

# FATHS FORM

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## CONTENTS

### Amazing Grace

By Julio Bermudez.....8

### A Lost Baptismal Font

By Alan Oakes.....14

### 360 Degrees of Inspiration

Text and Photographs by Thomas Schiff.....17

### Facing the Fault Lines

By Kurt Schindler, AIA.....25



**ON THE COVER:** A panoramic view of the interior of Antoni Gaudí's Church of Colònia Güell, outside of Barcelona, one of many panoramic images of sacred places created by photographer Thomas Schiff (article begins on page 17).

## DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Page.....	6
Notes & Comments .....	32
Artist/Artisan Directory .....	34
Architects Directory.....	36
Just One More Thing .....	37

## INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Botti Studio of Architectural Arts, Inc.....	13	R. Geissler Inc.....	37
Faith & Form/IFRAA Awards Program .....	3	Rip Caswell Studios .....	7
Faith & Form Subscription Form.....	31	Rohlf's Stained & Leaded Glass Inc. ....	16
J. Sussman, Inc. ....	16	Rohn & Associates Design .....	back cover
Marianna Thomas Architects .....	16	The Verdin Company.....	37
McMow Art Glass, Inc. ....	13	Willet Hauser Architectural Glass .....	4
Rambusch.....	6	Yale Institute of Sacred Music.....	15

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**NEXT ISSUE:**  
Shared sacred space,  
non-denominational  
space, and the  
challenge of  
ecumenical design.



# GREENHOUSE THEOLOGY

EDITOR'S PAGE \* MICHAEL J. CROSBIE




**G**LOBAL WARMING IS AFFECTING OUR economy, our health, and...our religious beliefs. That is the conclusion of the Lutheran World Federation, which recently published a summary of surveys of people around the globe who reflected on what global warming means to people of faith. As the authors of *God, Creation and Climate Change* note in its preface, "... climate change is more than just a secular environmental issue; it is an urgent challenge that goes to the core of our faith and spirituality and how this is reflected in the ways we view the world and in what we do. Climate change is moving us to reconsider and revise what we have previously assumed or believed. In that sense, it is changing theology—how we have thought about God and the rest of creation, especially in the modern era."

The summary posits that we have inherited certain assumptions about God and our relationship with God that contribute to the destruction of the environment. Certain beliefs (such as man's domination of the earth; that God acts primarily through history and not also in and through nature; that as agents of God we can use or exert power over the rest of creation) make it easier for us to proceed unfettered in the world, with little concern about how our actions are fueling environmental degradation.

Contrast this with different notions of God. Theologian Sallie McFague, note the authors, refers to God as "the inspirited body of the whole universe, creating, guiding and saving all that is. Rather than assuming God to be like a will or an intellect ordering and controlling the world, God is the breath that enlivens and energizes the living,

breathing planet." For Lutheran ecological theologian Joseph Sittler, rather than apart from God, "nature" comes from God and is capable of bearing God's glory. The conceptual difference here is the power of relationships. It is a view of the interconnectedness of all creation with God, who is not a distant, supreme being controlling the world.

Is this evolving theology another way of seeing God? Or is it a change in the way we perceive ourselves? The authors detect a shift in our relationship with the world in response to the ecological crisis. What would a new theology look like? The authors suggest a move from human independence to interdependence with the rest of creation; a shift from technological control to respect for, care for, and balanced use of creation and its resources through appropriate technologies; less of a Christocentric focus on the redemption of human beings, and more of a Trinitarian approach that appreciates creation, the spirit, and the inter-relationships throughout the cosmos, with all of creation as the scope of redemption; sin not just as a broken relationship between humans and God, but more as a break in our relationship with creation; less faith in technological or market-based "fixes," and more attention to the healing of creation; a move from our obsession with progress and development as measured in economic terms, and greater attention on what will result in more sustainable life for all of creation.

A theology based on such new assumptions could lead us to a new relationship with creation, God, and what we, ourselves, design and make. Might architects and artists of the sacred be the leaders in a new praxis of sustainable human creation? 

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *FAITH & FORM* AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT [MCROSBIE@FAITHANDFORM.COM](mailto:MCROSBIE@FAITHANDFORM.COM)

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# AMAZING GRACE

New Research into “Extraordinary Architectural Experiences” Reveals the Central Role of Sacred Places



Photo: © Cindy A. Paolucci/ uarunsacred-land-photography.com

BY JULIO BERMUDEZ



MOST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE of the relation of architecture to spirituality addresses the “objective” conditions of sacred buildings: their material, spatial, functional, and other empirical attributes. Long ago we discovered that, if well designed, architecture could evoke the sublime. It is precisely because churches, synagogues, mosques, and monuments can influence consciousness that we build them. And, because objective conditions are perceptually accessible, measurable, and testable, our empirical knowledge of sacred architecture has advanced over time.

Yet holy places are *not* objective constructs existing on their own, “out there.” Quite the contrary, the power of such environments lies in how they shape experience. It is their eventfulness in our consciousness that makes them unforgettable, profound, ineffable. Their value comes from how they change us. However, the subjective phenomenology of sacred places makes it hard, if not impossible, to observe, study, and

*Notre Dame Cathedral shimmers in the moonlight over the Seine. It was identified as one of the top ten places to have ‘Extraordinary Architectural Experiences’ (EAEs).*

understand them. Our methods to circumvent such a problem include personal testimonies from impeccable sources. If we go through the published record, we can find a good (but not large) number of such reports. However, this approach and its results always remain subject to scientific dismissal and rational skepticism; personal accounts cannot be generalized (and thus become knowledge) because they lack statistical significance and repeatability. Lacking a good understanding of the psychology behind the phenomenology of sacred spaces means to see only one side of the relationship between spirituality and architecture.

This article presents results of research designed to address our incomplete knowledge. While the investigation was not originally intended to focus on the experience of places of faith, the findings are heavily weighted toward them. The study walks a fine line between collecting a very large number of experiential accounts using a rigorous methodology (to gain scientific validation) and retaining the freshness and the “thickness” of the reported experiences.

JULIO BERMUDEZ IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING. HIS RESEARCH INTERESTS ARE IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF AESTHETICS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE, CULTURE, AND SPIRITUALITY. THE AUTHOR WISHES TO THANK THE THOUSANDS OF INDIVIDUALS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD WHO GAVE THEIR TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY. NOT ONLY DID EACH SELFLESS ACT HELP ADVANCE THE STATE OF THE ART OF OUR DISCIPLINE BUT, MORE IMPORTANT, IS A LIVING PROOF OF THE TRUE AND STAYING POWER AND RELEVANCY OF ARCHITECTURE IN OUR LIVES.



## CONDUCTING SURVEYS

From April 2007 to April 2008, two parallel and independent online surveys (one in English, the other in Spanish) were conducted to gather information about people's most profound, lasting, and/or intense experiences of architecture. The surveys defined Extraordinary Architectural Experiences (or EAEs) as:

*...an encounter with a building or a place that fundamentally alters one's normal state of being. A "fundamental alteration" is a powerful and lasting shift in one's physical, perceptual, emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual appreciation of architecture. Contrarily, an ordinary experience of architecture, however interesting or engaging, does not cause a significant impact on one's life.*

EAEs were selected because their exceptional nature amplifies the experiential effects of architecture and thus makes them easier to study than under normal circumstances; guarantees recall accuracy and thus facilitates data gathering and reliability,<sup>1</sup> has lasting consequences in the lives of both the public and professionals,<sup>2</sup> and is usually tied to well known places and/or perceptual features that simplify later objective analysis.

Both surveys had the same 36 questions about the experience (25 multiple-choice and 5 open-ended questions) and about the participant (6 questions). The survey was designed to be completed in about 10 minutes and was openly available over the Internet. The surveys produced the largest number of personal testimonies of EAEs ever collected (2,982: 1,890 in English and 982 in Spanish). However, since participation was totally voluntary, open, and unsupervised, the result does not constitute a scientific sample of any particular population. In fact, due to the procedures and instruments employed to produce, distribute, advertise, and complete the poll, the participating populations are skewed versions of the general populations. Respondents predominately have

an undergraduate or graduate college education (90% / 90%); (b) report architecture as their field of study (55% / 69%); and (c) are between 25 and 40 in age (39% / 39%) with the 41–55 age bracket (28% / 36.5%) trailing behind (please note: throughout this article, numbers related to the English survey are noted in roman type, with Spanish statistics following in *italic type*).

