St. Anna Marie's Convent: Wichita, Kansas

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Located on a picturesque site on the secluded northern shore of Cheney Lake, St. Anna Marie’s serves as the Mother House Convent for the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. After the existing St. Louis facility was destroyed by fire and because of its diminishing numbers, the congregation elected to merge with its sister convent in Wichita, Kansas. In order to accommodate the increase in the Wichita congregation the Sisters have decided to build a new convent.

Orientation is also a strong symbolic ordering principle in the convent design. The entire complex is oriented lengthwise from east to west. The baptismal, positioned in the east, represents the birth of the complex and is bathed in the light of the rising sun. The cemetery, positioned in the west and terminating the convent, lies in the long shadows of the setting sun. This use of natural light is symbolic of God as it enhances the gathering places of the sisters. The east-west alignment is also appropriate for the convent’s facade development. To the west the traditionally designed church represents the completion of the traditional era, while the contemporary chapel in the east, signifies the dawn of the new beginning. Thus, the Convent’s facades are representative of the gradual changes in today’s Catholic Church since the Vatican II.

The complex is arranged around three exterior courts which diminish in formality as they become more private. The major rooms between the outdoor spaces, the refectory and the library, form transitional thresholds to more private areas of the Convent. These thresholds indicate the important layering of the privacy gradient and provide a clear ordering element for the complex design.

The design of St. Anna Marie’s Convent provided a challenge in the complex planning of everyday spaces such as the refectory, infirmary, and living units. The incorporation of symbolism as an underlying theme throughout the convent design further emphasized the experiential and spiritual qualities of these spaces.
Plan and section.

North elevation.

Site section.