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Contact: Mary Larkin, Communications Director

larkin@aia-mn.org, (612) 338-6763

AIA Minnesota Announces 2015 25 Year Award Recipient The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville



Photo credit: Dana Wheelock

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA AIA Minnesota is proud to announce that **The Episcopal House of Prayer**, designed by Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc., is the recipient of the **2015 AIA Minnesota 25 Year Award**. Project team members from Cuningham Group include: John W. Cuningham, FAIA, Pete LeGeros, AIA, and Jeff Trappold.

Established by the American Institute of Architects Minnesota in 1981, the prestigious 25 Year Award annually recognizes one exemplary architectural project that has withstood the test of time. Recipients must be completed building projects, either individual buildings or groups of buildings, completed at least 25 but not more than 50 years ago, designed by firms with architects registered and practicing professionally in Minnesota.

The House of Prayer came into being during a time of ecumenical energy and openness between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, especially within the community of Saint John's Abbey. While the spiritual concept for the House of Prayer developed over a ten-year period, its physical form finally took shape and was built in 1990 on five wooded acres on the grounds of Saint John's Abbey and University—a collaborative effort between the Episcopal Church in Minnesota and Saint John's Abbey.

All materials for the project are natural to Minnesota and in some cases, such as the stone, come directly from the surrounding area. Granite from nearby quarries was used for the construction of walls and floors throughout the building. The building is completely accessible.

The original desire was to provide a center for up to 100 people who could participate in individual and group guided meditation. The main components had to be large enough where all those present could gather together while still providing the necessary environment for solitude and personal meditation. The owner asked that the facility represent liturgical themes in the most symbolic and yet restrained way. It was eventually determined that a maximum of 24 participants was more desirable than the original concept.

The main program elements for the House are elegantly simple and as built 25 years ago: nine single and four double bedrooms; kitchen and dining room; a great room for gathering; a library and meeting space; and The Bishop Anderson Prayer Room offering a silent space for reflection and prayer.

The building exterior is as restrained and reserved on the approach side as it is accessible and open to the woods on the private side. Inside, group areas flow into one another to promote a feeling of sociability and community. The gathering area at the entrance is the primary social and worship center and is the heart of the building. The sleeping wing extends into the woods and is the primary solitary area. It is acoustically and symbolically separated from the gathering areas. The peaked dormers in each room run all the way through the building and bathe the rooms in warm sunlight at dawn and dusk each day in addition to providing the hallway with natural light. The meditation room at the end of the sleeping wing opens on three sides to the natural beauty of the site.

The AIA Minnesota 25 Year Award jury was comprised of architectural experts from Minnesota, including: **Charles D. Liddy, FAIA**, Miller Dunwiddie Architecture; **Mamie M. Harvey, AIA**, Alliance; and **Ozayr Saloojee**, Associate Professor, School of Architecture - College of Design, University of Minnesota.

Some of the jury comments were:

“The building has been well maintained and has remained intact to its original design intent. A testament to its original strength of purpose.”

“Feels decidedly of place.”

“Love the idea that they went back to the original plan. The architects understood what the owners wanted.”

Project principal consultants include: Meyer Borgman and Johnson, Inc. – Structural Engineer; Construction Concepts – General Contractor; and Design Build – Mechanical.

More information regarding AIA Minnesota’s 25 Year Award may be found at [http://www.aia-mn.org/get-involved/aia-minnesota-awards/25 Year-award/](http://www.aia-mn.org/get-involved/aia-minnesota-awards/25-Year-award/)

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