

Youth center epitomizes “Ancient-Future”

by Jeremy Fretts

Contemporary theologian Dr. Leonard Sweet speaks of the “ancient future” church, where old and new coexist in a very postmodern symbiosis. The new youth center, “The Gathering Place,” for First Christian Church in Sullivan, Indiana, seems a likely realization of the concept in built form.

Its construction resembles a centuries-old Amish barn, featuring hand-selected, custom harvested, post-and-beam framing. Yet the facility houses a *very* contemporary ministry with all the high-tech accessories. Not only does ancient building form meet modern usage, the project team bridges generations, as well.

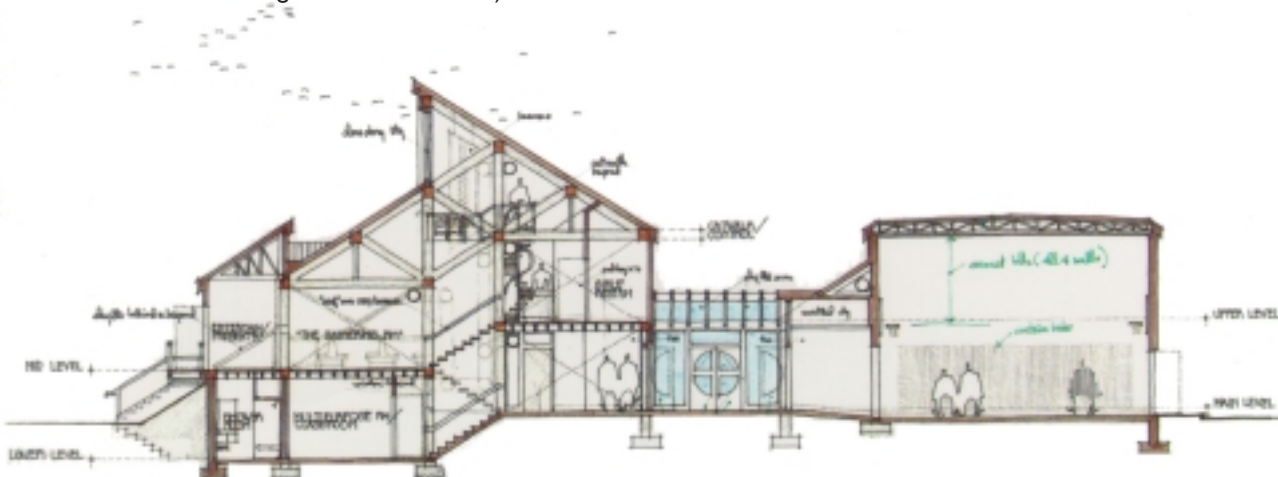
“I’m thrilled, as a senior citizen, to have been selected to work with the youth on their facility,” said Pete Lennox at the groundbreaking for “The Gathering Place” of First Christian Church in Sullivan. Pete was being a bit modest. Truth be known, the youth handpicked Pete after rejecting two other architects for their new ministry center.



Architect Pete Lennox with Gary Reid.

After interviewing two architectural firms, the building committee asked the youth for their opinion. “Well, you could hire either of those firms and it would be OK, but **we wouldn’t use the building.**” With that shocking revelation, the committee set out to find another architect. Gary Reid, a member of the committee, remembered the positive experiences he had had with architect Pete Lennox, and called Pete to ask if he would “come out of retirement” to design the facility. Little did he know that Pete’s idea of retirement is working 30-40 hours a week in association with **Architectural Alliance**.

Senior citizen Pete quickly became friends with the youth of the church, and developed a design based on sketches that youth member Aaron Reid had drawn. The resulting design is groundbreaking, indeed. Youth Minister Jerry Dusenberry considers it to be **a model for the 21st century church**. (Based on some of Dr. Sweet’s writings on architecture.)



The building is designed not to house youth classrooms, but to serve as a “Gathering Place” where the youth can bring friends who are not involved in the church’s youth program. To put it bluntly, it’s designed to be a hangout. With two snack bars, multiple levels of balconies, video projection equipment, and a small game court, the heavy timber structure is as dynamic as the youth program itself. That’s just what the folks at First Christian Church were looking for.

It remains to be seen just how well this ancient-future building will serve its community. However, with an ancient, time-honored construction method and the wisdom of an elder designer, the youth have a strong foundation on which to build the future of their ministry.

Oh, and one more thing: budding designer Aaron Reid, whose ideas are the basis for the finished design, has now decided to pursue a career in architecture.



Representatives of Architectural Alliance, First Christian Church, and Graber Agribuilders at the groundbreaking ceremony. At far left is Aaron Reid, whose ideas were incorporated into the final design

