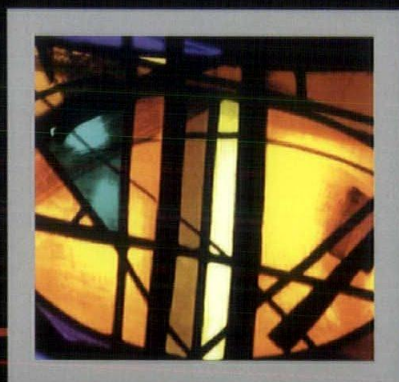
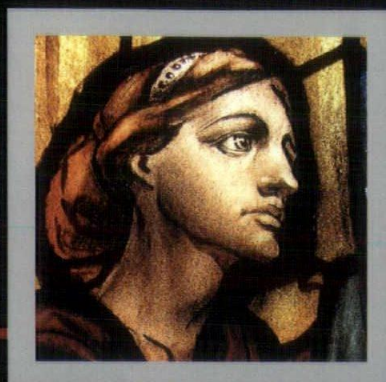
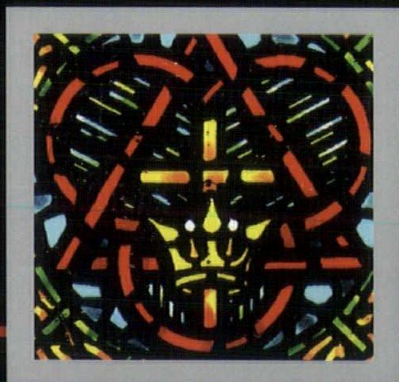


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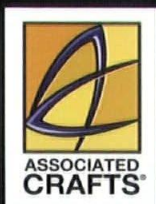
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#### ON THE COVER:

Christ Church Neighborhood House, as viewed from the garden of its historic house of worship, invites one into this community asset. (article begins on page 28). Photo: Courtesy of Voith & Mactavish Architects

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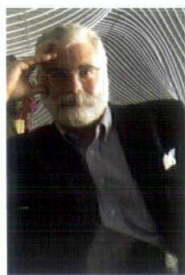
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The 2018 Faith & Form/ID Awards for Religious Art & Architecture



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## GOOD, ORDINARY

EDITOR'S PAGE \* MICHAEL J. CROSBIE


Recently I have been looking into the life of Connecticut architect Louis A. Walsh. Never heard of him? Not surprising. Walsh was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1877 to parents who had emigrated from Ireland. He attended local schools in Waterbury, and then entered Columbia University's architecture program (which had been moved out of the School of Mines at the insistence of legendary architectural educator William R. Ware, head of the architecture program—just to give you an idea of how architecture was viewed as some species of infrastructure back then).

Walsh graduated from Columbia in 1900, and went right back to Waterbury. He traveled a bit through the western part of the US for just a few years, working for architecture firms. Walsh returned to Waterbury in 1904 and opened his own practice. He designed all kinds of projects—mostly apartment buildings and schools—then developed a specialty working for the Roman Catholic Church in Connecticut. This was a boon for Walsh. He designed lots of churches, rectories, convents, parochial schools, parish halls, and Catholic hospitals. Even with

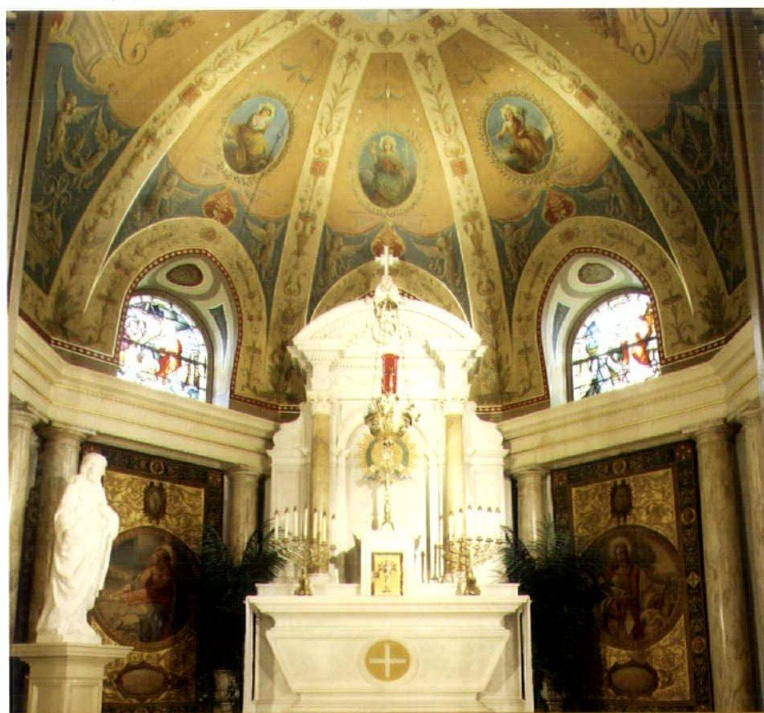
a brisk practice, it appears that Walsh kept his operation modest in size. He liked to work alone (an early, unsuccessful partnership with an older architect might have accounted for his preference for flying solo). His practice was always located in Waterbury, where he worked and lived until he died, in December of 1963, aged 86, at Waterbury Hospital.

Most of the buildings designed by Walsh that I have managed to find appear to be highly competent works of architecture, if not award winners. Walsh was a traditionalist—not surprising, given the time he studied architecture. Connecticut is dotted with his buildings. The highpoint of his career is a design completed in 1930 for St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Connecticut, which is a striking example of Collegiate Gothic architecture (a style he excelled at). He was a leader of the profession as well. Walsh chaired the state chapter of the American Institute of Architects and was active in the organization. But he was never a famous architect—which in a strange way makes him the perfect role model for the concerns of this issue, which focuses on the relationship between sacred places, their congregations, and the wider communities they are part of.

Walsh was a good, ordinary architect

who designed a lot of good, ordinary buildings. Many of his works are still in service (St. Thomas Seminary is currently restoring its beautiful chapel, designed by Walsh). At a time when there's much focus in architecture culture on the new, the bold, the odd, and the viral, architects like Walsh, who focused on creating good, ordinary architecture (which is much harder to do than it looks) continue to be unsung and their work not held up for emulation. We used to call this "background" architecture, which makes up the building stock of most cities and towns across the country. These buildings aren't in history books, but they make their contribution to the communities that raised them, are well built, and rarely insult one's intelligence. There is genius in their simplicity, honesty, directness, and sincerity. Today, there seem to be fewer and fewer good, ordinary buildings being constructed, designed by good, ordinary architects like Walsh, who appears to have made a commitment to the city he was born and grew up in, practiced in, raised a family in, and died in. The profession and the places we create could benefit from lauding the work and commitment to community of good, ordinary architects. 

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)

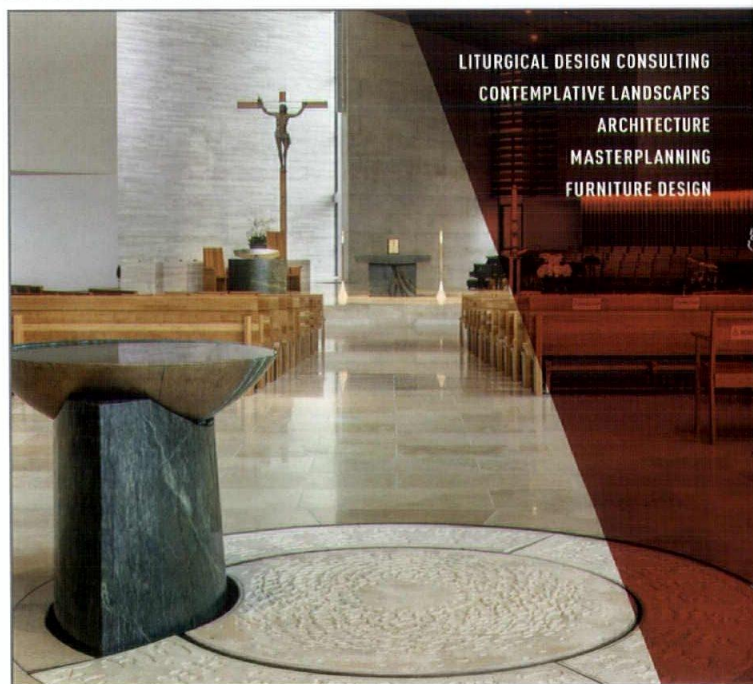


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# To Re-imagine Religion and Spirit

'You have to start by tearing out the pews'

By Donna Schaper



Photo: Tony Hisgett/WikiCommons



A restored chateau called “Chateau La Coste” in Provence brought me to tears recently. It had a “universal” chapel at its hilltop, renovated by Tadao Ando. It also had works of art by Ai Weiwei, Andy Goldsworthy, and more. It had been bought by an Irishman who wanted to marry the local and the artistic.

The chapel was like so many abandoned chapels on the road to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain: sun-blached stone, square, small, forgotten. I know my tears came abruptly, because so many American church buildings are about to go the same direction. They are about to be forgotten, with the front door ajar and the weeds breaking up the concrete. Very few have the simple beauty of the chapel at La Coste. But all of them have or at least had that connection between the best architecture a little community could afford and the local.

They put together soaring steeples and baked-bean suppers. They connected the babies to the old people and did “hatching, matching, and dispatching” for as long as anyone wanted. Then their time gave out. Some combination of secularism, multiple options, intermarriage, and conceit put most of our buildings and congregations out of business. Very few will transition to the next decade (PS: I love intermarriage).

The question driving me is what would happen if we did a creative adaptation as forceful as the one at La Coste—as married as the art and the locale are there? There, a Japanese architect encased the building in glass. Yup, he built a glass box around the chapel. It looks a little like a chapel on ice, or a chapel framed. He also put in three benches and three “holes” in the stone so that outdoor light could come up and light the altar. Moreover, he put in a wooden door that doesn’t quite fit the entryway, allowing a sense of the afterlife and heaven to be ever so visible at all times, as you peer out and wonder what’s exactly going on in this cockeyed arrangement. People who would “never darken the door of a church” can safely walk outside and around in the glass enclosure, which is maybe 18 inches wide. The spiritual-but-not-religious crowd doesn’t need to be made uncomfortable by worshipping inside. They can be safely close and also outside of any insults to their religious sincerity. I so love spiritual-but-not-religious people for their refusal to be hypocritical. Some of the conceit that destroyed churches and their buildings came from a strong willingness to be hypocritical.

The chapel at La Coste gives tourists and outdoor museumgoers a spiritual experience. What could our buildings do in their environment to also marry the artistic and the local and the spiritual? Surely we could remove the pews and have multiple uses for our “sanctuaries.”

Outside the chapel at La Coste there is a large red, beaded plastic cross. It reminds one of one of the Paris subway stations. Or a rosary. Or both.

What does the South of France and a Japanese architect have to teach American churches, all but gone and definitely in hospice?

One is that there is a tremendous opportunity hidden in plain sight, to re-imagine religion and spirit. These buildings can all become luxury apartments or groovy restaurants—or they can even more creatively adapt to their circumstance. They can become something different than they were.

*Judson Memorial Church, which overlooks Washington Square Park in Manhattan, is at the center of a vibrant community that radiates around it.*

Almost for sure, you have to start by tearing out the pews. Those pews have nothing to do with the flexible spirituality people are seeking today. Maybe these buildings are coffee shops or low-income housing or both. Maybe they are workspaces that are stained-glass-lit for people who need free Wi-Fi. Maybe they are daycare centers or eldercare drop in centers. Maybe they are yoga studios, theaters, dance spaces—places for artists that don’t cost a fortune, some of which artists decide to worship with the remnant congregation of a Sunday afternoon or Saturday evening in a truly flexible space. On Wednesday mornings at Judson Memorial Church (where I minister), we sometimes host “Morning Glories,” where 200 people come to dance (sober) and to enjoy the ecstasy of a strong beat. Perhaps on Friday nights joining AA and NA and FA and all the rest of the “downstairs” people, there is a place where people who are using opioids can come to pray and be touched and be held together by something larger than the chemicals that now bind them. And I do mean bind them. Religion comes from the word *religare*, to bind together.

