



Physical Symbol, Spiritual Reality

A Guide to St. George's Episcopal Church

By Jeffrey T. Gross

Welcome to St. George's. We have been blessed with a beautiful environment to help us grow into the complete human beings ("saints" in the old sense) God intends us to become. The church is both a symbol and means. In the case of St. George's these symbols are drawn from the Bible, tradition, nature, and the spirits of the artists who created each element. The church not only reminds us of God's plan for us and for the Christian Community, it also provides the means to do so. A closer look at the physical plant will give some sense of what we see as central to growth in God.

St. George's is really two joined buildings. The first [the actual church] is the House of God. The second [parish hall, offices, classrooms] is the House of the People of God.

THE HOUSE OF GOD

As Episcopalians we put our central emphasis on the House of God. The expression "House of God" emphasizes that God is the host and that we come as God's guests to receive his blessing and nourishment. Our Orthodox and Roman brothers tend to see the architecture of the church as offering a human idea of the heavenly kingdom that awaits us all. Episcopalians, with our origins in England, tend to see that heavenly vision in somewhat more restrained terms. The church environment is designed to help us focus on God and his life-giving grace expressed through the sacraments.

The key to growth is LIGHT. Just as a tree needs light as the source of energy and naturally grows toward that light, so Christians need the grace of God. We tend to think of buildings in terms of walls, but Christian architects beginning in the late eleventh century have understood that light is the very key to the presence of God. First, there is direct light, in the case of St. George's the light shining from the great window at the altar end of the church. As the Easter Eve liturgy reminds us, both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are full of images of light associated with God and his care for his children.¹ The architect has clearly used the light of the great window to focus our attention

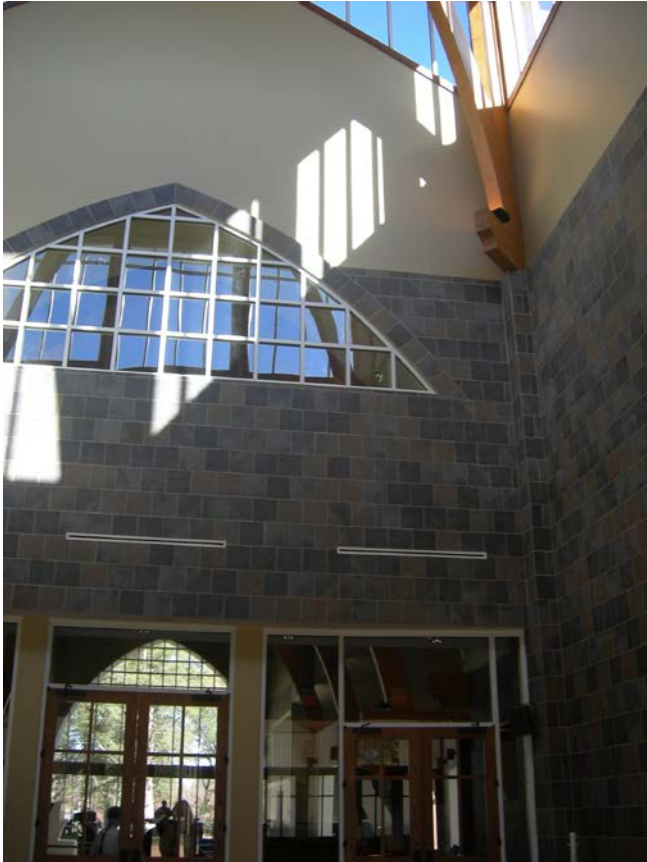


¹ The image of the burning bush and the pillar of fire in the desert and Christ as the light of the world are a couple of examples.

on God and his altar.

Second, there is indirect light that provides the ambience for the nave, the part where the congregation sits. Architects know that a major way to create a sense of mystery and reassurance at the same time is through indirect lighting. We are aware of light but not its source. In this case the architect has deliberately placed most of the windows for the nave well above the eye level of the congregation. The light is there, everything is clear, but we are aware mainly of the light from the great window.

Narthex



Journeys, physical and spiritual, must begin somewhere, and here the starting place is the narthex. The narthex, the gathering place just outside the church proper, is designed just for that as a place where people get together to visit and prepare for the service and where they meet after the service to greet one another and prepare to go forward to spread the light to others. We have deliberately made this space large and welcoming. The Church reminds us that spiritual journeys are communal, not just individual.

