Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, recently released its third "American Religious Identification Survey," which seeks to determine whether respondents regard themselves as adherents of a religious community (you can download a copy of the survey’s summary report from the Faith & Form web site at faithandform.com). Previous surveys took place in 1990 and in 2001. America is still predominantly Christian, but less so (86 percent identified themselves as Christian in 1990, compared with 76 percent now). Mainline Protestant congregations experienced the steepest declines in membership (from 17.2 to 12.9 percent).

Fifteen percent of the adults surveyed are not affiliated with an organized religion, are agnostic or atheist, or describe their religious affiliation as “None” (the moniker that the study uses for this group). The greatest growth was from 1990 to 2001, when the percentage of Nones jumped from 8.2 to 14.1 percent. Since 2001, Nones have grown by only 1 percent.

Here’s a surprising finding: self-described agnostics and atheists nearly doubled (from 0.9 to 1.6 percent between 2001 and 2008) . However, when people were asked their beliefs about whether or not there was a God or a supreme being, 12.3 percent responded that “there is no such thing,” “there is no way to know,” or they are “not sure.” These answers, which can be described as atheist/agnostic, come from a much larger percentage of the population than the percentage who identify themselves as atheist or agnostic.

In the study, slightly less than 70 percent responded “there is definitely a personal God.” But if 76 percent of Americans self-identify with Christianity, and 80 percent with a religion, how do we square these numbers? The study suggests that “many millions do not subscribe fully to the theology of the groups with which they identify.” This, I would say, leads to the conclusion that many of us belong to a religious community for nonreligious reasons, or...we’re hedging our bets: “I’m pretty sure there isn’t a God, but just in case...”

The study found erosion in participation in religious ceremonies for marriages and funerals. The study concludes with the observation that “...the United States in 2008 can be characterized as a country with a Christian majority population but with a growing nonreligious or irreligious minority. The growing nonreligious minority reduces the traditional societal role of congregations and places of worship in family celebrations of life-cycle events. The forestalling of religious rites of passage, such as marriage, and the lowering expectations on religious funeral services, could have long-lasting consequences for religious institutions.” What do these numbers portend about religious art and architecture? Organized religion continues to decline, and those who identify themselves as members of a religious group aren’t necessarily there to find God, but perhaps to find a community. Maybe we will need fewer structures for worship but more space for fellowship.
Each year we invite five jurors who represent different constituencies in the world of religious art and architecture—architects, artists, liturgical designers, clergy, and congregants—to select the winning projects in the Faith & Form/IFRAA International Awards Program for Religious Art and Architecture. After two days devoted to reviewing projects, deliberating, and making final choices, the jury has an opportunity to reflect not only on the winning projects, but also on all of the submissions, and to comment on what they have seen, what they have not seen, and the trends in the field.

This year our jurors detected the restlessness that is being experienced not only in the mainline faiths, but also in emerging worship communities regarding stylistic content in both art and architecture. Most (not all) of the jurors saw continued reticence on the part of congregations to embrace contemporary forms, modes of expression, and spatial experimentation. The jury felt that there is, instead, more interest in traditional (what some might describe as conservative) styles in both art and architecture. And the jury questioned whether faith communities are ill-served by such a lack of temerity. “Why are we so afraid?” one juror asked, rhetorically. “Why do we keep resorting to old forms? Why are we not venturing into the future?”

Ironically, one of the more adventurous clients identified by the jury was the megachurch congregation, which appeared more willing to try new architectural expressions (but not always with satisfactory results). The form of megachurch worship space is still evolving, observed several jurors, struggling to integrate worship with new technologies of video, lighting, and acoustics. This makes it hard, noted one juror, to judge whether megachurches are truly significant works of religious art and architecture.

The idea of shifting emphasis led the jury to speculate on the timeless quality of great religious buildings, and whether the permanence that has been expected from such buildings actually inhibits the experimentation that some jurors felt was lacking in the submissions. If traditional art and architecture continue to dominate the field, does this in turn make clergy, congregations, artists, and architects blind to new possibilities in worship environments? Might, in fact, less permanent environments, more adaptable designs, and buildings designed for invention better serve congregations in flux? Could such flexibility encourage experimentation in liturgy and worship style? And might it be a hallmark of “sustainable” design, in that it would keep worship environments relevant and changeable so that old spaces need not be demolished? Undoubtedly it would, and that just might be the reason there is so little open-endedness in today’s worship environments. Jurors speculated that in a conservative era of doctrine, flexibility is suspect because it invites a certain “liturgical free-styling” in the face of orthodoxy.