Without denying the limitations of this skewed representation, there are also some advantages. For instance, having a population with a solid understanding of architecture gives us more confidence about the collected data. This is particularly relevant because we are dealing with issues that are very hard to grasp, measure, and describe. The very large number of responses obtained supports studies with statistical significance within the responding population.

It is impossible to cover the breadth and depth of the survey's results in the space of this article. Therefore, I've limited myself to findings from the study that may be of most interest to *Faith & Form* readers.

## Phenomenology of EAEs

Let us start with the way in which EAEs unfold in experience and their effects. The beginning of EAEs was said by respondents to be sudden (51.5% / 58.5%)<sup>3</sup> and surprising (76% / 83%). Survey participants also reported very high levels of spontaneity in the experience (78.5% / 91%). With regard to their end, people stated that EAEs tended to finish without their consent (51% / 44%). However, if we consider the very high level of "don't recall" responses (16% / 19%) in the termination question, we see support for a non-consensual answer: who would consciously finish something so exceptional and then not recall it? This would put the "finishing-without-consent" statistics at a high 67% / 63%. In other words, the exceptional experience finished as it started and unfolded *on its own!*



*Underside of the dome and pendentive at Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, another popular EAE site.*





*A light shaft enlivens the coffered dome at the Pantheon in Rome, another frequent site for EAEs.*

When probed on how EAEs were felt, respondents reported introspective/silent states (87.5% / 87%) characterized by no talking (62% / 57%), strong body reactions (56.5% / 43%), and a higher level of awareness than normal (92.5% / 78%). Although only a minority reported weeping (18% / 28.5%), it is such an incredibly strong response that its relatively strong presence (roughly 20% / 33%) confirms the power of EAEs. Also, participants overwhelmingly agreed that EAEs were intense (80% / 88.5%), profound (89% / 91.5%), and vivid (85.5% / 84.5%).

There is remarkable consistency among these responses. For example, the powerful emotional tenor of EAEs neatly dovetails with the higher state of awareness claimed. High attention also takes place because the individual cannot predict and/or control what is to occur next. Since the person experiences the event as it happens (i.e., suddenly, surprisingly, spontaneously), she or he must remain vigilant, awake. An experience that is so free yet so alive points towards a suspension of the preconceptions, ideas, and will that individuals bring to most situations. In other words, EAEs are in-progress experiential discoveries based on a certain abandonment to the moment, a “being in the present” open to what the present reveals. Bodily sensations during EAEs (e.g., goose bumps,

weeping, trembling, chills, etc.) demonstrate a poignant state devoid of substantial intellectual intervention. These findings suggest that, despite the usual assumption of subjectivity, EAEs seem to move away from an ego-centered experience to plunge consciousness into a unique state that is neither objective nor subjective, but is both simultaneously. This set of experiential qualities must somehow be related to shutting down verbal functioning and the simultaneous opening of other ways of knowing, feeling, and sensing beyond left-brain, neo-cortex, or discursive operations.

#### QUALITATIVE POWER OF EAEs

Although these data provide an initial psychological profile underlying EAEs, such statistical study fails to convey the amazing quality of these exceptional experiences. For example, consider the following descriptions in the words of three survey respondents:

**A simple Gothic cathedral in central France:** “I walked into this church and was struck by the light and the straight soaring lines of extremely tall walls that curved to form the ceiling. The whiteness of the walls, the absence of stained glass, the lack of ornamentation—just the skeleton really, the stark yet graceful construction exposed—stopped me just inside the door. The lines seemed to fly up to welcome the light, inviting it to shine way down onto the stone floor below. The shafts of light repeated into the distance and their brilliance created elongated rectangles on the floor emphasizing the vastness of the interior. This visual impact caused an instantaneous physical reaction: quiet shivers of joy, a slow exhalation of an unnoticed held breath, and no desire to move, save for the slow smile I allowed myself. As I had entered from the rear of the church through the main doors, my first impression was that the church had been gutted. Empty yes, yet the space had presence, a fullness of spirit. I was overwhelmed with the light pouring in and the peaceful, glorious space created by the purity of the structure.”

**Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain:** “Passing through a second set of doors, I was immediately overcome by the sheer scale of the structure I had entered. Despite the clutter of scaffolding, I felt somehow lifted into the space. As I entered further I was amazed by the intensity. And I turned and saw a wall of stained glass full of life and color abstracted in form. It became a part of me. Despite its religious context, I felt as though I understood...it...and that somehow...it... understood me. I don’t know how to describe the ‘it’ part, but I certainly was unable to ignore the penetrating bond that was created. I sat down where I was able and did what I could to hold back the tears, pretending to blow my nose as the rest of the visitors passed by me. I eventually went back and took a picture of the place, but it serves only as a reminder. The image conjures the fringe of the feelings that were generated, but can’t quite simulate the overpowering nature of the event.”

**Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey:** “As I walked into the narthex of Hagia Sophia I remembered being told that it was a building that had done unprecedented things with the dome, but I hadn’t quite ‘gotten’ it in images or slides in art history classes. But then when I walked into the center I was completely overwhelmed because these rays of light were coming through the circle of windows at the base of the dome and filled the space with diffused light. I had been in a lot of religious buildings and I am not a religious person, but nothing quite prepared me for the feeling of mystical awe like that misty bright light that hung in the central space.”





Photo: © Cindy A. Paulinac / www.sacred-land-photography.com

*The intricately carved portal surround of Chartes Cathedral, often cited by visitors as inspiration for EAEs.*

These stories are representative of the ones from more than a thousand that people freely recounted in the surveys. Most are narratives describe events as overwhelming, transcendental, or spiritual. There is no denying that people attained an exceptional state of consciousness that was in many ways similar in sensation, emotion, intuition, or insight to that of profound religious or mystical experiences. We need only to go back to William James's 1902 seminal book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and review its analysis of the psychology behind holy epiphanies. We can also consider more contemporary studies of the neurobiology of religious experiences<sup>4</sup> to see parallels. And while such resemblance between EAEs and mystical experiences may seem initially strange, it is not so on second thought. Philosophers such as Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Gadamer have recognized the fundamental relationship between beauty and sublime states. The survey provides scientific validity that not only supports these claims; it also offers a wealth of psychological details about EAEs not well known until now. At its best, the most material of human artifices, architecture, delivers us to the ultimately immaterial. This may not be the case for everyone, but it is true that a vast number of people find EAEs as gateways to the sublime or holy.

Hence, it is not surprising that survey participants unambiguously reported that EAEs forever modified their understanding and appreciation of architecture (81.5% / 80.5%). Let us remember that these experiences irreversibly and fundamentally changed the interpretive framework of something very dear and well known to most members of the surveyed population (55% / 69% had architecture as their field of study). Yet EAEs accomplished such feats for a huge majority of

people in both surveys! Such a forceful and transformative shift cannot be really explained unless we acknowledge at some level the numinous quality of EAEs.

#### NATURE AND OUTCOMES OF EAEs

The survey inquired about the nature and outcomes of EAEs. Chart 1 is a summary of both polls. EAEs are exceptionally "Emotional," "Sensual-Perceptual-Physical," "Timeless," and "Pleasurable" experiences that deliver "Insight," "Beauty," "Joy/Satisfaction," and "Peace."

NATURE OF EAEs		OUTCOMES OF EAEs	
% Response	Quality	Result	% Response
72.3	Emotional	Insight	54.7
64.4	Sensual/Perceptual/ Physical	Beauty	50.7
45.9	Timeless	Joy/Satisfaction	43.4
40.3	Pleasurable	Peace	38.2

*Chart 1: Summary of query about the nature and effects of EAEs. Results are the compounded response of both populations.*

From these results, we can interpret that EAEs are aesthetic epiphanies characterized at least initially by their "Sensual/Perceptual/Physical" qualities. They afford a direct and intuitive discernment that, when related to the other survey data, provide profound, vivid glimpses into the nature of ultimate reality. In this context, the reported "Satisfaction/Joy" outcome has to be seen with an EAE's "Pleasurable" nature understood not only as sensual delight but also as a multilayer-





*Machu Picchu, Peru, was the number one location for Spanish-speaking survey respondents for experiencing EAEs.*

ered ecstasy that *also* includes intense feelings, intellectual fulfillment, and even spiritual realization. Finally, “Peace” as an essential result of EAEs has to be seen in the context of the third-ranked “Timeless” quality. Pervading it all is the intense emotional nature of EAEs that enables attention to rise to a peak from which beauty can be appreciated, penetrating insights attained, satisfaction and joy felt, and the attainment of an overall sense of peace.