Before you get on a high horse about people touring religion, or tourist religion, or sidelined religion, or how “awful it is to think of church people being sidelined in their own space,” take a good strong look at what it means to be religious. It may mean precisely to be sidelined—to connect to the people who are there and coming to you and needing you rather than to connect to the people you might like. Our church’s slogan is that we are “the perfect place for imperfect people.” That’s why our growing congregation is dwarfed by the other users of our building, 10-to-one. During a typical week 2,400 walk through our doors while 200 worship together on Sundays. I like that ratio. And from it, our building will creatively adapt.

When a church gets sad and its deferred maintenance starts to show, sometimes it is because it has lost its way. Sometimes it is because it committed the (small) sin of giving more to the community than it could afford. Whatever happened, when the new comes, there is an excitement. When a church is restored—with the elegance and simplicity and light that Judson now again enjoys—a signal of hope permeates the entire community. The building starts to talk: it says we are here to stay. And that is true of Judson. We are here to stay, to remain edgy and alert to the needs and power of the great community that surrounds us, including the fire-eaters right outside our door on Washington Square. We love the energy of the city and want to add our lights to its lights, our fire to its fire. Yes, we need a new elevator. And yes, we need a new roof. And we trust God, the community, and each other to raise the energy that will raise the money to keep us going for a long, long time.

My tears at La Coste were tears of joy, not sorrow. 

---

THE REV. DR. DONNA SCHAPER IS SENIOR MINISTER AT JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH IN NEW YORK CITY, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN FOR THE PAST 13 YEARS. THE AUTHOR OF 38 BOOKS ON SUBJECTS RANGING FROM SPIRITUALITY TO TIME MANAGEMENT, DEATH AND DYING, AND GARDENING, HER MOST RECENT IS *I HEART YOU FRANCIS: LOVE LETTERS FROM AN UNLIKELY ADMIRER*.



# The Economic Halo Effect

## An update on the value of historic sacred places and their impact on communities

By A. Robert Jaeger

IN 2016, PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES published the results of a national research project that documented the larger impact of congregations on their communities, and the results were stunning. For the first time in our 29-year history, we were able to comprehensively measure and substantiate the economic and social benefits that America's older churches and synagogues bring to their communities. *More than ever before, we are able to demonstrate that sacred places are de facto community centers, housing and serving the larger neighborhood or community in significant, often irreplaceable ways.*

Based on a close study of 90 congregations with older, purpose-built properties across three cities (Chicago, Philadelphia, and Fort Worth), the research findings included these highlights:

- The average annual economic impact of an urban sacred place is more than \$1.7 million. This impact includes the value of a congregation's operational and program spending, the value of schools and other educational programs, the local spending of those participating in congregation-sponsored events and programs, and the value of space that is shared for community-serving outreach.
- Almost 90 percent of those benefiting from programs housed by sacred places come from outside the congregation. Affirming the conclusion of earlier studies, the *Halo* research proved that the vast majority of those benefiting from congregation-hosted programs come from the larger community.
- Of the visits made by people to these sacred places over the course of a year, 89 percent were for non-worship activities, ranging from community programs to special events. Church and synagogue worship accounts for a small percentage of overall traffic to and from a sacred place.

In sum, the *Economic Halo Effect* research has affirmed and upheld Partners' message that sacred places have enormous civic value, serving populations in need, hiring and spending locally, attracting visitors, and strengthening towns and neighborhoods.

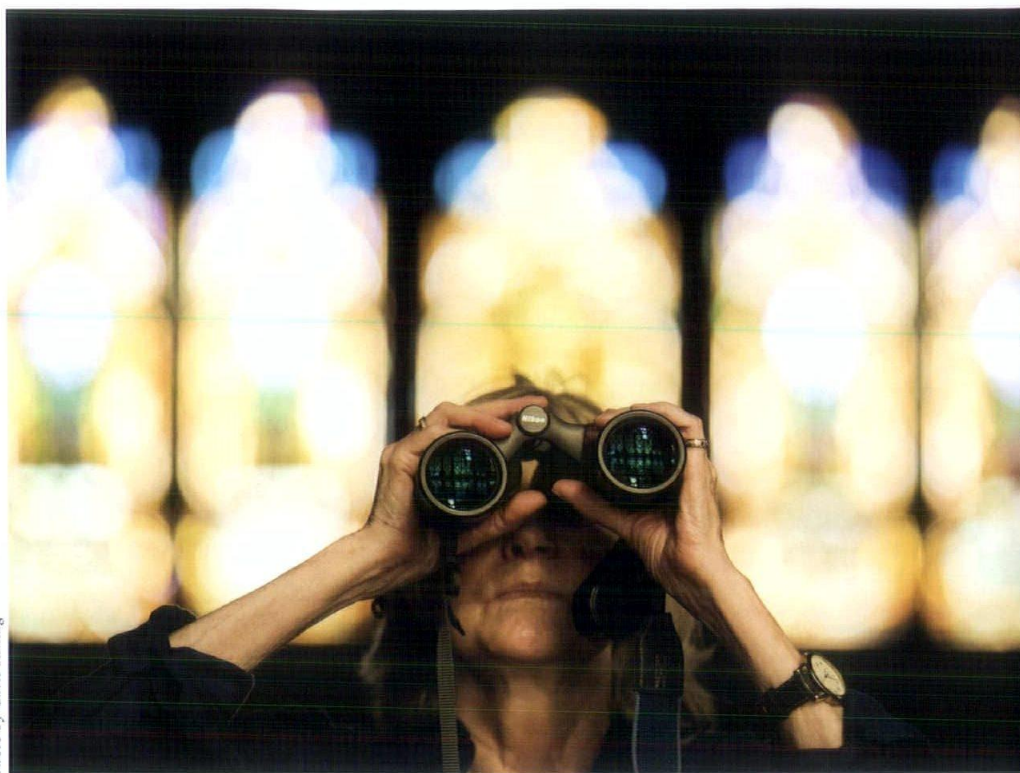


Photo by Chris Kendig

Since the publication of the *Economic Halo Effect* two years ago, Partners has focused on extending our knowledge and using *Halo* to help sustain and build the community value of congregations. For example, we are helping congregations make a better case for their value, both to their own memberships as well as the larger community. Partners has measured the *Halo* impact of several congregations participating in the National Fund for Sacred Places, for example, helping them tell their stories of community value. (See related article on facing page. -Ed.)


One National Fund congregation noted that "the economic value of our charitable work is the most valuable outcome.... Our lay leaders are impressed with the numbers.... We are right in the city, basically on a university campus, and sometimes our leaders question why we are letting groups use the space for free. But now they are proud of that because this shows the value in real numbers of what we provide."

Partners is also guiding congregations on how to use *Halo* to make a stronger case for financial support from outside their memberships. The economic language of *Halo* can be especially powerful for member giving, and with non-traditional funders, such as secular foundations, government agencies, and businesses.

We are finding that *Halo* can be very useful to new community programs that aim to support the civic value of sacred places. One good example is *Sacred Places/Civic Spaces*, a collaboration between Partners and the Community Design Collaborative in Philadelphia. (See

related article on page 14. -Ed.) *Halo* laid the groundwork and helped to justify this groundbreaking project, which is pairing three faith communities (Baptist, United Methodist, and Muslim) with architects and community groups, using design to reimagine and open up sacred places, bringing them into the civic plaza in significant, welcoming, and mutually beneficial ways.

Given the wide utility of *Halo*, Partners is extending its research to new populations. Recognizing that the original *Halo* research focused on urban congregations, Partners has been working to apply its knowledge of the *Halo* impact of small town and rural churches. This research will be public in the coming months, but already we know that the economic value of rural churches is significant including their impact on the lives of families and individuals in their communities.

The groundbreaking *Halo* study has substantiated something that we have always known intuitively, deep down: the bonds between faith communities and the towns or neighborhoods they are part of is real. These connections have economic impact, and they add layers of social support that communities need to thrive. Sacred places give back to their neighborhoods, whether the folks who live there are members of the congregations or not. All the more reason to sustain and preserve them. 

THE WRITER IS PRESIDENT OF PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES, WHICH HE CO-FOUNDED IN 1989, AND IS THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS ON THE STEWARDSHIP OF SACRED PLACES IN TRANSITION.



# 'Can you help us find money to take care of our building?'

By Chad Martin

For over 25 years, senior staff at Partners for Sacred Places have been fielding the question in this article's headline from congregations across the US, showing varying degrees of experience or capacity for stewardship of their buildings—from strategically planned restorations to desperate states of emergency. Indeed, this question was at the forefront when Partners began working with Broad Bay Church in Waldoboro, Maine. Broad Bay owns a 19th-century building designed and constructed by Samuel Melcher, a well-regarded regional craftsman at the time. The white clapboard siding and modest bell tower of this church building is not unlike hundreds of others scattered across New England's bucolic landscape. Yet Broad Bay stands out as a countervailing story amid broader narratives about declining membership and antiquated church life. Broad Bay is a young congregation by New England standards, birthed in the 1980s, and adopted its building from a shuttered congregation in 2002.

Broad Bay's community of hearty Mainers has brought the building back to life in recent years and has begun chipping away at deferred maintenance and overdue updates to re-establish the building as a hub of community activity on Waldoboro's Main Street. Local building experts volunteered to conduct a thorough assessment of the building in 2016 and found a growing need for major structural repairs to the steeple tower and for numerous upgrades to make the building fully accessible. Once these needs became clear, the congregation realized they had to find resources from beyond their own community. The congregation was committed to the careful stewardship of this asset, and that meant seeking financial help from beyond their own means. At that point, Partners invited Broad Bay to apply for the newly established National Fund for Sacred Places.

After more than a quarter century of wrestling alongside congregations with the question of where to secure the needed funds to appropriately care for aging historic buildings,

THE WRITER IS DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL FUND AT PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES. FOR A LIST OF RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS PARTICIPATING IN THE NATIONAL FUND AND OTHER INFORMATION, VISIT: [FUNDFORSACREDPLACES.ORG](http://FUNDFORSACREDPLACES.ORG).

*Steeple of Broad Bay Church in Waldoboro, Maine, one of the National Fund participants.*

