

# Church puts emphasis on buildings

by Faith Gray

When the word "church" is mentioned, one tends to think of elegantly-built and decorated structures, massive in size, almost overwhelming the senses.

They are buildings filled with art, precious symbols of fidelity and faith.

Richard Caemmerer Jr. thinks too much attention is given to the actual houses of worship, rather than to the worship that goes on within.

Caemmerer is actively involved in the creation of religious art and in church design. He spent 22 years as an art professor at Valparaso University in Indiana, during which time he produced sacred art for various churches worldwide.

He is also the founder of Grunewald Guild, an art establishment in Washington state, USA.

Caemmerer just finished a series of lectures at the U of A entitled "Art, Faith, and Foolishness: Creativity and the Christian Life."

The lectures consisted of slide presentations with corresponding discussion and anecdotes by Caemmerer. The slides depicted altars, baptismal fonts, stained glass designs, external church structure, and several other forms of religious art.

An enthusiastic gathering of about 50 people were very receptive to Caemmerer's engaging discussion on Feb. 10.

The main theme of that lecture (entitled "Sacred Art in a Secular Society") was the overemphasis placed on art in churches rather than on the worship itself.

Caemmerer remarked, "For most of us the focus of worship is not on the action of the people, but on the stuff hanging on walls."

He said the major preoccupation in creating the house of God was in building a facility worthy of God.

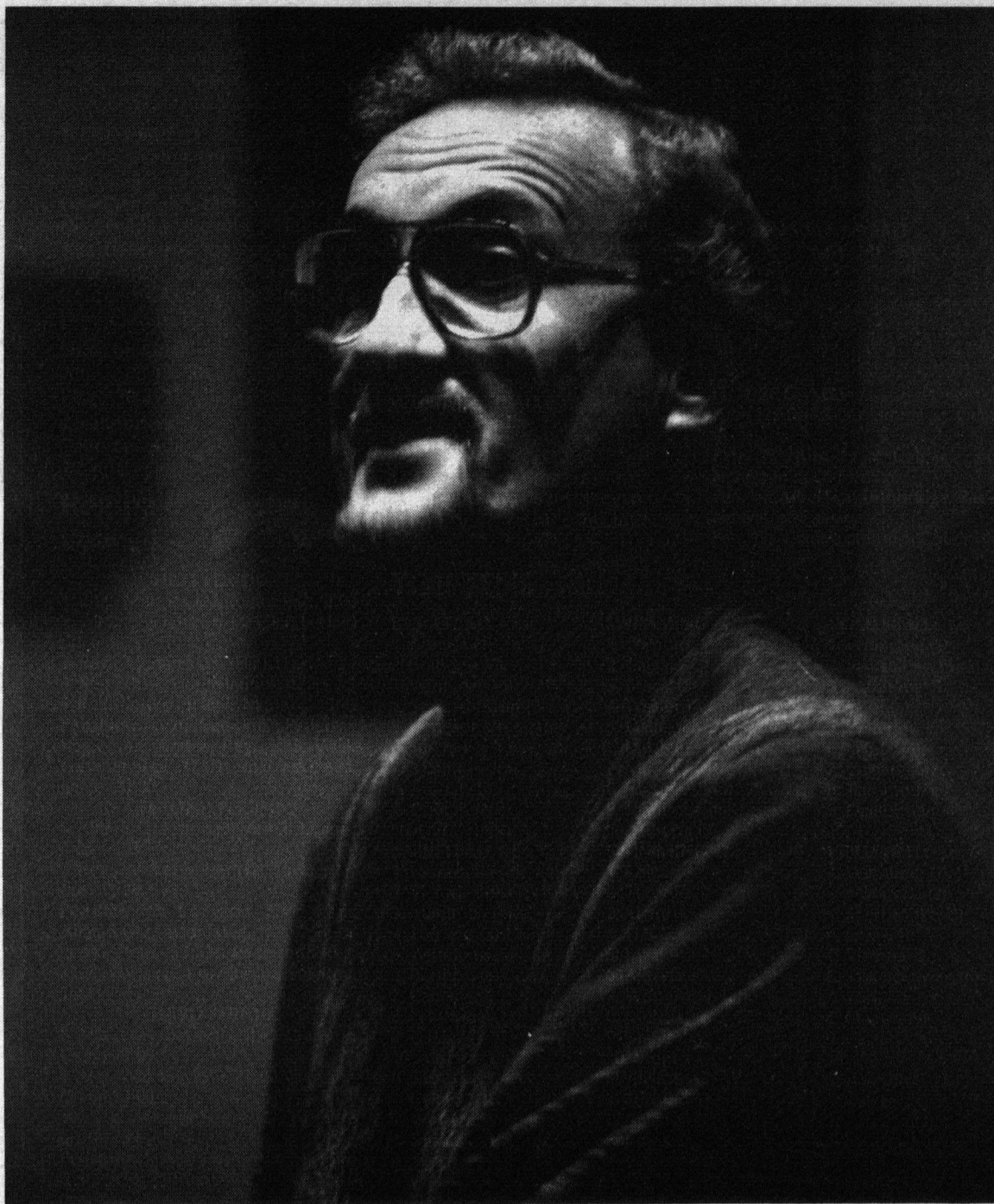
He added that our attention is slowly being shifted to the "house of God's people".