An unexpected finding was the low ranking of “Analytical/Intellectual” for describing the

nature of an EAE (6<sup>th</sup> / 5<sup>th</sup>). This does not necessarily signify a lack or irrelevancy of thought or analysis in EAEs, but that “thinking” comes fifth or sixth in relevancy and needs to be downplayed if the EAE is to unfold uninhibited. EAEs cannot be studied or explained as critical, analytical, or intellectual experiences.

#### TOP TEN PLACES FOR EAEs

The survey asked participants to name the place where they had experienced their EAE. Compiling the responses generated a list of

ENGLISH SURVEY	SPANISH SURVEY
1 Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain	Machu Picchu, Peru
2 Pantheon, Rome, Italy	Pantheon, Rome, Italy / Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamp, France
3 Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamp, France	Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain
4 Salk Institute, California	Alhambra, Granada, Spain
5 Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, France	St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, Italy
6 Taj Mahal, Agra, India	Barcelona Pavilion, Barcelona, Spain
7 Machu Picchu, Peru / Salt Lake City Public Library, Utah / St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, Italy / Chartres Cathedral, France.	Taj Mahal, Agra, India
8 Alhambra, Granada, Spain	Chichen Itza, Yucatan, México / Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
9 “My home” / Fallingwater, Pennsylvania	Banco de Londres, Buenos Aires, Argentina / Parthenon, Athens, Greece
10 Louvre in Paris, France / Eiffel Tower, Paris, France / Mosque in Cordoba, Spain	Eiffel Tower, Paris, France / The city of Venice, Italy.

*Chart 2: Top ten places reported to have induced EAEs*

buildings well known for their beauty and power. Chart 2 includes the list of the top ten sites that prompted EAEs. Notice the significant consistency in the two survey groups.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that so many respondents from different origins, languages, ages, genders, and cultures report EAEs at the same places strongly supports one of the fundamental tenets of scientific discovery: repeatability. Although an absolute replication is not possible due to the experiential nature of the event, the sheer number of testimonies for each one of these places *and* their consistency cannot be disregarded as being “subjective.”

Because most of these places are or had originally been religious buildings, it makes sense in the context of the findings of this research that architecture and spirituality naturally find one another during EAEs. Such exceptional events are invited by built beauty and it is logical to expect societies not only to notice such a link over time, but to exploit it as much as possible in their places for holy purposes.

It is significant that many respondents were surprised and changed by EAEs in buildings that they most likely knew intellectually beforehand (e.g., from history courses, travel books, etc.). The presence of these places (Walter Benjamin’s famous concept of “aura”) was strong enough to break through intellectual familiarity and offer a totally new and therefore surprising and spontaneous experience. This means that quality cannot be indirectly learned but must be directly apprehended, found, tasted in actual experience. If English were Latin, we could say that “*cognoscere*” can never be or replace “*sapere*.”


#### CONCLUSION

Although the research findings presented in this article begin to map the phenomenological structures and processes common to experiencing architecture in spiritual depth, much remains to be done. One important area of work will be to look at the correlation between the reported subjective states and the objective conditions present in a particular environment. For example, how do the psychological states reported by multiple individuals at the Pantheon in Rome correlate to the physical attributes of that place? Are there links between such relationships and those found for other buildings? Can we develop psychological and architectural frameworks or profiles that favor EAEs? What about the impact of gender, age, culture, and the like on EAEs? The answers to such questions could have important implications in our understanding of the relationship between architecture and spirituality in ways that begin to balance our one-sided knowledge base.



In the meantime, the thrust of the findings gives scientific validity to what the ancients and designers of sacred places for millennia have known intuitively: architecture can touch the soul and fill the spirit. This occurs as an extraordinary aesthetic experience of an inexhaustibly deep, sublime, and spontaneous

reality: a reality framed, presented, and built as architecture.<sup>6</sup> The fact that beautiful buildings devoted to such awesome tasks continue to move us across epochs, civilizations, and cultures is testimony of the presence of archetypal conditions at play. While we cannot depend on our analytical abilities to enjoy EAEs (nearly

2,900 individuals agreed that we need to hone our emotional, perceptive, and intuitive skills instead) we can definitely use our intellect to direct a renewed study of sacred places. It is clear that they still hold many secrets that can assist us in the creation of new places that will be extraordinary. 

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> When asked about recalling their EAE, the majority of survey participants agreed it to be “Strongly Vivid” (63.5% / 63.5%) with “Moderately Vivid” a clear second at 33.5% / 34%. Vague recollection was reported by only 3% / 2.5% of the people. This remarkably high level of recall convincingly points at the imprinting power of EAEs in memory and brings a high reliability to people’s testimonies.

<sup>2</sup> Refer for instance to: Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Robert Ivy, “The Essence of Education” (Editorial), *Architectural Record* 07 (2006) p.17; Norman Koonce, “Erasing the Boundary Between the Physical and the Spiritual”, the *AIA Journal of Architecture* (July 2005): 2.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the numbers for “gradual arousal” were still high (46% / 39%) implies that a slower and more steady arrival of the EAE may not necessarily diminish its startling effect.


<sup>4</sup> During the 2006 IFRAA Symposium in La Jolla, California, Patrick

Russell and Andrew Newberg presented compelling evidence showing that neuro-scientific studies of religious experiences may apply to perceptual phenomena in religious architecture. See also the work of Richard Davison at the University of Wisconsin Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience.

<sup>5</sup> Two buildings in the English Survey and one in the Spanish Survey show some bias toward “local” conditions. These are the Salt Lake City Public Library and the LDS Temple (Utah), and the Banco de Londres in Buenos Aires. This is due to my particular connections with populations in Utah and Argentina, (I estimate a 20/30% presence of the total in each survey). The relatively focused choice of the individuals in these populations deforms a bit the overall result. For the record, I must say, however, that these three buildings are examples of very good architecture.

<sup>6</sup> We are reminded of Michael Benedikt’s book *For an Architecture of Reality* (New York: Lumen Books, 1987) where he maintains that architecture’s fundamental role is to present reality.

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# A Lost Baptismal Font



BY ALAN OAKES

Frank Lloyd Wright is considered by many to be the greatest American architect. During a career that spanned more than six decades, Wright

designed more than a dozen sacred spaces, many considered to be landmarks in the progression of liturgical design. Spaces such as Unity Temple, Beth Shalom Synagogue, and Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church are famous examples of Wright's attempting to marry the needs of the worshipping community with his own unquenchable desire to turn the page on liturgical designs of old and create something new.

One of the first "sacred" commissions in Wright's career came in 1894. The previous year Wright was in the employ of Louis Sullivan. The great Chicago Columbian Exposition that awed millions with its plaster beaux-arts White City had just closed.

Having left Sullivan, Wright was free to honestly accept commissions of his own. Most of these early commissions were residences for Chicago's up-and-coming elite. One of those early clients was Frederick Bagley. Bagley was a marble importer by trade. The home Wright designed for him was mostly a traditional affair except for curious additions such as an octagonal dining room. Included in the home were marble furnishings Bagley had created through his business contacts.

In 1894, Bagley was so impressed with Wright's work that he commissioned him to create a baptismal font and communion rail for Thomas Bryan's family chapel, Byrd's Nest. Bryan was a wealthy lawyer with national political ties. In 1856, he purchased more than a thousand acres of land in the then western countryside of Chicago in a town called Elmhurst.

Bryan liked to recall that he saw a story in the Chicago papers about a Catholic church that had been turned into a bowling alley. Seeing the need for a church in his fledgling Elmhurst community, he chose to do the opposite: convert his estate's bowling alley into a church in 1862.

This chapel was later closed as the town's needs increased. A new chapel opened in 1865. The first service, presided over by Bryan him-

self, a lay Episcopal minister, was a memorial for the assassinated President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. Bryan was a friend of Lincoln's and had served as a pallbearer at his funeral. The chapel was given the name "Byrd's Nest" in honor of Bryan's wife, Jennie, a member of Virginia's famous Byrd family.

