



Flower Arrangement in the Church

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Chapter I

GENERAL RULES OF CHURCH DECORATION

Adapting the Decoration to the Architecture and to the Church Service; Main Points of Accent

VERY Saturday members of altar guilds and church flower committees arrange flowers in thousands of churches all over the country. To judge from appearances, these flowers are usually placed in the church by a willing and devout but not always a talented arranger. Even in some of our largest churches, flowers are allowed to cover significant carving and even partly cover the cross, and in addition are not only "stuffed" in vases, but also are often allowed to remain until they are wilted. There are suggestions in sacristan's guides and altar guild booklets as to the type and color of flowers to be used and certain restrictions as to their placement. However, there are no prescribed directions as to how the flowers are to be grouped and arranged. Surely the application of some of the basic rules of flower arrangement and of decorating generally can be adapted to church

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decoration and would improve the appearance of most churches considerably.

It is in the artistic and decorative use of flowers in the church that I am particularly interested in this book, and in most cases the proper decoration also obeys the rubrics. I would, further, like to see floral decoration restored to its proper place as an artistic accessory to the beauty of the church.

Since the beginnings of religion, flowers have played an important role and have been used as an expression of joy in all religions of the world. The Greeks and Romans placed garlands before statues of their gods and goddesses, and the Buddhist priests reverently placed the floral offerings in vases before the image of Buddha. Israel too, from the earliest times, worshiped God with floral offerings.

The Lord spake unto Moses (in Leviticus 23:40):
“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God....”

The Jewish *Magen Abraham* says that it was customary to place trees in the synagogue. The custom of bearing palm branches and willows on Palm Sunday has continued down to the present day. Formerly on Saint Bartholomew's Day rushes were

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brought to service. And all through the Middle Ages and even down to the eighteenth century crowns and garlands were placed before statues of saints and on candlesticks. The pavements were strewn with flowers or sweet smelling herbs, and the choir and clergy carried garlands, chaplets, and even wore wreaths on their heads.

The following items were taken from the inventories of old English churches:

“For byrch at Midsomer.”

“For holly and ivy at Chrystmas.”

“Paid for korks, flowers, and yow.”

“Paid for brome ageynst Ester.”

“Paid for rose garlands on Corp Xti daye.”

“A dozen and half rose garlondes on S. Barnabas.”

“Three dozen garlands for choir.”

Such decorations must have been beautiful and impressive. When we see some of our beautiful cathedrals decorated for Easter and Christmas we wonder why the beauty of flowers and trees cannot always be equally considered along with music, stained glass windows, painting, and sculpture. Surely flowers, properly used, can add to the impressiveness and beauty of the occasion. Von Odgen Vogt in his interesting book, *Art and Religion*, says, “The art of worship is a combination of all the

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arts. . . . The experience of faith and the experience of beauty are in some measure identical."

How then are we to plan our church decorations so that they become a part of our worship? First of all, the decorations should harmonize with the architecture of the church. Decorations should never cover or break the architectural lines, but should be consistent in spirit, line, and scale with the architecture of the building. In a Gothic church with tall vertical arches, decorations that tend toward the vertical will be consistent, while churches with curving arches could better be decorated with garlands or rounded masses of flowers or foliage.

In spirit, church decorations should be dignified and impressive. They should express the mood of not only the architecture but also the particular service. This effect is aided by the use of symbolism in the flowers and in the colors used in connection with some church services.

The chapel at United States Naval Academy at Annapolis affords a striking example for harmony of floral decorations and architecture. The classic white architecture, gold organ pipes, and blue and gold stained glass window above the altar may be enhanced and made dramatic by the use of gold or white flowers at the altar. These flowers should be massed in oval arrangement to harmonize with

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the curve of the arched window, and also to complement the formality of the church service.

The effectiveness of church decoration does not depend on a profusion of expensive flowers, but it does depend upon the use of the right flowers, decoratively speaking, and upon the carrying power of those flowers. The most impressive church decoration I recall was a floor-to-ceiling massing of Madonna lilies against the gold carved reredos of a Mexican cathedral at Easter. Although too lavish and primitive for most of us to attempt, it illustrated certain features adaptable to our church decoration today. For one thing, it had real drama and carrying power; it was as effective seen from the very back of the church as from the front. In the second place, it enhanced the beauty of the edifice and therefore the beauty of the service; the hundreds of lilies with their uplifted heads expressed the joy and exultation of Eastertide.