Entering the church proper, we are made aware that the focus is on God, His word, and Sacraments, and it is at this point that a second major element of architecture becomes apparent – a sense of verticality and space. The large volumes, especially the height, help to draw us away from our quotidian

concerns and remind us that we are in the presence of a reality greater than ourselves. Excessively large spaces can be overwhelming, and this is a parish church, not a cathedral. As such it is more about nurture than power. A parish church will not work if the congregation is not comfortable within its walls.

St. George's made the conscious choice to reflect the elements of a traditional English parish church in its architecture. We have employed a traditional floor plan with a nave for the congregation, a large altar area at one end of the church, along with the very high ceiling and vaulted trusses. We wish to create a comfort zone that keeps the focus on God and not on the confusions of a radical design in which the congregation feels threatened and disoriented. Modern life is threatening and disorienting enough, and if we are to hear and respond to God we must experience a level of calm and trust that reflects the life of the heavenly kingdom.

The wooden beams reinforce this traditional feeling and help create the ambience of light, verticality, and space. The pointed arch, by the way, was developed to allow for huge expanses of glass in Gothic churches (walls of glass with roofs of stone), but the pointed arch has become one of the defining elements of Christian architecture. It is, perhaps, the

single most important contribution of the Christian church to Western architecture.

Baptismal Font

On the right as we enter the nave is the baptismal font. In the early church baptisms took place in a separate building, the church itself being reserved for those who were already baptized. By the early twentieth century in the Episcopal Church, the sacrament of baptism had become largely a private affair, usually taking place outside the main services of the parish and attended primarily by family and friends. Now the Episcopal Church recognizes this sacrament as the action by which the individual becomes a member of the whole Catholic church and is welcomed into the whole community of the faithful. Baptisms usually take place during a major service and in the presence of the whole congregation. Some churches place the font in the middle of the central aisle just inside the door to the nave, thus emphasizing the movement from baptism to the altar of God.



The Aumbry

In ancient churches there was often a niche in the wall for storing items used in the liturgy. In some cases this niche or aumbry was used to hold the reserved sacrament but generally it held other items. At St. George's the aumbry is used to hold the chrism or anointing oil for the baptismal liturgy to sign the recipient as a member of Christ's church, another to anoint the sick, and a third to bless catechumens preparing to be baptized.



The Nave

The term nave has the same origin as "naval" and "navy" because the room with its curved beams looks like the inside of the bottom of a boat. In the floor along the side aisles are limestone inserts with Roman numerals. These indicate the Stations of the Cross, a devotion used particularly during Lent. There are fourteen stations and each indicates a moment in the final passion of Jesus. For instance, the first indicates the moment that Jesus was condemned to death and the fourteenth the moment when Jesus was laid in the tomb.



The Sanctuary

The sanctuary, more than any other part of the church, has been subject to the most radical changes with the liturgical reforms beginning in the 1930s. After a thousand years in which the sanctuary was seen as a place set aside from the rest of the church and reserved for the clergy, the sanctuary has become the gathering place for communion. The celebrant faces the congregation. The choir is positioned around the altar and not interposed as a barrier between the altar and the congregation. The celebrant now sits in the "president's" chair and presides over the liturgy, which is seen as the "works" of the whole

“Eucharistic assembly.”



The Altar

The most striking feature of the sanctuary is the altar, a spectacular work of art by Brian Russell, who also created the baptismal font and ambo (pulpit). Mr. Russell is fascinated by the transformative power of fire and water. The base of the altar suggests something of the turbulence of fiery creation, and the

table on top is ringed with blue-green cast glass. Inserted in the table is a small stone square, the mensa, which is the part of the altar actually consecrated by the bishop, and it refers back to the ancient tradition using tombs as altars. The altar remains the focus of the church, just as the Eucharist remains the focus of the liturgy.

The Tabernacle

With the renewed emphasis on the Eucharist as the central action of worship, there has been an increased tendency in the Episcopal church to provide a place in the church for reserving the sacrament so that it is available for home communion and other functions. The use of a cupboard, or aumbry, became fairly common, as it was in the old St. George’s, where it was identified by the presence of a sanctuary lamp above the door. Here St. George’s has created a tabernacle, a construction that gives more prominence to the reserved sacrament and provides another visible sign of the presence of God in the church. A particular feature of this tabernacle is that it is open and visible with glass walls and repeats within its structure the wooden beams of the narthex proper.

