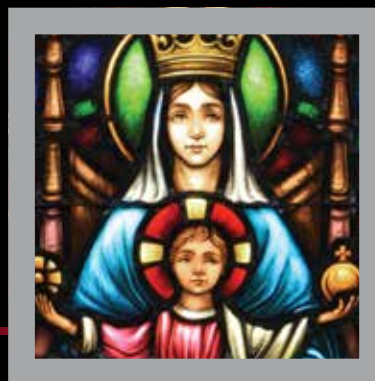
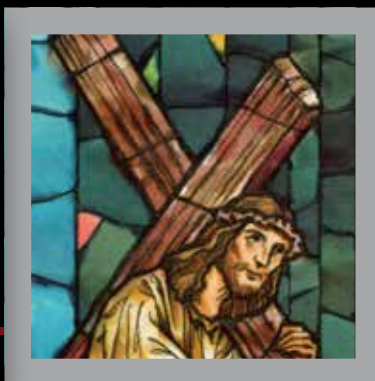
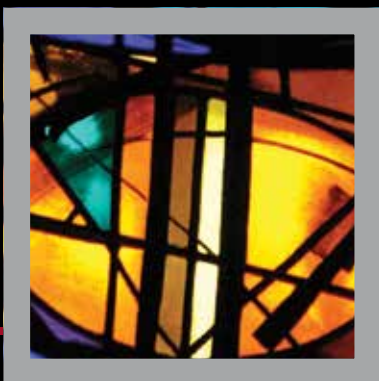
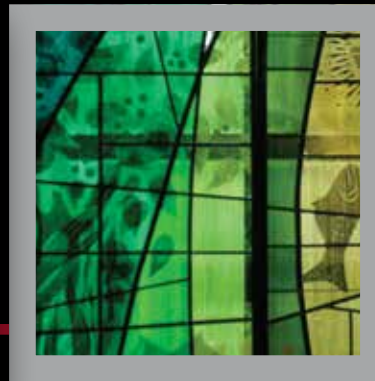
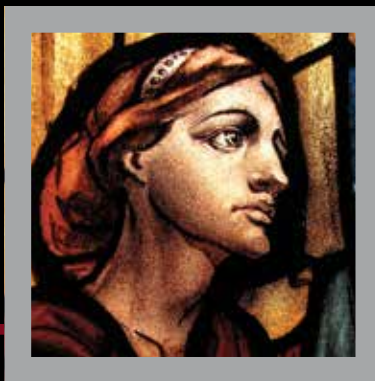
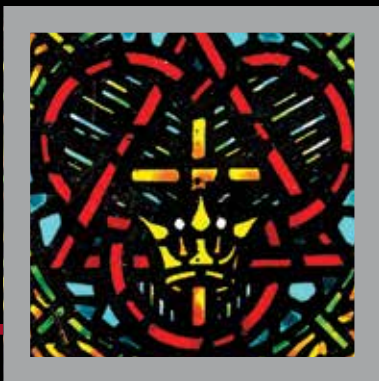


# FAITH & FORM

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Faith & Form's 50th Anniversary Issue

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# SACRED SILENCE

EDITOR'S PAGE ★ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE


*THE WORLD OF SILENCE* IS MAX PICARD'S 1948 meditation on silence in our world, its violation, and its spiritual dimensions. I place this book within the same dominion as two other works that I've written about in these pages over the past year: Junichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, and Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath*. The ideas in these books, each on a separate subject, are united by the authors' perceptions of how the realms of darkness, time, and silence possess their own sacred qualities. For Tanizaki, darkness accentuates light; within darkness we can find unfathomable holiness, mysterious and deep. Heschel's book challenges our conception of the sacred as located somewhere in space, lodged within a physical place. For him, only time is sacred, because we can neither create it nor control it; only the divine can do so.

Picard writes movingly about the godly in silence. He invites us to question our worship of "usefulness" in the shrines that we build to the practical: "Silence is the only phenomenon today that is 'useless.' It does not fit into the world of profit and utility; it simply *is*." He questions the values of a world whose highest praise is for function and purpose. Silence, he writes, "gives things something of its own holy uselessness, for that is what silence is: holy uselessness." In this, Picard sees within silence the presence of the deity: "...silence points to a state where only being is valid: the state of the divine. The mark of the divine in things is preserved by their connection with the world of silence."

Our mistake is in thinking that silence is a state of absence, that it

lacks something, that it is incomplete. For Picard, this is to misunderstand its blessed completeness: "Silence contains everything within itself. It is not waiting for anything; it is always wholly present in itself and it completely fills out the space in which it appears." In these ways, silence is like the divine, complete in every way: "The sphere of faith and the sphere of silence belong together. ...in this silence man approaches the silence that surrounds God Himself."

In a noisy world, sacred places are the last sanctuaries for silence. Picard writes: "Silence has locked itself up in cathedrals and protected itself with walls. The cathedrals are like silence inlaid with stone. The cathedrals stand like enormous reservoirs of silence. The cathedral tower is like a heavy ladder on which the silence climbs into heaven, to fade and disappear therein."

I close with a reflection on Mary Bishop Coan, who for several years served as *Faith & Form*'s copy editor (and who I met when I was an editor at *Progressive Architecture* in the 1990s). Her passing in February marked the end of a life dedicated to the clarity of communication, the precision of language, and the joy to be found in words. One of my favorite experiences as editor of this journal was to receive copy back from Mary covered with notes and observations about the English language: perhaps the use of a term, the correct deployment of a semicolon, or the untangling of run-on sentence. In her labors as a copy editor Mary was a gifted teacher, and I like to think that I am a better writer for having known her. 

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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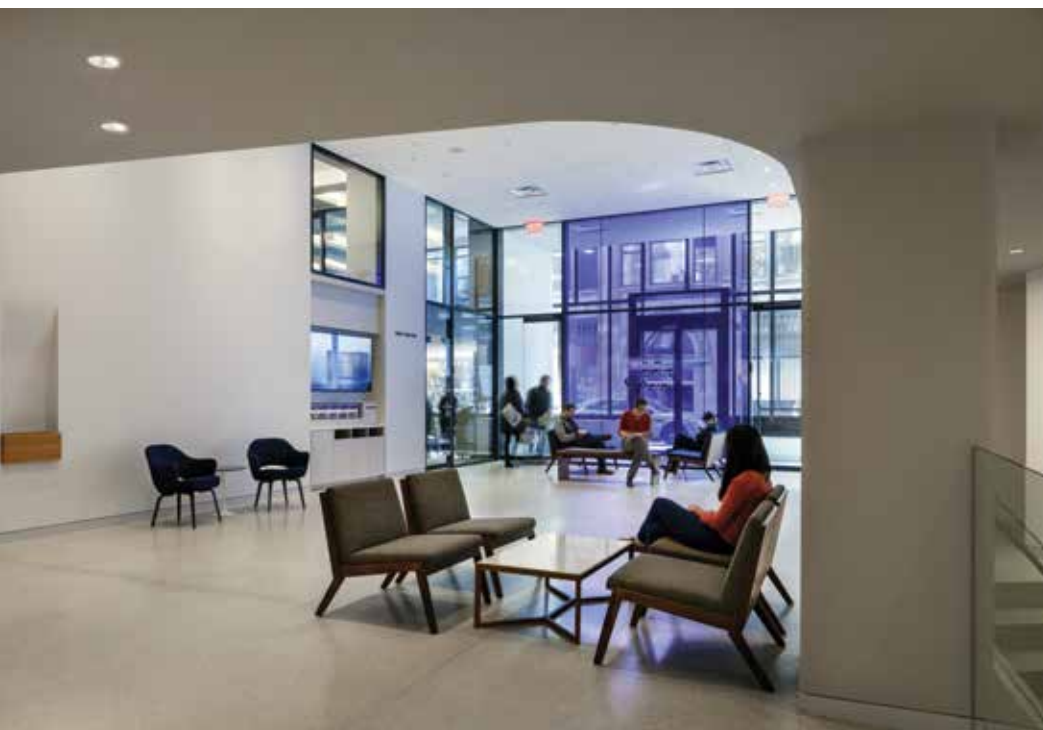
# A Synagogue as 'Extension of the Soul'

By Stephen Cassell, AIA

Photographs by Elizabeth Felicella/Esto



*The new synagogue presents a bright, welcoming face to the street.*



*The lobby is expansive, with colored light, and elegant details such as yarmulke storage as one approaches entry to the sanctuary.*

In the spring of 2007, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), the world's largest LGBTQ+ synagogue, received an offer from a developer to root its new home in the base of one of New York's residential towers. When my firm, Architecture Research Office, interviewed for the job we were excited about the project. At the end of the interview

we learned that Rabbi Kleinbaum, CBST's activist spiritual leader, already had a close, personal relationship with one of our buildings. To protest "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," her backdrop of choice was the Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Times Square, which we had designed in 1998. Predictably, just as CBST selected us to design the space, that real estate deal promptly fell through. Thus began our nine-year journey through a shifting landscape of gay rights to create a permanent home for CBST.

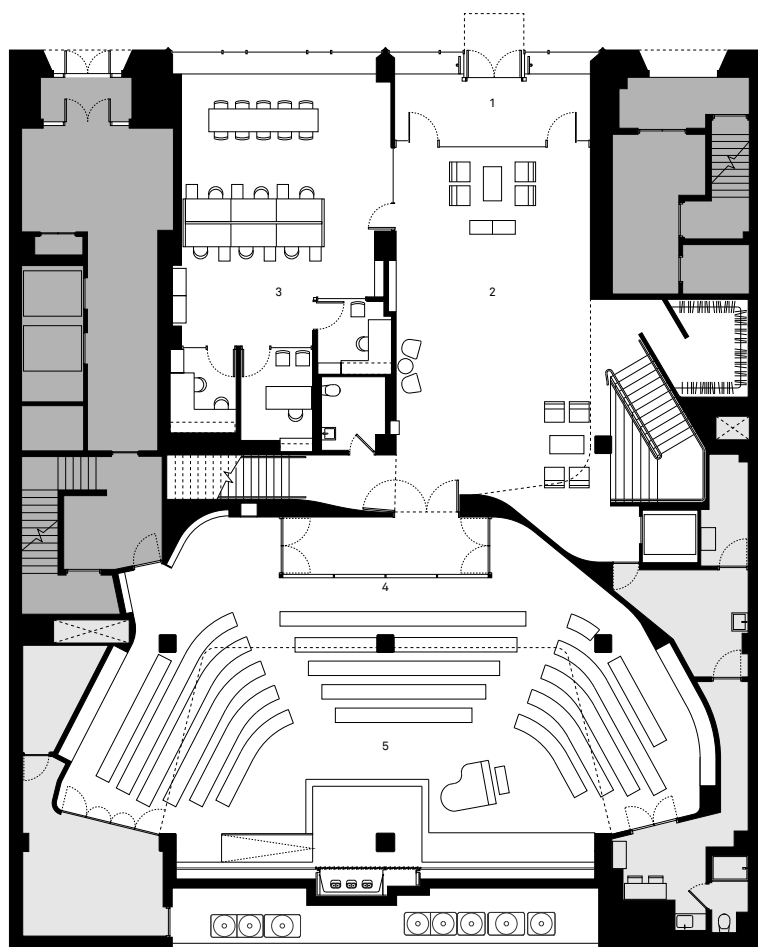


With its main space of worship in a church on 9th Avenue and 29th Street, separate from its offices and chapel in Westbeth Artists Housing on Bethune Street, CBST had operated in a divided landscape almost since its founding in 1973. The geographic partition had affected the community, undermining the congregation's social bonds, as members attending services in the church were disconnected from the synagogue's day-to-day work. While the space in Westbeth, which CBST had occupied since 1976, gave it a fixed address,

### First Floor

1. Vestibule
2. Lobby
3. Offices

4. Memorial Wall
5. Sanctuary

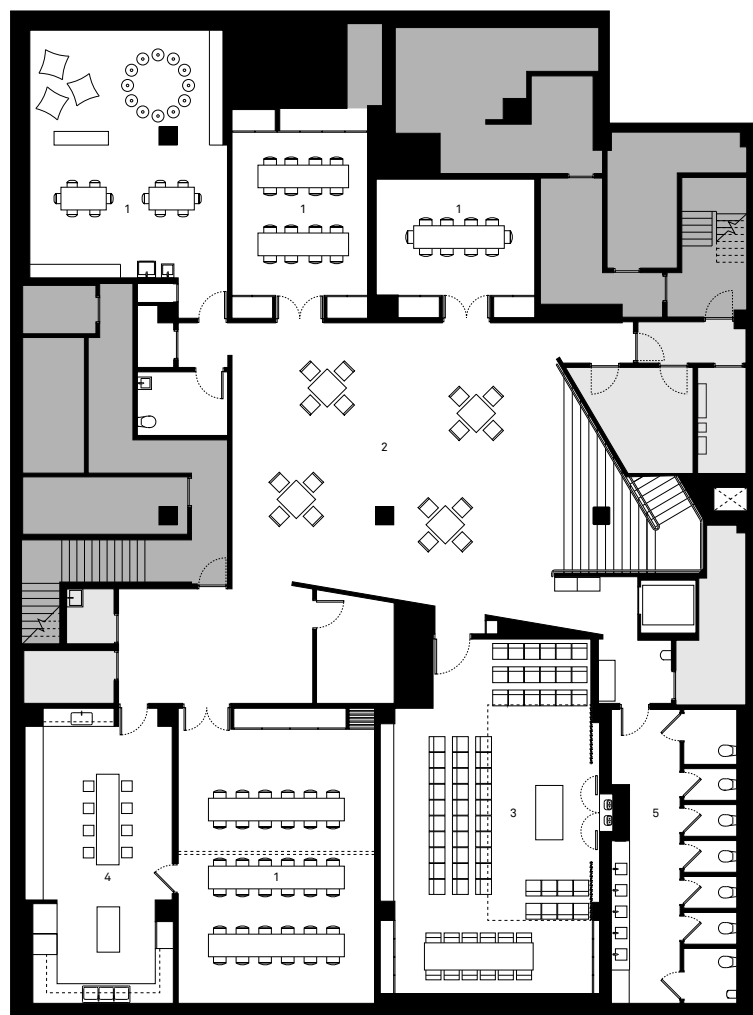


FIRST FLOOR

### Lower Level

1. Classrooms
2. Community Room
3. Chapel

4. Pantry
5. Restroom



LOWER LEVEL

### *Street level and lower level of the compact yet gracious plan.*

it was difficult to find because the entrance was out of the way, only accessible through a courtyard at the end of a ramp. That disjointed configuration made the synagogue feel hidden – “closeted” like a 1970s lesbian bar, as Rabbi Kleinbaum describes it.