Church decoration should have a unity of plan and all parts should harmonize. No matter what your scheme of decoration is, the eye should be led to the altar where the service is taking place. Therefore, the climax or focus of the decoration should be placed at the altar. The most successful decorator sees his scheme as a whole and brings his decorative

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climax to the front, or eastern, end of the church just as a playwright places his climax in the last act. Attention should be led from the nave of the church to the chancel, and from the chancel to the sanctuary and finally to the altar.

The main points of accent in church decoration are: the entrance to the chancel, the entrance to the sanctuary, the sides of the altar, and, finally, the very cross itself. The pulpit and the lectern may also be decorated—and the top of the rood beam, if there is one. For a great feast, such as Easter, the arches and pillars, as well as the choir stalls and the center church aisle, may be decorated with discretion. As long as the decoration does not interfere with the service, you may bank the front of the chancel rail or the choir, but the organ pipes should be left undecorated. The organ pipes are ornamental in themselves. Moreover, any flowers or greenery may interfere with proper sound production of the organ. Whatever the ritual or service, the dignity of the eastern end of the church must not be destroyed by fussy decorations. There should be dignity and richness. This is best expressed in decorations by a formal, symmetrical plan that calls for pairs of vases and balanced arrangements.

Just as there are points of interest where decoration should be placed, there are also other places in

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the church where there should be no flowers or greenery. It is better to err on the side of simplicity than to over-decorate, and an ounce of restraint is worth more than all the flowers in a florist's shop. Church custom restricts the use of floral decoration to some extent. It does not allow the use of flowers on the altar table. The main reason for this is that the flowers would interfere with the performance of the priest's service. Flowers are not allowed on the tabernacle, or in front of the tabernacle door.

If there is a painting or triptych above the altar, the flower arrangement should not be so tall that it breaks into the subject matter of the picture. If, instead, there is a dossal curtain or mosaic or carving of a conventional design, the height of the flowers is determined by the size of the vases and candlesticks and the size of the altar itself, and becomes a matter of proportion and design rather than conformity with liturgical custom. Do not decorate the cross on the altar. Likewise with the altar rail, for flowers and greenery will interfere with the communicants as they kneel at the rail. The chancel or rood screen should not be decorated, as decorations cut off the view of the altar, although the top of the rood beam may be enriched with decoration.

Do not put jars of flowers or pots on the chancel steps or the sanctuary steps. Tall and handsome jars

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placed against the east wall on either side of the altar will give an even greater effect and will not interfere with the performance of the liturgy. Nor will there be any danger of an accident that might interfere with the service. Also, do not decorate the hand rail leading to the pulpit, nor the pulpit shelf itself, for the same reason. Never cross the main vertical or horizontal lines of the architecture, and never break the beauty of an arch with meaningless loops of greenery. When the pulpit, lectern, the pillars, or the choir stalls have decoration or carving, do not cover these with floral decorations since they are already decorated. For the same reason, fine stained glass windows should not be covered with greenery. Also, never fall into the bad taste of making flowers or greenery into crosses, stars, triangles, or other holy symbols. The foremost rule, of course, is to follow the structural lines of the church, and at all times to remember the function of the building and to make all decorations in harmony yet subordinate to the church service. These are general rules and your ability to follow them depends upon your artistic ability or your skill as a decorator and your knowledge of the church liturgy.

If the church which you are to decorate has a liturgical altar, your problem will be somewhat different than in a church with an altar which has

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one or more retables. The liturgical altar is free standing and, although it may have a shelf behind it, there is space between the altar and the shelf and the shelf itself is not any higher than the altar. Thus the rule of having no unbroken horizontal line higher than the altar is observed. Vases of flowers may be placed on this shelf back of the altar and extra candlesticks may also be placed here. Vases may also be placed in niches at the sides of the altar. Vases are never placed on the altar itself.

The non-liturgical altar is not free-standing. It also may have one or more retables which are usually graduated like steps behind the altar. Vases of flowers may be placed on these retables, but it is easy to err by using so many that one gets the effect of a stand in a florist shop. Since the retables are higher than the altar one must be careful to remember that the altar is the center of interest and that this rule must not be broken. There are many non-liturgical altars and they can be decorated correctly, but they do involve more of a problem than the liturgical altar.