The architectural style of the new chapel is perhaps best described as Victorian Gothic. Its matchbook size, a scant 36 by 18 feet, created a cozy interior that was cherished by early community founders. Phyllis Bates Schwab, an early Elmhurst resident, recalled that, "Byrd's Nest Chapel was such small place. It seated only 100 people. There was a pot-bellied stove at the back of the church and you could smell the burning wood for blocks away – there were chimes in the church, very beautiful chimes... It was very pretty."

The wealth of the community increased over time. Well-to-do Chicagoans fled the city after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. By 1894 Elmhurst had grown considerably in numbers and stature.

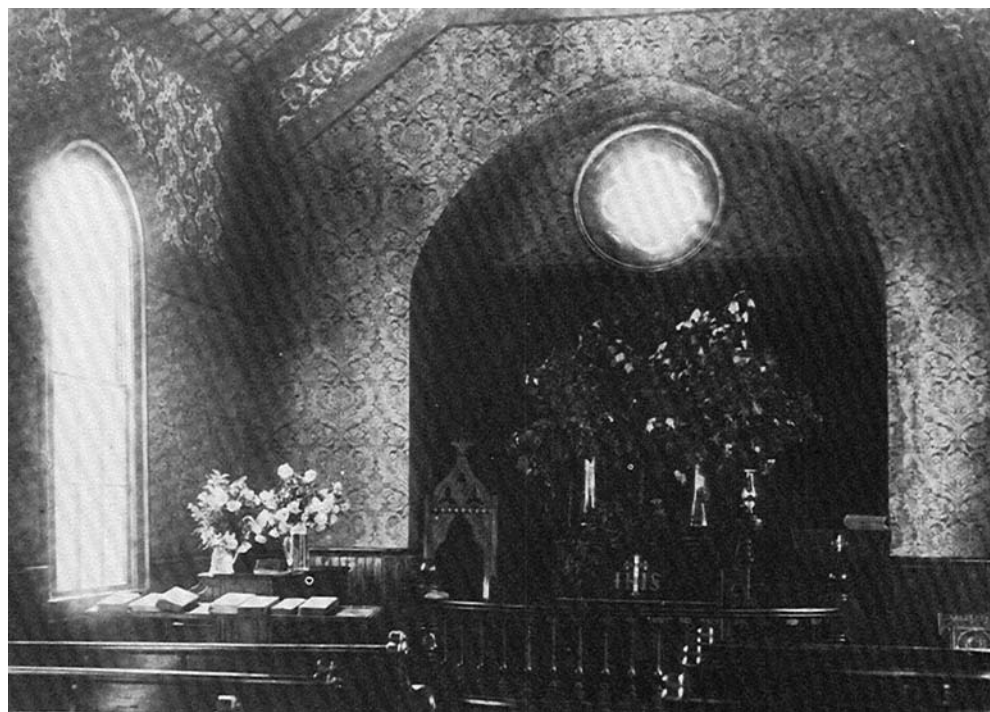
There is no known documentation about how Thomas Bryan and Frederick Bagley came to know each other or how the commission for a baptismal font came about. In fact, before this article was written, all that existed in the Frank Lloyd Wright archives was a photo of the font (and a rendering for an accompanying communion rail that was never built) with a citation that it was for client Frederick Bagley.

Wright apprentice and Taliesin archivist Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer notes, "All that we know about the design is the photograph of the font."

It was only through extensive archival research that we have documentation that Bagley commissioned the font for Bryan's Byrd's Nest Chapel. The Chicago Architecture Club held an exhibit at the Art Institute of



*Historical photo of the exterior of the Byrd's Nest Chapel.*



*The chapel's Victorian interior.*





Photo: Copyright © The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 2009

*The only known photo of Wright's one-of-a-kind font, which would be impossible to reproduce. "Since there is no plan, nor elevations to show all sides of the piece, it could not accurately be constructed and considered a thoroughly Frank Lloyd Wright design," says Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer.*


The marble font appears to be as diminutive as the chapel itself. Episcopal baptismal rites of the time did not require immersion or submersion of new members, who most often were infants. In a chapel heated by a pot-bellied stove, a small font would be amply sufficient. Indeed, there are stories that American settlers used chunks of ice for baptisms during the wintertime.

The base of Wright's font is triangular in shape. One could ascribe this shape to the Trinitarian formula proclaimed during a baptism, but there are no records stating that this was Wright's intention. Elegant leafing and carving reminiscent of Louis Sullivan create a flower shape to the piece. The skill of the design indicates how masterful Wright himself was in creating richly ornamental objects. Certainly, the motif of a flower opening, an image of new life, is appropriate symbology for a baptismal font.

In the body of Wright's work, the baptismal font is significant, says Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer. "It is significant simply because of its early work

where much of Wright's decorative designs had Sullivan characteristics, having been designed the very next year after he left Sullivan's office to go to work on his own."

Thomas Bryan died in 1906. Soon after, pieces of his estate were sold off by family members. In 1914 Byrd's Nest Chapel, since renamed Church of Our Savior, was torn down to make way for a new city street.

And what of the baptismal font — the only known baptismal font ever to have been created by Frank Lloyd Wright, America's greatest architect? There is no record of where it is today. Only a couple of sources state that it was turned into a bird bath at a later date. A very rare "Byrd" bath indeed. 

ALAN OAKES WAS THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF THE AWARD-WINNING PBS DOCUMENTARY, *THE PAINTED CHURCHES OF TEXAS, ECHOES OF THE HOMELAND*. HE CONTINUES TO PUBLISH ARTICLES AND PHOTOGRAPHS ABOUT ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN BOOKS AND MAGAZINES INCLUDING *TEXAS ARCHITECT*. PRESENTLY, HE IS RESEARCHING THE CHURCHES OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT.

Chicago in 1902 that lists the font as an exhibit piece with Wright as the designer, Bagley as the client, and Bryan's chapel as the place where the baptismal font was placed.



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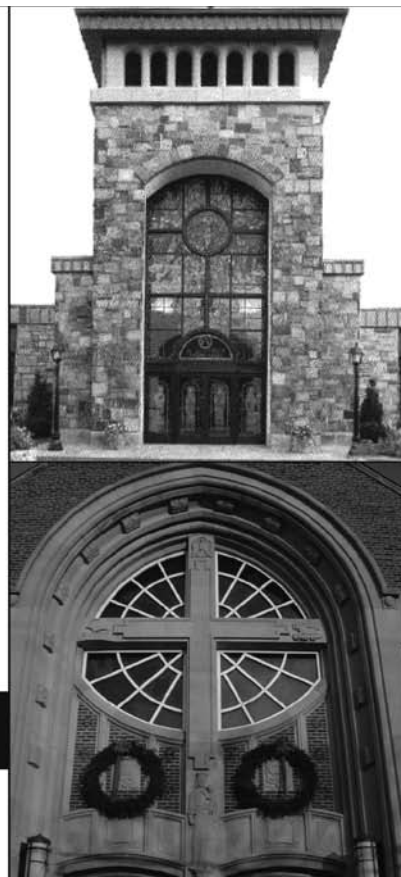
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TOP: First Christian Church in Phoenix, Arizona, completed in 1973, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for Southwest Christian Seminary in 1950.



BOTTOM: Frank Lloyd Wright's Beth Shalom Congregation in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, was completed in 1959.



## 360 degrees of inspiration

It was when viewing Frank Lloyd Wright's First Christian Church in Phoenix that I began to see places of worship as a wellspring of spiritual connectedness as well as creative beauty. Subsequently, I embarked on a way to express this transformative experience in photographs.

In 1994, with a Hulcherama 360 camera, I was able to register a great and sweeping range of between 180 and 400 degrees. These expansive, panoramic images of interior and exterior spaces blended dimensions and revealed rhythms and patterns inherent in architecture, thus creating a moving effect.

Text and photographs by Thomas Schiff

Over the past 15 years I have traveled throughout the United States in search of inspiring subjects. The images I have produced are found in collections throughout the world as well as in various publications (*Panoramic Cincinnati*, 1999; *Panoramic Ohio*, 2002; and *Panoramic Parks*, 2005).

I am currently working on a panoramic photography book on architecture of faith in the U.S., with assistance from the Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Interfaith Dialogue at Xavier University in Cincinnati.



The Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, designed by Philip Johnson and completed in 1980, can hold 2,900.