CBST’s history and mission made it imperative that the architecture of its new home reflect the synagogue and congregation—a proud, radically traditional and inclusive group, an institution at the forefront of gay rights advocacy, unaffiliated with one particular Judaic movement. With the pressure off to start the design, we used the opportunity to embark on a three-month programming study. After interviewing more than 100 congregants, as well as individuals and professors outside of the community, we were able to develop a sense of CBST’s programmatic needs, an intellectual framework for the project, and an understanding of what the costs of such a project would be. The programming study also made CBST’s goals for the new space clear: the rabbi and her congregants were determined to

create a strong presence in the city, they hoped to establish a true sanctuary from the city (as a synagogue and an LGBTQ+ organization concerned about security), and they wanted to emphasize their inclusivity.

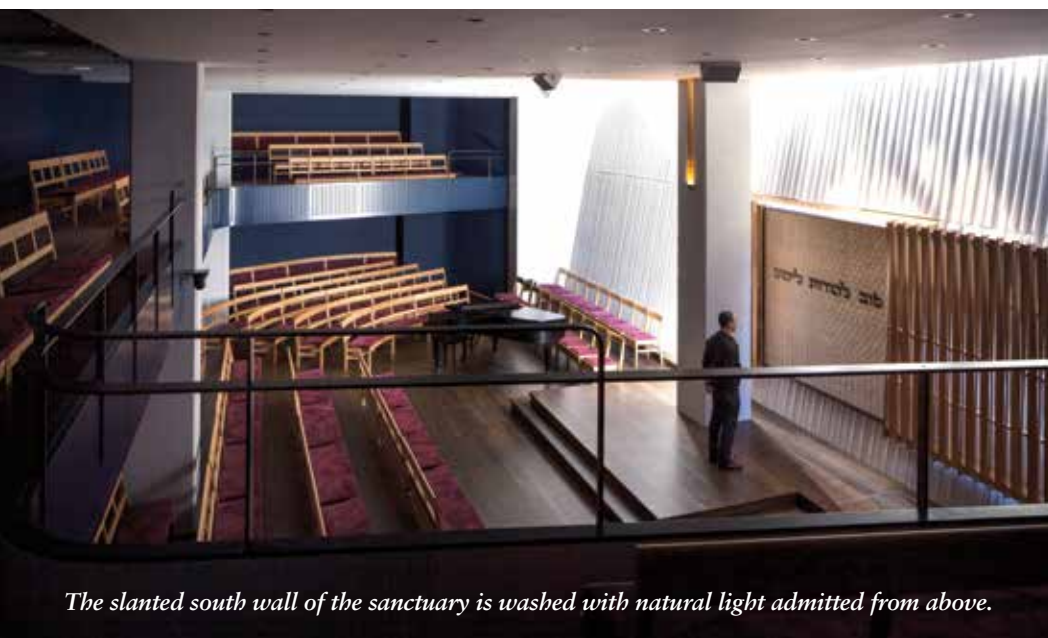
The programming study also helped us realize the ways in which CBST was distinct from a typical synagogue. One major difference was in its congregants’ diversity: socioeconomically, religiously in terms of Judaic movements represented, and geographically (with members from across the tri-state area). In addition, CBST was a congregation trying to accommodate for future growth and evolution as LGBT families with children were becoming an integral part of the synagogue and early members were aging. In planning terms, the study confirmed our thought that each space in CBST’s new home would have to serve multiple functions. It also emphasized the need for lecture space for social justice work and a wedding hall. (This was in 2007, several years before same sex marriage was recognized as legal by New York in 2011.)

By the start of the design development process, we knew that three core elements would focus the design: worship, community/outreach, and learning. All synagogues emphasize community and learning, yet these qualities were especially important for CBST, where the shul provides a haven for gay Jews. To keep us on track and the congregation informed, CBST formed a building committee to work with us. Led by Aari Ludvigsen (an architect) the committee cemented the close collaboration with us and also with Rabbi Kleinbaum. Together, we frequently met with the congregation to present and receive feedback openly as we strived to realize a vision for a synagogue designed with the flexibility to accommodate a variety of activities and occasions, and with individual elements that would also hide the existing building structure, pipes, and electric lines. In retrospect, watching the building committee work so hard to make sure that the design was as inclusive and “of” CBST as possible was wonderful. So many special, expressive details, both large and small, would





*Entry into the sanctuary reveals the ark with its sliding wood screen.*



*The slanted south wall of the sanctuary is washed with natural light admitted from above.*

not otherwise have existed: the quotes from Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" (which is in their *siddur*, prayer book) in the terrazzo and elevator; the signage outside the non-gendered restroom asking all to respect the gender expression of their fellow members; the wall celebrating every congregant's donation to the building fund, regardless of amount; the hearing loop in the sanctuary for the hearing impaired...and so many more.

After chasing the real estate market and studying more than 40 sites, in January 2011 we finally found our space at 130 West 30th Street: a storefront at the base of a landmarked building by Cass Gilbert dating to 1928. Built as a warehouse, clad in terra-cotta reliefs with Assyrian-inspired motifs, and with a more recent past devoted to the fur industry, the 18-story structure in the heart of midtown Manhattan had been converted into condos

in the early 2000s. Embedded in the historic façade with its winged guardians, horse-drawn chariots, and lions, our storefront boasted high ceilings, a mezzanine, and a tall basement—and, importantly, was adjacent to a police station. After existing in a split configuration between windowless offices and a small chapel in Westbeth with shabbat services in a church 20 blocks away, the congregation now had its first permanent home: a headquarters, home base, and physical face for the active institution.

We envisioned the façade—ultimately a composition of lit signage, vertical gold pinstripes, and lavender glass—as an embodiment of CBST's radical traditionalism, mediating the historic designation of the landmark building and presenting a modern and active institution. Set back 18 inches from the façade, the lighted element satisfies landmarks guidelines,

as do the gold pinstripes, which refer to the original gold-leaf storefront signage. Yet they are also undeniably for CBST, the gay synagogue. The lavender pane of glass was a critical part of our solution to clearly identify CBST. We considered traditional blue, but decided to test magenta, a reference to the pink triangle forced on prisoners to identify gay men in Nazi concentration camps and later reclaimed by AIDS activists in the 1980s. After long discussions and several options, the choice was lavender, which is imbued with the significance of the past and celebrates the present. Now—announced in large glowing letters, with gold vertical divisions across 50 feet of glass lined with blast-proof film, a 16-foot-tall lavender pane, four visible hanging rainbow flags, and brass door handles designed by artist and architect Mark Robbins—Congregation Beit Simchat Torah is hard to miss, a storefront for an urban synagogue that welcomes all in.

The promising qualities and clear limitations of the interior space were typical of a New York project and apparent early on, particularly the challenge of how to fit a sanctuary within the existing column grid. It was clear that using the existing building layout and capping the occupancy of the sanctuary at 299 would be cost effective, as structural changes and building code requirements for 300 or more were too costly to pursue. Part of the design process was constantly trying to figure out seemingly effortless solutions to these and similar limitations.

The lobby features four gay-pride flags created especially for CBST by the late Gilbert Baker, the artist and activist who designed the iconic symbol. To the right is the administrative staff; above them, the rabbinical suites. (This configuration establishes the visual connection absent from the Westbeth location.) The sanctuary, the spiritual heart of CBST, occupies the far end of the lobby rather than opening off the entrance, as at other Manhattan synagogues. This placement separates the sacred space from the city space, enhancing its sanctity and encouraging social engagement in the area between the two. To reach it, congregants pass the offices, a *kippot* (yarmulke) holder, and enter with another set of custom, carved brass door handles that remind yet again, in Hebrew, "It is good to give thanks." Mounted over the sanctuary door is the brass plaque with the Ten Commandments from CBST's previous home: a pair of male and a pair of female lions of Judah flank the tablets, in gender equality. A vestibule set with a constellation of lights, the back of the memorial wall, draws congregants into a luminous sanctuary.



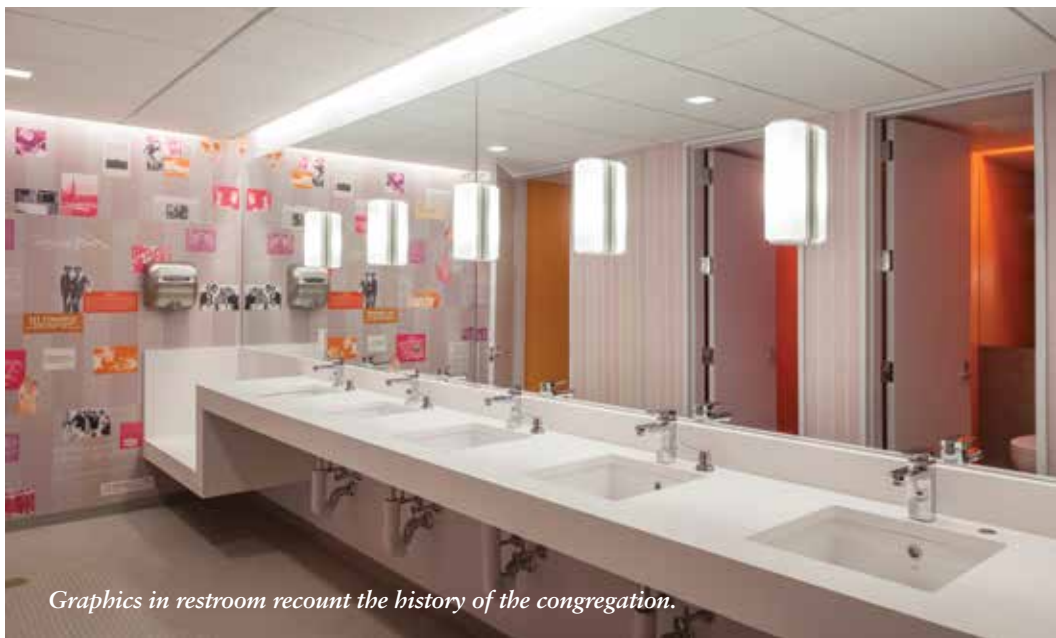
The sanctuary wall, a mass of fluted concrete, anchors the synagogue. Canted at a 10-degree angle to admit natural daylight (the one design element required by the Talmud for a synagogue) through a skylight, the wall is dramatic, acoustic, and avoids adding square footage to the restricted footprint. Congregants who had spoken movingly about being able to watch the sun set through the glass roof of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center during CBST's open-to-all high holiday services there inspired our own skylight, which casts a changing play of light and shadow on the wall, naturally illuminating the sanctuary as the sun sets at the start of a Friday night service.

The design of the sanctuary wall and skylight actually emerged from a fundamental aspect of CBST's services: music. To ensure that the new home would be even more vital in that regard, any visual solutions for the sanctuary had to follow from the acoustical imperatives. Bringing in Threshold, acoustic engineers accustomed to designing concert halls, allowed us to achieve two acoustic goals: to not disturb the residential building above, and to enrich the sound of the space. We determined the solid mass needed would be at the skylight and that concrete would be the prime focus of the sanctuary. The concrete flutes are grouped to align with Judaic numerology and thin as they angle downward to catch the light, inspiring the gold pinstripes across the façade.

Traditionally, synagogues are not as typologically consistent as other spaces of worship, with varying arrangements around the ark. An early iteration featured a shoebox-shaped sanctuary facing east – too much like a church and, for the rabbi, untrue to CBST's vision of itself. Alternate options led to seating that curves around the bema, an arrangement that reinforced a sense of intimacy and community among the congregation as seats were no more than 35 feet away from the center on both the main level and the balcony. We carried the formal language of gentle curves playing off of the canted wall into the lobby design and throughout the space. Whether or not to use pews was the topic of discussion for more than a year: for many they represented something too traditional. On the other hand, pews gave a stronger sense of order to the sanctuary and made it more efficient to meet the 299-capacity goal. From our perspective, the opportunity to reinterpret such a traditional element of worship would also result in efficient, custom seating that could serve flexibly for different services. Ultimately, the stackable oak pews (which allowed them to be stored so that the sanctuary could be used for wedding



*The sanctuary offers an intimate setting for a number of functions.*



*Graphics in restroom recount the history of the congregation.*

banquets), custom made by English furniture maker Luke Hughes, reinforce the formal order of the space. All remaining concerns evaporated once CBST opened.