"The facility servants the liturgy" and not vice versa, he said.

Unfortunately, art can be a part of idolatry. Many churches throw a lot of funds into the decor of the church and forget about the community works.

"In the process of implementing change, we forget that it is a people thing," said Caemmerer.

He implied that too much label-



Richard Caemmerer spoke this week at St. Joe's chapel

photo by Ron Checora

ling occurs in the house of worship. "We create spaces and then assign to these spaces certain hierarchies," he said.

For example, most pulpits seem to be hiding the Bible rather than displaying it. Caemmerer recalled that after he had designed a rather low-lying pulpit, one minister asked him "What if I have to scratch?" That, said Caemmerer, is when he

realized what pulpits were really for!

Caemmerer found that there is still too much excess in religious art. Architects seem to want the building to be served rather than to serve.

Even when the design is simple and elementary, "the starkness of it calls attention to itself," he continued.

For example, "Our Lady of the Hymnboard" is his pet name for one church sanctuary which has a single, prominent hymnboard hanging on its center wall.

To one slide depicting a very brightly lit and coloured altar, he pronounced, "It looks like hell!" During the ensuing laughter of the audience Caemmerer said it would seem appropriate to bring marsh-

mellows on sticks to such a church.

He explained further that "it's distracting from the reason we're there, which is God's business and uplifting ourselves."

Caemmerer felt that society today is dismal and the "art reflects that mind set." The attitude is "people for themselves" and our art is characterized by hedonism and excess, he said. Excess in art is bad, he explained, because then art lacks "craft, which is the sense of finely-made stuff."

To the future of art and religion, Caemmerer focuses on the people of the church, and how they can be put to work in the business of the church.

He says that "your reasonable sacrifice" is not necessarily money. It is your legitimate sign of yourself; it is who you are as students, teachers, etc.

While working as an art professor in Indiana, Caemmerer said he became disturbed by the expression and teaching of art. This led him, in 1980, to establish his own art foundation, Grunewald Guild.

Grunewald Guild is located in the Cascade Mountains of Washington, USA. Caemmerer described it as "a school and retreat devoted to the practice of all the relationships between art and faith."

Grunewald Guild is a small, private school averaging 25-50 students and 25 staff and faculty.


Caemmerer is excited about the growth of the school which concentrates on teaching, practicing, and researching art.

One important project Caemmerer is working on at the Guild involves trying to get the names and images of artists and their art representing primarily the third and fourth worlds.

He categorized such artists as Latin Americans, blacks, native Americans, and street people. He said that the images initially taken to the third and fourth worlds were first world images and had no relevance to the people there.


Caemmerer wants to introduce third and fourth world images into the first world and "evangelize the church with these images."


When asked how his field may be relevant to a wide range of students, Caemmerer remarked that throughout history, the social, economic, political, and religious views of a society are readily observed in the art of that time period. Probably of more relevance to students, he added with a smile, is the fact that he is the designer of the Budweiser beer label.



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