Such rigidity is expressed not only in the arrangement of the spaces, but also in the art that adorns the architecture. Some of the jurors detected little toleration for greater artistic expression by both artists and architects. There is more emphasis on meeting the program and satisfying client wishes. While such professional responsibility is to be applauded, might artists and architects be abdicating their role as visionaries in the realm of sacred art and architecture?
2009 Faith & Form Religious Architecture Award

Sun-pu Protestant Church is on a corner between commercial and residential areas in Shizuoka. The sanctuary sits close to the commercial zone and faces a railway, its corner entry towards a town square. Remaining functions, including a parsonage, are near the residential zone. The chapel is a simple cube similar in volume to neighboring buildings, while the rest is under a pitched roof, like the buildings on a narrower side street. Throughout, pure light and the sound of voices are key; God is described first as “the light” and then as “the word.” During worship believers read the Bible together aloud.

The exterior is clad in split, unfinished boards with a wavy texture. Light strikes this uneven surface, narrow shadows sharply contrasting with sunlight, the wall wrapped in shadow and light. The wood wall will age to dark silver, lines of light and shadow contrasting like an etching plate. The darker wall will also highlight a cross and a grape-ivy filigree entry gate. In the sun, the wall changes color, lighting the ground with a cross and a grape-ivy filigree entry gate. The interior is wrapped in thin boards with a wavy texture. Light strikes this thick envelope: at the ceiling, each board almost thread-like, gauzily filtering light; light spills on the wall in shimmering pixels. Light strikes and highlights each surface or shines through, achieving ideal reverberation for spoken word.

Jury Comments
This building gives true meaning to what a sanctuary should be. Externally, in reaction to the immediate environment, it is a rugged, strong work, withstanding the context and weather. Inside it is warm, comfortable, and infused with light. When the sun moves, the room changes with different qualities of light. The sacred meaning of a simple cube, expressed in the strong contrast of the wood grain, vertical against horizontal, displays a great sensitivity to context. The light-quality inside is a surprise, given the bold sculptural statement outside. It is hospitable marriage of light and materiality, dedicated to use.

Religious Architecture
New Facilities
Church Sun-pu
Shizuoka prefecture, Japan
Awards
Religious
Award
New Facilities
Chapel Addition
Shepherd of the Valley
United Methodist Church
Hope, Rhode Island
Architect
Taira Nishizawa Architects
3six0 Architecture
John Horner Architects
Architect & Associates, Inc.
Karna Architectural Acoustic Design
Kamiko Structural Engineering
Ornament Designer
(entrance gate)
Maki Kaneko
Furniture Designer
Taira Nishizawa Architects
Photography
Hiroshi Ieda
Acoustical Engineer
Karna Architectural Acoustic Design
Structural Engineer
Kamiko Structural Engineering
Lighting Engineer
Religious Architecture Award
2009 Faith & Form Religious Architecture Award

The program called for a multi-purpose space that could be used for children’s services, small religious ceremonies, and church congregation meetings, with seating for up to 65 people. The furniture layout needed to be flexible, depending on the use of the space. The congregation also wanted a new entry to the chapel and an existing education wing.

The site in rural western Rhode Island is surrounded by farmland. The existing church is a prefabricated building from 1970. The chapel addition is located to the north of the existing education wing. The architect conducted a programming study in order to define the needs for expansion, and developed a tectonic based on the concept of “spirare” (spirit), “inspirare” (breathe) and “spirale” (expansion and connection). The schematic design proposed a new education wing, restructured chapel end wall, and reorganized entry.

The resulting design respects the original church. The existing vinyl siding was replaced with wooden board-and-batten details that alternately expand and contract, creating a new exterior and openings for modulated light. The geometry of the ceiling/roof and floor spirals north, setting the position of the structure, windows, and ceiling/wall acoustics.