The building committee requested that we integrate elements of Judaica selectively into the design of the synagogue. By custom, the sanctuary must contain two: the ark (which houses the Torahs) and the Ner Tamid, an eternal flame. It made sense to embed the ark in the concrete wall to center the space; although an awkwardly placed structural column threw the symmetry off, it was a constraint too costly to remove. With the Ner Tamid we struggled much more with its design and placement. After exploring possible solutions through a series of studies—none of them to our liking or the building committee's—Aari suggested that the column could represent the Tree of Life. With that, it became a natural home for

the Ner Tamid. Carved into the column and coated in gold leaf, it holds the animated moving light that serves as the eternal flame, the Ner Tamid; a constraint became an opportunity to reference tradition by blending technology with modern design.

Rabbi Kleinbaum gave us a clear directive that everything in CBST's new home needed to be "fabulous." We took this to heart, especially in the sanctuary, where the ark became a series of layers. The exterior, sliding door of steam-bent oak opens to a second door covered in fabric handwoven of natural fibers with gold and silver wire by Jorge Lizarazo and his artist collective Hechizoo. This door slides back to reveal the curtain above the Torah, the *Parochet*. At Aari's suggestion, the layers of the ark would also indicate the use of the sanctuary space—from secular (closed) to religious (open)—with a *Parochet* inspired by



*Elevator cab graphics adjacent the lower level community room.*

traditional Jewish papercuts. We decided to translate traditional papercuts as laser-cut burgundy fabric over a sheer gold cloth. The rabbi encouraged inclusive design elements from different Jewish traditions, including Sephardic references, so I developed the fabric cuts from a leaf pattern motif on a frieze in a 14th-century synagogue in Toledo, Spain.

The memorial walls in the sanctuary and chapel commemorate individuals lost to AIDS and in the Holocaust, reminding CBST of its struggles, accomplishments, and underlying ideals. Bearing witness to the devastating effects of AIDS, CBST lost a large number of its members to the disease. An early concept for these all-important elements envisioned a translucent wall between the sanctuary and the vestibule. The sanctuary side would illuminate the names of those being honored, while the vestibule side would appear as an abstract constellation of lights. The extended design process allowed for technology to catch up to our needs: each name is lit by an individually addressable, computer-controlled LED.

A gracious stair leads from the lobby to a lower common area wrapped by classrooms, chapel / library, a small kitchen, and support spaces. There, the AIDS remembrance quilt hangs. Like its upstairs counterpart, this lower lobby serves as an event space. Its center becomes an open, welcoming community and exhibition space, flexible enough for kiddish, a meal after shabbat, or a cocktail party. To create a seamless transition between floors, wider steps at the foot of the social stair function as a hangout spot. For those descending, the diagonal wall on the left of the stair emphasizes the chapel entrance.

The chapel/library blends the house of study and the house of worship by providing space for a significant library within a chapel. A screen wreathed in steam-bent oak frames a set of historic ark doors from a 1920s synagogue in Tremont, Bronx, carried over from CBST's Westbeth chapel. Compared to the sanctuary, the chapel/library is a smaller-scale, more intimate, multipurpose room, envisioned to service life-cycle events like small weddings. A second memorial along the far wall honors family members of congregants with illuminated plaques.

Opposite the ark, a wall of books enriches the space with a warm aesthetic and functions as an important symbolic and theological strategy to connect the texts directly with worship.

Tucked in the corner of the lower level, the restroom also embodies the core values of CBST. After many discussions with the clergy and congregation about non-gendered restrooms and how to make members in transition comfortable, the options were either to design around New York City's Building Code or, as Rabbi Kleinbaum insisted, to acquire a variance from the Department of Buildings that would specifically allow for the shared option. The time-consuming process included an application and a letter from the rabbi emphasizing the importance of building a "*shalom bayit*, a peaceful, safe, and inclusive home for all who come through our doors." The variance was granted with a letter and the statement (unexpected from the Department of Buildings): "In consideration of the proposed synagogue for the LGBTQ community where the conventional definition of gender is no longer sufficient." The restroom features individual stalls with full-height, soundproof doors, and full-length mirrors within, so a member is able to apply makeup and adjust clothing in private. The bright wallpaper, custom designed by Permanent Press Editions, depicts CBST's history in a collage of images that recall moments both joyous and sad: from a photograph of the celebration when marriage equality was passed in June 2015, to a letter of an early congregant describing the effects of AIDS before the disease was identified, to the Department of Buildings' letter itself.

We witnessed a changing social landscape through the nine years of the project. Same-sex marriages became legal in New York with the passage of the Marriage Equality Act (June 2011, in the middle of CBST's Pride service). Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed in September 2011. The Supreme Court overturned the Defense of Marriage Act in June 2015 (both the plaintiff and the plaintiff's lawyer are members of the congregation). Stonewall became a national monument last June in 2016. Today, the battle over bathrooms is still a contentious issue to overcome. As a congregation, CBST has been advocating for human rights long before these historic moments.

When CBST opened its new doors on April 3, 2016, the sense of accomplishment, welcome, and beginning was palpable. "I really believe, says Rabbi Kleinbaum, "that this building is an extension of CBST's soul and will be a place for us to grow in ways we can't imagine."

We are honored that she thinks so. 

#### PROJECT CREDITS

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# Becoming Luc Freymanc: @Jesus.Drawings

By Shauna Lee Lange

LUC FREYMANC HAS PRODUCED MORE THAN 2,000 drawings and paintings in stylistically unique examinations of Jesus and the crucifix, offered to the world through Instagram @jesus.drawings. In a basement studio in a town outside of Philadelphia, this artist virtuoso practices Christian humility.

Instagram and website viewer feedback indicated many of Freymanc's drawings (some of which are shown on the following spread) were being used for meditative prayer, sometimes even for relief of difficulties and emotional tensions. He decided to do what icon painters have done since early Christian times—to keep himself as persona, removed from any exchange. With true iconographers, it was historically impossible to gain permission to copy or use works. Subsequently convinced that the only true method for letting art speak for itself was to completely remove oneself, Freymanc adopted a pseudonym absent any anxious attitudes about commerce or fame. He explains, “I do not want to know anything about the artist behind a piece of sacred art I use for my personal ‘*Visio Divina*.’ Staying in the background seems even more important to me here in America where I had to see this surprising, oftentimes massive antipathy among Christian denominations.”

Freymanc is a calculating and enigmatic Christian diplomat with a penetrating intuition in rendering intricate rhythms in figures. These living poems of human spirituality, married with mysterious anonymity and speckled against the backdrop of Gestalt theory, achieve universality. There is a sobriety that gives greater prominence to the force at hand and a maturity in demonstrating extraordinary control. Within episodic and repetitive drawings spells, the artist yields multiple daily works, each rendered in less than 20 seconds.

In 2001, Freymanc began making available royalty-free and alternative-style Christian art for worldwide non-commercial and church use. This work primarily consists of drawings and paintings for individuals, churches, and Christian religious organizations for websites or other media. He also began creating, showing, and selling religious and secular expressionist works under his real name, but gracefully declines to publically reveal that information. In explaining his approach he says, “For me, to be truly relevant, art must either political or sacred. Everything else, as masterful as it may be, is pure decoration.” Freymanc believes that the most prominent type of Christian art in the US is a pleasing yet shallow depiction of the surface of faith. “I think artists should more often convey the suffering of Christ in the love for humanity to remind us that being a Christian is demanding.”

## SPIRITUAL PROCESS

Freymanc's heraldic disposition, pietistic zeal, and evident knowledge of art are evident in his drawing exercise preparations. Before he works, there is a “cleansing of the mind,” but not what he would characterize as prayerful meditation or direct intention. When he wants to express emotion (man of sorrows, crucifixes), he attempts to bring himself to a mode of strong empathy. He has to feel how Christ might have felt (to the extent this is possible) in order to capture the suffering, pain, or desperation with a just a few pen strokes. To achieve this, Freymanc relies on extensive medical study on the cruelties of scourging and death on a

cross. The crucified oscillates between brutal pain in the feet and hands countered with respiratory distress.

Quieted by an instinct for equilibrium, the artist also extensively studied life in that time and location. “I read everything and anything that enabled me to better empathize. This empathy is a bit draining emotionally, which is why I often end drawing sessions with some ‘lighter pictures.’ And I cannot dive into the same empathy every day, which is why I often draw more relaxed scenes or symbolic subjects.”


The artist says his pseudonym also serves as a gateway for him to “become” Luc Freymanc. As he switches off his real-life, conscious brain, he shuts the door to a more rational approach to art. That closing then opens the floodgates to purely inspirational flow. This, he believes, is his God-given talent. The hand executing the work becomes an extension of the greater spirit. Unsurprisingly, he is often so wrapped up in the quality of gestures and cadences of sinuous and tense marks that he is “unaware” of where the drawing is heading to. He cites Gestalt Theory when he describes how he knows when to stop such a quick drawing in time for maintaining the right level of ambiguity.

## STUDIO PRACTICE

Last year, Freymanc broke both his arms; they were largely immobilized for months. With the left hand partially paralyzed he found even his right hand less adroit. To regain motor dexterity and fluency, he began drawing again with very small works that required no arm movement and only one hand. This is when he began posting his hundreds of drawings to Instagram, which gave him an easy way to make works available to the public and allowed for the execution of minimally edited and seemingly casual posts.

Freymanc describes his home basement studio as large and crowded, with several workstations. He reserves an average of three days a week solely for art. However, briefly once each evening, he draws and posts online 20 or so images. Some of them are like monoprints—wet drawings rubbed over to a second sheet and then refined by adding some ink or pencil marks. He likes to listen to Al Kresta talk radio because it helps distract his conscious mind from drawing. Sometimes he uses oriental papers but he doesn't like to handle unwieldy individual sheets. Freymanc prefers to use rolls mounted on desks so he can work continuously. He likes challenging papers, those that “talk back.” He is always using several notebooks, pads, and rolls with different paper and rarely works in color.

## ARTISTIC MISSION

Freymanc calls himself an illustration artist, but only out of protest. His thematic development is a calling, but to him “ministry” is too weighty a word. There exists a mission to show people that Christian art can be non-conventional. It can be exciting, fresh, raw, and expressive. That is no easy task, and he is constantly balancing how to be loose and provocative without being blasphemous. He purposefully seeks the fleeting and the volatile. After all, this is the sign of our times. Yet, the medium and the becoming of Luc Freymanc have their constraints in serving purpose. They often only allow for the spark of the sacred at a moment in time. This artist channels that ineffable sacrality with originality, an admirable coherency, and without ever reaching a feeling of satiety. 

See photo essay on the next page.

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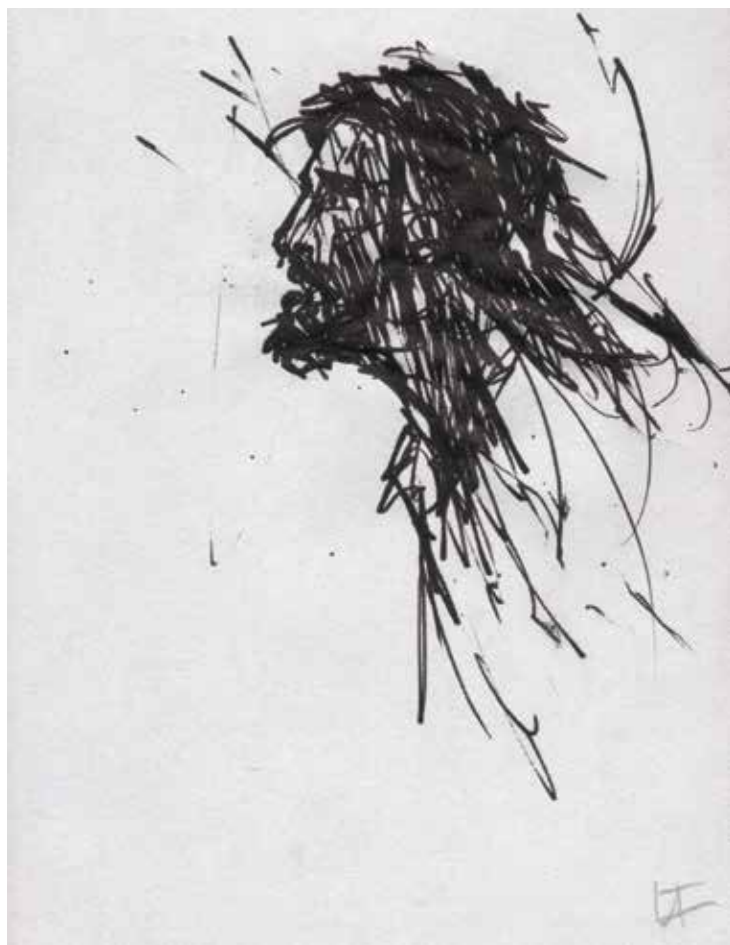
*'Jesus taken down from the cross'; ink, fountain pen, paper; 9 x 11 inches; 2004.*



