans between two massive concrete shells and allows the penetration of soft, diffused light into the space. Lights suspended above the roof plane allow the church to have a similar quality of light at night that it receives during the day. The Massive 25 foot tall doors are made of cast brass as are the opaque panels behind the altar that keep the priest from being back-lit during early morning mass, as the congregation would be facing east. The brass inside the church will remain polished while the exterior brass will be allowed to weather and take on a beautiful patina.