Jury Comments
This is a beautifully designed enclosure, clearly defining what is new and the time when it was added to the existing building. The buildings relate to and talk to each other. The entry is exceptional, fits the site beautifully, and inspires different functions. It has a clean architectural shape, honors the existing building, and is evocative in its use of materials and forms inside and out. The design demonstrates bravery on the part of the congregation and the architect.
The interpretation of its meaning, eliciting associations from sails on the open sea, the 12 tribes of Israel, and the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Adjacent to the sanctuary is a social hall that enables the sanctuary’s 140 seats to expand to 250 for High Holiday services. The first purpose-built synagogue in southern Minnesota, the new 15,000-square-foot B’nai Israel Synagogue creates a symbolically appropriate home for the congregation and Mayo Clinic visitors. The heart of the structure is a sanctuary organized in a partition that reinforces communal gathering and faces east toward Jerusalem. In the sanctuary, a unique ark wall composed of two layers of abstract patterns rendered in white translucent acrylic - merge pended layers of the ark wall guide the eye into the illusion of stratified depth, recalling the darkness-into-light journey of religious expansion. The back wall bema wall is subtle and beautiful. Light and space are meticulously layered to create a sense of tranquility, while mahogany, stucco, and brick evoke a sense of warmth. A garden terrace accentuates the building’s symbolic relationship to the land, providing a space for celebration of annual rites such as Tu B’Shvat and Sukkot. The building consists of a stone “nave” made of locally quarried limestone with a wooden truss-supported, standing-seam metal roof that visually floats over the top of the building and is separated from it by clerestory windows all around. The simplicity of the exterior is reinforced by a hidden gutter system integrated into the standing-seam metal roof. The height of this roof provides a commanding presence throughout the campus. Custom chandeliers, stained-glass windows, and interior wood furnishings designed by the architect complete the interior. Seating is moveable cathedral chairs. The All Saints Chapel is a new worship and convocation space for a private Episcopal college preparatory school, founded in 1893, located on the northern hill country edge of San Antonio. The school is co-educational for grades 6-12. The goals of the project were three-fold: provide an iconic worship and convocation space that becomes the central focal point of the campus; move the chapel from temporary quarters in the cafeteria; provide much needed additional classroom space. The 21,200-square-foot, two-level building is located at the heart of the campus and is the backdrop of an existing amphitheater—a site identified by the architect during a master planning phase. The chapel can accommodate more than 500 worshipers – in excess of the school’s current enrollment. The chapel straddles the main north-south pedestrian spine of the campus, which connects the academic and residential halves of the site and is centered on the east-west axis of the amphitheater immediately to the east. It is readily visible from all parts of the campus. The architecture of the
The Cathedral of Christ the Light provides a sanctuary in the broadest sense of the word. Located in downtown Oakland on the edge of Lake Merritt, this house of worship offers sanctuary in the broadest sense of the word. The Cathedral of Christ the Light provides a sacred space for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together and be nurtured spiritually.

Two interlocking circles create the sanctu¬ary’s footprint design of the “vesica piscis,” evoking the symbol of a fish. An overarch¬ing goal of the project was to create a space that resonates with the cathedral’s specific temporal, physical, and cultural place. In consideration of the traditions of Bay Area architecture, the most elemental qualities of light, material, and form were used to create sacred space within an ethos of sustainability.

The cathedral draws on the tradition of light as a sacred phenomenon. Through its poetic introduction, indirect daylight enno¬matically introduces light, material, and form were used to create temporal and cultural place. In consideration of the traditions of Bay Area architecture, the most elemental qualities of light, material, and form were used to create sacred space within an ethos of sustainability.

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The abbey church complex, designed by Marcel Breuer in the 1950s, includes an upper and lower church and monastic chapter house. The new 9,200-square-foot project includes the renovation of the existing chapter house, a two-level lobby addition, and the new blessed sacrament chapel. The monastic community asked that the facility be more open to the public and more comfortable to use, and the new chapel be “conspicuous to the gathered faithful, prayerful, accessible and also architecturally significant yet sympathetic to the church.”

Throughout the abbey church Breuer used materials that subtly play on shadow and light. Light is used to create atmospheric and spiritual effect, without revealing its source or true nature. Both the chapter house addition and the chapel build on these ideas found in the abbey church complex.

The addition creates a new accessible entry and connection to the upper church and a new lobby and entrance for the renovated chapter house directly from the parking area. Adjacent to the abbey church, the blessed sacrament chapel reconfigures an ordinary office building.