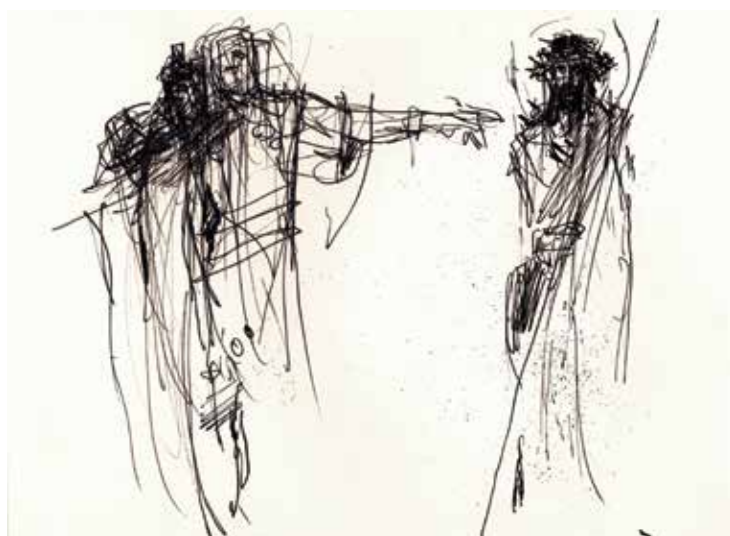
*'Jesus, annoyed'; ink, brush, water-colored pencil, Unryu paper; 21 x 11 inches; 2015.*



*'Ecce Homo'; ink, reed pen, paper; 4 x 5.5 inches; 2011.*



*'Jesus, firm'; ink, fountain pen, paper; 4.5 x 3.5 inches; 2004.*



*'Ecce Homo with Pilate'; ink, fountain pen, paper; 9 x 11 inches; 2004.*





*'Jesus in pain'; ink, fountain pen, paper; 8.5 x 5.5 inches; 2017.*



*Untitled; ink, fountain pen, paper; 9 x 11 inches; 2004.*



*'Crucifixus'; ink, reed pen, paper; 4 x 5.5 inches; 2011*



*Untitled; ink, fountain pen, paper; 5.5 x 4 inches; 2007.*



*'Jesus with crown of thorns'; ink, reed pen, paper; 5.5 x 4 inches; 2011.*



*'Jesus'; ink, fountain pen, paper; 5.5 x 4 inches; 2007.*

# 'A House for the People'

Photographs by



*The roof of St. Thomas More Church seems to reach out in a welcoming gesture.*

Vatican II ushered in a liturgical renewal that was unprecedented in inviting “lay and ordained worshippers to occupy a unified space symbolic of their own unity in Christ.”<sup>1</sup> This understanding set in motion post-Vatican II church designs that heralded a centralized plan with nave and sanctuary intimately connected. Why, then, is there now a reemergence of classical, pre-Vatican II churches? In most cases, this return to a pre-Vatican II architectural building style is stated as serving a reform of the reform, or as

returning sacredness to our places of worship. Embedded in this return to an architecture of pretentious ornamentation is a clerical culture where it is commonplace to speak dismissively of Vatican II and to demand a return to deep and dark sanctuaries that remove the clergy from the assembly.<sup>2</sup> Absent in this view is a respect for Vatican II theology and how an intimate relationships by clergy and laity with the sacramental rites and rituals of the liturgy which then leads to establishing a sacred place and a spirit-filled community.

## WORSHIP SPACE ARCHETYPES

An understanding of worship space archetypes is needed to appreciate what defines a pre- or post-Vatican II church. There are

two principal archetypes for the design of a worship space: temple and meetinghouse.<sup>3</sup> Another common reference for each archetype is the “House of God” and the “House for the People of God,” terms that imply both a theological distinction and a difference in how the spaces are organized. These two archetypes can also be defined as creating either a two-room or one-room space.<sup>4</sup> Having so many different terms to define a worship space can be a challenge, especially when seeking clarity.

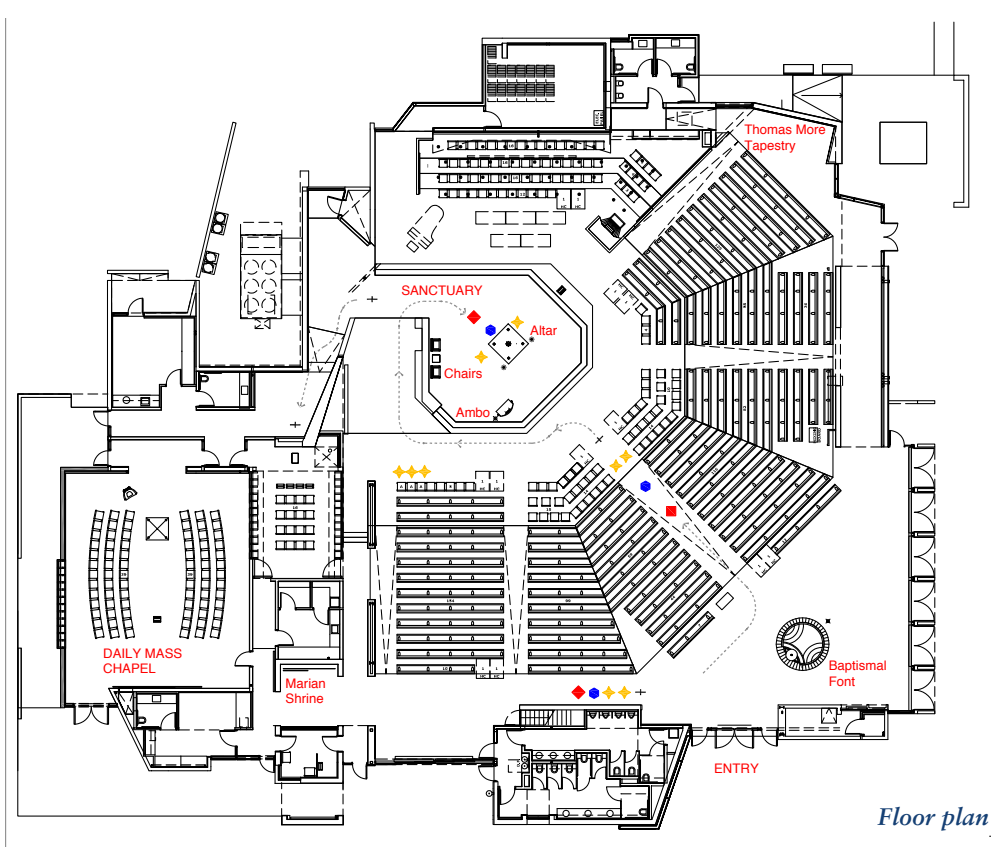
From a historical perspective, pre-Vatican II church buildings principally followed the temple, or two-room, archetype. In contrast, the meetinghouse or one-room archetype is perhaps most representative of a Vatican II worship space. In simplified terms, the

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# People of God'

By Robert Habiger, AIA, ACLS  
RMA Architectural Photographers



Floor plan

actively engaged in the liturgy, and to have a space that supports, rather than hinders, such participation. The Church has described this major point as follows: “The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations.”<sup>7</sup> Active participation comes about when we encounter each other and the sacraments in a setting that promotes communal prayer.<sup>8</sup> Communal prayer cannot happen when a physical and psychological separation exists between the assembly and sanctuary.

A major feature of worship space designed for the House for the People of God is that no physical separation exists between the celebration space and the assembly space. A theological understanding for the House for the People of God archetype is that the Eucharist is central to the celebration. *Built of Living Stones*, the “go-to” document regarding Roman Catholic church design in the US, describes this singular guiding design principle this way: “The community worships as a single body united in faith.”<sup>9</sup> In practice this characterizes a one-room space, sometimes referred to as a central-plan space.

While the House for the People of God archetype is the essence of a Vatican II worship space, attributes of the House of God archetype should not be ignored when designing for a sense of place and meaning. People respond in a positive manner to buildings with large linear assembly spaces, clearly defined artistic features, numerous devotional experiences, and tall tower forms.

## A CHURCH ATTUNED TO LITURGY

What makes St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Oceanside, California, significant is its good architecture and being attuned to the liturgy. The church building was designed by architect Renzo Zecchetto of Los Angeles (our firm served as liturgical design consultant, involved in liturgical space programming, liturgical furniture design, and artist selection). The design evolved through an informed view of how liturgy affects the design of the worship environment.

Early in the design process a liturgical program was produced in collaboration with the parish interior design committee. This document covered every liturgical aspect of the church, including site features, building spaces, liturgical furniture, devotional art, music ministry requirements, and, of course, how the space was to support the rites and rituals of the Church. When asked if the liturgical program informed the design the architect says that “without question” it did.

Here are just three examples of how the liturgy gave form to the building. The centrality of the altar in the midst of the assembly came from studying such statements as: “The altar is the center of thanksgiving that the Eucharist accomplishes.”<sup>10</sup> The decision to place the baptismal font at the entrance to the worship space and at the main aisle was informed by such statements as: “Initiation into the Church is entrance into a Eucharistic community united in Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, a separate reservation chapel was created from studying multiple

temple archetype establishes a hierarchically dependent two-room space, while the meetinghouse archetype establishes a unified one-room space.

## HOUSE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Vatican II emphasized a theology that sought to create deeper personal participation in the liturgy. As one theologian recently noted, the Vatican II documents emphasized that it is the “People of God” who are the principal celebrants of the liturgy.<sup>5</sup> Of course, this does not diminish the importance of the ordained celebrant, who “represents Christ as the head of the Body.”<sup>6</sup> What is expressed throughout the Vatican II documents is the importance of the assembly, their need to be



*Seating radiates out from the altar, drawing all into the celebration of the Eucharist.*

documents, including the dedication rite where the instructions state that the “blessed sacrament is carried through the main body of the church to the chapel of reservation.”<sup>12</sup>

While the liturgy served to guide the project, the architectural design itself is significant. In 2016 the new church garnered the coveted Grand Orchid Award from the San Diego Architectural Foundation. In the award narrative the architect described the main concept as being a space that had to “promote both a sense of community and a sense of transcendence.”<sup>13</sup>

The architect understood that the tower was more than an exterior form expressing a temple archetype, stating that he was tired of a tower just being a symbol and he wanted it to have a purpose within the building itself. He describes how the tower is placed on “the axis of light” so as to bring meaningful light into sacred elements of the building. This cascading light enters into the Marian Shrine, one of the two prominent devotional spaces in the church. The tower is a visible symbol to the community and is also something more that has a positive impact on the interior space.

The architecture does more than establish a place marked by an iconic tower form. The building has a sheltered outdoor narthex, two outdoor meditation gardens, two significantly scaled devotional shrine spaces, and clearly delineated rooms for each prime liturgical function which all give order and composition to the building. The architect explains that design decisions were made to create layers of transparency and openness. In plan, the Eucharistic reservation chapel is located between the daily mass chapel and main Eucharistic hall. Tall vertical windows separate the rooms from each other. These floor-to-ceiling vertical slits of glass were detailed to provide both privacy and openness.

The liturgical action of the mass and sacraments are in the midst of the assembly, not removed from the assembly. The large interior volume for the Eucharistic hall is not only shaped to embrace the assembly as a unified Body of Christ, but its large volume was created to support a future pipe organ. The music ministry, including the future organ, completes the circle around the altar so as to establish a unified one-room worship space. The assembly space has a wood ceiling that disappears above the sanctuary. The taller open ceiling at the sanctuary is perceived by the architect as creating “a raw void,” a transcendent space.

One of the most influential design features is the quality of light that enters the building. Through the use of large expanses of clear glass, the light entering the worship space is ever-changing and different throughout the day. This openness to the exterior environment is the principal form-giver of the building and offers parishioners the ability to connect inside to outside on a daily basis so as to experience something greater than themselves. While transparency and openness are hallmarks of the design, the design of the church building is a response to the documents of the Church.

#### FUTURE OF VATICAN II LITURGY

Right after Vatican II there was an understanding that the renewed liturgy demanded that worship spaces be designed differently, the principal thought being that the pre-Vatican II church building was no longer an appropriate environment for the renewed liturgy. However, many post-Vatican II worship spaces built immediately after the council had a singular focus on the rites and rituals with little attention given to devotional spaces. An argument can be made that these initial spare and simple spaces overlooked the emotional and spiritual expectancies






*Location of celebrant and the congregation emphasizes the House of the People of God.*

of a post-Vatican II space. It took many years for liturgical consultants to sufficiently inform how a worship space needed to include devotional shrines and the various other spatial elements that parishioners identify as adding to their spirituality.

In essence there is still a battle underway with regard to understanding the heart and soul of the Vatican II liturgy and how a church should be organized and designed. While some are advocating for a return to pre-Vatican II-type worship spaces, a resilient group is continuing to advance designs that emphasize a unified Body of Christ. Vatican II ushered in the understanding that the assembly is the principal celebrant of the liturgy. This cannot occur when the assembled are merely “observers.”

What makes St. Thomas More special is the collaboration between the architect and liturgical design consultant to create a place that responds to Vatican II liturgy and is great architecture as well. St. Thomas More is an unabashed contemporary piece of architecture that is unmistakably a church. To embrace a House for the People of God approach is to move forward in theology and liturgy. Needing to continue to validate this after so many years since Vatican II is disconcerting, but this does not reduce the need to remain true to the fathers of the liturgical renewal. St. Thomas More parish understood that they wanted a place that fully embraced the renewed liturgy and be a place of beauty and transcendence. 

