

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

SACRED, NOT STUFFY

Seeing the new St. George's Episcopal Church reaching toward heaven makes longtime member Lee Winchester think of lemons. "The Lord took lemons and squeezed it into lemonade for us," he said, recalling the bitter feud that caused the church and St. George's Independent School to split in 2004. At 83, he admitted, "It's hard to face change, but now that it's done -- it's hard not to get caught up in the enthusiasm."

Visitors to the \$11 million, 8-acre work site at 2425 S. Germantown Road can catch a glimpse of how ideas from the church's 500 members are being translated into reality: The white clapboard-sided church features a row of 40-foot-tall arched Southern pine trusses that frame the altar area and offer a view of aging cedars and oaks.

On the south side, an archway captures the majesty of a nearby 150-year-old oak.

"One of our greatest priorities was to preserve those trees. That was a challenge," said architect James F. Williamson, who designed the church. He combined the traditions of English Anglican architecture with turn-of-the-20th-century designs of St. George's neighboring churches.

He added white clapboarding to mirror the siding used at Germantown Presbyterian located across the street. With both Germantown Methodist and Germantown Presbyterian sharing space nearby, he said, "We wanted to be compatible and create a sense of community."



Matthew Craig/The Commercial Appeal

Ramos Eliodoro (left) and Daniel Chavez ride a lift Wednesday to their workplace -- the laminated southern pine trusses in the sanctuary of the new St. George's Episcopal Church on Germantown Road. The pieces were fabricated in Virginia and soar to 50 feet at the ridge. The project is set to be complete in November.

Visitors should not expect to see stained glass. Clear windows near the vaulted ceilings frame the natural beauty outdoors. "An experience of the sacred or God cannot be forced onto you by architecture, but it can encourage it," Williamson said.

Sacred doesn't have to be stuffy. Williamson added a whimsical element taken from Notre Dame in Paris. "When water comes down the roof, it'll come shooting out of sheet-metal gargoyles," Williamson said.

His overall design aim -- a restful and meditative space.

"It is peaceful," said building construction superintendent Larry Pillow with Grinder, Taber and Grinder Inc.

Workers expect to finish by Nov. 1. The Rev. Gary K. Sturni said church leaders plan the consecration Nov. 3.