The addition opens an opportunity for personal rather than communal reflection and meditation. "It figures an ordinary office building reinterpreted as a place of prayer, a place where the sacred and the secular, the contemplative and the working, are beautifully suspended in a way that results in a sacred space. The extraordinary use of light and shadow create a spiritual ambiance. The character of the space creates an atmosphere of calmness and meditation, an atmosphere of peace where the faithful can study light and sacred objects."
The Cathedral of Christ the Light celebrates the liturgical traditions of the Catholic faith through the vocabulary of 21st century design and technology. Architecturally scaled graphic elements highlight the cathedral’s play of light and its integration of Catholic symbols as key elements. The overall design intent was to convey an inclusive statement of welcome while merging Catholic traditions with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities.

The mausoleum, drops in elevation to give the feeling of descending into the catacombs below the cathedral. The crucifix at the end of the processional ramp originates from one of the diocese’s parishes. It was refinished and placed here as a symbol of the communities that the cathedral serves. A circle of glass illuminates the catafalque from the altar of the sanctuary above, bringing daylight into the mausoleum space. Impala Black granite brings contrast to the Egyptian Desert Gold.

Jury Comments

This $11 million project brought a 75-year-old, Gothic Revival cathedral into compliance with current Roman Catholic liturgical standards. It provides new spaces for gatherings, meetings, and administration. Work included restoration of the cathedral interior and the design of new ritual focal points. A new Great Hall for community gatherings links the cathedral, rectory, and new office wing. A gracious front entry plaza includes wide steps, lighting, and ADA access ramps.

Inside the main worship space, a new granite baptismal font for baptism of high-tech glass and wooden louvers. The light, both natural and artificial, is skillfully manipulated through an abundance of high-tech glass and wooden louvers.

Jury Comments

This project shows how a church built a long time ago can be rejuvenated by the careful selection of furnishings, lighting, and an emphasis on where the altar should be placed in a Roman Catholic house of worship. There is appropriate identification of what is rich and supportive of a sense of place, and elevating it respectfully through restraint. The new design respects the community, celebrates it in a virtual openness. The chapels are also conducive to ambulatory movement around the altar. The painted plaster walls, sculptures, and elaborate ceiling were restored to create a warmer, more unified scheme. Deteriorated pews were replaced with chairs for greater flexibility and a tile floor was installed. The old altar was removed from the chance to make room for an expanded choir and new Paul Fritts pipe organ. A distinct Chapel for the Reserved Eucharist was created with a ceiling featuring gold leaf constellations that accurately depict the sky on the night of the cathedral’s dedication. New reconciliation chapels with a sky-lit entry vestibule originate from one of the diocese’s parishes. It was refinished and placed here as a symbol of the communities that the cathedral serves. A circle of glass illuminates the catafalque from the altar of the sanctuary above, bringing daylight into the mausoleum space. Impala Black granite brings contrast to the Egyptian Desert Gold— a material used in the ancient pyramids.

Jury Comments

The chapel spaces throughout the interior of the cathedral are inviting and are quite spacious. The mediation areas have seats along the wall, inviting the visitor to spiritual openness. The chapels are also conducive to ambulatory movement around the cathedral, while the space of the central nave is more conducive to corporate prayer. The light, both natural and artificial, is skillfully manipulated through an abundance of high-tech glass and wooden louvers.

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Jury Comments
Sukkot, the feast of Tabernacles. The design of harvest, Wesleyan’s Sukkah was designed to be historically associated with the Exodus and the tradition of the Sukkah as a temporary structure led by architect Elijah Huge. Following the ten-semester-long Research-Design-Build studio architecture students at Wesleyan University, as a Studio, a class of 16 undergraduate archi-

stand outdoor exposure, repeated assembly and disassembly, and store easily. The final project is sited on the brow of a hill overlooking a large field at the center of campus. Built of 1-inch-diameter structural arches with 1-inch-diameter bamboo cladding, the structure is stable yet ephemeral. The simplicity of WesSukkah’s construction and clear tectonic expression echo the Sukkah’s history as a nomadic hut, while its explicit impermanence encourages introspection on the fragility of human life and reflection on the vastness of the natural world.

The piece consists of 13 chairs, six on each side and one at the head of the table, outlining the room with four steely square bars. Each hinge (vertex) is designed as holding hands. The installation seems to be a pen-cil drawing of the last supper. Jesus’ chair is empty, while the chairs of the 12 apostles – Simon Petrus, James the Greater, John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the Lesser, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot – are draped with typical symbols for each of them, which take them into the present.