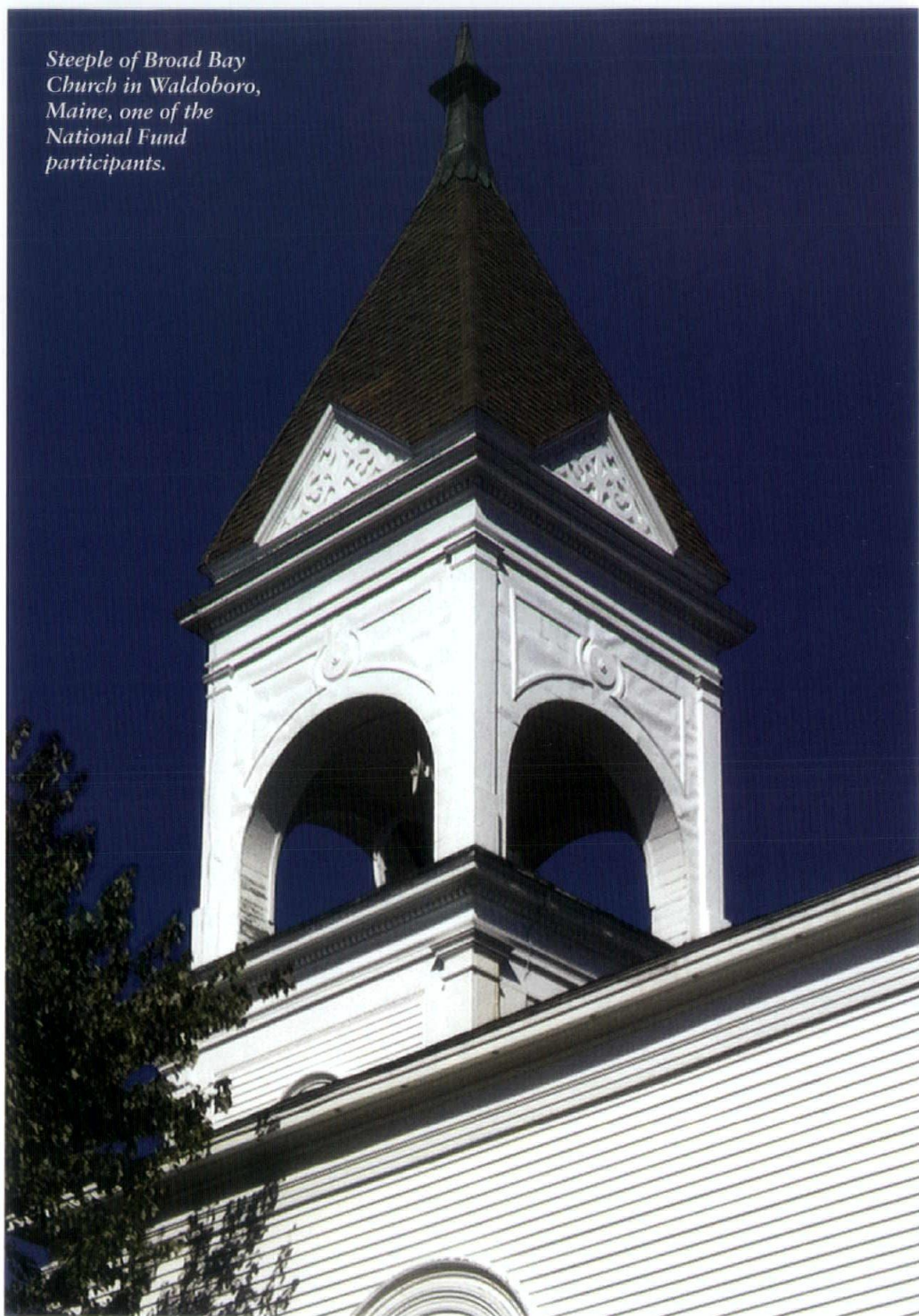


Photo: Brian Schreuger

Partners achieved a long-sought dream to establish a national funding source for such projects itself. Thanks to nearly \$14 million in grants from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., and a partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, for the first time Partners has had the opportunity to provide major grants on a national scale to historic houses of worship in need of restoration, repair, and upgrades to better serve their communities.

Now halfway through these funding cycles, the National Fund is demonstrating a positive impact on the feasibility of dozens of capital projects. And the technical assistance

provided by the program is helping congregations like Broad Bay raise funds from many stakeholders beyond their memberships and to oversee the complexities of major capital improvement projects.

## THE PROGRAM

Staff from Partners and the National Trust use five funding criteria to select a geographically and religiously diverse group of congregations for the National Fund each year: A property and its congregation has to have a national/regional significance; the congregation has to demonstrate community





*Broad Bay Church occupies an important presence in its Maine community.*

engagement and impact; there has to be an achievable scope and for the project to be eligible; the congregation has to have a capacity for raising funds; the overall health and vitality of the congregation has to be strong. Keeping all of these criteria at the forefront has helped ensure that projects funded by the program are important buildings reflecting America's religious legacy as well as vital centers of community life today.

Through the National Fund, Partners provides technical assistance in the form of training, small planning grants, and a package of customized services ranging from capital campaign expertise to developing best practices for sharing space with community partners. The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides advice on architectural considerations as needed. The program culminates in capital grants of up to \$250,000 for congregations that can raise matching funds and plan an eligible project scope.

#### THE CASE OF BROAD BAY

For Broad Bay, these services have provided multiple benefits. Partners provided resources on interviewing architects, contributed to the congregation's written request for

proposals, and reviewed proposals submitted by two firms. In the end, Broad Bay has contracted with Barba + Wheelock Architects, a Maine-based firm with extensive experience in both historic preservation and working with small churches.

In the same way, Partners has worked alongside the congregation as Broad Bay prepares to launch its biggest fundraising campaign ever. Resources from the National Fund oriented the congregation to best practice for capital fundraising, contributed to testing the feasibility for a major campaign within the church and its community stakeholders, and connected the congregation to consultants for the campaign—another regional firm, Full Harvest Fundraising.

The story at Broad Bay continues to unfold, as there is yet much work to be done to complete the project there. But thanks to the careful and diligent planning described here, Broad Bay will soon be ready to receive a major grant from the program, and is positioned to raise nearly double their original funding goal for the project. Not every congregation receives the same level of support, but in every case the National Fund works alongside them through the long haul of planning

thoughtful projects aligned with national best practices for historic preservation and of conducting successful capital campaigns.

#### THE NEED

Given the question Partners has fielded throughout its history—"Can you help us find money to take care of our building?"—perhaps the need for the grant-making work of the National Fund is self-evident. Partners research over the years has documented the extent to which America's older religious properties are certainly at risk and further resources are needed to sustain them.<sup>1</sup>

Two years into the work of the National Fund, the program is adding to the understanding of this need. Over the course of three application rounds in 2016-18, more than 400 congregations have submitted a formal Letter of Intent seeking grant funds. The geographic spread of these inquiries is nationwide, with applicants from 47 states, including Hawaii and Alaska, as well as the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. A wide swath of faith traditions is represented among these congregations as well: Roman Catholic; Greek, Coptic, and Russian Orthodox; every major mainline Protestant denomination; and



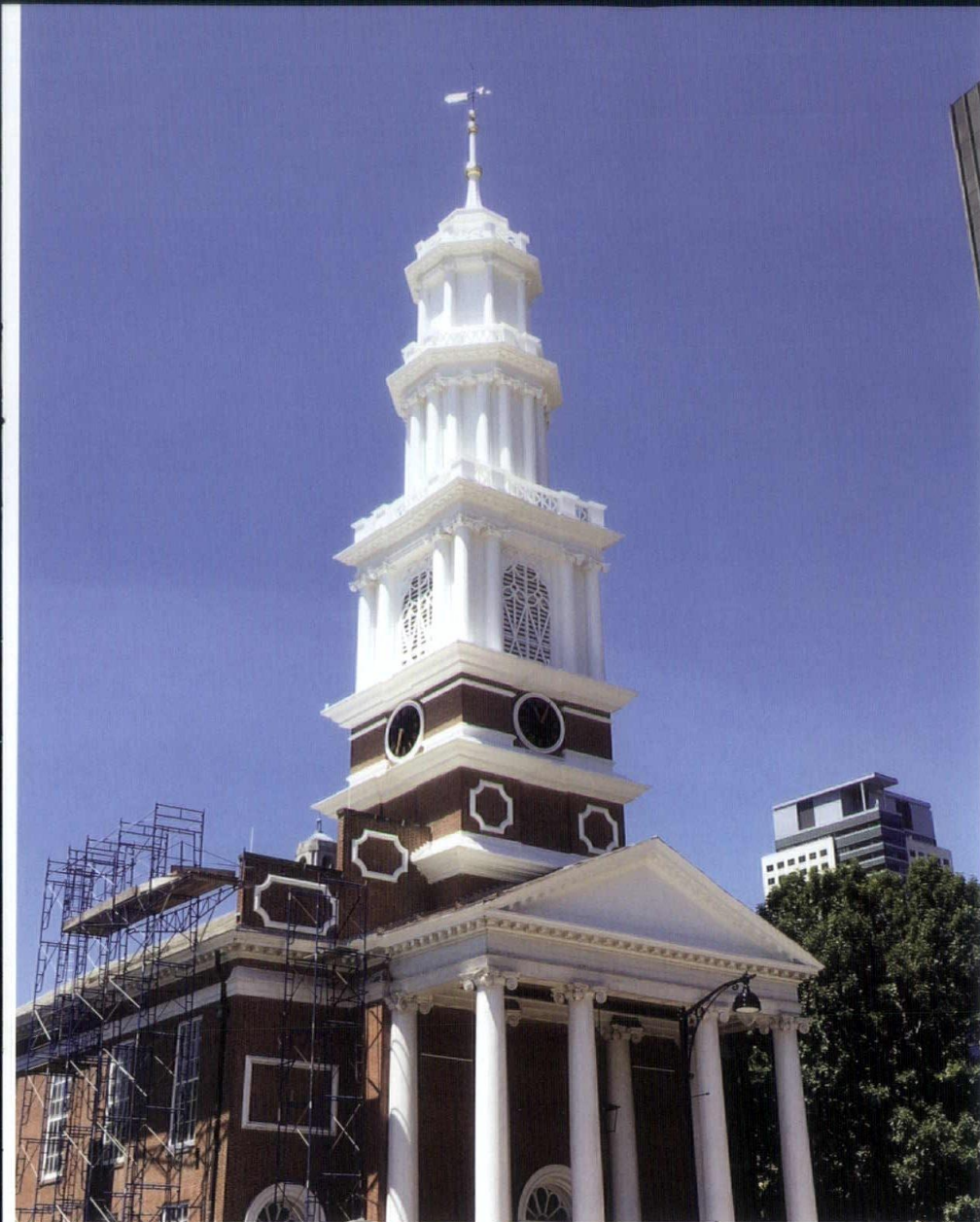


Photo: Rochelle Stackhouse

*First Church of Christ (also known as Center Church) in Hartford, Connecticut, occupies an historic site at the center of the city.*

#### Reform and Orthodox Judaism.

Every applicant has demonstrated the need for some level of financial support beyond the capacity of the congregation's membership in order to appropriately care for its building. Some are facing urgent repairs such as crumbling masonry or significant water infiltration. A few are currently uninhabitable due to extensive damage by fire or hurricane, forcing congregations to occupy temporary locations for years at a time. Yet the vast majority of applicants report programs serving their broader communities, arguing that the stewardship and care of these facilities is vital to the common good of towns and cities across the country.

#### THE PROJECTS

The National Fund is designed to support a wide range of "bricks and mortar" projects. To date, the National Fund has awarded 31

congregations into the program reflecting a broad mix of projects. A few examples highlight the program's scope.

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut, also known as Center Church, is one of the oldest institutions in the state, founded in the 17th century. Its building, constructed in 1807, is an iconic presence not far from the historic Old State House. Over the last couple years the congregation successfully raised about \$2 million for a project to stabilize and restore the cupola and spire, restore and repair wooden architectural features at most levels of the tower, reinforce the structural integrity of the tower, and restore the tower clock. Earlier this year Center Church completed this project, led by TLB Architecture, with the support of a \$250,000 grant from the National Fund.