## NOTES

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‘Original 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY’

# Reverence and Reconstruction

How a relatively undistinguished building in Brooklyn, New York, has become an oft-copied symbol for a rapidly growing Jewish movement around the world.

By Frances Halsband, FAIA, and Eli Meltzer, AIA  
Photographs by Andrea Robbins and Max Becher

Chabad-Lubavitch is a philosophy, a movement, and an organization. Begun 250 years ago in Russia as a reinterpretation and renewal of Jewish life and practice, it found new meaning and success beginning in 1940, when the Sixth Rebbe (Grand Rabbi) Yoseph Yitzchak Schneerson fled from Europe to New York. The Chabad group purchased a small building at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn to serve as its new world headquarters and a home for the rebbe. The building itself—a three-story red brick Gothic-inspired structure—had been built in the 1920s as a residence and doctor’s office in the growing neighborhood of Crown Heights.

Relocated in a secure New York base, the organization began a period of aggressive growth. In 1951, under the leadership of the new Seventh Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the organization aspired to reach everyone of Jewish origins around the globe, and invite them to engage in a deeper study of their religion and its promise. The rebbe was incredibly successful, in his lifetime a commanding figure, active in political and cultural circles as well as a spiritual leader. He established new Chabad centers on college and university campuses throughout the US and in cities around the world. The rebbe died in 1994, but movement has continued to grow without an apparent leader. Today there are 4,500 *schluchim* (emissaries) in over 3,500 Chabad institutions in 55 countries around the world, representing outreach to hundreds of thousands of people. Some believe that the charismatic seventh rebbe is the *Moshiach* (the messiah) who will eventually return to lead the movement once again.

The basic Chabad houses, on campuses and in cities, are run by *schluchim* (typically a rabbi and his wife). As emissaries, they welcome Jews and others in the area to participate in shabbat (Friday Night) dinners, classes, and lectures to deepen their faith and understanding of their religion. Typically the Chabad group begins in a house—a home

for the *schluchim* and a place of welcoming. As each community grows, these houses are rapidly outgrown, and larger buildings are purchased or constructed to meet specific needs. While there is a long tradition of Jewish synagogues built in regional styles that reflect their immediate location, increasing numbers of Chabad houses are looking back to 770 Eastern Parkway for design inspiration.

## RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

There are several goals behind the choice to replicate. Serendipitously, the number 770 has special significance. In Hebrew, letters are assigned numerical values. The letters of the word *parazta*, a Hebrew term meaning “burst forth” (as in the biblical verse, “You shall burst forth (*u’faratza*) westward, eastward, northward, and southward.”) add up to 770. The concept is that light emanates from 770 to the four directions of the world. It also turns out that the numerical value of *Beis Moshiach* (The House of the Messiah) is 770. Visiting the *Beis Moshiach* brings worshippers closer to the presence of a holy figure, into a place where his memory is alive as a continuing inspiration. Photographers Andrea Robbins and Max Becher, who have documented Chabad houses around the world, note that the buildings also serve as a landmark and meeting place for insular international travelers. Images of 770 have started to appear on yarmulkas, party favors, and stationary, establishing a brand identity.

## THEME AND VARIATIONS

Comparing the first dozen 770s from around the world provides not only a study in religious form but a look at transformations. When does the copy stray so far from the original as to be unrecognizable? The Brooklyn 770 (shown in the photo above) is primarily visible as a front façade, the side and rear walls largely hidden from view. The plan, almost unchanged since 1940, includes the rabbi’s study, some meeting rooms on the ground floor, and apartments above. Copies vary in the degree to which they reproduce the front façade, but every architect must start anew in creating a plan specific to the needs of the client.

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*'Milan, Italy'*

Measured drawings of 770 are the basis for the buildings in Kfar Chabad, Melbourne, and Jerusalem. The front is reproduced as a three-story, variegated red brick façade crowned with three unequal pediments, a symmetrical arrangement of Gothic-inspired windows with patterned mullions and keyed limestone frames, and an oriel projected over the central front door.

The first known copy of 770, in 1980, came about when the world's first Chabad house at UCLA burned down claiming the lives of three students. In planning to rebuild, the rabbi had the idea that three "points" on the roof would honor the three students who had perished. It was an easy step to imagine that the three peaks would be those of 770, but there was concern that such a thing might be considered inappropriate. Through various emissaries the rebbe was approached, and eventually word was received that the rebbe and his wife would be very happy to have a copy of the house in Los Angeles. The building is brownish brick with a first floor devoted to a parking garage.

The first authorized and carefully planned copy is in Israel. In 1985, during a period of turmoil and uncertainty concerning the fate of the Chabad library of 40,000 volumes housed in 770, the rebbe instructed that another study center and library be constructed in the Israeli town of Kfar Chabad, near Tel Aviv, and that the building should be a replica of 770 (a photo is shown on the cover). Architects were dispatched to Brooklyn to measure and photograph every element of the original, drawings were created, contracts were signed, and miraculously, the building was completed in less than a year, on time and under budget. That building is today both a study center and a pilgrimage site for visitors who wish to imagine themselves in the presence of the rebbe.

There is a story that the *Mosaich* might return to Earth by way of Milan or Melbourne. The Chabad rabbi in Milan, aware of this tale, concluded that it would be fitting to have a house that would be suitable to receive him. Thus a somewhat similar building was constructed in 1994 (photo above). This was the first replica to encounter the requirements of a local design review board, which perhaps accounts for the changes in proportion and the transformation of the oriel window into a balcony over the front door.

In Melbourne, precise replication was the goal. Chief Rabbi of England Jonathan Sacks, speaking at the dedication in 1997, said:

*"Every house of prayer is an extension of Jerusalem, except that in the meanwhile it is found here... This special synagogue built here, in fact, is not only a part of Jerusalem but also a part of an additional place unique in kind—770 Eastern Parkway, the home of the greatest Jewish leader of our generation... For so many of us—770 was the Jerusalem of our generation!"*

For the cornerstone, a stone from the original 770 and a stone from the holy city of Hebron in Israel were used, and they were laid with the shovel that the rebbe had used to lay the cornerstone for the expansion of 770 in 1988.

The next known precise copy of 770 was constructed in Jerusalem in 2000-2002. The iconic presence of this red brick building in a sea of white stone buildings is startling to behold (shown on page 20, middle). It is clear that contextual design plays no part in this story. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Havlin (Chabad emissary to Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem) spoke at the dedication:

*"A building like this reminds one instinctively of the rebbe and all that is connected to him—it arouses his memory—and creates a strong urge for Torah and Chassidism."*

The decision to construct "a 770" is not an easy one. Sometimes the urge to create something new, the difficulties of reproduction, local zoning, and the very real programmatic requirements of the plan stretch the rules. In Sao Paulo, the Chabad House sits on a garage plinth, with a second floor door to nowhere floating above (page 20, bottom). Here the proportions are made more vertical by the demands of the site, but the small scale is in marked contrast to the surrounding skyscrapers. The architects of the Rutgers Chabad house relegated the copy of the principal façade to the side of their building, with a random collection of windows and doors and an off-center oriel. This copy has drifted far from the source.

The building in Kiryat Ata Haifa pushes further, with a free-form interpretation of Gothic on all four sides, a random door, and dramatic color breaks. Another Chabad on Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles solves the problem of increased size by starting with a close rendering of the original three bays, and then repeating a pedimented larger bay around



*'Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, California'*



the block (page 20, top). A recently completed Chabad house in Tacoma, Washington, is only two stories, perhaps in deference to residential zoning or the limitations of budget and program. The rendition of details is quite accurate and overall proportions are well done. However, illustrating that proportion and detail may well play a greater role in recognition than mere massing, it maintains its identity though only two stories tall.

We are perhaps observing the first 30 years of a movement that will gain intensity and sophistication as replicas of replicas start to appear, and architects and clients learn from each other. However different their settings, all of these buildings seek to create the feeling and spirit of the original, a place to sing.

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat  
down, yes we wept, when  
we remembered Zion...*


*For there our captors required  
from us a song...*

*How shall we sing the Lord's  
song in a strange land?*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my  
right hand forget its skill.*

*May my tongue cling to my palate, if I do  
not remember you, if I do not bring up  
Jerusalem at the beginning of my joy.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay would not have been possible without the extraordinary photographs of Andrea Robbins and Max Becher. Their research and careful documentation revealed a world of places that are out of place, and yet belong to a larger place. We are greatly indebted to them for generously sharing their work with us. We also would like to thank Rabbi Motti Seligson, Director of Media Relations for Chabad.org, who welcomed us to 770 Eastern Parkway and provided insight into the history and current operations of the Chabad Centers. 

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*'Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem, Israel'*



*'Sao Paulo, Brazil'*







# [RE]BUILDING POSITIVE

*By Erik Heitman, AIA*

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, THE STONEWALLS of the Westport Presbyterian Church loomed large over Westport Road, the main thoroughfare in one of Kansas City, Missouri's oldest and most historic neighborhoods. The crenulated parapets and rough-cut stone of the Romanesque Revival church did not aptly reflect the welcoming and vibrant congregation that worshipped inside. Outside, the church stood at a crossroads between the three distinct areas of the Westport neighborhood: a dynamic entertainment district on the west, an important commercial corridor on the east, and a quieter residential enclave in between. Despite its small size, the congregation has always been an active force in the community.

Like many urban churches this congregation had experienced a significant decline in membership during the latter part of the 20th century as families moved away from the city center out to the suburbs. As membership waned, the congregation opened the doors to local non-profit organizations, maintaining the church's place within the community. Over the years many arts organizations, historical societies, and social service providers called the church their home. During the last decade, as people began to return to the city, the remaining members of the Westport Presbyterian Church were engaged in a process of redefining how they could better serve the community in response to changes around them, when disaster struck.

On December 29, 2011, a fire engulfed the church, severely damaging a building that had

served as the spiritual home for one of the oldest congregations in Kansas City. While the fire destroyed the building, it did not destroy the Church. The congregation quickly decided to rebuild in the community they had been a part of since 1835. In the wake of the fire, BNIM was selected to lead the reconstruction of a 27,000-square-foot church building and community center that would serve the congregation for the next 100 years.

## RETHINKING PRESERVATION

While the original building stood in ruins, the BNIM Design Team posed a question to the congregation that resonated with the pastor, Reverend Scott Myers: "What does this building want to become?"

Commitment to historic preservation was a value held by many within the congregation; however, the original roof, interior structure, and finishes were all damaged beyond repair. The limestone walls were one of the few elements that withstood the fire in good condition. The site and the positioning of the existing buildings were also problematic. The original church was constructed in three phases. The sanctuary building and tower were built in 1905, followed shortly after by a three-story administrative wing (the Goodman building) constructed in 1915. A second addition (Baity) was built in 1954 to provide expanded Sunday school spaces and fellowship opportunities. The spatial relationship between the original sanctuary building and subsequent additions created a cavernous exterior space

that accentuated the distance between the street and the front door. The existing grading, landscaping, and sidewalks in this area severely limited any opportunities for meaningful outdoor program area. Furthermore, the proximity of Goodman to a tall retaining wall was a contributing factor for the history of flooding in the building's basement.

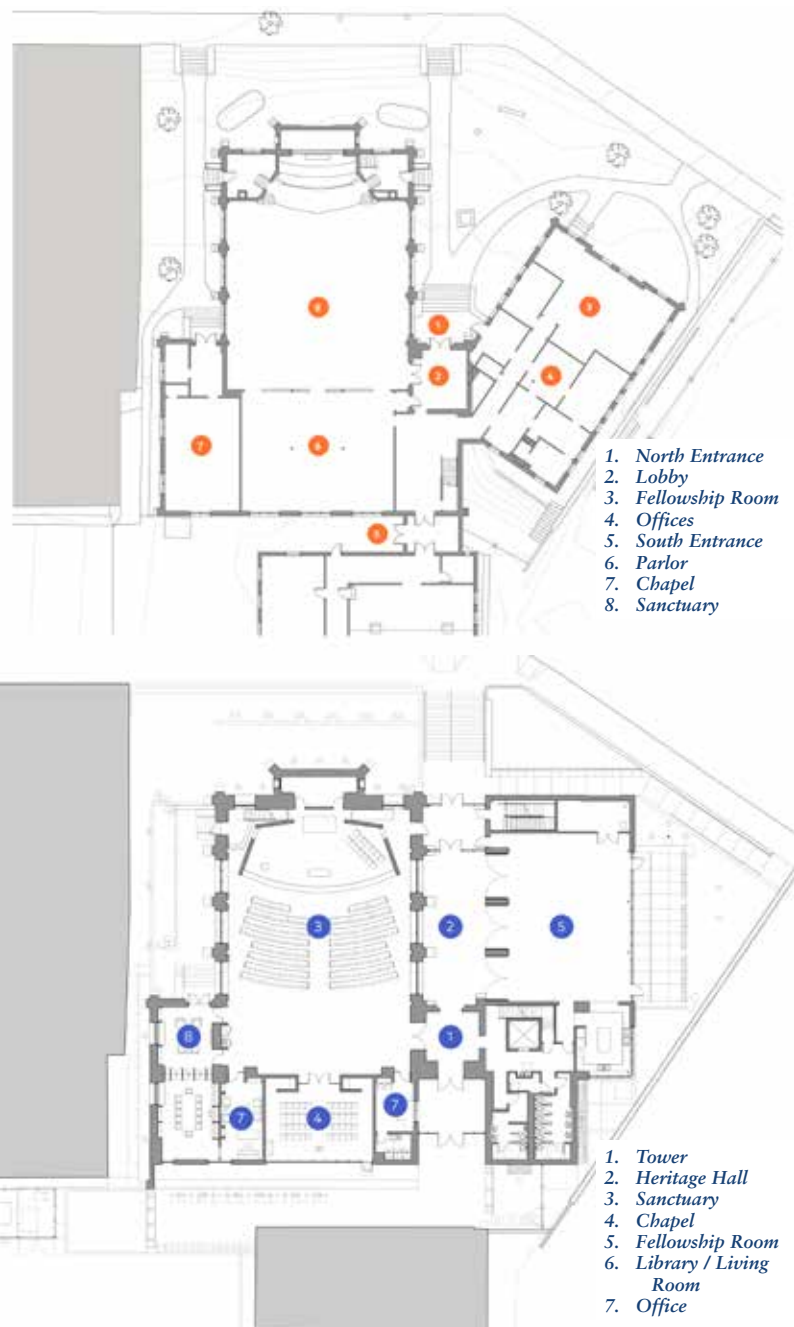
Several design charrettes were held with the Church's Session Committee to define the vision for the new building. The future needs of the Church were clear. First and foremost, the building had to be a place of fellowship which exemplified the mission of the Westport Presbyterian Church: "To discern God's activity in the new millennium; to follow Jesus in ministries of service, healing, justice, and prayer; and to make the city a better place for people to live, work, and worship."