The piece offers an opportunity for the viewer to have a visiting right and is allowed to think about the apostles’ attributes that are warning and hope at the same time. The materials are modern rather than traditional. The piece has an almost industrial quality to it. It is done in such a way to imply fellowship and at the same time emptiness and sadness. It is also a contemporary interpretation of the apostles and their martyrdom, with an invitation to take a seat at the table. The cost of the seat, of discipleship, is expressed in the individual objects. The architectural context in this old, Romanesque space, speaks volumes.

Jury Comments

The Last Supper as described in the Bible is an integral part of today’s religion. Therefore this artwork is viewable but cannot be occupied. The viewer has a visiting right and is allowed to think about the apostles’ attributes that are warning and hope at the same time.

Religious Architecture
Sacred Landscape
WesSukkah
Wesleyan Center for Jewish Life
Wesleyan University
Middletown, Connecticut
Award
Honour
Designers and Builders
North Studio
Wesleyan University
283 Washington Terrace
Middletown, CT 06459
Elijah Huge (architect and assistant professor), Megan Nash (teaching apprentice), Alexandra Bean, Saul Carlin, McLean Demny, Gideon Finsen, Celia Hollander, Daniel Keller, Stephanie Lee, Rosa McFhleen, Alexander Mercari, Cameron Rowland, Elana Scudder, Benjamin Stockman, Gabriel Tomaun, April TovPLIED, Emily Tyler (students)
Client Committee
David Leipguier Teva (Rabbi), Jeremy Zwelling (professor), Benjamin Sachs-Hamilton, Becky Eidelman (students)
Photography
North Studio

WesSukkah was designed and built by North Studio, a class of 16 undergraduate architecture students at Wesleyan University, as a semester-long Research-Design-Build studio led by architect Elijah Huge. Following the tradition of the Sukkah as a temporary structure historically associated with the Exodus and the harvest, Wesleyan’s Sukkah was designed to be assembled each autumn for the celebration of Sukkot, the feast of Tabernacles. The design of a Sukkah is guided by a complex rabbinic code, which includes restrictions on site, materials, scale, light versus shadow, and structural support systems. The structure is intended to offer shelter while maintaining symbolic and literal connections to the broader landscape through its materiality and permeability.

During Sukkot, students pray, study, eat, sleep, dwell, and socialize in the Sukkah. The client emphasized that the Sukkah be welcoming privacy for the Sukkah’s religious users. In response, the structure was coming to all. In response, the structure was created an intentional sacred space providing privacy for the Sukkah’s religious users. The ju

Jury Comments

This is an excellent example of the kinds of ephemeral forms that can inspire participation, both permanent and temporary, and a contemporary manifestation of an ancient practice. It is also wonderful that this work is a product of students and faculty working together. In this case, the design and building experience becomes a religious experience. It is a super-manifestation of the intent of the holiday and its only required religious act. The architecture requires the students to fulfill that core religious act: a reminder of what one should do all year long.

2009 Faith & Form Sacred Landscape Award

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Bruno Eikel, blacksmith and artist, and Reinhard Weber, communication specialist and artist, better known as EikelWeber, developed this metal-forged version of the Last Supper. The piece of art is shown in the Bartholomew Chapel in Paderborn, Germany, constructed in 1056. The piece consists of 13 chairs, six on each side and one at the head of the table, outlining the room with four steely square bars. Each hinge (vertex) is designed as holding hands. The installation seems to be a pencil drawing of the last supper. Jesus’ chair is empty, while the chairs of the 12 apostles – Simon Petrus, James the Greater, John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the Lesser, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot – are draped with typical symbols for each of them, which take them into the present.

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The series “Stations of the Cross” was first exhibited at the World Youth Day celebrations in Sydney, Australia 2008. The launch was the first stage of a three-year project that will eventually consist of 15 life-size oil paintings that draw upon biblical stories to explore contemporary issues, transplanting modern day figures into age-old scenarios. For example, the depiction of Christ as a black boxer raises issues of human justice and racial inequalities in a modern visual translation of traditional iconography set against the ethereal quality of an abstract expressionist backdrop. South Sydney Uniting Church, which commissioned the series, wanted art that connected with the inner life of the parishioners in the Waterloo region—the heart of Aboriginal Sydney. The objective was to make the artworks an integral component of theological education, and theology an integral component of art education. The study depicting the sleeping or intoxicated “disciples” in the Garden drew these comments from parishioners: “I think we should hang this one permanently in the church. We all have addictions. We all fail. And yet we’re all part of the story.”

