

# The 2000 Renovation of Miller Chapel



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## All Things Bright and Beautiful

by BARBARA A. CHAAPEL

*Living Word, as you once spoke, come now and speak anew.  
Reveal your way, your truth, your life, give thought and insight true.  
With open hands and flaming hearts we gather in this place  
To learn of you, be led by you, and know you face to face.*

Singing these words of a hymn written by PTS alumnus and trustee Fred R. Anderson and set to music by John Weaver, the Princeton Seminary community rededicated Miller Chapel in a moving service on October 9. Other than for the opening convocation of the academic year in September, when the still unfinished building was the site of worship, the dedication service marked the first time the Seminary community had gathered in its historic sanctuary for more than a year.

Board of Trustees chair Robert Adams preached a sermon titled “Holy Places,” recalling the sacred history of the chapel that has graced the Seminary campus and been its spiritual center since 1834. Renovated no fewer than four times (in 1874, 1933, 1964, and 2000), Miller Chapel today welcomes worshippers to a larger, light-filled sanctuary with a central pulpit and communion table and with astonishing acoustics for its new organ and grand piano.

President Gillespie brought greetings to the Seminary community, invited guests, and visitors, with warm thanks to the many donors (alumni/ae, trustees, faculty and staff, friends, foundations, corporations, and churches) who made the buildings a reality. As of December 31, 2000, \$7,125,200.04 had been received to support Miller and Scheide. The project, as is true with many renovation and construction projects, exceeded its original budget by more than twenty percent.

“I am pleased how well the renovation retrieves the original ‘one-room’ meetinghouse, while preserving intact the marvelous detailing, Corinthian columns, and Greek Revival fixtures of the 1933 alterations,” says James F. Kay, professor of homiletics and chair of the renovation committee. “To see the sturdy, elevated pulpit and the substantial Lord’s Table centered together in the midst of the congregation clearly communicates the centrality of Word and Sacrament for Christian worship.”

Seminary archivist William Harris agrees with the high praise for the renovation. “The chapel renovation has surpassed all my expectations,” he extols. “The original beauty of the place has been enhanced handsomely by the use of rich, lively color and the introduction of period chandeliers. The place is literally radiant both by night and by day with a warm, inviting, and even numinous light. One feels drawn here for personal meditation as well as for public worship.”

Coming from a historian, that is high acclaim indeed. Harris has studied the earlier incarnations of the building and knows that architects, builders, and planners alike worked hard to preserve the vision of its original architect, Charles Steadman. Like the original building, the chapel today unites celebrants, choir, and congregation, emphasizes the centrality of the preached word with the central pulpit, and places the communion table at the same level as the congregation.

“The simplification of the east end, which has left nothing but table, pulpit, and organ, has also contributed to a deeper sense of reverence in the chapel,” Harris says. “There is much less architectural and liturgical distraction now so that one can focus on the service with greater ease. I think the founders and early fathers of the Seminary would be very happy indeed!”

One of those early fathers, Professor Charles Hodge, gave a “discourse” at the first rededication of Miller Chapel in 1874. He chose as his topic preaching. “Two things are included in preaching,” Hodge said. “First, the communication to be made is of the nature of the message. The preacher is a herald, and the office of a herald is to proclaim what he is commanded to announce. And so ...the preacher is the messenger of God.

“The second idea included in preaching is that it is a method of oral instruction. It hath pleased God to make the proclamation of the gospel by the living teacher the great means of salvation. Other methods of instruction are important; this is indispensable. God has so made us that the human voice is the most effective instrument for conviction and persuasion. Therefore it is that God has adopted it as his great instrument in saving [men].”

Following in Hodge’s footsteps, many of the future teachers and preachers of the church will discover their calling through the pulpit and pews of Miller Chapel.

But not through word alone. Also through music.

Miller Chapel is now adorned by the new Joe R. Engle Organ, a tracker organ built by Paul Fritts of Tacoma, Washington. It is Fritts’s first major organ on the East Coast.

No two people are happier about its presence than the man whose gift made it possible, Joe R. Engle of New York City, and the man who will play it, the Seminary’s director of music and organist, Martin Tel.

Tel gives great credit to Fritts. “Paul did the work of a master organ builder, and now the organ takes on a life of its own; it sighs with sounds deeper than words.” He explains that a tracker organ is a mechanical-action organ, where each key is attached to a thin strip of wood that links the keyboard to the pipes. Through a complex series of connections, a tracker opens a valve that lets air into a chamber beneath a pipe.

“A tracker organ is symbolic of simplicity,” Tel says, “though it is not a simple organ. The way the organ works is in a way analogous to the movement of the Holy Spirit. If you open yourself to this instrument, it will speak to you, move you.”

Tel’s colleague and world-renowned organist Joan Lippincott, who recently retired as the organist at the Princeton University chapel, played the inaugural recital on the Engle Organ at a colloquium on the place of the organ in Christian worship in early February. She was moved to tears when the organ was physically moved into the chapel, pipe by pipe, in the fall. “This is an amazing day,” she said. “I think it’s symbolic of a new life, a new presence at the Seminary. It will be a leader in worship that moves people. My life has been about music and worship, and I’ve been waiting for such a moment as this when such a great instrument would arrive in Princeton.”

One of Lippincott’s fond memories at the Seminary was of a service where she played a hymn on the first chapel organ and the students “sang so loudly the organ couldn’t be heard.” Her impression is that “PTS has been a singing place,” and she looks forward to “our singing together—the new organ, the choir, and the community.”