The new building needed to be welcoming and accessible to all. The sanctuary would need to be both intimate and spacious to accommodate their plans for a large pipe organ. The Church also wanted to make their fellowship space more open and available to the surrounding community, and they hoped for a storefront space to extend their ministry to the street.

Finding a balanced response to the program needs and the challenges of the site meant the building needed to be a place respectful

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*Before and after plans of church and facilities.*

to the rich history of the Westport Presbyterian Church and forward-looking, embracing the dynamic community it served. Preservation in this instance would not be an all-or-nothing proposition; it would be as much about preserving the congregation in place as it would be about preserving a piece of architecture. Through an integrated process of collaborative discovery, BNIM led a design approach that embodied the idea of “Building Positive,” focusing on positive outcomes at all scales to create transformative, living designs that would allow the congregation to thrive.

In reverence to the Church’s rich history the decision was made to restore the most sacred portion of the original church structure, the sanctuary building and tower. The 1915 Goodman building would be deconstructed to accommodate a new building better suited to the site conditions. The new church was imagined as a modern structure delicately inserted in and around the rough-cut, stonewalls that remained, a complementary contrast to the 1905 Romanesque Revival church. The parti is organized around the church’s historic tower where the original arched entrance is located. The tower was reimagined as a two-story

volume with views of the sky above seen through clerestory glazing; from outside, the tower’s clerestory acts as a lantern drawing parishioners and pilgrims towards the two main entrances are on axis with the tower. A grand hallway links the building’s north entrance to the original entrance at the tower. In this space, called Heritage Hall, the once-exterior stonewalls of the tower and sanctuary become interior finishes in this space that has been programmed as gallery space to display church artifacts and remembrances. The strong, north-south axis created by the tower, Heritage Hall, and entrances become the communicating link between two distinct wings of the building: a sanctuary wing that includes programmed spaces which are more private to the congregation, and a fellowship wing that is intended to be more open to the community.

#### THE WORSHIP SPACE: A DELICATE INSERTION

The sanctuary and gathering space are the heart of the new church. The tall, gabled mass that houses these two spaces serves as a place of worship, teaching, performance, and gathering, designed to evoke feelings of reverence and lightness. Daylight enters the space through continuous, clerestory glazing that delineates the new construction from the old, and creates the effect of the roof plane floating above the historic walls.

The volume created beneath was shaped by the room’s acoustic design criteria. BNIM worked closely with acoustical designers Jaffe Holden, and Pasi Organ Builders, to balance the acoustical needs of a 21-stop organ with choral performance and spoken word. Manipulating the program elements into a simple diagram while maintaining the acoustical quality of the space required the team to push each other outside the realm of normal practice. The resulting sanctuary is a worship space where disparate components, including the organ and a modern AV system, join harmoniously.

Directly south of the tall, gabled mass is a lower volume that incorporates the chapel, administrative offices of the church, a library, and an informal lounge space. The chapel is a more intimate worship space with a strong connection to the outdoors, featuring full-height curtain wall (south) and clerestory glazing (east and west) that bathe the room in daylight. Floating between the vertical mullions of the curtain wall are five historic stained-glass windows salvaged from the original chapel. Miraculously, the leaded stained-glass windows, built by Willet Studios in 1948, had not been damaged; however, the steel frames and saddle bars supporting the glass had deteriorated causing the windows to bulge and sag. The historic windows were fully restored and now have renewed brilliance.

Inside the sanctuary and chapel, the design team honored the legacy and history of Westport Presbyterian Church through material selection. After the fire, a construction team led by A.L. Huber General Contractor painstakingly deconstructed the original building to salvage as much material as possible, including stone cladding from Goodman that would be used for new landscaping and wood from the original structure. The reclaimed wood served as the foundation for an authentic and simple materials palette that provides a delicate, modern backdrop and supports the rich texture of the historic stone and the modern insertion.

#### FELLOWSHIP SPACE: COMPLEMENTARY CONTRAST

East of the sanctuary and tower, a two-story wing has been constructed to house a large communal space (fellowship room) with an accessory kitchen space and storage, as well as a new elevator and toilet facilities on the ground floor. The massing of the new fellowship wing aligns with the historic sanctuary. Like the sanctuary, the addition is



*New wing to the left balances against walls of the original church and new sanctuary constructed within them.*



Photo: Michael Robinson

*Outdoor space outside new fellowship room offers quiet respite.*

clad in native Kansas limestone; however, the new stonewalls are honed to distinguish themselves from the original rubble stone façade.

The footprint of the new fellowship room has a direct relationship to original sanctuary's structural frame. Historic stone pilasters that once supported the sanctuary's gable roof were used to establish the layout of the fellowship wing's steel frame. The west wall of the fellowship room opens to the Heritage Hall, revealing the purposeful alignment between old and new structure. The east wall is defined by a full-height curtain



*Interior of fellowship room overlooks plaza.*

wall with views of a new garden space that is an extension of the fellowship room and invites nature's sunlight, fresh air, and sounds to refresh and inspire people. The porous relationship between these three spaces draws a simultaneous connection between the church's rich history, its present, and evolving natural world around it.

Below grade, the fellowship wing basement extends out to the street where the "Storefront" emerges. The storefront was created to extend their ministry beyond the stone walls of the Sanctuary and provide a





*Heritage hall with fellowship room to the left and old church walls to the right.*



*New sanctuary is designed and constructed within the footprint of the old, with salvaged stained glass and font.*

direct connection to the Westport community. The Storefront can act as a stand-alone space open to the community and made available for use by outside groups or not-for-profit organizations that align with the Church's mission. The all-glass walls of the Storefront are designed as an extension of historic retaining walls that define the neighboring property on 40th Street.

The new fellowship wing and Storefront are sited to balance the needs of the overall


campus master plan with those supporting the development of a flexible, functional, and sustainable learning facility. At the street, a grand stair on axis with the tower connects the church's main entrance with the sidewalk 10 feet below. The natural slope of the site along 40th Street is used to create the first half of an accessible route from the sidewalk to the main entrance with the second half of the accessible route wrapping around and over the Storefront, revealing a rooftop garden.



*Tower space orients visitors to the main sanctuary entrance from both sides of the new building.*

#### REINVIGORATING FAITH THROUGH DESIGN

After a five-year exile during design and reconstruction, Westport Presbyterian Church is quickly becoming the center of community life that it was before the fire. This vibrant worship center acts as a bridge between the area's active commercial and entertainment districts and the quiet residential neighborhood. Since opening in April 2016, worship attendance at Westport Presbyterian Church has increased by 30 percent and the Church is growing with new members, particularly young families drawn to the energetic new space. This growth has allowed the Church to offer children/youth Sunday School for the first time in years. The new sanctuary has been used to host community support groups, folk dance groups, musical concerts, and live theatre events. The Church's children's peace program and Boy Scout troop have flourished in the new fellowship wing, and members have become more involved in social justice and community service work.

To celebrate the first anniversary in their new space, an art exhibit was held utilizing the entire campus. Reflecting on his tenure as the church's pastor, Myers said, "the Church has emphasized for at least 30 years now, finding the connection between spirituality and the arts, and this is done through the worship services and now it is really being expressed through the building...I think you can learn the art of loving God in this space." 



# Back to a Stained-Glass Future

The work of Scott Parsons at Our Lady of Loreto Church and Gothic stained glass.

By Kenneth von Roenn

In March 2016 I visited Derix Glasstudios in Taunusstein, Germany, and saw the fabrication of windows designed by Scott Parsons for Our Lady of Loreto Church in Foxfield, Colorado (which have won several Faith & Form/IFRAA awards). Having worked in stained glass for a long time I thought I had seen all that was possible in the medium, but was absolutely astounded at the uniqueness of Parsons's designs, as well as with the meticulous execution by the artisans at Derix. I realized upon seeing the work that this was very fresh and contemporary in its vision, through imagery that was not from a stained-glass tradition. For some odd reason the work seemed to have something that reminded me of Gothic stained glass, even though it was of a completely very different style. But, I couldn't understand what this quality was.

After returning home and reviewing the photos of the windows in fabrication, I slowly began to understand the connection between Parsons's work at Our Lady of Loreto and Gothic stained glass. As differently as they are stylistically, I began to realize over a few months that they share several characteristics, with one very important commonality.

One of the most obvious commonalities between them is that both are narrative compositions, with imagery that is composed with the intent to inform the viewer, as well as moving them emotionally. Gothic windows were created with the purpose of instructing medieval worshippers in the teachings of Christianity, since there was no widespread religious education. Windows were depictions of figures and events with the intent of communicating

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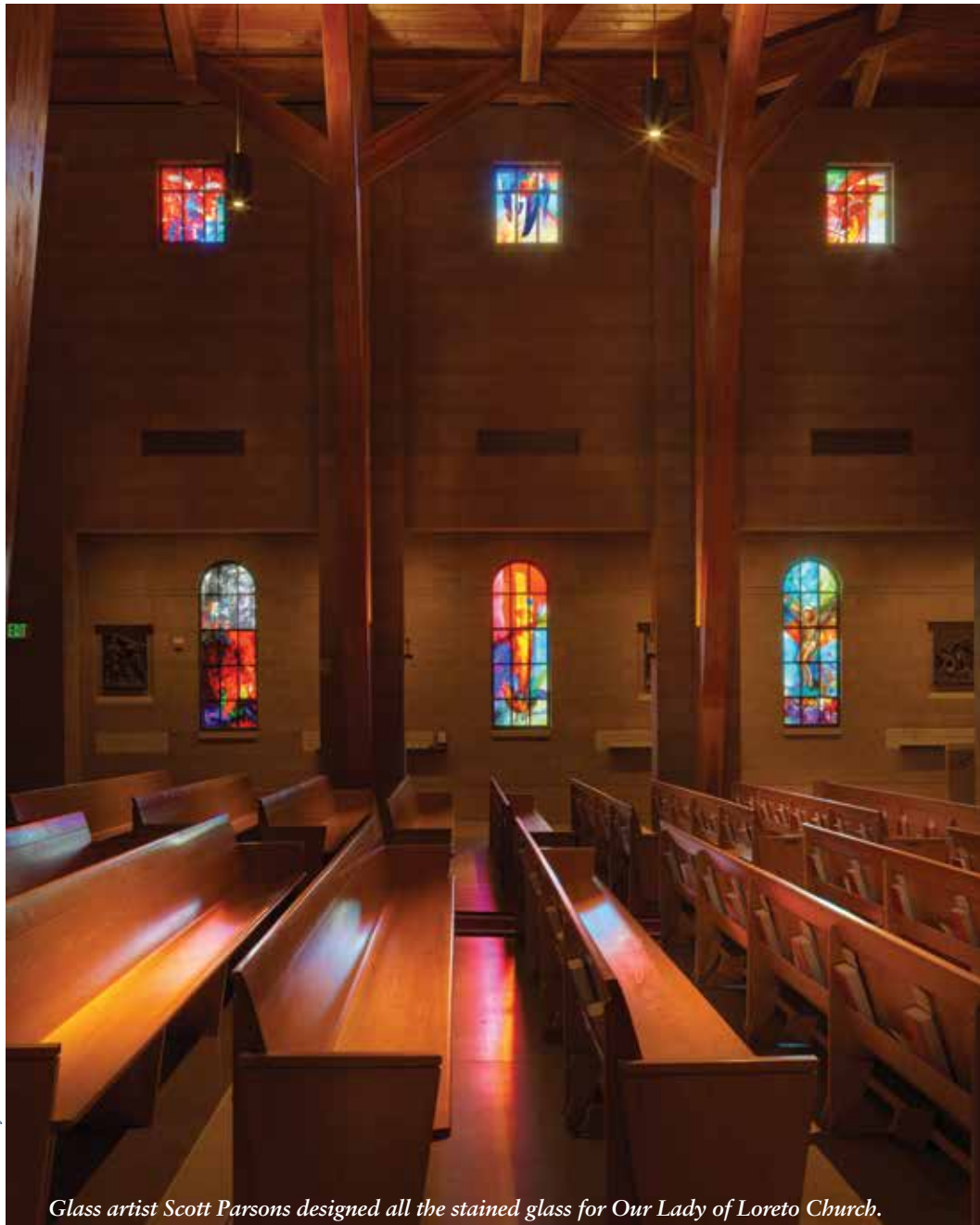


Photo: Steve Maylone

*Glass artist Scott Parsons designed all the stained glass for Our Lady of Loreto Church.*

a story, a "poor man's Bible," as we have all read far too many times.