**Jury Comments**

Exhibiting these paintings in a church invites interpretations that reflect the changing times and the social context. The work is thought provoking and makes a powerful statement, recontexting the Stations of the Cross as a contemporary and relevant experience.

**Jury Comments**

The Beit Knesset triptych of hand painted and fired glass, laminated prismatic glass, and platinum calligraphy represents the spiritual journey undertaken by Abraham and Isaac in order to fulfill God’s command. The predominant blue and grey palette symbolizes the quiet meditation of Abraham and Isaac throughout their journey. The light in the top left hand corner represents Abraham’s understanding of God’s will throughout his difficult passage.

The center panel (71 inches high by 48 inches wide) is imbued with exciting texture, platinum hand-painted English lettering, Hebrew text written in red, and a red line moving diagonally upward from the lower left corner of the central panel to the upper right corner. The stirring coloration parallels the many levels and layers of thought of our forebears—the spiritual search, the questioning, and the struggle of personal feeling with the message of faith. The red line symbolizes the physical path and the spiritual path Abraham and Isaac took from the foot of the mountain to the summit, and the base of their divine relationship to the pinnacle of acceptance and understanding.

The side panels (each is 69 inches high by 42 inches wide) are infusions and splashes of color: gold, silver, blue, and red. Hints of soft yellows are painted to awaken our minds. The colors remind one of the ethereal recognition each individual can have of the Divine when we allow ourselves to loosen our position from earth to the heavens. The faceted glass border and colored fringes add yet another dimension of holiness to the triptych. The refraction of light through the surface texture adds diamonds of dancing light to the existing form.

**Jury Comments**

This is a lovely meditative piece that sets the mood for the space. The window also serves to block views from a highrise in Manhattan. The color palate is beautiful, with lovely and undulating tones. The stylized calligraphy is fashioned with care, with tension between the English and Hebrew letters. Interacting with light, the panels are a powerful art form with rich composition of color and texture.
Known as the “Nobel Prize of Architecture,” the Pritzker Prize this year goes to an architect who has created a number of sacred spaces. Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, 66, has been described as an “architect’s architect” in that his works (which are not numerous, given a practice over 30 years) are carefully crafted, materially exquisite, and atmospherically evocative. Among his most celebrated buildings are the Saint Benedict Chapel in Switzerland, completed in 1988; the Herz Jesu Church in Munich from 1996; and the Saint Bruder Klaus Field Chapel in Germany, constructed in 2007.

The trajectory of Zumthor’s career reveals his interest in materials and their expression. Born in Basel in 1943, his father was a cabinetmaker. In fact, he trained as a cabinetmaker for four years, then studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule (an arts and crafts school in Basel), and later at Pratt Institute in New York. In 1967 he returned to Switzerland, where he worked as a building and planning consultant and preservationist on historic villages. His experience in restoration gave him a knowledge and appreciation of the vernacular construction techniques that builders had used for hundreds of years, and how materials weather and acquire an irreplaceable patina that mark them as timeless. He also taught historic preservation at the University of Zurich.

In 1979 he established his own practice in the small mountain town of Haldenstein, Switzerland, where he continues to work today, with an office of about 15 employees (including craftspeople as well as architects). Zumthor has kept his practice small, which allows him to be selective about the projects he works on and to devote his full attention to them.

In writing about architecture and his own work, Zumthor emphasizes its experiential qualities. He draws existential connections between architecture and the life that happens around it, through it, and in it. Materials and how they are rendered and perceived are a major emphasis (not surprising for an architect who spent a decade studying historic structures and how they coexist over centuries with everyday life). For example, in his book, Thinking Architecture, Zumthor writes about the handle on the door to his aunt’s garden, which impressed him as a child: “That door handle still seems to me like a special sign of entry into a world of different moods and smells. I remember the sound of gravel under my feet, the soft gleam of the waxed oak staircase. I can hear the heavy front door closing behind me as I walk along the dark corridor and enter the kitchen.”

In another publication, Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects, Zumthor ruminates on definition of atmosphere as “this singular density and mood, this feeling of presence, well-being, harmony, beauty…under whose spell I experience what I otherwise would not experience in precisely this way.”

Zumthor’s handling of materials and details has been compared to that of Mies van der Rohe and Louis Kahn, but the phenomenological character of his ideas about how architecture is memorable and meaningful, how we interact with it through our bodies in four dimensions, and experience it with all our senses, ties him closer to the architectural ideas of Christopher Alexander, Charles Moore, and Kent Bloomer.