Tel agrees. He believes that the chapel has exceeded expectations for acoustics for hymn singing and organ playing. “We made some improvements, but the greatest acoustical assets were inherited from the old building: hard surfaces, century-old walls and ceiling, classic shape, balcony.

“The elimination of the narrow chancel with the added air volume [that were part of the renovation] is icing on the cake,” he says. “The old nave in the pre-renovation chapel always enjoyed marvelous acoustics for singing. Now with the new configuration the organ and choir may join with the congregation in reveling in the joy of resounding music.”



Even the organ builder has passionate words for the chapel. “The organ is totally dependent on the room,” says Fritts. “A great organ can’t work in a bad room. Here in your chapel, the room gives the worshipper a wonderful sense of envelopment. You know where the sound is coming from, but you feel enveloped by it at the same time.”

Kay is thankful for the other ways in which the building is hospitable. “I am grateful for the new provisions, like the elevator, the widened aisles, and the special seating, for individuals challenged with disabilities. These features symbolize the Seminary’s continuing commitment to hospitality for all of God’s children.”

Scheide Hall, a new companion building to Miller Chapel that will be open and in use for the second semester, also includes handicapped-accessible bathrooms and elevators. It houses offices for Tel, for the director of student counseling, Nancy Schongalla-Bowman, for the acting chaplain, Eric Springsted, and for the chapel secretary, Carol Belles. On the second floor is a large light-filled room for choir rehearsals and musical recitals, and outside, between Scheide and Miller Chapel, there will be a lovely outdoor meditation garden with amphitheater seating.

Named to honor the family of longtime Princeton Seminary trustee and benefactor William H. Scheide and his wife, Gertrude, Scheide Hall was dedicated in ceremonies on October 9. Former Board of Trustees chair David B. Watermulder told the large crowd gathered on the windy fall afternoon that William Scheide’s father, John, had been a trustee of the Seminary from 1939 to 1942. He was a collector of rare books and manuscripts and owned one of the world’s largest collections of rare Bibles. His son William, a musicologist, followed in his footsteps, becoming an avid book and manuscript collector as well as a leading interpreter of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. He owns one of the largest collections of Bach manuscripts in the world and was the founder and director of the Bach Aria Group, which has performed concerts internationally.

“How fitting that at the dawn of this new century,” said Watermulder, “we highlight two significant developments in the life of the church in honoring Bill Scheide: the increasing emphasis on the relationship of the arts and religion and the enlarging role that laypeople play in the life of the church. Here in this beloved quadrangle, we add our twenty-first-century statement, as this first building of the twenty-first century takes its place next to these buildings of the early- and late-nineteenth century.”



Former moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and former PTS professor of Christian education Freda A. Gardner was the first to pray for the building and those whose lives and ministries it would support.

“How lovely are your dwelling places, O God,” she prayed during the dedication. “We meet you here today where the beauty of design and crafts have met the beauty of stone and mortar and glass, where generosity and resources have made of vision and prayer a dwelling place dedicated to your glory.

“Giver of every good and perfect gift, in gratitude and thanksgiving we dedicate this building to your everlasting glory, praying that we and our successors and all who dwell within it may know your abiding presence and grow more and more in Christ.”

Many who planned, worked, raised money, and prayed for the chapel and Scheide Hall over the last two years “grew in Christ” as they did so. Tony DiGiacomo, supervisor of construction, was the first one on the site after the job was awarded to Haverstick-Borthwick. As he was removing pews in the chapel balcony, he found an old Bible in the back of one of the pews. “I got interested in reading it,” he said, “and began reading at Genesis and got all the way through Mark during the

months of this job.” He read in the construction trailer at the beginning and end of each work day, and one day President Gillespie walked by the trailer, saw DiGiacomo reading, and asked him why he was reading the Bible. That encounter began a conversation between the two that grew over the months.

“Dr. Gillespie was intuitively kind,” said DiGiacomo. “He had a deep sense of caring and was very inclusive and supportive.”

DiGiacomo’s hope was that the chapel would be “the jewel it was intended to be.” Sadly, he died suddenly just a few days before the chapel was completed.

Dave Gibson drove the tracker organ—in pieces—in a Mayflower van from Tacoma, Washington, to Princeton. It was the first organ he had ever delivered, and he drove his cargo with care. “It took two and a half days, and I went slower than usual to give it a smoother ride,” he said. He pulled the van up in front of Miller Chapel at 5:00 a.m. on October 4 and watched in amazement as workers unloaded the pipes and cabinetry and began to build the organ before his eyes in its new home.

“I’m going to have to come back to hear this thing played,” he said.

German Martinez, PTS associate director of facilities and project manager for Miller and Scheide, attended lovingly to the myriad details of such a big job: finding the historical glass for the chapel windows (a slight shade of purple with a hand-blown look); making sure the heart pine flooring was well laid; sending the pews out to a restorer in New York that specializes in church pews; purchasing chandeliers from Italy; overseeing the insertion of the clerestory windows in Scheide; even arranging for portable toilets on the quad for students during a construction delay necessitated by relocating a main water line. “It’s been hard work, but a complete joy for me,” he says. “I’ve loved it because I know the importance of the chapel, and now of Scheide Hall, to the Seminary community.”



Thousands more will experience the joy of worshipping and working in Miller Chapel and Scheide Hall: donors, alumni/ae, students, faculty, visitors—present and future. The sermons and hymns of worship in Miller Chapel, the hours of pastoral counseling and worship planning and choir rehearsals in Scheide Hall, will touch literally thousands of lives. Perhaps Joan Lippincott, one of the visitors, says it best. “This new chapel and its organ will change the Seminary, the community. In a way, you can say it will change the world, because it will affect people far from Princeton, far beyond here.”