Ambo



The ambo (or lectern or pulpit) is the single most important feature of many Protestant churches. The Judeo-Christian tradition of worship has always emphasized listening to the word of God. The term “ambo” comes from a Greek work meaning elevated, and it was originally an elevated platform from which the gospel was read to the congregation. Eventually the tradition of having both a lectern (reading desk) and pulpit (from “pulpitum” for stage or platform) developed. St. George’s has now restored the ancient practice of a single elevated place from which to proclaim the word of God. Sermons are be closely linked to the Gospel for the day.

What then does the architecture of the House of God tell us worshipers? First, it tells us that we are the honored guests in this house, not the Host. We are clearly in a place set aside. We open ourselves to hearing and receiving God. We cannot hear properly if we

are always talking or always focusing on ourselves. Congregations of The Society of Friends (Quakers) traditionally sat quietly during their services until someone felt moved by the spirit of God to speak. Episcopalians use the *Book of Common Prayer* as a way of focusing on God and not just on our own concerns. Second, we are reminded that we are not just solitary individuals, but are part of the larger whole, the Catholic Church. “Common” in *Book of Common Prayer* means that which we all share in common. The architecture of St. George’s reminds us that we are part of the whole church, not just of this parish and this time. We are part of a church that embraces all the saints, past, present, and future; those who have died; and those who are yet to be born. The traditional architecture reminds us that we are part of a continuing tradition that has endured for two thousand years.

In the House of God we leave our burdens and we receive God’s blessing, encouragement, and nourishment. Our experience in the House of God prepares us for the House of the People of God.

THE HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The House of the People of God is the place where, strengthened by God, we carry on the work of the Church. To continue the metaphor of Light, we are not only nourished by the light of God, we Christians bring that light to each other and to the world at large. As Simeon said, we must be “a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.” Here in the House of the People of God we carry on the daily work of the church. It is here that we engage with all the complexities of daily life in this world. As the hymn says, “Not always on the Mount may we / Wrapped in the Heavenly Pleasure be.” The House of God offers us a vision of that pleasure, but we must also take that to our daily lives, and this second part of the parish building helps us do just that. This busy building helps us to help each other within the parish family and gives us resources with which to help others.

Just as St. Paul and the apostles emphasized the internal strength and support of the congregations they founded, St. George’s has a primary obligation to help its own members as they move along the path to salvation. On the obvious level there must be facilities for teaching and study for all the different groups that go together to form the Parish of St. George’s. Kids, teenagers, and adults each need their own spaces to grow. Just as the epistles are full of references to collecting money for other congregations, providing for the eucharistic meals, and settling disputes, the modern church must have an efficient office. St. Paul could dictate his letters (or make the occasional point by writing in his own hand), but we need the services of e-mail, the internet, and the photocopy machine.

The most important part, however, of tending to the needs of the members of the parish is symbolized in the parish hall. We must come together as an extended family. The mere fact of being heaped together at the same place and time, helps to remind us that we are indeed one family and that we share one another’s concerns. The wine and cheese reception [or more often cookies and coffee though not very Episcopalian], on the new patio after the Sunday Eucharist functions as a real part of what we must be about. Episcopalians have a reputation of looking after themselves, but we also have a responsibility to the wider community.

With God’s help we will receive light and nourishment and spread light and nourishment to others.

The Columbarium

A Special Place to Remember Souls Departed



St. George's has designated a space to recreate the Columbarium established at the Poplar Avenue church and move it to the new campus.

Urns and earth will be relocated in a patio fountain and garden on the eastern side of the church with an entrance just off the walkway from the Porte Cochere.

The design preserves a quiet and reflective space for its visitors.