Zumthor’s Architecture of the Spirit text continues on page 27

Smooth concrete showing the successive pours makes of the exterior of the Klaus Chapel.
The theme of connecting earth to sky, prevalent in many sacred buildings, is found in the Saint Bruder Klaus Field Chapel in Germany, which Zumthor designed for a farmer who built it with the help of neighbors. The austere, planer concrete exterior surrounds a sensuous, organic interior that wraps around the visitor like the fingers of God. Zumthor achieved the space through an elaborate construction process. A total of 112 sapling trunks from a local forest were cut and arranged in a teepee fashion. Over the course of 24 days, layers of concrete, each approximately 50 centimeters thick, were poured around the outside of the conical structure. Metal sleeves were positioned before the application of the concrete to create pinholes of light. After the concrete layers were set, a smoldering fire was built inside to smoke the saplings for three weeks, causing them to dry out and loosen from their concrete sheath. When the trunks were removed, what remained were their ghostly outlines, darkened by the fire’s soot. Melted lead was then ladled onto the ground to create a mottled floor surface. The view straight up into the leaf-shaped oculus is like a perspective through the star-studded heavens toward the incredible light of a galaxy.

In the case of the Saint Benedict Chapel in Sumvtig, Switzerland, Zumthor created a new church to replace a baroque chapel that had been destroyed by an avalanche in 1984. The new site is on a footpath to the alp high above the village, in the midst of houses and farm buildings, and is protected from avalanches by the surrounding woods. The new chapel is completely covered with larch wooden shingles, reflecting Zumthor’s interest in materials that are both old and new, tied to the building traditions of the region yet expressed in a completely new way.

The aperture of the Saint Bruder Klaus Field Chapel suggests a leaf or tear drop, and here Zumthor uses virtually the same shape for the chapel’s plan. As the chapel is approached it presents a pinched edge, with an almost makeshift entrance off to the side. As it expands downhill, the chapel swells with a rounded form as it overlooks the valley. All of the materials inside are rendered naturally.

Some have questioned why an architect with such a slim portfolio should receive what is considered by many as architecture’s highest international honor. In the case of Peter Zumthor, the Pritzker jury has awarded exceptional quality over quantity, as evidenced in architecture of considerable spiritual power.
incorporates the use of timber frame construction and optimizes the use of glass. The truss design mimics the branches of the growing trees and reinforces the woodland context. According to Kenneth L. Davison, Jr., Vice President of College Relations at Belmont Abbey College, the design “required a great deal of sensitivity, especially considering the Gothic architecture of our campus, many of the buildings being more than 100 years old. Yet it was also important for the design of the chapel to fit the natural surroundings, to create something that is inviting for prayer, yet not conflict with the existing architecture.”

Progeny of Thorncrown

Thorncrown Chapel, designed 30 years ago by E. Fay Jones and winner of an AIA Honor Award in 1981, has inspired countless architects of sacred space. The latest project that can trace its lineage to Thorncrown is the recently completed St. Joseph’s Adoration Chapel on the campus of Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina, designed by WMG Design, Inc., of nearby Charlotte. The small 30-person chapel is nestled in the forest between the monastery and student housing to provide a quiet respite for worshipers. The chapel is constructed of a timber frame and glass walls to allow enjoyment of the forest’s beauty.

The goal for the college was first and foremost to create a retreat on campus where students and staff might worship and meditate, but also to provide a haven where the public might retreat from day-to-day life. An idyllic site nestled in a forested area was chosen near the secondary entrance to campus and adjacent to student housing to create a retreat on campus where students and staff might worship and meditate, but also to provide a haven where the public might retreat from day-to-day life. An idyllic site nestled in a forested area was chosen near the secondary entrance to campus and adjacent to student housing to provide a quiet respite for worshipers. The chapel is constructed of a timber frame and glass walls to allow enjoyment of the forest’s beauty.

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Surviving in the City: New Tools for Congregations

Faith and Form: The Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art and Architecture

Rising maintenance costs, shrinking congregations. This all too familiar dilemma faces many urban congregations as pressures increase on urban development and demographic shifts continue. But, on a recent sunny (and warm) day in Seattle a group of preservationists, architects, and community leaders gathered together in the stillness and beauty of the former Seventh Church of Christ Science (now the Seattle Church of Christ) in the heart of Queen Anne to hear Robert Jaeger, the Executive Director of Partners for Sacred Places, talk about how it is possible to save urban congregations from demise.