Construction on Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., commenced in 1907 and was completed in 1990.



TOP: Louis Kahn's First Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York, completed in 1961.



BOTTOM: Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio, designed by James Keyes Wilson and completed in 1866.



TOP: Marcel Breuer's Saint John's Abbey Church in Collegeville, Minnesota, was completed in 1961.



BOTTOM: A humble Spanish mission church in New Mexico.





# Facing the Fault Lines



BY KURT SCHINDLER, AIA

Many congregations who occupy historical houses of worship will face serious choices over the next decade, as changes in seismic codes and the threat of devastating earthquakes prompt religious communities across the country to consider major renovations to their cherished ecclesiastical buildings. The delicacy and intricacy of the design, engineering, and construction work involved in the seismic preservation of historic houses of worship are often matched by the delicate and intricate process that congregations and project teams follow in order to reach the right design and budget plan.

Although California has been most aggressive in tightening its codes, seismic requirements are becoming progressively stricter nationwide. “As engineers, we are very aware of the seismic hazards mapped by the U.S. Geological Survey, and of increased earthquake intensities predicted in many areas of the country,” says Andy Merovich, SE, of A.T. Merovich & Associates, structural engineers based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Some seismically vulnerable areas of the country are especially under-prepared for earthquakes, he says, such as the New Madrid fault zone near the Missouri–Tennessee border, or Charleston, South Carolina. When earthquakes strike areas not known for seismic activity, regulations also become stricter. For example, Portland, Oregon, has had its classification change from seismic zone 2 to seismic zone 4 in the past two decades. In addition, after every reasonably strong seismic event, such as California’s 1971 San Fernando earthquake, 1994 Northridge earthquake, and 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, engineers learn more about how seismic forces affect various structural materials and systems, often leading to a new wave of regulations. Changes in recent years to the International Building Code—which most jurisdictions across the country look to when setting and updating their own building codes—also mean that many building codes now require building projects to include soil testing; and if the site has soft soil, builders may have to meet stricter

seismic design standards even in areas of low or moderate earthquake risk.

The recently completed restoration and reinforcement of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in San Francisco illustrates the key procedural elements in the process of adding seismic reinforcements to historic ecclesiastical buildings. While the mix of design solutions at St. Mark’s is unique to the site, the project development process demonstrates that input from the congregation and from design and building professionals is crucial from the earliest stages of the process as congregations answer questions that are common to each historical preservation endeavor. Dedicated congregational committees play a significant role in shepherding the project from design to completion.

St. Mark’s serves the oldest Lutheran congregation on the West Coast. Designed by German-American architect Henry Geilfuss to blend Romanesque and Gothic elements, and constructed in 1894, it is considered one of the grandest German churches in California. Its timber roof and floor construction and wood-framed interior partitions with lath-and-plaster finish are beloved by the congregation. The landmark survived the great quake of 1906, but the Loma Prieta tremor of 1989 left the unreinforced masonry building in need of a seismic retrofit. ELS Architects led the architectural planning and design of the church renovation, which was completed in 2006.

## DESIGN TEAM’S EARLY ROLE

Congregations will have to consider how much seismic protection is necessary and what the priorities are for preserving the integrity of their structure’s historic features. These decisions will influence the project’s overall cost. Design and engineering professionals can provide crucial information and can suggest solutions early on, helping congregations fully appreciate the design, safety, and cost tradeoffs.

The scope of the project can range from a moderately expensive effort that brings the building in line with current life-safety standards to a more expensive effort that reinforces the entire historic structure so it can withstand a major seismic event. The latter will require a higher standard of design, engineering, and renovation, and consequently a larger price tag.

The congregation will have to consider several factors in deciding to what extent the historic integrity of the structure should be preserved. In some communities, a building may be designated a landmark, which has both positive and negative effects. Historic building codes may allow the team to avoid having to meet certain requirements of local building codes, but the landmark designation may require oversight by a local historic design committee or a landmarks preservation board, which can sometimes limit the congregation’s options. At St. Mark’s the design team was able



*View of the church in its neighborhood context during the 1950s.*

KURT SCHINDLER, AIA, IS A PRINCIPAL AT ELS ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA. HE SPECIALIZES IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND PERFORMING ARTS BUILDINGS.

Photo courtesy of St. Mark's Lutheran Church



to fully conceal a thorough seismic upgrade inside the existing fabric of the structure. Yet this approach can often add costs.

An architectural and engineering team with historic preservation experience can help the congregation prioritize the building's historic features. Should reinforcements be mounted on the inside or the outside? That depends on which features the congregation seeks to preserve. In the case of St. Mark's, the congregation decided that the character-defining areas of the structure were the interior of the main sanctuary, the narthex, and the brick exterior. The congregation's renovation commission worked with the architects to develop seismic solutions that would preserve these character-defining areas. The renovation and restoration project applied innovative methods to conceal the upgrades to retain the church's historic fabric, stabilizing brick walls from the inside with "shotcrete"—pneumatically applied concrete—while using center-core reinforcing where it was important to preserve interior decorative finishes. In addition, the design team wove a horizontal steel structure through the existing wood trusses to reinforce the roof.

Research into the building's history can help determine what is original in the existing structure. Areas that have been altered from their original status may not be important to preserve. For example, at St. Mark's, research found that the tile floor of the narthex and the wood floor of the sanctuary were original. Congregational representatives felt that these features were important to preserve. These priorities are reflected in the design, which inserts a seismic diaphragm from below, leaving the floor covering in place. Installing the seismic diaphragm in this way added as much as 25 percent extra in cost for this particular feature because of the time and expertise required.

In some scenarios, it is simply not possible to fully conceal new bracing within the historic building. Designers often classify building spaces or features as "very significant," "significant," "contributing," or "non-contributing" categories generally recognized within the preservation community. A rating system allows the congregation to determine what zones are worth preserving at all costs, and what areas can be compromised in order to give the design team flexibility to accommodate structural improvements. Working with the design team, the committee at St. Mark's decided that the attic areas above the sanctuary and a portion of the lower level below the sanctuary could be slightly modified. On the lower floor, the design kept the spatial configurations intact, but lined the walls with shotcrete, shrinking the rooms by eight inches. Windows in the lower levels were also slightly filled in to accommodate a spandrel beam that provides the structural rigidity to support the sanctuary floor and keep the walls in plane during a seismic event.

Expect constant consultation between designers, engineers, and the congregational representatives. "As engineers, we can do strength calculations based on wall heights and lengths, but we can't make determinations about wall finishes without input from the designers," says Merovich, the structural engineer. "We look to the architects to give us the geometry that would define the zones where the new materials could be placed, in order to calculate the engineering properties of the reinforcements."

It is important to select a contractor relatively early in the process. The construction work is bound to be highly technical, so a congregation needs to find a contractor who can do it correctly. A contractor with expertise in particular construction methods can help make realistic estimates on crucial cost questions as the designers and engineers move from the conceptual level to the level of specific design details, but the lowest bidder will not necessarily be the best choice. At St. Mark's, the center-core reinforcement design required experienced contractors, and Plant Construction was selected just a few months after the architects were chosen. An experienced contractor can also refer knowledgeable subcontractors for specific tasks as required. This also introduces the element of negotiation with contractors, usually over a lump sum or a guaranteed maximum price. The contractor should be able to provide detailed estimates for each construction element involved in the design, which the client and the design team can review and query if necessary.

Setting aside the seismic issues, there is one final decision to make: Will the project be restricted to seismic and life-safety concerns, or is this also an opportunity to expand and refurbish the structure in order to meet new goals? Is this the time







to redo the stained glass windows and expand the kitchen, or can those budget items wait? Any changes that would adjust the occupancy of the building should be handled carefully. A design that converts an unused store room to a new chapel, for example, would raise the building's occupancy, and trigger new code requirements that could delay the seismic work. To control costs, St. Mark's decided not to make major changes to its building program at this time, but the congregation did want to spend resources on historical preservation. Non-seismic cosmetic work included restoring the original Douglas fir sanctuary flooring and the narthex tile floors to their original splendor and analyzing the original paint to select the colors for the sanctuary walls.

#### COMMITTEES AND CONGREGATIONS

Congregations usually have a main governing board that delegates a committee of interested members to guide the seismic reinforcement project. The committee's job is to work with the design and construction team to develop either a single scheme or several possible alternatives with specific details about the costs and inherent tradeoffs. The committee often makes its recommendations to the board, and then board members and committee members present the scheme to the congregation.