Another commonality is that both Abbot Suger of St. Denis, the early formulator of Gothic architecture, and Monsignor Ed Buehl, the pastor of Our Lady of Loreto, developed the thematic narrative for the windows from which the designs were created. Abbot Suger's themes were relatively direct figurative representations of stories. Msgr. Buehl's themes are much more than this in that they present the worshipper with a message that is more intellectually and emotionally engaging. Msgr. Buehl's themes go beyond literal to become poetic. But this is because Msgr. Buehl's intent was different than that of Abbot Suger's in what he aspired to express. As he explains, "I considered that the Loreto windows were to be a means through

which the viewer, not so much was being taught something, but rather was being invited to enter into something, namely into the very mystery of the Trinity as the Trinity has revealed itself in Christ and in the Church and sustains and loves the Church.... From an architectural standpoint, the church was designed to symbolize the Church founded by the Trinity. The upper dome windows, north round window, and the 10 angel windows speak of what used to call the Church Triumphant, the Church of eschatological consummation. The abstract form of these windows doesn't simply tell the story of the heavenly Jerusalem but invites the viewer into it, into the eschatological consummation of all things in Christ. And the lower Mysteries of the Rosary windows speak of what we used to call the Church Militant, the Church



Photo: James W. Jones W. Roy Messmore



Photo: James W. Jones W. Roy Messmore

*A window depicting the season 'Fall' revels in autumnal hues.*

*The 'Angels' piece uses overlapping imagery.*

that is us still on the militant pilgrimage of life, of faith, hope, and love, led by and through the eyes of she who made it most perfectly and completely, that is, through the eyes of Mary (rosary). These 10 magnificent windows invite us to take up her journey of following her Son, and so to take up her Son's journey from the Father back to the Father, inviting us to enter into that story and make it our own."

These different narrative approaches of Gothic stained glass and Parsons's windows for Our Lady of Loreto were also similar in their recognition of the needs of the worshippers. The medieval worshipper relied on the stained-glass windows to learn about Christianity, while the contemporary viewers of the windows at Our Lady of Loreto are presented with a much more complex theological commentary that goes far beyond fundamental biblical representations. Each is right for their time. Just as the themes of Our Lady of Loreto would have been lost on the medieval worshippers, so too

would the simple portrayal of biblical stories be of little pertinence to contemporary viewers. While this seems somewhat simplistic, it does call into question the authenticity of mimicking an historical style and design approach for a contemporary context.

What I found of particular interest, however, were the stylistic approaches of both Gothic stained glass and Parsons's designs for Loreto, and how each were stylistic embodiments of their respective time period. Gothic stained glass developed from a Byzantine style common to the Romanesque period, which is recognized for its flat, two-dimensional portrayal of figures and forms. This stylistic approach was common to other art forms of the era, such as frescoes and manuscript illustrations, while independent paintings did not begin to emerge until after the advent of Gothic architecture. This was a style that developed from symbolic representation of figures as opposed to the movement toward pictorial realism associated with the Renaissance.

Like early Gothic stained glass, Parsons does not strive to express a visual reality, but rather a dimension beyond our perceived reality. He refers to this as a "sacramental imagination," or as Alexander Schmemmann writes in his book *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, "Our entrance into the presence of Christ is an entrance into a fourth dimension which allows us to see more deeply into the reality of the world." Parsons's response to this statement is "how one connects to the world as sacrament, how one tries to see it all as a gift." How similar this is to the medieval aesthetic sensibility as described by Umberto Eco in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*: "Medieval taste, we may conclude, was concerned neither with the autonomy of art nor the autonomy of nature. It involved rather an apprehension of all of the relations, imaginative and supernatural, subsisting between the contemplated object and a cosmos, which opened on to the transcendent. It meant discerning in the concrete





*'Lamb on Throne' combines abstraction and realism.*




*The window 'Thrones' reveals an inventive use of color.*

object an ontological reflection of, and participation in, the being and the power of God.”

However, especially important is Parsons’s personal stylistic approach and its sympathetic affinity with the visual vernacular of contemporary graphic arts. It is this visual association that gives his work its contemporary sensitivity, for it is a visual language that is common to our time. This type of a graphic style populates our visual world through print, broadcast, and digital media today, and has become a visual lexicon of our time. An apt example of this stylistic approach is the illustrator/artist Dave McKean, whose work has influenced Parsons. In looking at Parsons’s work it is easy to see the use of atmospheric backgrounds and graphically stylized figures, which are common components of McKean’s work. Also of influence to Parsons’s work are Robert Rauschenberg’s collages, in which we can see similarities with Parsons’s compositional construction of layered imagery. This

collage approach to composition is a fundamental component of Parsons’s creative process, which involves drawing, painting, and digital manipulation, from which his layered imagery is created. The effects that can be achieved digitally are particularly important in understanding Parsons’s aesthetic. As he writes, “With a computer I am able to work in many layers at once with many different ideas and images..... In *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, Eco discusses Aquinas’s use “of ‘*compositio*’ and ‘*visio*,’ where *compositio* is the combining operation”—which is part of judgment—and perhaps as an extension of that, deciding what to put on which layer in Photoshop. *Visio* is “an ‘apprehension’ of the structural harmony which *compositio* has brought to life. It is the interrelationship of form that matters, the in-between spaces, the silent spaces in music that determine the aesthetics, the relationship of form, and ultimately the success of the work.”

In addition to these commonalities, they share one characteristic that is more important than style. It transcends style and goes to the essence of an architectural art. By its nature, architectural art is fundamentally about relationships: relationship to the architecture, of which the art is of but part and parcel; relationship to the culture as a visual commentary; relationship to the viewers whose perception of the architectural experience can be elevated with the integration of art. An architectural art, very simply, is authentic when it is in tune with the architecture, the viewers, the culture, its time, and when it speaks to its era.

An authentic art survives stylistic evolutions over time to become a benchmark of art history. In this regard, I believe historians will judge Scott Parsons’s work as being authentic, original, and (most importantly) a contribution to the historical trajectory of stained glass in architecture. 

# From Ashes to Resurrection

By Adam Zimmerman

*Exterior and interior of the 1995 church that was lost to fire 2014.*



THE MORNING OF APRIL 5, 2014 WAS LIKE most Saturdays during the Lenten season at St. Elias Ukrainian Catholic Church in Brampton, Ontario. There was a service planned for that morning, and likely spring cleaning and preparations for the Easter services two weeks later. Instead, the pastor, Father Roman Galadza, and his wife—who also happen to be parents to my wife, Sofia—were woken up to a call from the security company regarding a fire alarm. It was 6:00 in the morning when smoke was detected and some 15 fire trucks were on their way. By 10 that morning, the building was gone.

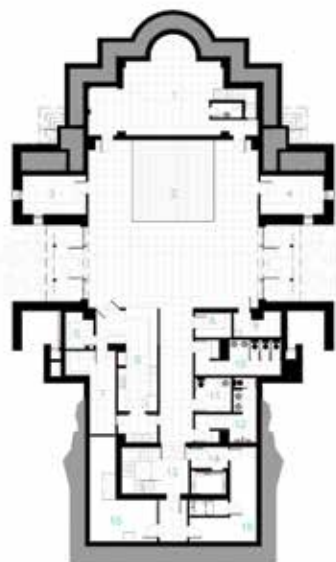
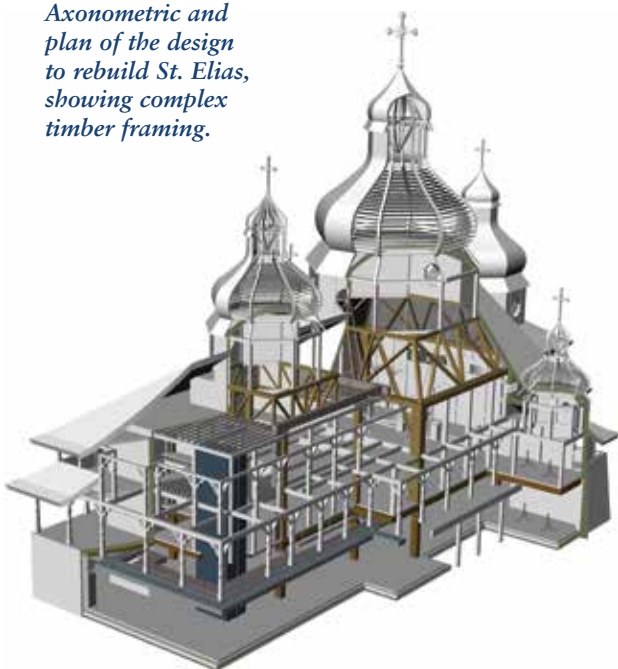
Those well beyond the immediate community shared in the shock and sadness caused by the fire, which was determined to be accidental. Built in 1995 and designed by the late Robert Greenberg, the timber-frame Byzantine church was known to people around the globe (as became especially apparent as notes of condolences started pouring in). Modeled after the 17th-century Boyko style of what is now Western Ukraine, its five onion-shaped domes could be seen from miles away. Inside, the walls were covered in iconography that took 20 years to complete. In the weeks that followed, the community mourned as they held Easter

services in a tent next to the ruins, and turned their efforts to rebuilding.

My wife's connection to St. Elias goes back to childhood; her father is the founding pastor of the parish, which was established in 1979. In 2009 our firm volunteered to design the parish house, completed in 2011. In the two years that followed we also designed a carriage house in a style similar to the church, as well as a pavilion for concerts and outdoor services. The day of the fire, we made certain they knew our pro-bono services were available. We worked with the building committee to establish a project team, which included a local architect of record, a structural engineering firm, and an MEP/FP engineering firm. All were carefully selected specialists with relevant expertise and sensitivity to construct such a unique and important building.

From the outset, the objective was to rebuild the church in the same spirit and style. It remained the same size—approximately 11,000 square feet, and 100 feet high to the top of the cross on the main dome—at the same location, oriented east, with the main entrance on the west elevation. As before, there are no pews. We worked from the original plan, which adheres to the Byzantine tradition that architecture should

*Axonometric and plan of the design to rebuild St. Elias, showing complex timber framing.*



Basement

- 1 Lower Sanctuary
- 2 Hall
- 3 Office/Nursing
- 4 Store
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Cold Storage
- 7 Storage
- 8 Coat Closet
- 9 Vest Closet
- 10 Women's
- 11 Family
- 12 Men's
- 13 Stair
- 14 Elevator
- 15 Mechanical
- 16 Utility Storage



First Floor

- 1 Working Sanctuary
- 2 Shrine/Altar
- 3 Syntheson/ Apse
- 4 Stair
- 5 Solea
- 6 North Transept/ Confessional
- 7 Nave
- 8 South Transept/ Chapel
- 9 Narthex
- 10 Vestibule
- 11 Elevator



Exterior of completed church rebuilt to recall the original.

Photo: Janet Kimber



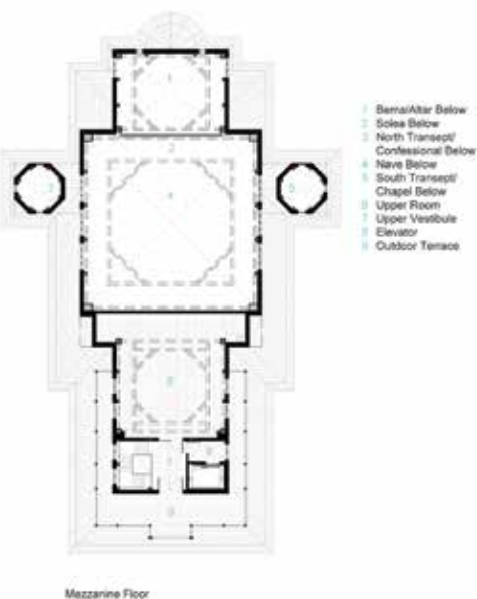
Detail of exterior shows intricate craft in wood and copper.

Photo: Janet Kimber



follow liturgical function. In fact, Greenberg spent extensive time designing the building from the inside out. He worked closely with

the parish's Protodeacon David Kennedy to learn about the various services and how they are conducted, so that in turn, he could provide a plan that allows for services to be celebrated in the most dignified manner possible. A Byzantine liturgical church needs a narthex, a naos (nave), and a bema (altar area). While we stayed true to the original church, there are differences. Some were required by code, others involved maintenance and sustainability. Innovation in wood building has come a long way over the past 20 years; we were able to revisit architectural details that could further support Byzantine liturgy.



#### PROJECT CREDITS


Zimmerman Workshop Architecture + Design (Design Architect); DKStudio Inc. (Architect of Record); Moses Structural Engineers Inc. (Structural Engineer); Sustainable Edge Ltd. (MWP Engineer); Santoro Construction Inc. (General Contractor); Timber Systems Limited (Timber Fabricator and Erector).