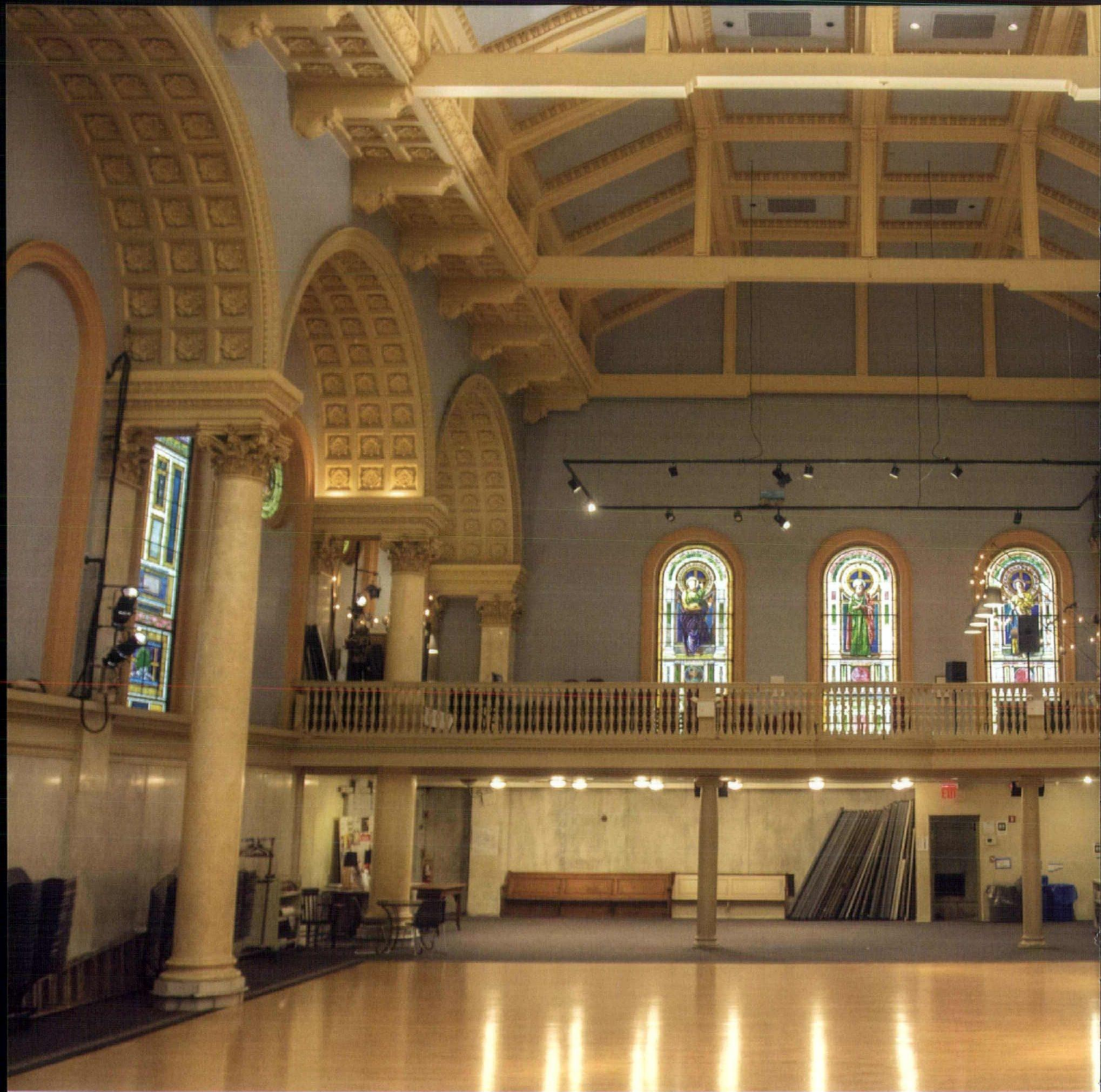
Another example of core historic preservation supported by the National Fund is the

installation of a fire-suppression system at the Cathedral of the Holy Ascension of Christ in Unalaska, Alaska. Holy Ascension, a wood-frame structure built in 1896, is the oldest cruciform Orthodox church in America. In addition to housing religious artifacts dating to the origins of the parish in the early 19th-century, the cathedral also has an extensive collection of icons, some believed to date back to the 16th century. As such, a modern fire-suppression system to protect the building and its artifacts and artwork is a vital preservation project for this isolated fishing community. A capital grant from the National Fund will support this project, estimated to cost over \$1 million and require two full building seasons.

Other congregations are working on projects that improve accessibility to their facilities, enhancing the spaces for shared community use. Judson Memorial Church in New York, New York, exemplifies this kind of project. "The Judson" has opened its building for use as a venue for music, theater, and dance for decades—recognized as the birthplace of postmodern dance. And the building features one of the most significant collections of John LaFarge stained glass windows in the country. Yet the various levels have only been partially accessible by elevator, and in recent years the aging elevator breaks down from time to time. So, Judson is working with Kouzmanoff Bainton Architects to design an elevator modifying the existing elevator location to service all levels of the building, including the balcony that serves as a community theater venue. While the full project scope is still in development, the National Fund anticipates supporting this project at a maximum grant level.

Other congregations have seen the National Fund as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to embark on extensive building projects encompassing a range of activities. Trinity United Methodist Church in Idaho Falls, Idaho, has taken this approach. With encouragement from Partners for Sacred Places, Trinity contracted with Myers Anderson Architects to conduct a thorough building condition assessment prior to finalizing their project scope. The congregation knew that they needed to attend to some roofing and masonry issues, and wanted to upgrade some interior spaces. Trinity opted to continue working with Myers Anderson to create a wholistic scope of work based on findings of the building condition assessment, including masonry and roof repairs, renovation of ADA compliant bathrooms, window repairs, and a remodel of the commercial-grade kitchen. The National Fund has awarded Trinity a capital grant of \$190,000





toward their \$600,000 campaign, and the project is scheduled to be completed late in 2018.

#### THE LEARNING

As noted above, we are just beginning to glean lessons learned about these congregations as we conclude the first two program years of the National Fund. Comprehensive evaluation will continue as each project concludes. In the meantime, we have observed several key insights thus far.

Even congregations that rise to the top of a competitive grant program like the National Fund have mixed track records of working with architects experienced in historic preservation. Many have earnestly

worked to assess the most urgent repair needs for their buildings. Yet of the 400 Letters of Intent received to date, upwards of half do not have an established relationship with an architect or other preservation experts in their community. For congregations like these, the technical assistance and professional support provided by the National Fund has been critical to designing a successful project.

Yet the value of professional expertise, both for development and management of the building project as well as for the capital fundraising needed, cannot be overstated. Readers of this publication surely agree. But our experiences in the program thus far reinforce this reality. The expertise provided by architects with experience in historic preservation is invaluable for maintaining a holistic approach to the project, keeping



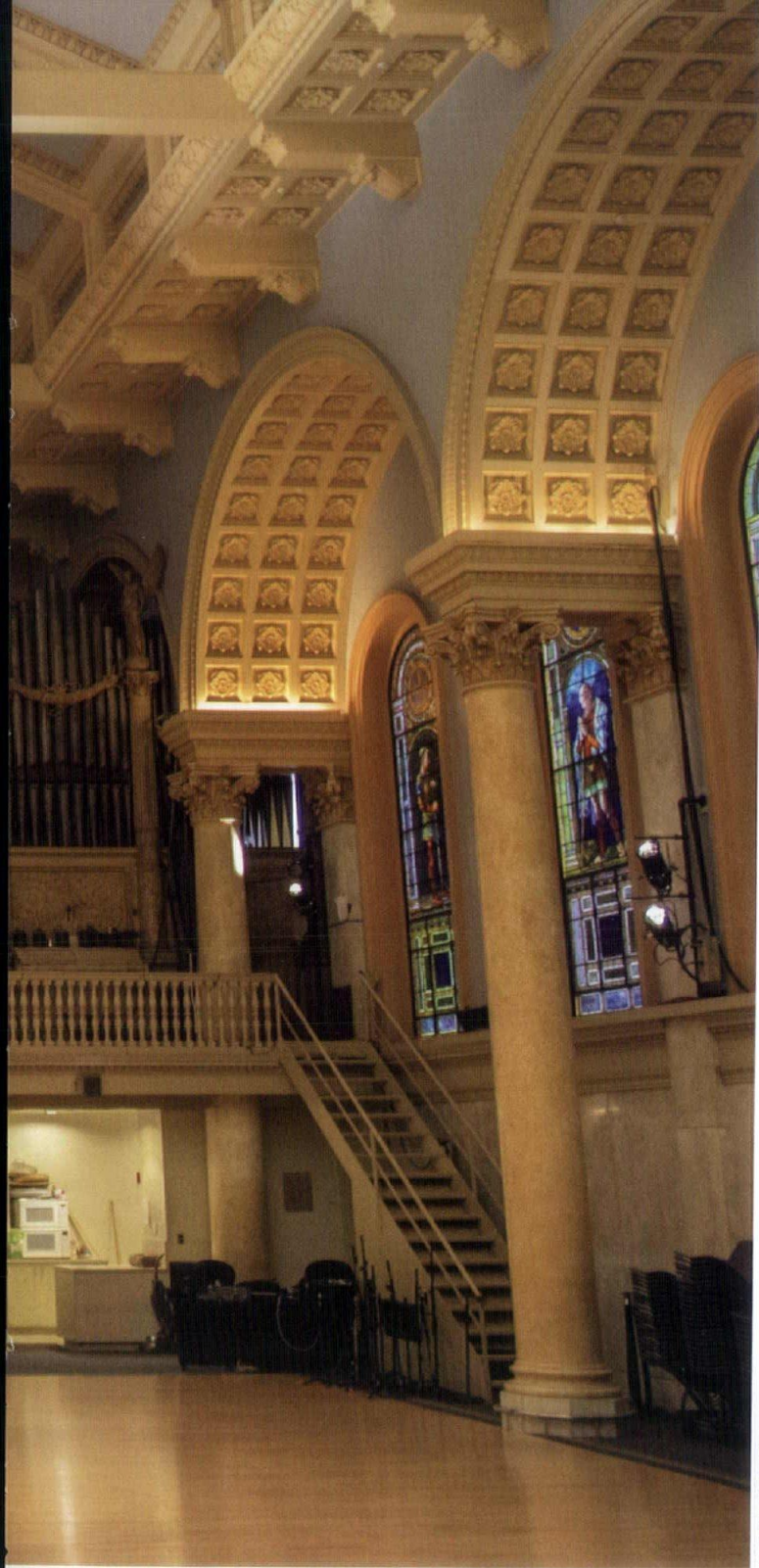


Photo: Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites In Alaska



Above: The Cathedral of the Holy Ascension of Christ in Unalaska, Alaska, is sited amid the region's natural wonders.

Left: The central meeting room of Judson Memorial Church in New York City is a place where the entire community of congregants and neighbors cross paths.

for capacity. United Baptist Church in Poultney, Vermont, is an outstanding example. Though the church membership is only a few dozen, under the thoughtful and determined leadership of a young, new pastor the membership and annual budget have steadily grown. The pastor and lay leaders have worked effectively to build partnerships with local organizations and make the building available for a variety of community uses. This goodwill is translating into an effective capital campaign to restore the envelope of the building and add ADA-compliant restrooms to enhance community use. United Baptist is showing that small congregations can manage significant projects by cultivating relationships with a broad set of stakeholders beyond the membership of the congregation.

Finally, we are learning how vital a community of praxis is for encouragement and success. Providing opportunities for leaders from congregations across traditions and scattered across the country to gather for shared learning builds confidence and real capacity. And while projects like these cannot succeed without patience and hard work, congregations often emerge stronger, more dedicated to their mission, and more deeply connected to partners in their communities.


Despite the many challenges congregations face today, including caring for aging facilities, programs like the National Fund contribute to the thriving of vital congregations and help ensure their buildings continue to serve as anchors of common life for decades to come. 

Photo: Michelle Thompson

the project proceeding on time, and demonstrating adherence to best practices in preservation.

Congregational health and capacity is one of the most vital factors in project success. This may be hard to assess from a distance, beyond surface measures like membership and annual budget size. But we have already adopted some tactics for deepening our assessment. We have learned to inquire about recent conflicts and transitions, and congregations are typically quite candid in sharing about their struggles. We have learned that clergy tenure matters. A new priest or rabbi, no matter how strong a leader, typically has too many competing priorities to effectively lead a successful campaign and major building project.

At the same time, membership size is not the primary determinant

#### NOTES

1. See Diane Cohen and A. Robert Jaeger, *Sacred Places at Risk: New Evidence On How Endangered Older Churches And Synagogues Serve Communities* (Partners for Sacred Places: Philadelphia, PA, 1998). Online at: <http://bit.ly/ff-spar>. Accessed July 5, 2018. For an example of a complete survey of one city's historic religious properties, see "Philadelphia's Historic Sacred Places," at The Pew Charitable Trust (2017). Online at: <http://bit.ly/ff-phsp>. Accessed July 5, 2018.



Philadelphia's religious building stock is in transition, due in large part to the declining memberships and resources of many congregations, which echoes the situation in cities and towns across the country. The moment a building is sold by a congregation or its denominational office, a new user will likely decide its long-term fate. The numbers confirm this. Of the city's 839 purpose-built religious properties, 17 percent are no longer in religious use. Half are no longer occupied by the original congregation. Since 2009, nearly 35 religious buildings have been demolished.

Many of the mainline Protestant congregations that have not yet left the city's less affluent neighborhoods or transitioned their buildings to congregations of other denominations are likely to do so in the next decade. There is great opportunity to initiate new congregations or new community-serving programs at these sites, but most denominational bodies lack the capacity to invest in creative, new alternatives.