At St. Mark's, this committee was known as the renovation commission, and its members met regularly and were deeply involved in the project. The commission ranged from eight to ten members, including the commission chair, the pastor, and the church president, as well as parishioners whose backgrounds included religion, architecture, engineering, finance, accounting, academics, marketing, and healthcare. "The commission's contributions included needs assessment, planning, congregational approval, selection of the professional team, contracts, project accounting, governmental approvals, and construction supervision," says commission member Herb Lembcke. "The core of the commission, including the chair, pastor, and church president, stayed involved throughout the project to insure successful completion."

Naturally, the congregation's representatives often include people with experience and interest in the historic building or in the design and construction sectors. It's important that members have open minds about what the design and engineering solutions might be. The committee should include members familiar with the budget constraints and the fundraising possibilities that the project faces. If a congregation can expect to pay only \$10 million for a seismic reinforcement that will cover basic life-safety issues, then there is no point instructing the designers to draw up a \$20 million proposal to keep the structure fully intact during an earthquake. In reality, the budgeting and design proposal process usually occurs in a dialogue over months or years, as committee members explore funding options and weigh them against design and construction possibilities.

#### FUNDRAISING AND FINANCING

Fundraising campaigns can help finance seismic renovations, but they may not be enough by themselves. "At St. Mark's, members of the congregation made substantial commitments, but the project required a substantial amount of additional capital," says Lembcke. "Many different traditional ways of financing were explored, including loans from banks and other financial institutions. However, these avenues did not provide sufficient funds, and the church could not meet financing costs. We needed a more creative solution."

Some churches are fortunate enough to have development opportunities or may own land that can finance seismic work. More than 40 years ago, St. Mark's had created a separate nonprofit corporation to develop Martin Luther Tower, a low-income multistory housing structure for senior citizens. The debt had since been retired, and there was a waiting list for occupancy. "It was possible to refinance the residential structure with a long-term low-interest loan and sell tax credits by forming a new limited corporation, with the existing corporation in the general position and

*(article text continues on page 31)*

*The façade of St. Mark's Lutheran Church expresses its robust 19<sup>th</sup>-century masonry structure, albeit un-reinforced at the time of original construction.*



*At the lower floor perimeter, an eight-inch layer of shotcrete (designated in blue) was installed (1). A seismic diaphragm was installed beneath the sanctuary floor. Shotcrete at the gable ends of the church and in the chancel walls was put in place (2).*





*Between the windows of the sanctuary, pilasters were infused with masonry cores. In the attic (3), above the ceiling of the sanctuary, new horizontal steel trusses provide bracing. The steel works in unison with the existing wood trusses (4).*





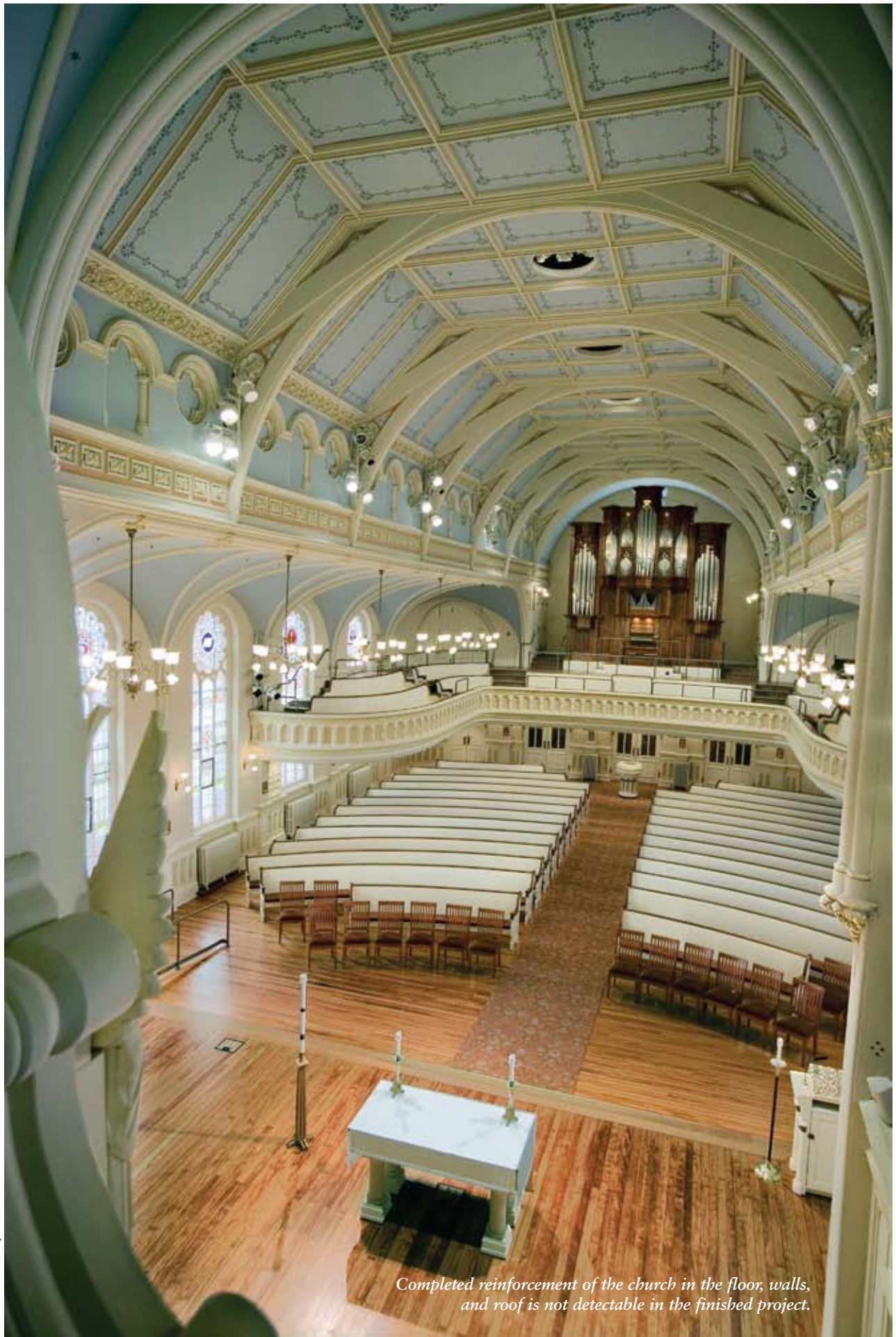


Photo: David Wakeby

*Completed reinforcement of the church in the floor, walls, and roof is not detectable in the finished project.*



the tax credit purchasers in the limited position,” says Lembcke. “In 15 years, the limited entity will sell its interest back to the original corporation.” Proceeds from the capital funds program were used for seismic improvements to the senior housing structure, for interior and exterior improvements to the structure’s public spaces, and for St. Mark’s \$11 million seismic and renovation upgrade.

#### DESIGN ADVOCATES

Project committee members are often self-selected individuals who value the historic building and are enthusiastic about repairing and reinforcing it. Some of their work will involve pitching the design proposals to the rest of the congregation, who might be weighing other priorities. Should the congregation expand its weekly soup kitchen, or should it ensure that its historic structure can withstand the next big earthquake? Each congregation makes its own decisions on these questions, but analysis by design and engineering professionals early in the process can help quantify the tradeoffs.

The delegated committee members who interact directly with the design and engineering team will eventually become trusted advocates for the plan to the rest of the congregation, so it’s crucial that the committee reach a consensus. Reaching this level of consensus on the committee often means extra rounds of dialogue and discussion between committee members and the design team, but in the long run this consensus is crucial for the success of the final project. All committee members

should be explaining the issues to fellow worshippers in a consistent way at after-service coffee hour.


“The keys to building consensus at St. Mark’s included the renovation commission’s timely presentations to the congregation, the securing of congregational approvals, monthly hard-hat tours of construction progress prior to church services, and weekly meetings with the architect, contractor, and subcontractors,” says Lembcke.

While the architect will typically coordinate between the client and the structural engineer, Merovich says he enjoyed interacting directly with leaders of the St. Mark’s renovation commission: “We explained the plan to them so they could explain it to others. They were very interested in the building, and in the problems and possible solutions, which was a nice collaborative aspect to the project.”