Photo: Janet Kimber

Interior will eventually be decorated with icons and art reminiscent of the previous church.

When the original building was constructed, the budget was tight. It also became quickly apparent that it's not so easy to scale up a true wooden building such as this (Boyko churches are much smaller). Structural spans in timber became challenging and expensive, so there were necessary compromises and time did not permit more thorough vetting. Most notably, the original 30-foot-diameter central dome was supported by mega columns directly below and within the nave. In Greenberg's plan, the columns were intended to buttress to the perimeter, making for a nave free of obstacles and better sightlines. That proved complicated and costly, so the mega columns landed directly below the footprint of the dome above. In our design, a series of trusses spanning 42 feet run along each side of the nave. The trusses are supported by four "mega" columns located in the outside corners below (each one about 20 feet wide); together with the diagonal struts, they are designed to resist the enormous lateral forces that result from wind on the largest dome. These columns spread farther apart (approximately 10 additional feet in both directions) than the columns of the original building. The new positioning is in line with Greenberg's original intent and reflective of what one would see in traditional Boyko churches.

When St. Elias burned to the ground, I had a certain degree of hesitation to participate. We were humbled to participate yet anxious to "get it right." On October 1, 2016, we joined hundreds of parishioners and visitors for the consecration of the new church. There were tears of joy, but also a bittersweetness. Over time, iconography will color the walls again, artifacts will be replaced, and this church will embody cherished memories and moments. To design a sacred space that will mean so many things to so many people—a place of worship, a home-away-from-home, a place that will be enjoyed for generations—is rare. 

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# Construction as Prayer

## The Making of the Sukkah

BY REBECCA TUSCANO-MOSS AND MICHAEL J. CROSBIE



*Architecture student design for the sukkah includes a partially covered roof and niches for offerings.*



*(Above left) Some of the architecture students who prefabricated building elements and assembled them for the sukkah. The construction of this Jewish ceremonial space was accomplished on a secular university campus with a multifaith student team, many of whom experienced the making of the sukkah as a form of prayer.*

*(Above right) Sukkah construction underway on campus; elements earlier prefabricated by students will be disassembled after the festival of Sukkot.*

The design and construction of architecture is a product of human thought and labor. Whether practiced by talented professionals or inspired amateurs, the act of conceiving a design and then acting upon materials to bring it forth can allow the

designer/maker to extend one's self into the environment, inhabiting the built world. Such constructions can be the result of creative actions in which the maker's spirit and labor are transformed into symbolically meaningful objects. In his book, *The Social Construction*

of Reality, Peter Berger writes that this very human drive "externalizes" people into the world outside of themselves. He describes humans as "world constructors" who fabricate objects through which they externalize themselves, projecting their "own meanings and reality," thus transcending the natural world.<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade expresses a very similar idea in *The Sacred and the Profane*, when he writes that in creating a world to inhabit through human labor, one not only "cosmicizes chaos but also sanctifies his little cosmos by making it like the world of the gods."<sup>2</sup>

Another perspective on human labor is as a form of prayer through which the human spirit is projected into the object being created. Much physical labor, particularly building construction, is made up of repetitive actions: digging trenches, laying bricks, tiling roofs. In most world religions prayer is likewise a repetitive action: the celebration of the Roman Catholic Mass is a ritual repeated over and over for centuries; praying the rosary incorporates the repetitive action of prayers recited in decades; members of monastic orders repetitively circulate a cloister as a form of prayer. Muslims use misbaha prayer beads to recite a circuit of 33 prayers; Buddhists and Hindus employ the *Japa Mahala* to recite 27 prayers four times in repetition; those of the Baha'i faith recite a verse 95 times after ritual ablutions.

We explored the connection between conceiving, making, and prayer in the design and construction of a sukkah by Department of Architecture students on the University of Hartford campus in West Hartford, Connecticut, working in collaboration with the campus Hillel Jewish student organization. The sukkah is a freestanding or attached enclosure in which the Jewish holiday of Sukkot is celebrated. Sukkot begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur and lasts seven days. During this time, a benediction is offered and meals are shared within the sukkah, which should be made of natural materials and have a roof covering partially open to the sky. The sukkah must be built under the open sky without obstructions (not under a tree, or located with a room above it). The walls can stay up all year, but the roofing should be unprocessed plant material (known as *sechach* or *s'kahakh*) and should be in place no longer than 30 days before the holiday to prevent it from wilting. Its material should have grown out of the ground but no longer attached to the earth. In this project, the roof covering was of saplings collected in a nearby woods and phragmite obtained from along a river on campus. These were laid over the open roof between the sukkah walls. By Jewish law the walls can be no





(Left, top) Plywood construction of the niches allowed for laser-cut “graffiti,” which is a traditional element of the sukkah.



(Left, below) Prefabricated elements are laid out and in the process of assembly.



Natural, unprocessed materials such as saplings and phragmite are set in place in the sukkah’s end wall.

higher than 30 feet and no lower than 3 feet tall, and the space must be big enough for at least one person (preferably more).

Because this is a campus structure, the sukkah walls are designed so that they can be easily assembled with repetitive units that can

be dismantled and stored for next year’s holiday. In Judaism the numbers 6, 12, and 18 are sacred, so the students incorporated them into demountable units 18 inches square, which had depths of 6, 12, and 18 inches. When assembled into a wall, these square niches are open to receive gifts and offerings for the holiday, and they are adorned with graffiti (another sukkah tradition) that was laser cut. The sukkah wall units were constructed by students weeks before final assembly on campus.

The work was completed by students and faculty of Jewish, Islamic, Christian, agnostic, or atheistic backgrounds, but all seemed to engage the project in the spirit of construction as a form of prayer. As 150 individual plywood units were fabricated, transported, and assembled, the work took on a repetitive nature, which some students and faculty likened

to prayers and chants. Prayers were offered at the beginning and end of the two days of construction. During construction, a Roman Catholic student remarked that he felt that he didn’t need to attend Mass that day because he saw his sukkah work a form of worship. A practicing Muslim student asked to help because she had just received word that her grandmother had passed away in Bangladesh. She felt alone, and wanted to help construct this space for Jewish ritual as a way to pray for her departed grandmother.

The process of designing and making architecture can take on the spiritual dimensions of prayer; in fact the act of prayer and the repetitive nature of building construction offer ways of transcending the everyday and accessing the spiritual. As the writer Wendell Berry, in his article “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” so eloquently observes: “If we think of ourselves as living souls, immortal creatures, living in the midst of a Creation that is mostly mysterious, and if we can see that everything we make or do cannot help but have an everlasting significance for ourselves, for others, and for the world, then we see why some religious teachers have understood work as a form of prayer.... Work connects us both to Creation and eternity.”<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

1. Peter Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 104.
2. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), p. 65.
3. Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” *Cross Currents*, Volume 43, No. 2, 2011, [bit.ly/ff-cberry](http://bit.ly/ff-cberry), accessed January 4, 2017.

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# WHAT SHOULD MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE BE?

THE LAST WORD \* FAHED BAKER

The religion of Islam is built upon an understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Many verses in the Quran urge Muslims to think deeply about creation and the miracles of the universe. Fasting, prayer, and all other forms of worship in Islam are regulated according to the sun and the moon. As a major part of the Islamic rituals, Muslims go to mosques to pray five times a day. Historically, Muslims didn't go to mosques only to pray, they also went there to gather, discuss, and learn about Islam and all other aspects of life. The first mosque in Islam is the house of the prophet Mohammed, which was built in the 7th century in Medina, Saudi Arabia. It is the perfect example of the simple and functional mosque. Its vernacular architecture resembled the concepts embraced by Islam, such as a minimal lifestyle, the clustered community, and a shared prosperity. In the following centuries, Muslims wanted to show the greatness and holiness of mosques, so they started to decorate them with intricate geometric and botanic ornaments. Although mosques are still being decorated today, most Muslim scholars have never considered ornament a necessity. Islam prioritizes equity, charity, and public welfare before considering the extravagant details.

Inspired by this belief, I think that contemporary mosque architecture should be more concerned with the spatial qualities rather than with decoration. For example, the latest advances in construction science and technology can reduce the number of columns inside a prayer hall, or preferably eliminate them, to preserve the continuity of the lines formed by worshippers, who prostrate themselves during prayer. Curtain walls and skylights might allow natural light to change the ambience of the

prayer hall and engender an inspiring atmosphere for prayer. The prayer space can be made more inviting by increasing the transparency of the building enclosure and increasing the visibility from the outside. Solid walls might be reduced to the requirements of function and security. Natural vegetation may be invited inside the space to celebrate divine creation instead of depicting it on the walls. Natural materials, rough or polished, can be forthrightly used for finishes throughout the mosque as the purest way to embrace the human connection with the Earth. Natural ventilation streams might be introduced into the prayer hall through wind catchers and operable windows to sustain a healthy and uplifting environment. The strong relation between the prayer and the Earth discourages elevating the mosque above the ground. To help establish a connection with heaven during prayer might best be accomplished with a simple roof. Pure geometric shapes have strong and iconic characteristics that exceed the two-dimensionality of ornament, and they can be applied exquisitely in three-dimensional form.

The mosque is a place where the connection with God is established, where the purpose of life is understood. Mosque architecture should not only represent Islam's principles, beliefs, and values to the world; it should also function as a bridge between Muslims and their place of worship. The experiences that such architecture can create, and the meanings it can convey, can be part of the mission and understanding of this faith community—any faith community. 

THE AUTHOR IS A PALESTINIAN ARCHITECT WHO RECENTLY COMPLETED HIS MASTER'S DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD.

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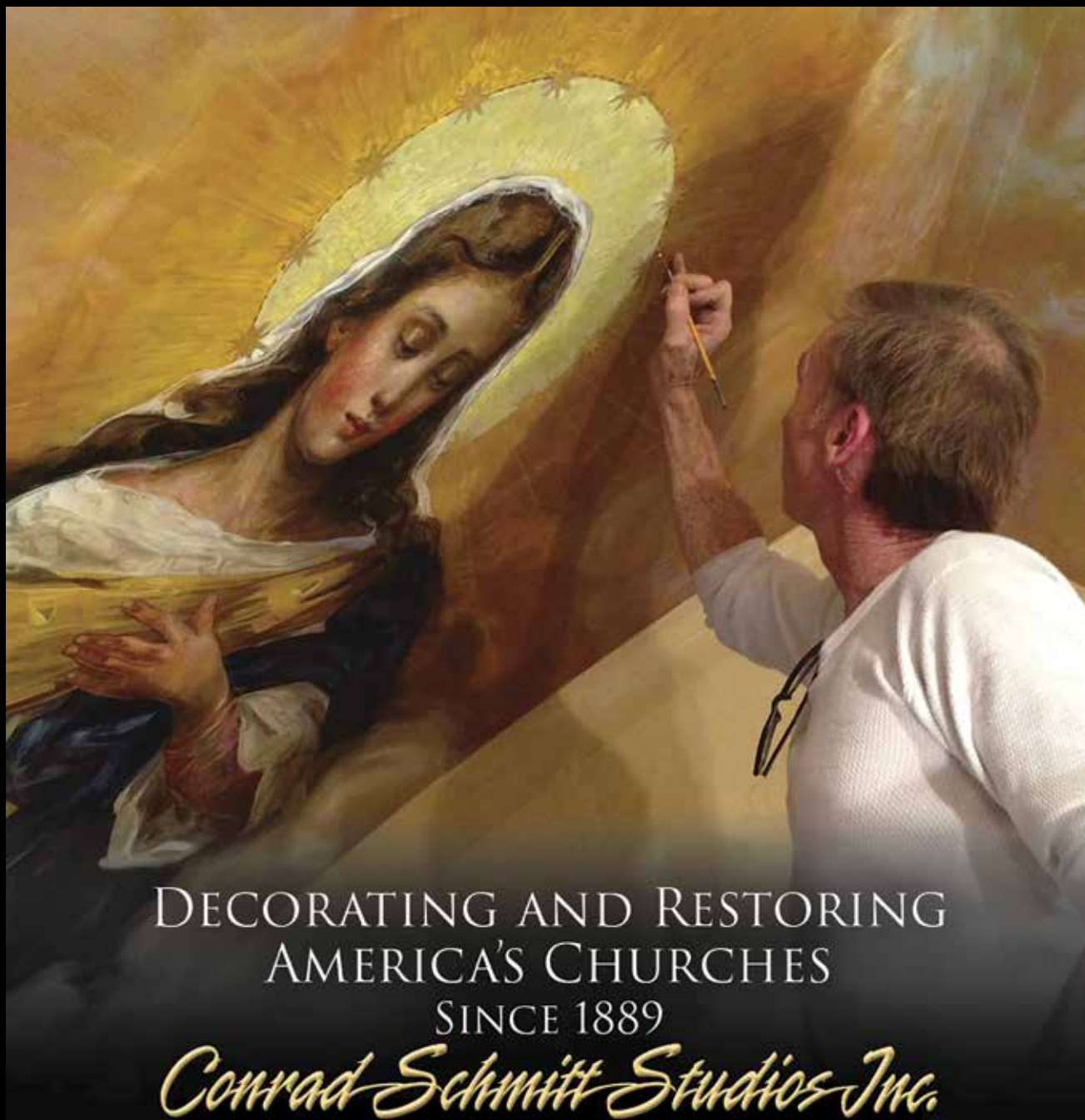
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