

Saint Paul Lutheran Church, 1959/1969, by Victor Lundy, FAIA

The church was established as a mission in 1955 in the midst of Sarasota's postwar boom. The mission grew rapidly, outgrowing its rented worship space at the Civic Center on North Tamiami Trail, and purchased land in 1957 for a new sanctuary east of the Tamiami Trail. Nearby, young families were flocking to newly built homes. Architect Victor Lundy was engaged in October of that year, and the planning began. The \$80,000 building, built in just eight months by contractor T.T. Watson Inc., opened in August 1959 under the leadership of Pastor Leroy Trexler. The mission became a church in 1961.

Lundy (b. 1923, Brooklyn, N.Y.) was establishing his reputation as a leading Sarasota architect who had a flair for artistic designs



that were “more roof than walls.” Lundy did a number of churches in the Sarasota area, including Bee Ridge Presbyterian, which featured a large, soaring roof and a façade punctuated with walls of offset bricks.

Lundy used walls of sliding glass – they still can be opened – and glued, laminated pine structural members that serve as both posts and beams. They are connected like outriggers to stone-clad anchors, creating covered, open-air patios that were used

to seat the larger congregations of the winter season by simply opening the sliders.

Lundy said God could be found in the heights of the ceiling, while the people were represented by the structure's broad base.

The church building and its architect were featured in the state and national press, including *Architectural Forum* in December 1959. An article titled "Lundy's personal architecture" boosted his reputation as one of America's most creative and artistic designers. Celebrating "lone wolf" Lundy's ever-present passion for curvaceous architecture over the strict functionalism of modernism's International Style, the author wrote, "Lundy never had to break out of the box; he was never in it."



In 1960, Lundy's St. Paul design won an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects.

He would later reflect on the challenges each church posed. His designs were soaring, but his clients' budgets were grounded in reality.

"Every one of these little things was agonized into existence," Lundy told the *Herald-Tribune* in 2001. "The budgets were so small. If I erred, it was trying to do too much with limited means and situations. But then when they were done, I expected them to be honored as an art piece. You

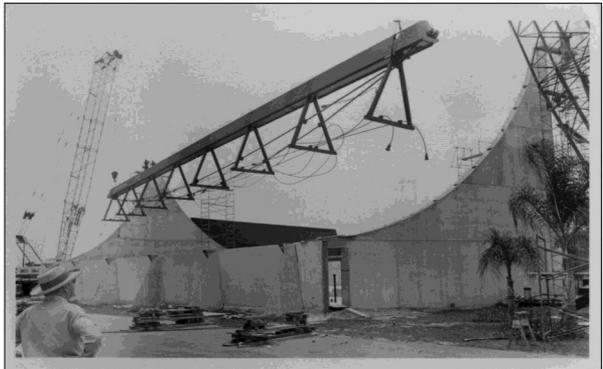
don't tamper with a painting, and I expected people to respect that."

Lundy's original plan included a larger sanctuary that would be built when the funds were available, at which time the 1959 structure would become the Fellowship Hall. "When there are new needs, you build another building, but you leave the original piece," Lundy said in 2001.

In 1962, the church built the complementary Sunday School building. It also has a soaring roof with Glulam beams. In fact, at a time when roofs were flat and hidden, Lundy exposed and amplified them. "There is nothing contrived about my architecture," he told TIME magazine in 1959. "It is bold and naked. If it doesn't succeed, then everybody knows about it."

By 1966, St. Paul Lutheran was ready to build the third building of its complex, signing a contract with Lundy on June 7. But rather than using walls of glass, this building, which opened in 1969, would have roughly the same dimensions as the

Fellowship Hall, and the same soaring roof. But the walls would be of unfinished concrete, as modernism



had yielded to Brutalism (from the French *beton brut*, or raw concrete). And instead of Glulam beams, the roof would be supported by cables hung from a 140-foot beam at the peak of the roof and anchored in the exterior buttresses on each side of the structure. The original plan called for the two main

buildings to face each other on the same east-west access with a courtyard between. Instead, the structures were built at right angles.

Lundy went on to become design director for HKS Architects of Houston. He led the design team for the GTE World Headquarters. His greatest architectural achievement is considered to be his U.S. Tax Court Building in Washington, D.C.

The “artist architect,” as the Herald-Tribune described him, spends much of his time painting and drawing. “All my life, I have drawn,” he said. “Architecture has been my art form.”

“He is of a generation of architects who are trained in the two camps (Beaux-Arts and Bauhaus) and he shows the skill set of both – clarity of structure, clarity of form, with this incredible drawing and rendering skill,” said University of Houston professor Donna Kacmar, who is editing a book about Lundy. “His ability to draw and have clear ideas about form and structure, and materiality and the technical aspects of architecture, are united because he was educated in both systems.”

-- Harold Bubil. Photos: St. Paul archives (1 and 2); Harold Bubil (3)



Thank you for visiting our campus of Victor Lundy designed buildings.

We do accept any free will donations of appreciation to help maintain this heritage.

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Architectural Ministry
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www.StPaulSarasota.org

God bless your day!
You are welcome in worship on Sunday
at 9:30 am