Meanwhile, "hermit crab congregations," which took on properties built by congregations of other denominations (typically Protestant or Roman Catholic), are struggling to sufficiently care for their buildings—many of which suffered from deferred maintenance under their original owners. Instead of attempting to restore their buildings with scarce reserves, these congregations are de-accessioning them. This trend is especially apparent among Roman Catholic-built complexes that were de-accessioned by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the early 1990s. Catholic churches in North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia were closed and subsequently sold to independent, mostly African American congregations or aspirational non-profit organizations. Nearly three decades later, many of these buildings are coming onto the market for a second time.

Often, hermit crab congregations transition their properties to real estate developers who intend to demolish the structures, clearing the path for new construction. This transitioning takes a variety of forms. In 2016, we researched 28 demolitions that took place between 2009 and 2016. Of the 28 cases, 22 were associated with development pressure. Of these 22 demos, 20 made way for new housing. There were no instances of the 22 where the congregation that originally erected the building (the first occupant) sold to a developer who planned to

# Sacred Places in Transition

By Rachel Hildebrandt

*Photographs by Chris Kendig*



demolish it. In 15 of the cases, a hermit crab congregation sold to a developer who planned to demolish; there were three instances where a new congregation resulting from a merger sold to a developer; in three cases the congregation's denominational office—which acquired property upon the congregation's disbandment—sold to a developer who planned to demolish. The data suggest that the length and strength of a congregation's attachment to its property matters. Attachment substantially affects the building's outcome.

## VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE

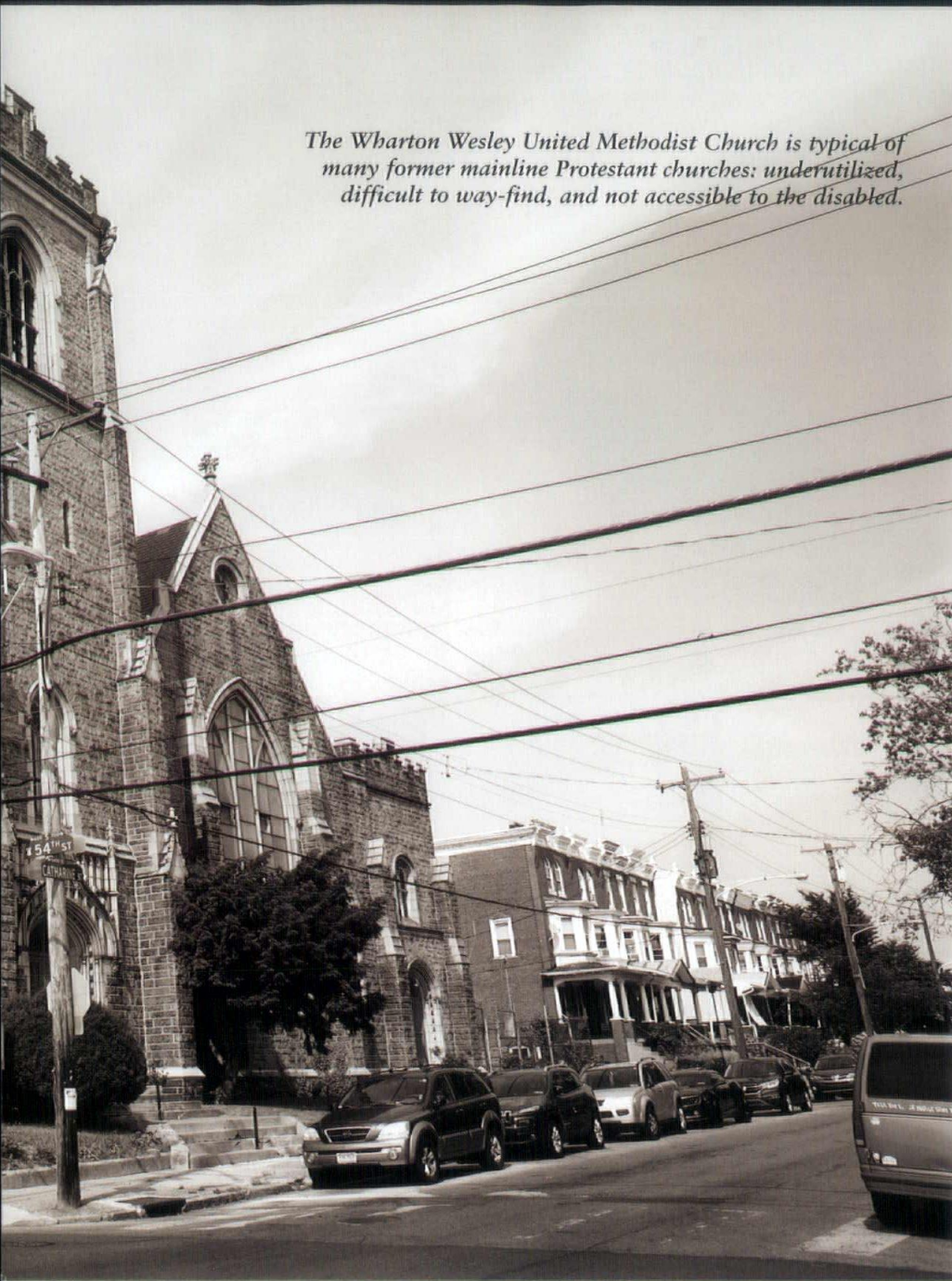
An examination of the factors that contribute to congregational vulnerability and resilience are at the heart of the PennPraxis-Partners study. Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and conducted in partnership with PennPraxis, the study produced an updated citywide inventory

of older, purpose-built sacred places and an accompanying narrative that summarized key research findings. Initially, the idea was to classify each of the 22 congregations studied as either vulnerable or resilient. It was impossible to do this, however, because any given congregation exhibits signs of both vulnerability and resiliency. A congregation is vulnerable when one or more circumstances open it up to possible closure or merger. Poor, unstable, or changing leadership; inability to sustain a paid, full-time clergyperson; declining membership and giving; significant internal conflict; antagonistic relationship with denominational leaders or unsupportive leaders are all factors that contribute to congregational vulnerability. When a congregation is facing these realities while also trying to plan for the future, preservation of the institution almost always takes precedence over preservation of the building.

THE AUTHOR IS A SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER AT PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES IN PHILADELPHIA. MORE INFORMATION ON INFILL PHILADELPHIA CAN BE FOUND AT: [SACREDPLACESCIVICSACES.COM](http://SACREDPLACESCIVICSACES.COM). A VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN CONTEXT.



*The Wharton Wesley United Methodist Church is typical of many former mainline Protestant churches: underutilized, difficult to way-find, and not accessible to the disabled.*



The building was originally Union Baptist Church, where renowned African American vocalist and activist Marian Anderson first performed and where her vocal talent was cultivated as a teenager. In 2015 the congregation sold its historic yet unprotected building to a real estate developer who replaced it with luxury townhomes.

#### INFILL PHILADELPHIA: SACRED PLACES / CIVIC SPACES

Given these circumstances, which are playing out in many cities across the US, unprecedented numbers of religious buildings will be transitioned out of religious use in the years to come. Many of these buildings will be adapted for residential use or demolished—unless key constituencies convene to identify alternatives.

Partners for Sacred Places and Philadelphia's Community Design Collaborative are challenging the notion that these are the only options facing at-risk properties. A collaborative new program, *Infill Philadelphia: Sacred Places / Civic Spaces*, seeks to inspire people to imagine an alternative future in which older and historic sacred places serve as inclusive community hubs. Funded by the William Penn Foundation, *Infill Philadelphia: Sacred Places / Civic Spaces* adds the design community's voice to a growing dialogue about the intersection between sacred places and community vitality. Working teams—each composed of a congregation, a community group, and a design firm—will, through an iterative design process, envision a new future for each congregation's property.

What are the goals of this new program? The hope is to demonstrate that underutilized space in historic sacred properties throughout Philadelphia can be activated in ways that expand the civic commons, serve a larger secular purpose, and strengthen communities while also sustaining congregations themselves. The idea is also to promote understanding of the realities faced by faith communities stewarding historic, purpose-built sacred places—what are the challenges and how can we meet them through working together? Historic, purpose-built religious properties present common design challenges—what can be learned that can be shared among congregations? Another goal is to develop innovative, replicable models in which religious buildings house a multitude of co-existing religious and secular uses.

Work by three teams is underway: The Philadelphia Masjid, which is collaborating with People's Emergency Center and HOK; Wharton Wesley United Methodist Church, which is partnered with ACHIEVEability and

A different set of circumstances can render the building vulnerable. Among them are the congregation's desire to preserve the institution at any cost to the building; the congregation is not the original owner/occupant; only a small portion of the property is used; the congregation is unable or unwilling to properly care for the building; no qualified professionals are involved to assess the condition of the building envelope and systems; there is a disconnect between the congregation and the surrounding community; most congregants are commuters who live outside the community; the issue of parking has become contentious; there is pressure to sell due to real estate conditions/values in the community; the property is not locally landmarked.

Consequently, struggling congregations explore the following options: downsizing into smaller, more manageable properties;

merging into other, typically stronger congregations; closing the doors altogether. They explore these options in this order: hoping first to keep their faith community together in familiar surroundings; second, to keep their faith community together elsewhere. This ability to respond to hardship and to adapt to survive epitomizes *resilience*. But congregational resilience can render historic sacred places vulnerable. Congregations that are not necessarily struggling to stay afloat transition their buildings as well. This is especially true of commuter congregations in communities with strong housing markets. In this context, congregations extract the value of the real estate to create funds that can be used to invigorate and sustain the congregation and to ease congregants' commute, including their ability to park. A notable example of this occurred with the selling of New Hope Temple Baptist Church.









*Left, top: Wharton Wesley Church offers space for neighborhood dance within its under-utilized facilities.*


*Left, below: The Philadelphia Masjid offers a 'Back to School' give-away to local families in its community.*

*Above: The cavernous Zion Baptist Church facilities contain an empty performance space in its 'annex' that could become a community asset.*

Brawer & Hauptman Architects; and Zion Baptist Church, which is working with Called to Serve CDC and Studio 6mm.

The Philadelphia Masjid, a mosque nestled within a former Roman Catholic school, represents the many congregations that have taken on large, Roman Catholic properties. Wharton Wesley United Methodist Church, the product of the strategic merger of a growing black congregation and a declining white one, is a prototypical example of congregations involved in adapting Mainline Protestant churches with many challenges. Wharton's facilities are underutilized, difficult to way-find, and not accessible to the disabled. Zion Baptist Church, which peaked at 6,000 members under civil rights leader and social activist Reverend Leon H. Sullivan, is typical of a congregation that is struggling to build upon the legacy of a larger-than-life figure who put the church on the map.

Launched in June of this year, the initiative first sponsored a precedent exhibit featuring built examples of sacred places accommodating new, community-serving uses—from congregations and nonprofit organizations that had recast their historic religious buildings (and adjacent landscapes) for new construction that was relevant to the faith community's mission. The exhibit, on display at Philadelphia's Center for Architecture + Design from June 1 to July 31, featured 25 sites.

Since June, Partners for Sacred Places and Community Design Collaborative have been working with the three teams to determine the program for their properties. Each of the congregations had ideas and preferences, which were evaluated by community stakeholders. Community stakeholders convened at each site during July to identify assets inherent to the respective site, congregation, and community, and then group assets to create new initiatives that make the highest and best use of the site. To learn more about this initiative and stay in the loop, please visit [sacredplacescivicspaces.com](http://sacredplacescivicspaces.com). 