Seismic renovations are usually multi-year projects, and very often there can be leadership transitions inside the congregation over the project’s life span. Sometimes projects can face delays while new clergy are brought on board, as was the case at St. Mark’s. In such cases, the leadership and dedication of the project committee becomes critical.

Once the congregation approves a plan, the design team will also help move the project through any relevant approval process for historical buildings, planning, and building codes. Early meetings with building officials and historic review agencies to gain conceptual approval can pay significant dividends when

going through the final detail review process to attain the building permit and get the project through the construction process. Any project will require at least two official checks before construction goes forward. A structural plan check will look for seismic and structural soundness, and an architectural plan check will examine the life-safety codes, such as fire safety and emergency exits. The architect and the structural engineer will be crucial in the interaction with the building officials, because there is invariably some ambiguity in the classification of historic buildings into different code regimes, each of which would have different implications for the final design. Expect some back-and-forth between the design team and the building officials before the design is approved. To gain official approval at St. Mark’s required adding a sprinkler system that would cool the tall stained-glass windows in the event of a fire. At this stage, the architect might employ a code consultant in order to bolster the credibility of the plan to the local officials. For St. Mark’s, the design team also obtained approval from the city’s Landmarks Commission and Planning Department.

Architects who engage in this kind of work check their egos outside. The highest compliment is when someone says, “I can’t tell what the architects did here.” One of the most difficult challenges for congregations facing seismic upgrades may be finding consultants who delight in concealing their craft in order to celebrate the craft of people who went before. 

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# NOTES & COMMENTS

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Submissions to the 2009 Faith & Form/IFRAA International Awards Program for Religious Art and Architecture are welcome. The awards program is open to artists, architects, and designers worldwide. Submissions to the awards program are made online, at [www.faithandformawards.com](http://www.faithandformawards.com). Deadline for award submissions has been extended to July 7, 2009.

### A CATHEDRAL REBORN

Following a devastating fire in late 2001, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, the seat of the Episcopal Church in New York City, was closed to bring the world's largest Gothic church back to its former glory. The fire started in the cathedral's gift shop, destroyed the north transept, and caused heavy smoke damage throughout the structure. What followed was a \$40 million renovation and restoration, including a thorough cleaning of smoke, soot, and water stains. The cathedral was rededicated last November, reopening the entire structure with restored stained glass, stone carvings, tapestries, and metalwork.

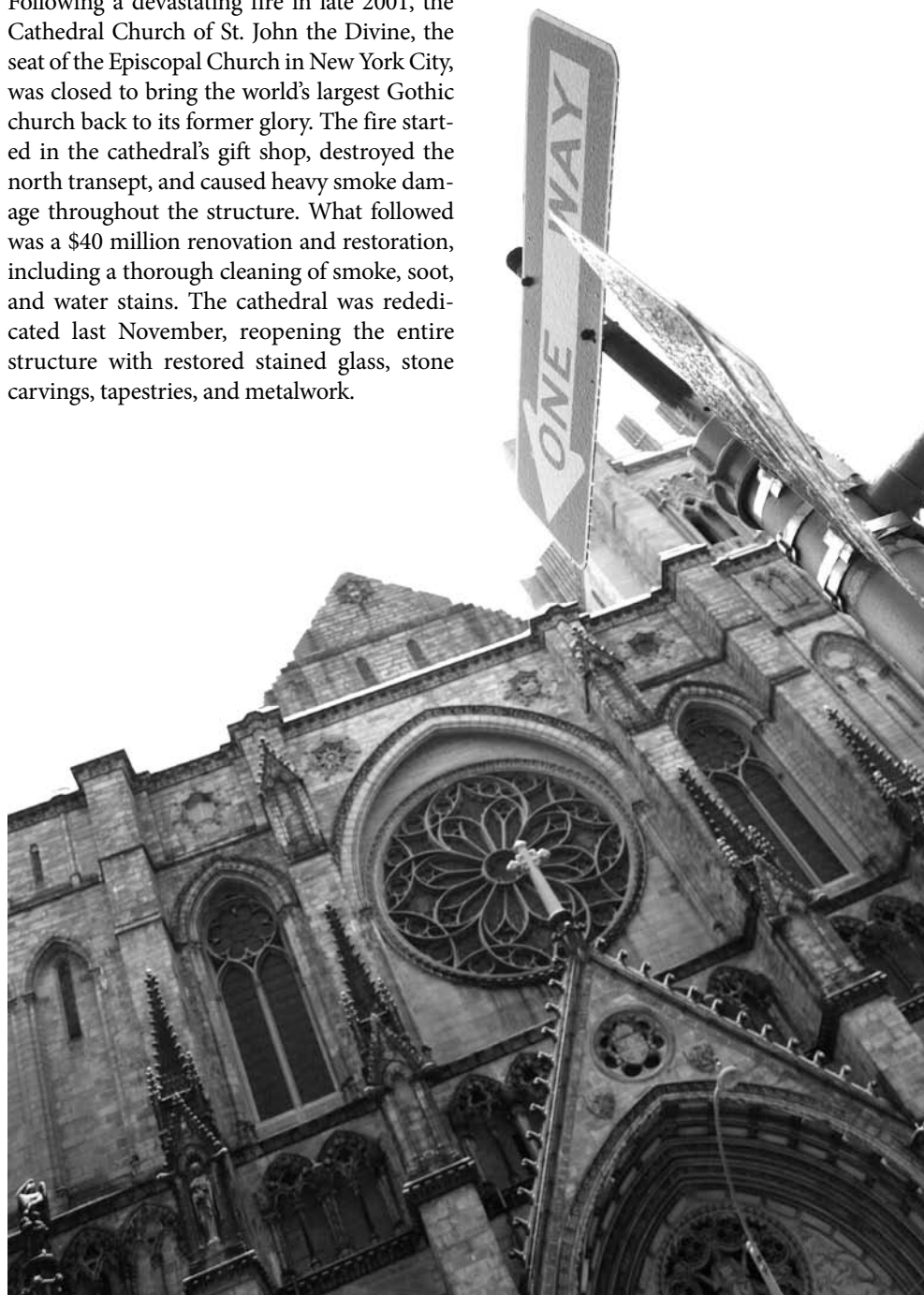


Photo: Christopher Crossbie

## Quote of Note

*I love you when you bow in  
your mosque, kneel in your  
temple, pray in your church.  
For you and I are sons of one  
religion, and it is the spirit.*

*Kahlil Gibran (1883 – 1931)*

### DIALOGUE ON ARCHITECTURE, CULTURE, AND SPIRITUALITY

Mount Angel Abbey commands a hilltop overlooking farmland surrounding St. Benedict, Oregon. The site reminded the Benedictine monks who founded the monastery in 1882 of their native Switzerland. In the 1970s, Alvar Aalto designed a library for the abbey—one of only two buildings he completed in the U.S.

So Mount Angel was the perfect place to hold the inaugural symposium of the Forum for Architecture, Culture and Spirituality (ACS) this past March. According to its Web site, ACS was “established in 2007 to support architectural and interdisciplinary scholarship, research, practice, and education on the significance, experience, and meaning of the built environment,” with a particular focus on its spiritual dimension. Among its members are architects, artists, educators, clergy, and researchers. According to ACS’s founders, the goal of the forum is dialogue in response to “a remarkable growth in scientific and professional research on mind and spirituality accompanied by an increase in public interest in the subject.”

The symposium was the first step in broadening that dialogue, which had until then transpired mostly through the ACS Web site. Of ACS’s approximately 120 members, more than 30 gathered at the Mount Angel retreat house for a wide-ranging discussion over two days that allowed nearly all the participants to present papers and projects. It is impossible to list all of the topics considered, but here are just a few to provide a sense of the diversity present: “On Teaching the Design of Poetically/Spiritually Charged Environments”; “Christopher Wren, Christian Cabala, and the Tree of Life”; “Creating a Sense of the Sacred: The Palliative Care Unit at the University Hospital of Gottingen, Germany”; “Ordinary Spaces and Extraordinary Sacredness: The Hindu Festival of Lights”; “Regarding Sacred Landscapes and



the Everyday Corollary” (one paper, by Julio Bermudez, is the basis of his article, which begins on page 8 of this issue).