Flowers Suitable for Church Decoration

AUTUMN	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER
White	White	White	White
aster chrysanthemum gladiolus dahlia	carnation rose cyclamen gardenia	tube rose tulip magnolia lilac snowball peony rhododendron ranunculus geranium hyacinth calla lily Madonna lily iris camellia	coxcomb amaryllis stock shasta daisy matillaja poppy (in California) double petunia hydrangea agapanthus viburnum zinnia snapdragon
Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
chrysanthemum gladiolus dahlia golden glow	carnation rose	tulip calla lily day lily daffodil iris ranunculus	coxcomb zinnia snapdragon
Red	Red	Red	Red
chrysanthemum gladiolus dahlia aster	carnation rose cyclamen poinsettia	tulip peony scabiosa geranium anemone ranunculus	coxcomb amaryllis zinnia snapdragon

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AUTUMN	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER
Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
		delphinium violet (in bunch)	cornflower (in bunch) hydrangea agapanthus
Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
dahlia chrysanthemum gladiolus	rose	day lily	zinnia amaryllis coxcomb tiger lily
Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink
chrysanthemum dahlia gladiolus aster	rose carnation tuberous be- gonia cyclamen	camellia peony tulip scabiosa rhododendron geranium hyacinth	zinnia amaryllis stock double petunia hydrangea rubrum lily snapdragon
Violet (Lavender Purple)	Violet (Lavender Purple)	Violet (Lavender Purple)	Violet (Lavender Purple)
chrysanthemum dahlia gladiolus		tulip scabiosa rhododendron geranium hyacinth ranunculus violet lilac	zinnia stock double petunia hydrangea

Chapter IX

DECORATING THE CHURCH FOR WEDDINGS

Suggestions for Decorative Schemes; Bride, Attendants, and Church Decorations; Flowers and Colors for Weddings

HE CHURCH is the mother of all drama and, therefore, a large church wedding should be planned and the scene as carefully staged as though it were a tableau. In arranging a tableau, the staging and costuming are planned as one harmonious unit, each adding to, and gaining from, the beauty of the other part. So in planning a wedding, the bride's dress and the dresses of her attendants should be chosen with the background and the whole setting of the wedding in mind. Thus, if the bride is a petite blonde and has chosen a bouffant dress with ruffles and frills, the mood of the dress will want to be echoed in the flowers from the wedding bouquet (which in this case might be lilies-of-the-valley and bouvardia or an old-fashioned nosegay set in lacy paper) to the flowers for the church altar. In contrast, a tall striking brunette might have a severe satin dress of medieval inspiration and carry calla lilies or arum

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lilies arranged in a stiff vertical bouquet. In this case, all the flowers of the church should echo this mood of the bride's clothes and flowers. Sheafs of arum lilies could be bound to the aisle pews, making the pathway for the bridal procession, and vertical bouquets of arum lilies together with a great abundance of green foliage could be arranged at the entrance to the chancel and at either side the sanctuary entrance and altar, with small vertical arrangements of arum lilies on the altar. In other words, the wedding decorations must be planned as a whole so that the wedding will give an impression of finesse which will enhance the beauty and dignity and solemnity of the occasion.

The decorations of the church should be the setting and background for the wedding, but they should never give the impression of a florist's shop. Decorations should always be planned with the architecture of the church in mind. If a garden effect is desired, and in order to get this effect it is necessary to cover the lines of the architecture, it would be better to have the wedding in a garden or, if a florist's shop effect is desired, better to rent the florist's shop—and probably less expensive!

If a wedding is to be in a church, surely the church should be recognizable. It is, however, to be hoped that the church chosen is beautiful in itself

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and, of course, if possible, it should be the bride's own parish. The best thing that the decorator can do is to enhance and enrich the architectural setting. Where then can we decorate and how set the stage for the wedding pageant? As at every church service, the attention needs to be focused at the altar for it is there that the actual wedding ceremony is performed. The pathway down the center should lead the attention to the eastern end, and the decorations should lead by rhythmic steps toward this center of interest. If the decorations on the pews are too elaborate they detract from the front of the church; also too elaborate or too large bouquets may interfere with the view or the passage of the wedding procession. However, decorations should be placed at the center, because such decorations decidedly add to the beauty of the wedding procession. The center may be roped with garlands of flowers or greenery. Standards may be fastened to the pew ends and these may hold bouquets of flowers tied with ribbons, or the posts might be topped with baskets of flowers or simply wreathed with flowers.