# Soulful and Social

The shifting borders between sacred place and secular space

Edited by Michael J. Crosbie

*This issue's theme is an exploration of the connections, overlaps, and opportunities between sacred places and the communities in which they live. Such an appraisal demands that we examine how we define a sacred place, and what makes it different from the larger community beyond its walls. It calls into question the very nature of a boundary between the sacred and the civic, or whether there really needs to be any dissimilarity at all. Permeability appears to be the new condition of these sacred/secular boundaries. How can these new community spaces be soulful and social simultaneously? This roundtable presents perspectives on the borders of the sacred and the civic, how these demarcations are changing, how faith groups are reaching out to form bonds with the community, and reaffirming, clarifying, or challenging the definition of sacred space.*

## BEYOND THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

Religious architecture and sacred places have rarely been unified, singular locales. Instead, they are typically complex and heterogeneous, where boundaries between the sacred and secular were blurred or indistinct. In his book, *Space and Place*, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan observes that religion either embeds a people in a specific place, or frees them from it. The religious historian Jonathan Z. Smith is suspicious of any fixed concepts regarding sacred places and, in *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual*, argues that the sacred is more often sought beyond the confines of place and priesthood.

In many indigenous cultures, clear distinctions between the sacred and the profane are rare. Ritual settings are generally autonomous, with only periodic needs for specific spaces. Sacred geographies include both natural and built environments. Many encompass vast areas, often determined according to cosmogonic models and linked by pilgrimage paths. The Navaho of the American Southwest consider the Four Corners region to be an integrated landscape of landmarks significant to their mythical histories. Similarly, Taoism includes a sacred geography that stretches across China and identifies Five Sacred Peaks, 10 major and 36 "cavern heavens," and 72 "blessed lands," all believed to be interlinked.

For many, a sacred place doesn't necessarily need to be a defined place, or be consecrated by architecture at all. Devout Muslims mostly pray independent of the mosque. Domestic spaces can also serve spiritual practices, such as the shrines for daily pujas in some Hindu homes. Many Protestant denominations focus more on scripture and personal beliefs than on architecture. Most explicitly, there is the phenomena of placeless televangelism, and voluminous evangelical churches that evidence little interest in architecture beyond its seating and theatrical capacity.



Watercolor by Thomas Barrie, AIA

*The Golden Summit is part of a sacred geography of mountains, temples, monasteries, Tai-chi ch'an academies, and pilgrimage paths at Wudang Mountain in the west-central Hubei Province in China. For centuries pilgrims have paid respects to a syncretic pantheon of immortals, folk gods, sages, emperors, and Buddhist bodhisattvas.*

Understanding religious architecture, especially in an increasingly heterogeneous and globalized world, demands complementary approaches to the still-dominant distinction between the sacred and the profane.

— THOMAS BARRIE, AIA

*The author of *House and Home: Cultural Contexts, Ontological Roles* (Routledge, 2017) and other books, the writer is also a professor of architecture and North Carolina State University.*



Or at yet a larger scale, in countless Mexican villages such as Mitla, Oaxaca, in the days before Easter, residents lash palm fronds to lampposts and build temporary Stations of the Cross at various intersections. For a few hours on Good Friday the entire municipality becomes an outdoor sanctuary in which villagers together retrace the steps of Jesus until, before nightfall,

the impromptu Via Dolorosa dissolves back into the once-again prosaic townscape.

Claims to the permanence and immutability of sacred space are viable and important religio-political positions. But, upon closer inspection, such assertions are difficult to sustain as the actual fact of the matter.

~ LINDSAY JONES

*The author of several books and a professor emeritus at Ohio State University, Lindsay Jones is the editor-in-chief of the second edition of Mircea Eliade's Encyclopedia of Religion.*

#### THE NEW MEANING OF SACRED SPACE

Traditionally, most spatial practices of sacredness require limit and partition, with a parallel social practice of hierarchy and ritual. However, a profound and continuing revolution challenges inherited patterns between the sacred and profane, requiring the boundaries so often determined and defined by adepts and initiates to stretch and jostle with new realities of community and meaning-making. While the reality of sacred places as exclusive and restricted has become diffuse and permeable, most sacred environments are still differentiated from the secular environment around them. From design and style to their original purpose and contemporary meaning, many sacred spaces continue to be different in important and unexpected ways.

Across the country, communities of faith are living through profound changes by re-defining the notion of sacred place away from the inherited concept of physical separation from the mundane and the everyday. Instead they embrace a vital difference that continues to make them unique but proximate to the many patterns of daily life and culture lived out by the diverse stakeholders of the communities surrounding sacred places. With new partnerships between churches and a variety of community uses -- from performing arts, to health, and entrepreneurship, and more -- sacred places prove that they do not have to be off-limits

although they are different. Difference, in this new outlook, is outlined in contrast with the spaces around us that engender increasingly narrow affinities, drawing individuals into tighter and more homogenous groupings. Sacred places, however, offer few of the "catholic" or universal spaces for connection and engagement across background, culture, belief, and discipline in our time. This new model of sacredness is emerging in faith communities responding to the need for a new relationship with the growing secular world.

Use drives design and sorts architectural typologies throughout the built environment. Religious use for worship was paramount. But today these kinds of uses, which were traditionally central for religious property, now often represent the smallest portion of use within the building. These architectural landmarks have become community hubs for thousands of uses beyond those traditionally tied to religious identity. The thriving sacred places of today and tomorrow are open to myriad and evolving kinds of gathering, creativity, and endeavor. This inclusion, long an aspiration of faith communities, is becoming the new meaning of sacred place, turning sacred inside out in order to sustain its future.

~ JOSHUA THOMAS CASTAÑO  
*The author is director of Community Engagement Services for Partners for Sacred Places.*

#### COMMUNITY AND SANCTUARY – DEFINING SACRED SPACE

Throwing open the doors of a house of worship lets the sacred spill out into the community, yet the opposite happens, too. As congregations engage their communities, their places of worship risk their own secularization. What, then, does sacred space mean in this context? The answer involves the delineation of sacred space from everything else, and the language of sacredness itself.

Setting aside the familiar spectrum of solutions – a sanctuary used for no purpose but worship, or the meetinghouse model where community is recognized as sacred unto itself – we should delve into the contested territories that characterize many houses of worship. How does a sanctuary feel like a sanctuary if it also serves support group meetings and youth group dodgeball, parenting classes, and performing arts?

How does a sanctuary feel like a sanctuary to congregations of different faiths that share worship space?

One architectural element provides an adaptable solution: the threshold. Thresholds are designed to be crossed. Distinct from barriers, they are in fact always part of a passage. Importantly, they signal a change -- the moment between there and here. From the sidewalk outside to the sanctuary within, focusing on meaningful thresholds can make a sacred space feel both permeable yet distinct.

Formal manifestations of sacred thresholds are familiar (the dais, the bimah, the altar) as are elements marking a space within a space (baldachins and mandaps), but there are subtler variants as well. Changes in proportion, lighting, materials, and acoustics and can all signal a transition from the temporal to the sublime.

But how is a space identified as sacred? All

faiths have visual cues to connote sacredness in architecture. Each has specific iconography or implements of worship; some are universal. Verticality, a point of focus, richness of material, an elevated plane -- these architectural qualities communicate solemnity and dignity in ways that adapt across the faith spectrum, while remaining accessible to secular communities.

By communicating sacredness in universal terms and by allowing a permeable delineation of sacred space, congregations can preserve and strengthen their identities as sacred places while building a closer synergy between liturgical and pastoral mission.

~ TAYLOR AIKIN, AIA  
*The author is an associate and senior project architect with Murphy Burnham & Buttrick (MBB) Architects in New York and worked on the recent restoration of St. Patrick's Cathedral.*



*The bright, transparent, and inviting entry to the new Congregation Beit Simchat Torah synagogue establishes a landmark in its community.*

Photo: Elizabeth Felicelli/Esto

#### PLANTING A SYNAGOGUE IN A NEIGHBORHOOD

The history and mission of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) in New York City made it imperative that the architecture of its new home reflect both the institution's role at the forefront of gay rights advocacy and the congregation itself, a proud, radically traditional and inclusive group that was an important part of its wider New York community. At the time I started working on the design, CBST's current home, which dated from shortly after its founding in 1973, was difficult to find, only accessible through a courtyard at the end of a ramp. That disjointed configuration made the synagogue feel hidden. The congregants I interviewed consistently spoke of the need for their new synagogue to have a strong, visible presence within the neighborhood—to be out,

proud, and open to all. Yet they also spoke of the deep need for a sanctuary within the city, a space where individuals could worship safely, both alone and as a community, in a world that is not fully accepting.

The search for a building to house the new synagogue yielded a landmarked, Cass Gilbert-designed building with 50 feet of storefront. The symbolism of this street-front location was powerful, asserting CBST's presence on the street and transparently reflecting its motto of being "open to all." With a new façade—a composition of lit signage spelling out Congregation Beit Simchat Torah with vertical gold pinstripes and lavender glass—the architecture embodied CBST's radical traditionalism, revealing a modern, active institution within a historic, landmarked setting. Away from public eyes,

the sanctuary—whose only connection to the outside is through a skylight that washes daylight along a fluted concrete wall—is a soulful space for private worship.

The new synagogue embraces the neighboring community, making its presence known. The view from the street into CBST's offices lets the world see that those within are working for social justice every day. Yet this embrace is balanced by the sanctuary, which is purposely removed from the city. The introspective and extroverted together define and strengthen the synagogue as a whole.

~ STEPHEN CASSELL, AIA

*The author is a founding principal of Architecture Research Office based in New York, New York. CBST was a winner in the 2017 Faith & Form/IFRAA Awards program.*

#### MOVING IMAGES OF SACRED SPACE

Frequently, claims to the "sacredness" of a place, especially a contested site like the Hopewell-era Earthworks of Newark, Ohio, are predicated on the supposed permanence and immutability of that status. Outraged by the continued presence of a golf course built over the 2,000-year-old geometrical mounds in 1910, indignant Indians assert that because this was *in the past* a traditional sacred site, that it remains *in the present*—and ought to be *in the future*—the sort of exceptional place that is exempted from recreation, greens fees, and chemical fertilizers. Once sacred, always sacred.

More often, the sacredness of places is temporary, fluid, and permeable—a dynamism that reveals itself in processions and ambulations of every scale and complexity. For instance, there is the modest and moving image of a devotee approaching the Mexican pilgrimage site, Sanctuary of Chalma, on his knees, accompanied by an assistant who carries two tiny carpets to cushion this journey of genuflection. The pair uses a leapfrog-like system, wherein each time a two-by-four-foot rug is rolled out in front of the pilgrim it claims a new eight square feet of sacred space; each time a rug is rolled up behind him, the same small patch of the city is returned to the profane.

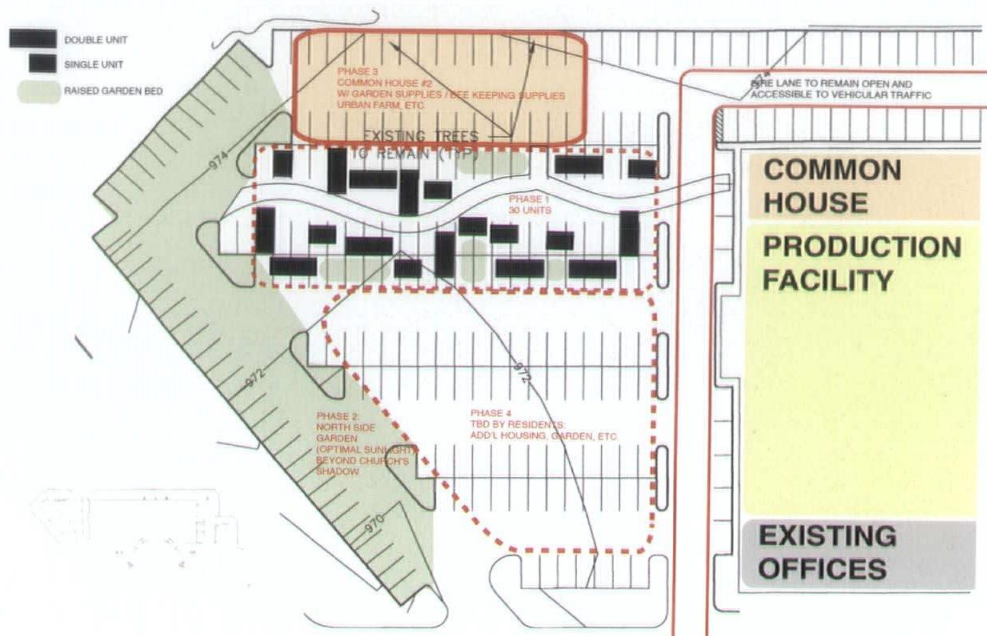
A similar dynamic unfolds in larger and more communal ways in the annual Holy Week procession in Oaxaca, Mexico, in which the image of Our Lady of Solitude, patroness of the city, is carried five blocks from her Basilica to the main cathedral. The two Catholic church endpoints are permanent sacred spaces, but in-between what was moments before a car-filled thoroughfare is swiftly transformed into an inviolable processional way. And then, just as quickly, after the Virgin and her devotees pass by, the temporarily sacrosanct street is returned to the quotidian.