Discussion sessions wrapping up the conference allowed reflections on the challenges of bringing such material into the studios of art and architecture programs. There is a sense that students are hungry for such discussions in class, and as content for studio work, but that professors may be reluctant to bring the discussion of spirituality into the classroom. The symposium, perhaps, made a step in that direction.

More information about ACS is available on its Web site (<http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/acs/>) and a publication of the inaugural symposium’s proceedings is being planned.

- Michael

J. Crosbie

#### BOOK REVIEW:

*Sacred Buildings – A Design Manual*

RUDOLF STEGERS

(BIRKHAUSER, 2008) \$110

This book is a valuable resource to anyone who designs contemporary religious buildings for any of the three Abrahamic faiths. The 69 examples are drawn from churches, synagogues, and mosques built since 1970. There is a particular emphasis on mosques, as the construction of such buildings is increasing in the West. The book opens with an excellent chapter on the history of church architecture, which includes an absorbing discussion of contemporary worship spaces. There are also sections that discuss synagogue and mosque design, and chapters on acoustics and lighting for religious buildings. The balance of the book includes profiles of churches, synagogues, and mosques from around the world—all in a strong modern idiom. In this book, Stegers has made a significant contribution to the discipline of sacred architecture.

#### BOOK REVIEW:

*God, Creativity, and Evolution – The Argument From Design(ers)*

MICHAEL BENEDIKT

(CENTERLINE BOOKS, 2008) \$15.95

In this short treatise, author Michael Benedikt (an architecture professor at University of Texas Austin), takes us on a journey through evolution, the nature of design, atheism, creationism, and draws parallels between evolution and design, and the role of God as a designer still at work. He also discusses the spiritual dimensions of the lives and works of Michelangelo, Wright, Le Corbusier, and Kahn.

#### BOOK REVIEW:

*Theology in Built Environments*

SIGURD BERGMANN, EDITOR

(TRANSACTION BOOKS, 2009) \$49.95

This anthology of essays exploring religion, architecture, and design presents a cross-section of current thinking, trends, and propositions concerning the environments that we create for worship. Sigurd Bergmann, a professor of religious studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, and chair of the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment, brings together the work of 14 contributors (including this journal’s editor and editorial advisor Richard Vosko) who consider the place of architecture, art, and design in historical and contemporary sacred places. The contributors view buildings, scriptures, conversations, prayers, preachings, artifacts, music and drama, and built and natural surroundings as contributors to a contextual theology.

#### ONLY CISTERCIAN GOTHIC PORTAL IN NORTH AMERICA COMPLETED

Three 12th-Century entry arches to the ancient chapter house of the Abbey at Santa Maria de Ovila in Spain have been reconstructed in California at the Abbey of New Clairvaux. The 800-year-old arches were brought to America by newspaperman William Randolph Hearst in the 1930s. He had intended to reconstruct the magnificent

Ovila Chapter House within one of his homes, but never did so. The stones were donated to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and languished in Golden Gate Park for decades.

The arches and their outer and inner rings were re-assembled using mostly original stones. New limestone, chemically compatible with the 800-year-old stones, takes the place of missing stones. The portal is the iconic feature of the Chapter House. “It’s the

most significant and visible design element,” said master stone mason Frank Helmholtz. “It’s very classic early-Gothic mixed with Cistercian architecture which strives for simplicity.” The reconstructed portal of the former Santa Maria de Ovila monastery is an architectural masterpiece that was built between 1190 and 1220 by Cistercian monks. The reconstruction was carried out by a team of historians, architects, builders, and stone masons. Now that the portal is completed, the next step will be to complete the Chapter House interior, including its walls, columns, vaulted ceiling, and floor. This work will be done in three stages. Funds have been committed for the first stage: installing the 800-year-old stone in the three walls up to column height, and erecting the two central columns. In the second stage, the restoration team will reconstruct an elaborately arched Gothic vaulted ceiling inside the Chapter House; finally the floor will be installed in the third stage. For additional project information and to view new construction photos, visit: [www.sacredstones.org](http://www.sacredstones.org).





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## COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD?

JUST ONE MORE THING... \* BETTY H. MEYER

Do you live in a community or in a neighborhood? I admit I thought these terms were synonymous until I read an article by Elizabeth Padjen, FAIA, in *Architecture Boston*, of which she is the editor. Padjen wrote of hearing a siren and rushing across the street to see if she could help with a house fire. She did not know the residents of the house because she had only recently moved to that street from a small city where she knew every home and had attended parties and dinners in many of them. She missed her old home.

When the fire was out she was surprised to find that other people who had come to help were introducing themselves, not just to her, but to each other. She was shocked to realize that people who had lived nearby for years did not know each other by name or family. Padjen concluded that she had moved into a friendly *community*, not a *neighborhood*. What is the difference? A community, she wrote, is a locale where one recognizes and smiles at familiar faces; a neighborhood is where you know the faces by name and ask about their families, their work, and future plans.

The article made me think about my own situation. I have been so proud of my community. On my block alone are homes with Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Buddhist families. I wish there was a Muslim home too; my guess is there is probably an agnostic or an atheist or two. I think it is a community to be proud of, but after reading the article I realized that while I am helping to create a community I have not followed through as a neighbor. I do not know all these people by name or vocation, much less do I know their families. I have not invited them into my home nor have I been invited into theirs. In today's fast-paced world, with all its problems, we are all too busy to concentrate much time or effort on human, personal relationships. To be honest I must admit that my community, as good as it may be, is not a neighborhood.

Can a neighborhood be created? This has long been a question on the minds of clergy and of architects. Isn't this what *Faith & Form* is really all about? All faiths are concerned with relationships, and architects are concerned with forms that promote them. When I read articles by either clergy or architects, I believe we are succeeding in many ways, but of course we must be open to change, with new learning and experience.

Recently, I read in the *Muse & Spirit* journal that it has expanded to cover all of the classic nine arts and has encouraged the public to react and participate. Any individual may receive the magazine, without charge, just by sending in a mailing address. Anyone may submit an article about his or her work and be assured it will be seriously considered by professionals. The editor, J. Daniel Brown, wrote: "Our kind of organization must be a Jack-of-all-trades to survive. We want to reach as many people as possible and help them learn and discuss but not attempt to convince." He is building an organizational neighborhood. I called and congratulated him and his staff on their efforts to foster neighborly relationships. On the back cover of *Architecture Boston* I noticed an architectural photograph and beneath it an ad titled, "Thought Forms." I am trying to form my thoughts about community/neighborhood differences. Will you join me?

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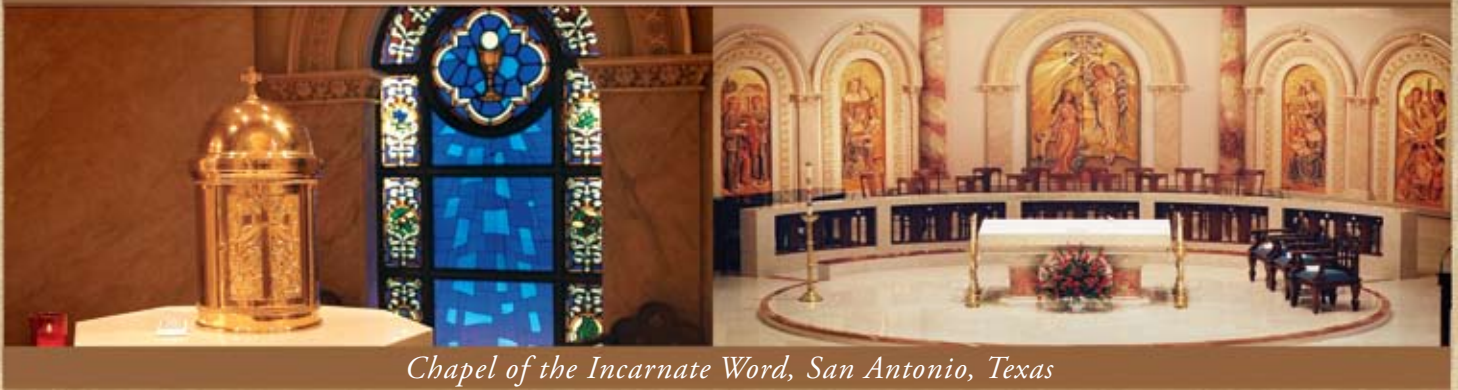
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