Just two years ago the 1926 Neo-Byzantine Early Christian Revival structure by Harlan, Thomas & Grainger faced the wrecking ball when the congregation miraculously raised enough funds to purchase the property, and the developer was willing to walk away to preserve the historic structure, located at 1505 1st Ave., Seattle. Executive Director of Partners for Sacred Places, talk about how it is possible to save urban congregations from demise.

Moving away from simply saving buildings and more towards keeping the living aspects of a congregation alive is the best investment a congregation can make, offering opportunities to thrive and develop. More government agencies and programs are also realizing the value of preserving houses of worship as well. Currently 25 states are funding preservation as part of community development efforts as they realize it is possible to respect and adhere to the historic significance of the structure to the surrounding neighborhood. Today the property sits as a designated City of Seattle Landmark through the preservation and dedication of an entity community, and a thriving congregation keeps the structure alive and connected to the community.

The “public value of sacred space” may seem like odd phrasing, Jaeger offered, but clearly this Seattle example is a testament to exactly that concept. Entire communities benefit from preservation of houses of worship, not only from an architectural standpoint but also from a social standpoint. Many congregations have become isolated over time even though they exist within urban cores, and they have not done a good job of sharing with the public what they already do for their communities. Many congregations run preschools, food banks, clothing banks, and allow the public to use vacant halls for community gatherings. All congregations provide sacrificial programming to varying degrees, programs that serve the entire community because it is part of the congregation’s mission to fill obvious voids that social service or government agencies are unable to fulfill. These are exactly the social activities that, Jaeger noted, are ideal to quantify in financial terms and to raise funds to meet congregational financial needs. While saving the structure and maintaining a congregational home may be the underlying drive for a congregation to reach out to the public in this way, the value of what a congregation can make, offering opportunities to thrive and develop. More government agencies and programs are also realizing the value of preserving houses of worship as well. Currently 25 states are funding preservation as part of community development efforts as they realize it is possible to respect and adhere to the historic significance of the structure to the surrounding neighborhood. Today the property sits as a designated City of Seattle Landmark through the preservation and dedication of an entity community, and a thriving congregation keeps the structure alive and connected to the community.

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The Editor of Faith & Form is always looking for contributions of articles and images on the topics of religion, art, and architecture. Please send your news to Faith & Form: The Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art and Architecture at 1304 N. Adams, Silver Spring, MD 20910, or email: mcrosbie@faithandform.com. Submit your news and comments to the editors of Faith & Form at faith&form@faithandform.com.
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Submit your cost-saving strategies or projects, built or unbuilt, to the editor: mcrosbie@faithandform.com

Doing More With Less
“Middle ground” as a term is usually thought of negatively, as a type of compromise, but I would like to suggest that we look at this term in a different way. These days, congregations and architects are often focused on how to blend old and venerable traditions of religious architecture with the need for new and contemporary perspectives.

I talked recently with the Reverend Jean Alexander of the Congregationalist and Methodist United Parish of Auburndale, Massachusetts, which was established in 1857 and is on the National Register of Congregational Churches. We discussed what she would like to see changed in the interior of her church to better serve the modern congregation. She said she would first ask for the congregation’s input and for a beginning statement from the builder before introducing her own suggestions. We both agreed that the primary question is how to connect with the new generation. Paul Tillich, the well-known theologian, emphasized the actualizing of new forms but, of course, what those forms will be is up to us.

Second, Reverend Alexander said she would then feel free to say that she finds the present altar space cluttered, and more simplicity desirable. After eliminating a center aisle, she would retain the pulpit but not the lectern. The altar with the cross would stay the same, but the dossal fabric hanging behind it would be subject to change for seasonal and artistic expression. She creatively mentioned that it could sometimes represent symbolically other faiths and thus give her the opportunity to educate the congregation.

In my mind Reverend Alexander has located a “middle ground”: she recognizes that the exterior of this award-winning historic church must be kept intact, but that a change in the interior can be accomplished in such a manner that exterior and interior work together harmoniously. The middle has been found in combining the traditional with the contemporary. A linear continuity has been established between the old and the new. If the religious experience is a pathway and the search for new forms is an ongoing evolution, then we must light the road traveled even as we hold the lantern out before us. The Past and the Present become the Future!
Jesus is the same for every one of us.

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