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We often associate the word sacred with divinity and the holy, but it also signifies dedication to a purpose, security against violation, and immunity from interference – all meanings that convey the important role that sacred space has long played as a haven from a harsh world. In medieval Europe (where chaos reigned in many places) churches, convents, and monasteries offered a place for people to seek safety, security, and a higher and more holy purpose. That same role exists today: to provide a refuge for the homeless, who have no other place to go, who remain among the most vulnerable to violence and violation as they live on the streets, with little or no protection from the police. In some cities, churches and temples are the only places allowed to provide homeless shelters, but in a few cases that sacred purpose goes even further.

A doctoral student in housing studies at the University of Minnesota, Gabrielle Clowdus, has worked with the leadership of a major church here to provide a safe space – a sacred place – for the homeless and to create a productive community in partnership with this population. The church occupies a former big-box store and owns a 72,000-square-foot space and adjacent parking lot that it has offered to a new non-profit organization called “Settled,” which Clowdus started. Settled leverages the skills of many homeless people to produce tiny homes and other products that those living on the streets might need.



*Site design of conversion of big-box store into a homeless shelter production facility, supported by a local church in Minnesota, which will include factory floor, common house facilities, offices, and worship areas, with homeless shelter units set up in parking lot.*

Rather than have a modern employer/employee relationship, this non-profit follows a model more common in the medieval period, where people contribute to the community whatever skills and talents they have, co-creating the products of their labor and cooperatively operating the organization. Settled will cycle the revenue generated by the sale of its products back into the community, while allowing the homeless to live in the

production center or in the tiny homes they produce in the adjacent parking lot.

This effort reflects an important new role for sacred space. Religious institutions have protection, through the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), from “unduly burdensome or discriminatory land use regulations.” RLUIPA, enacted in 2000, allows such institutions to shelter the homeless population and engage in a mission-related activity like homeless housing that exclusionary zoning regulations often prohibit. RLUIPA offers a secular solution to sacred communities seeking to address a secular problem. The law also helps religious communities to remember the broad meaning of the word “sacred,” which refers to a space of solace and security, dedicated to a higher purpose, and immune from interference (including that from hostile members of the public and elected officials who pay no heed to the homeless in their communities). Settled reminds us that we shouldn’t settle for anything less than that.

~ THOMAS FISHER, ASSOC. AIA  
A professor in the School of Architecture and  
Director of the Minnesota Design Center  
at the University of Minnesota,  
the author serves on this journal's editorial  
advisory board.



re chapel at Park Avenue Synagogue's  
i M. Black Lifelong Learning Center,  
signed by Murphy Burnham & Buttrick.

*continues on next page*





*The sanctuary of MTEFA Architecture-designed St. Augustine's Episcopal Church, which hovers over its Washington, D.C. neighborhood, is visually permeable and open to the city.*

#### PERMEABILITY IN LITURGICAL SPACE

For a space to be sacred, does it have to be secluded, cloistered, or visually inaccessible? For centuries, sacred architecture--from medieval cathedrals to contemporary black box theaters--has created an interior focus through heavy or mysteriously opaque physical structures. This historical expression of sacred space can provide a sanctuary from the world, but it may also reinforce an experience of separation rather than integration. As communities become more diverse, even the most inspiring and beautiful sacred structures can seem disconnected from their physical and social environments. This physical separation may unintentionally reinforce an inward focus on the part of the worshipping community as well as create an unwelcoming image in the eye of the neighbor, to the detriment of both.

Instead, in a layering of physical, narrative, and symbolic landscapes, permeability can create an opportunity for communities of faith to extend their experience into the surrounding environment and invite new ways of seeing. Rather than simply managing light, framing a great view, or creating a well-placed window, approaching visual exchange as an aesthetic means of communication can be a powerful way of creating new insight, shared experience,

and profound connection. This porous exchange of meaning provides a foretaste of sacred experience, and even hope.

St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. and the Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church in Maryland offer a visible exchange that both informs the liturgical environment and also reaches out to the wider context. At St. Augustine's, framing the liturgical space within a view of the city creates a single scene in which each sphere enriches the other. The juxtaposition engages the imagination and magnifies the possibilities for the integration of spiritual experience and physical landscapes. At Chevy Chase Presbyterian, a frameless glass door and transom offer transparency and open the stone building for dialogue with those who pass by. Through an intentional dematerialization of the building envelope, the poetic language of permeable space breaks down the barriers that define it by gathering together a mutually informed and potentially transformative landscape.

— MICHAEL T. FOSTER, FAIA, AND DAVID FRIEND, AIA  
*The authors are with MTEFA Architecture in Arlington, Virginia, specializing in design and strategic consulting for faith-based communities and liturgical spaces, and educational buildings.*

18



# Community, Space, and Time in Islamic Architecture

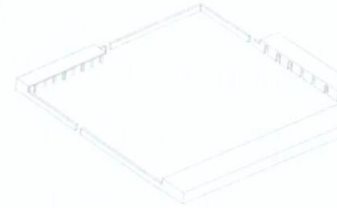
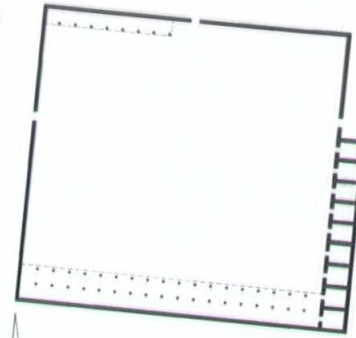
By Ozayr Saloojee

In all the aspects, cultures, and geographies of the Islamic world, one will often hear the term “*ummah*” in conversation. It is heard in conversations between friends and families. It is heard from the *minbar* of the mosque at the Friday prayer; heard in animated discussions between teachers and students, at evening meals. It is a commonly used word. It is also a deeply complex word. It is a word that exists not only as a linguistic or purely semiotic term, but also exists as part of a layered philosophical and religious discourse. It is at once a practical term, and also an operative one. It is both a conceptual term and a poetic word. Loosely translated, the word *ummah* means “community.”

But this word is not simply a noun that references the physical body of believers around the Islamic world. It is at once a word that identifies both a local community and a global one. It is a word that indexes the near and the distant. It is a term that is lateral—horizontal if you will—across space and place. It is also a word that challenges and upends our notions of time. In one meaning, it can be of the present and in another, the past, yet in a third: the future. In this sense, the word *ummah* is therefore also vertical. It works as a temporal *axis mundi*: a chronotope that exists in the classical age of Islamic art, architecture, culture, and history, while also anchored to the present, and simultaneously more than the present. The single body and time of the believer is tied, always, to the larger body and time of the *ummah*.

One can speak of an Umayyad or Ottoman *ummah*; an *ummah* of scholars; a geographical *ummah*: the *ummah*, for example, of a region—the Maghreb or the Hejaz; the *ummah* of a specific place: Tunis, Konya, Dearborn, Cape-Town, and so on. The word, in its linguistic form and from its etymological roots, is tied to a shared ethos of faith and belief, yet celebrated in the diverse aesthetic, artistic, and cultural worlds of the Islamic universe. This notion of community is embedded and expressed in the diverse spatial practices of the Islamic world. It ranges in scale and scope certainly, and in doing so echoes the Quranic verse that describes the *ummah* as being “created...from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other).” (Quran, 49:13)). The idea of community and its expression in architecture and urban space is, at its very heart, about knowledge, exchange, and dialogue. And this we can see most expressively and richly in the built and constructed works of the Muslim world.

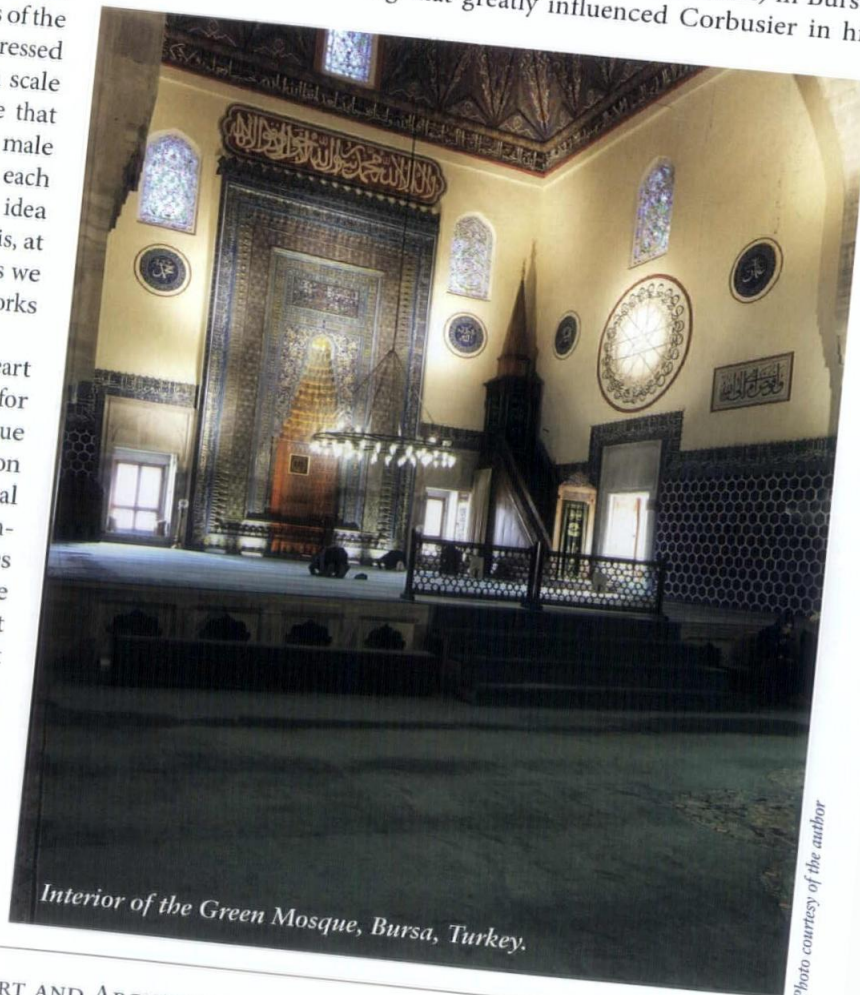
The most immediate example is, of course, the mosque—the heart of the community. A gathering place for congregational prayer, for solitude, for celebrations both festive and melancholy, the mosque exists (like the word *ummah*) as *communitas*. Its linguistic expression in Arabic (*masjid*) links to root words like *jama'ah*—a congregational togetherness, and *sujud* (prostration). The mosque is a place for community and for worship. While its form may differ (like its communities around the world), its essential purpose is of and for community. The horizontal dimension of the mosque celebrates an idea of space that links community across the globe. Its vertical dimension means that the community of the mosque becomes both an historical connection and future seeking aspiration. The faith and form of the mosque are tied both to the historical past and to the projective and desired future of the paradisiac garden.



Hypothetical floor plan and perspective drawing of the Prophet's House, Madinah.

The best historical exemplar is the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad, built in Madinah upon his migration from Mecca. The mosque Muhammad (unlike the structure that exists today) was most—est—a simple space that was connected, physically, to his house. In the example, we see that the intimate space of the family was tied to the congregational and public space of the mosque. Community in the Islamic world is, as a result, multi-scalar, referencing units small and large, local and global. As a result, the mosque embodies worlds within worlds.