The next point of decorative emphasis should be the chancel entrance. Although a pair of vases filled with flowers would be sufficient for most church celebrations, for a wedding it is permissible to bank

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this point with flowers. However, I consider it more dramatic and therefore more fitting to have the floral emphasis nearer the main point of interest. The entrance to the sanctuary is the next place for decoration and here we finally have the immediate setting for the ceremony and so will want floral emphasis at both sides of this entrance and on both sides of the altar. If you are going to bank any flowers or greens, here is the place to do it. Tall pedestals may also be used to hold large flower arrangements and may be of wood or gilt or marble, as the architecture of the particular church may require. Florists can furnish these or, if you are doing your own decorating, you can rent pedestals.

For a wedding decoration to be really distinctive there should be not only a plan but an idea or theme must be back of the whole wedding scheme. One New York dress designer draws inspiration for all his wedding dresses from costumes of other ages. He selects the costume era to match the type of the bride he is designing for. If all wedding gowns were of such a definite period, it would be an easy task to work the plan and the decorations about such a wedding gown. For example, when the bride wears a satin gown of Medieval inspiration, the theme of the wedding could be worked out with

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wreaths and garlands. The bride and her attendants could wear wreaths of flowers on their heads. The wedding bouquets could be made into garlands and the main aisle or bridal pathway could be garlanded, while garlands of flowers could also decorate the chancel and sanctuary rails and all the candlesticks could wear wreaths of flowers. This theme would be effective if carried out in an all-white wedding with lilies made into wreaths and garlands, or gardenias might be used, or carnations, or the wreaths and garlands could be made of various tones of one color or of several colors. Heather and pink roses make effective garlands or, if you live where hibiscus grows, you might string them as the Hawaiians do their leis.

If you want your wedding to have decorative distinction, the question of color must be given careful consideration. Perhaps the all-white wedding is the most effective and yet the easiest to plan. If, however, you prefer color, the best effect can be gained from a monochromatic color scheme, on the different values from dark to light of one color. For a perfect monochromatic color sequence, start with the white for the bride and repeat this in the background of the church decorations; then the attendants may be dressed in different shades of one

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color, such as pale pink to deep rose with flowers of accenting values of the same hue also. Or the bride could wear creamy white and the color sequence could go from that into yellow orange, red orange, and even red—of course in grayed intensity.

Many weddings have been planned on rainbow color schemes, but the idea sounds better than it actually is, for so many different colors split the color effect, and the wedding as a whole does not have the satisfying decorative unity of a wedding where the plan calls for fewer colors.

Branches of blossom trees or dogwood, pink or white, make effective decoration for spring weddings. The blossoms give an effect of lightness and the out-of-doors and for this reason seem suitable with such materials as organdy, net, or chiffon for the bride and her wedding attendants. The branches can be cut tall enough to make archways for the wedding party and could even form an archway over the altar. For accent such flowers as tulips in white, pink, or yellow could be used for attendants, and in vases together with dogwood or daffodils for a yellow-and-white color scheme.

In seventeenth century England, the churches, as well as the streets and houses, were decorated on

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May Day. The description that Edmund Spenser gives of church decoration is interesting and offers a suggestion which could be carried out for a wedding if not for the ordinary church service:

Youths now flock in everywhere
To gather May baskets and smelling briar
And home they hasten the posts to digt,
And all the church pillars ere daylight.

To be sure, plenty of florists' baskets have been used to decorate the churches. However, they are all somewhat in bad taste. If really good looking baskets can be found, they would be attractive if tied to the ends of center aisle pews. Then you could use large baskets of similar design at the front of the church; and the attendants, even including the bride, could carry baskets of flowers. Colored horsehair hats or straw hats may be tied with ribbons and filled with long sprays of flowers to serve as baskets.

In planning decorations for a wedding, always remember that the wedding should be gay yet dignified and simple. Although I have suggested pageant methods, these should always be done with finesse, and the effects should be subtle and unstudied. The most exquisite and impressive decorations are often the simplest. In a little country

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church I once saw wedding decorations which consisted solely of garlands of oak leaves and pine with white lilies on the altar. The bride and her attendants wore white and each carried a single spray of Madonna lilies.