List of Those Buried in the Columbarium

George Kelly Allison	<i>April 8, 2002</i>	Betty Mayes Matthews	<i>December 26, 1998</i>
Carl A. Boller, Jr.	<i>July 12, 2002</i>	Elaine Mayer	<i>April 16, 1998</i>
Virginia H. Boller	<i>July 17, 2001</i>	Richard Mosteller	<i>August 10, 1997</i>
Dean Campbell	<i>May 31, 1995</i>	Theodore Muir	<i>May 30, 2003</i>
Al Dunning	<i>September 4, 1995</i>	Josephine Reed	<i>May 4, 1996</i>
Daniel Dunning		Janet McLennan Robertson	<i>September 15, 2003</i>
Jean Campbell Fox	<i>February 20, 2006</i>	William Ross Robertson	<i>July 22, 1996</i>
B.B. Fox	<i>March 9, 2001</i>	Lloyd H Saunders	<i>November 23, 1997</i>
Sarah Emily Griffith	<i>December 10, 2002</i>	Lloyd (Rusty) Saunders, III	<i>April 24, 2002</i>
Virginia Valentine Haight	<i>December 6, 2002</i>	William J. von Lackum	<i>August 20, 1998</i>
Robert Haverty, Jr.	<i>October 6, 2000</i>	Virginia Elliott von Lackum	<i>October 16, 2007</i>
Barbara Ann Lyons Lee	<i>June 15, 1999</i>	Jane Marie Wied	<i>September 2, 2000</i>

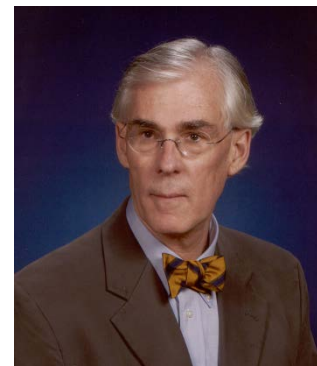


Designed for Change

An Interview with Architect Jim Williamson

By Kit Decker

In late June, 2007, I had the opportunity to sit down with our architect, James F. Williamson, FAIA, with Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects, to talk about the design and building of our new church. Jim, as he is known to our congregation, spoke freely and passionately about the design



and structure of the church. The following is presented in the Question and Response format in which we talked.

Q. What were your “sources” for the design of the building?

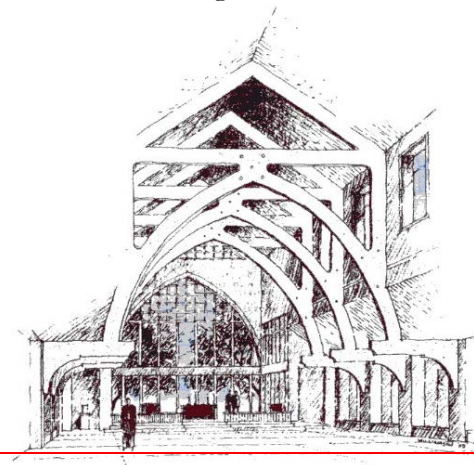
R. I had about five main sources: (1) The Program List of Requirements from the Building Committee; (2) the site, what it offered and it’s challenges, specifically the grove of old trees and the Great Oak and also the placement on the corner with two other churches in “Old Germantown;” (3) Episcopal church tradition, specifically English country/village churches; (4) the traditional architecture of the Mid-South, small town architecture; and (5) integrating concepts from other designs and finding new solutions.

The Program List of Requirements listed the functions and programs which must be accommodated by the new building, as well as some special design principals such as that the layout of the buildings would draw people in from Germantown Road, the beautiful hardwood trees and especially the large Oak tree would be preserved, natural light would be prominent, the design would have flexibility, and the building would look like an Episcopal church. Also of importance were specific improvements from the old church to include an acoustic system, individual room temperature control, a new organ, a larger narthex, gathering space at the back of the church, designated bookstore space, a nursery located next to the nave and parish hall, a state-of-the-art kitchen, improved preschool and office spaces.

The site was exciting and challenging. I wanted to preserve the grove of ancient cedars and use the building to focus attention on them. I think such a focus makes a theological statement of the relationship between humans and nature. I was concerned with how automobiles would enter the site but not ruin it. I looked for a middle ground between convenient accesses while not taking over the site, such as with a large lot.

I was concerned with the approach to the site; the challenge was “What do you first see? How do you know it’s St. George’s?” To create the public imagery for the church I spent a lot of time looking at pictures and architectural characteristics of old English country churches. A primary characteristic of those churches are no steeples; country churches have squarish bell towers that are massive, rooted in the ground. In England they are often built of stone and of wood in the U.S. That was the inspiration for the narthex tower which is siding and glass.

Another characteristic of English country churches is a manicured, green open space. The medieval name for this was the Garth and it was surrounded by walkway. That also helped communicate between theology and nature. It creates an outdoor room. I’ve designed an ambulatory which wraps around the outside of the buildings between the building and the Garth. It is 12 feet wide and a place for public gathering and conversation. In traditional English churches, this is the cloisters.



Arches are characteristic of English country churches, thus the nave is tall and lofty and the structure which holds it up is obvious to view. I’ve used red oak trusses. Natural light in traditional churches comes from clerestory windows (clear or stained glass). Catholic churches used lots of stained glass. The Protestant idea is to have clear glass/clear light flooding the church.

There is no historical precedent for the big window at the end of the nave. The idea for it grew out of seeing the grove. It faces north so sunlight will not shine directly into the nave as it would if facing south. I turned the nave slightly on the lot so the entrance end points toward the Old Oak Tree. If you stand in the narthex, the focus in both directions is on the natural world. The building is in perfect alignment with the Oak and the Cedar Grove.

Q. What do you mean by traditional Mid-South architecture?

R. I'm a native of Memphis and I remember Germantown from its early days. I've always loved the wood clapboard buildings (homes and churches) of Old Germantown. The church will not be wood, it is "hardy plank" a synthetic that duplicates the look of wood siding. It will be painted white. I also looked at the other two churches to ensure "fit" for the aesthetics of the corner. I believe a building should fit both the site and the larger community.

Q. You mentioned the acoustical design, what is special about it?

R. We wanted an acoustical environment that would support and enhance choral and organ music. The challenge is to balance human voice and music. We tried to create reverberation for music; the high ceilings and long/wide room will do that. We minimized sound absorption; the finishes of wood ceilings, floors, pews were chosen to be reflective of sound. For the spoken word, you need and will have a first-rate audio system custom-designed for the room. We got one of the best acoustical technicians to work with us on the design. There will be speakers on the wall to focus sound on the listeners. There will be built-in time delay so that you hear the same at front and back of the room.

Q. What features do you describe as non-traditional or unique?

R. It won't be immediately clear if the church is traditional or contemporary. Detailing is spare (contemporary) with wood trusses in a traditional shape, but with simple, spare lines (contemporary). Light fixtures are also modern and on an automated system that can be adjusted for the service. The large chandelier in the narthex is designed from red oak, same as the trusses. Candleholders on the walls between windows will be made of the same red oak material.

Q. Why red oak?

R. It is available, reasonably priced and a warm color.

Q. What are some of the other non-traditional/unique features?

R. The parish hall has a number of unique features. The room divider when opened disappears into panels on the side. A glass window at the top creates a feeling of open flow and light while muting sounds if the room divider is closed. There is a conversational alcove with a fireplace. The terrace and the view from it into the trees (Cedar Grove) are unique.

Episcopal church buildings need to speak to both tradition and the social cutting-edge positions of the Episcopal church. The interior will change over time. The altar rail is removable; you can open up that space for alternate forms of worship or for plays, concerts, or other functions. The church has been designed to be flexible throughout for multi-use with moveable walls, removable altar rail, lighting, and a mixture of permanent and moveable chairs/pews. You can experiment with other forms of worship by rearranging the

chairs that form the front rows. “I believe the church will continue to change and anything architecture can do to facilitate that change is good to do.”

Q. What is the architect's function vis-à-vis the congregation, general contractor and subcontractors?

R. The architect is the Captain of the Team. He has the overall vision and is responsible for ensuring that what others do is integrated into that vision. He/she delegates the work to specialists. David George, Chairman of the Building Construction and Steering Committees, has been spectacular to work with. We've become good friends.

Q. You say you have been primarily designing churches for the last 15-20 years. What is it that you like best about designing churches?

R. Congregations are concerned about beauty, creating sacred spaces; it is easier to work with them to create an architectural work of art than for commercial buildings where often the goal is to erect a facility of maximum size for minimum cost. Congregations have budgets and you must work within their budgets, but it is possible to do that and also create a beautiful worship space. St. George's had determined that the worship space was their priority, that they would make cuts in quality or quantity in other spaces to ensure quality and beauty in the narthex and nave which form the worship space.

St. George's Milestones

Seventy Years Since First Consecration

- January 15, 1924.....Diocesan Convention received the title to the Strickland lot on the NE corner of Germantown Road and Spring Street in Germantown
- August 1, 1934..... Application for mission status
- July 1934- March 1937.....St. George's congregation worships in the Germantown Masonic Lodge on Spring Street. directly across from the Strickland lot
- October 11, 1936..... Cornerstone laying of St. George's Episcopal Mission at Germantown
- March 28, 1937 (Easter)..... Consecration of church building by Bishop Maxon
- January 30, 1944..... St. George's Parish recognized by the Convention of The Diocese of Tennessee (The Diocese of West Tennessee was formed in 1982)
- 1946..... Rectory built site on south of the Masonic Lodge
- 1947..... A vestry room and two classrooms were added to the church structure
- June 11, 1953..... Title received to property between Poplar Avenue and Dogwood Road
- August 30, 1953..... First services in sanctuary on Poplar Avenue
- September 4, 1953..... Deconsecration of Church at the corner of Germantown Road and Spring Street
- June 23, 1959..... St. George's Day School chartered
- June 1964..... Rectory on Dogwood Rd. constructed
- October 26-28, 1972..... First Antiques Arcade
- February 18, 1979..... First services in new sanctuary on Poplar Avenue campus
- March 4, 1979..... Consecration of new Poplar Avenue sanctuary by Bishop Sanders
- April 10, 1981..... St. George's original church ("the Chapel") moved to Poplar Avenue campus
- April 23, 1982..... Chapel cornerstone laid
- June 15, 1983..... Consecration of Chapel by Bishop Dixon
- January 1988..... Gibson and McCarroll buildings constructed
- December 28, 1992..... Fire in Chapel
- December 22, 1995..... Dedication of Columbarium and Memorial Garden

November 14, 1999..... Dedication of Labyrinth
June 2004..... Poplar Ave. church campus sold to St. George's Independent School
April 23, 2006..... Groundbreaking for new church at 2425 South Germantown Road
October 12, 2006..... Contracts awarded, work begun on South Germantown Road site
November 25, 2007..... Deconsecration of church at Poplar Avenue
December 1, 2007..... Consecration of South.Germantown Road church by Bishop Johnson

Clergy Who Have Served St. George's Episcopal Church

Charles Weller , Archdeacon, 1934-1937	Susan K. Crawford , Associate, 1992-2003 (Interim Rector, 2002)
Sterling Tracy , Priest-in-Charge, 1937-1938	David A. Hall , Assisting, 1994-1998
Thomas P. Simpson , Priest-in-Charge, 1938	Paul Donald White, Jr. , Rector, 2003-2004
Harold Hoag , Priest-in-Charge, 1938-1940	George M. Klee , Associate, 2003-2004 (Assisting, 2001-2002)
Guy S. Usher , Rector, 1940-41	Robert H. Hansel , Interim, 2004
Charles Leonidas Widney , Rector, 1941-1952	Gary K. Sturni, D.Min. , Rector, 2006-2013 (Interim Rector, 2004-2006)
Thomas A. Roberts , Rector, 1952-1956 (Deacon-in-Charge until 1953)	Reynolds S. Cheney , Assisting, 2005-2006
Frank Mauldin McClain , Rector, 1957-1962	Lewis McKee , Assisting, 2005-2006
David E. Babin , Rector, 1962-1965	William S. Murray IV , Curate, 2006-2007
Robert Cherry , Rector, 1965-1967	Jerry Crook , Assisting, 2006-2014
Sidney G. Ellis , Rector, 1967-1971	Louis H. Hayden , Assisting, 2009-2015
Chester Allen Cooke , Rector, 1971-1986	James Marquis , Assisting, 2012-2015
James W. Cubine , Assisting, 1982-1983 (Deacon-in-Training, 1981)	Dorothy S. Wells , Rector, 2013-present
Mark K. Wilson , Associate, 1985-1986 (Assisting, 1984)	Noble R. Walker , Assisting, 2013-2017 (Interim 2013)
Peter W. Hawes , Rector, 1987-2001	Marion Chandler Whitman , Curate, 2015-2016
George Gibson , Associate, 1987-1988 (Consultant, 1978-1986; 1988-1991)	David M. Carletta , Associate, 2017-2018
John W. Rafter, Jr. , Associate, 1988-1989 (Assistant, 1988)	Noah Campbell , Associate, 2018-present
Raymond L. Blakley , Assisting, 1989-1991)	