Consider, for a moment, the Green Mosque (Yeşil Cami) in Bursa, Turkey (1421); a building that greatly influenced Corbusier in his

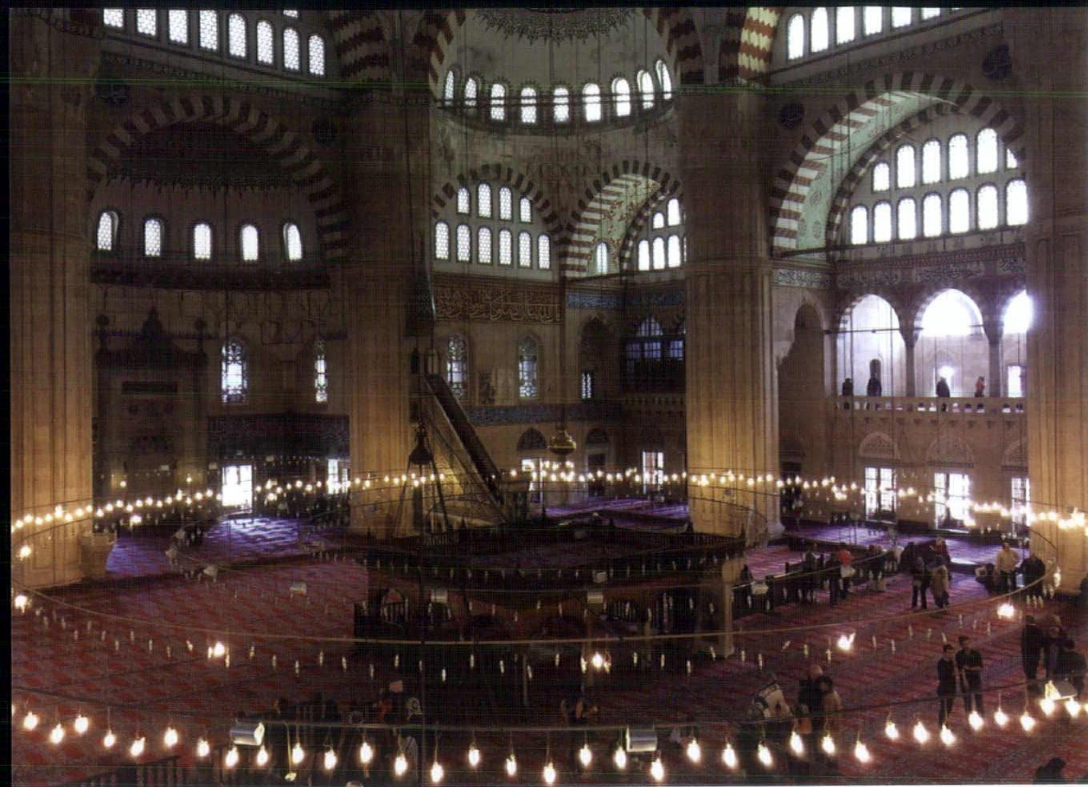


Interior of the Green Mosque, Bursa, Turkey.

Photo courtesy of the author

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Left, top: Interior of the Selimiye Mosque, Edirne, Turkey.

Left, below: A community courtyard, in the Albaicín, Granada, Spain.

Right: Interior courtyard of the Koza Han, Bursa, Turkey.



Voyages en Orient (see Le Corbusier, *Voyages d'Orient Carnets*, Phaidon Press, 2002), where he, as he described, experienced a “pictorial integration” with reality. A small building, the mosque served as a place of prayer, while its internal (and covered) courtyard served also as a social and jurisprudential space of the Ottoman court. Two *iwans* (arched spaces) face the *mihrab* and serve as spaces for two *kadis* (judges) who would mediate (and sometimes legislate) disputes within the space of the mosque itself. The sultan and his family could preside on an upper level in the *hünkâr mahfil*, observing the proceedings. Flanking rooms (recently restored) served both as small classrooms, prayer spillover, but also as retreat spaces. In the Green Mosque, one can see the full and broad cultural function of community—entwined as religious, social, and legal space.

The later Ottoman *külliyes* (complexes) take on a more ordered and organized expression in the *Waqf* (the pious endowment) of a patron to provide not only space for religious purpose, but also for the community at large. Sinan’s great İstanbul complexes such as the Süleymaniye and the Selimiye, allow not only for the mosque masterpieces of his patrons, but also provided—as part of the Sultan’s public commitments—a public kitchen, a library, a lodge for dervishes, several schools, a public bathhouse.





There are ample examples in the historical and richly diverse architectural legacy of the Islamic world. The Qarawiyyin Mosque (and much of the domestic urban spaces of Morocco's cities (Fez in particular) is so hidden yet connected to its surroundings that it is impossible to know where the mosque ends and the urban stuff around it begins. Doors might lead to family *riyaads* or into the space of the mosque itself. The Albaicín in Granada is another example, a labyrinth of streets and doorways that seem to make that portion of

the city into a single home—the urban equivalent of an *ummah*. More examples are plentiful: the integration of *bazaars*, *souks*, and *bedestans* of Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne; the Silk Road *caravanserais* that tied hospitality to commerce and to faith (each *caravanserai* often had a central mosque); the *hamams* and bathhouses that were equally social spaces and the spaces of informal diplomacy and administration.

When we look back through the long arc of history, examples of this ummatic architecture abound—particularly in countries with

the *longue durée* of this cultural and religious worldview. And while there is no Ottoman, or Umayyad, or Abbasid, or Selcuk empire to endow complexes of extensive buildings and city blocks in Canada and the US and around the predominantly non-Muslim worlds, it is worth remembering the more modest dimension of the space of this community: a prayer room at an airport, a meeting on the corner of the block, in the backyard, a family dinner at home, a street-front mosque in Brooklyn, a handshake between strangers, now friends. 67



# CREATING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ARTS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

BY MICHAEL J. CROSBIE



*Above: Brian Sanders' JUNK dancers rehearse in the fellowship hall of Shiloh Baptist Church in Philadelphia.*

*Below: Documenting workshop discussions between the host congregation and the artist group is a good technique for understanding shared missions and visions.*

In cities and towns throughout the country, many shrinking congregations have room to spare, while artists are looking for affordable places in which to create. Why not bring them together for mutual benefit? How do congregations with space they are not fully utilizing find just the right collaboration with arts groups in search of a place to exhibit, perform, or pursue their work? How can artists and faith communities forge partnerships that help people of belief as well as those seeking a place to do art? *Faith & Form* talked with Karen DiLossi, director of the Partners for Sacred Places' Arts in Sacred Places program, which seeks to develop long-term, sustainable relationships between faith-based groups and arts organizations. In addition to DiLossi's comments here, visit the Partners for Sacred Places Website to see some of the partnerships they've helped create: [bit.ly/ff-reimagine](http://bit.ly/ff-reimagine)

**Michael J. Crosbie:** Karen, what are the implications of congregations working with arts groups to share space, thus extending the faith community into the larger community?

**Karen DiLossi:** The implications can be positive and negative. On the positive side the faith community is opening its doors, rolling out the welcome mat for more than just people in their congregation. Many of these congregations are already doing that through food pantries and AA meetings on-site. The key with artists is to make them feel welcome, as well as the people who follow the arts: students, audiences, funders, other people in the larger community. A congregation can expand their community footprint in a positive way. The more people going through a religious facility, the more people have a positive experience within those walls, the more people can be rallied to help a faith community if their buildings are threatened. On the "negative" side, it needs to be a match that works for both.

**MJC:** How are arts groups and the congregations "matched up," and how does one assess

what is possible within a given "host" space?

**KD:** These two questions are linked. Answering the second question is partly answering the first. It has to be the right mix of a lot of different things. It might be helpful to think of the "dating" analogy. There should be a physical attraction: aspects or traits that you admire. With arts groups and sacred spaces, it's the same. The spaces suggest what can or cannot happen there: for example, adequate ceiling heights are necessary for dance performance, columns in the space would be a problem, the type of flooring might prohibit the space's use. Sanctuaries naturally attract musical performances, those places were made for sound. Different spaces can accommodate different kinds of artists without having to make large changes to the spaces.

Then there are all the other things to consider. What is the mission of the arts group or the art they are producing, and how does that align with the mission of congregation?

What is the ministry of the congregation, how do they express it? How does this



connect with the artist and what they are trying to accomplish? Is there chemistry between them? These questions need to be considered at the very beginning. Also, both the congregation and the artists have to be up-front about their resources and capacity. What can the artists afford to pay, how are



costs are covered by the congregation to make the space available, such as upkeep and maintenance?

At Partners we've formulated "areas of discernment" that we use to match up congregations and artists. Mission and vision alignment is the most important. Personal compatibility is critical for possible conflict resolution. The artistic content needs to be considered: the artist should ask for permission, not forgiveness. The congregation has to know what is going on within its facility and if they are comfortable with it. Understanding the decision-making process on both sides is very important: who gives approval, makes decisions? Within some faith communities, the decision-making process is not clear. This information has to be shared early in the match-making process.

**MJC:** What kinds of internal questions do arts organizations and congregations need to ask themselves before committing to a partnership?

**KD:** Finances are a huge factor. Too often the artists think congregations can give space for nothing, or space can be changed to accommodate the artists' use of it. If you're an artist, you have to have a realistic "rent line": How much can you afford to pay for the space and the other costs? Most congregations can't give away their spaces for nothing (such income might be critical for a congregation to hold on to their facilities). The congregation has to be honest about their financial and personnel resources. They shouldn't make promises they can't keep. However, according to our research, among congregations willing to share their space and the artists they partnered with, the number one reason is not financial gain. It is mission fulfillment for both the congregations and the artists. How can a congregation and the artists help each other to fulfill their missions? They are both working for a common good. They often have more in common than not.

**MJC:** You mentioned artistic content as an area of discernment. How does a congregation address the issue of artistic content and censorship?

**KD:** Artistic content has to come up. There should be an "artistic content clause" in the agreement between the two parties. The artist has to have the freedom to meet their mission through their art, with the knowledge that this is first and foremost a house of worship.

Sometimes circumstances undermine the original intent. For example, one of the first space-sharing matches we put together, the artists said they wanted to tell the stories that go untold—that was their mission. The congregation saw this as supporting their own ministry, which directly assisted people whose voices are unheard and stories are untold—such as the homeless or the drug and alcohol addicted. It spoke to them—a perfect match. But because the congregation was not honest about its financial situation, even with rental fees collected, it wasn't enough and the building had to be sold. Another congregation was interested in buying the building, but one of the big sticking points for the seller was that the artists be allowed to stay. The new owner said certainly. The building was sold, but a year later the new congregation told the artists they had to leave. It came down to artistic content, which the new congregation was not comfortable with. It's important for the congregation and the artists to know where is their own line in the sand, and if it is crossed, how is it addressed. Something else congregations should consider in these matters is that different spaces might have different levels of sacredness—one might be appropriate for the artistic content, while another space (perhaps the sanctuary) is not. Also, what is the use of the space: maybe a space is being used just for rehearsal, without an audience, and performances take place somewhere off site. We focus on finding the right match.

**MJC:** What about the issue of capital improvements to the space?

**KD:** We recommend a very measured approach, realistic, and sup-  
portable. You shouldn't have to spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 to make a space useable. Cosmetic changes—a new coat of paint or replacing

carpeting—are reasonable, but more capital-intensive investments in the space should be considered carefully. Spaces for the visual arts are sometimes more challenging. Does it require natural light? Can the space get dirty? Is the creation of dust or residue OK? It depends on the artistic medium—performers create less dirt and those same concerns don't apply. Perhaps photographers or jewelry artists create minimal dirt or dust that the congregation can be OK with in their space. The most success we've had with visual artists is a co-working creation space in the Philadelphia Design Center, a former sacred place—a fellowship building that has been repurposed, adapted for use by visual artists of all kinds.

**MJC:** What might be the tax implications for artists and faith communities alike in terms of these partnerships?

**KD:** The laws are different depending on the place. My best advice would be to encourage the congregation and the arts group to do their due diligence by consulting with legal and financial professionals as to the implications. With such legal and tax ramifications as possibilities, we suggest framing the partnerships with "whereas, therefore" positions.

*Whereas* the mission of the congregation is such and such, *therefore* the work of an arts group supports it and is part of the congregation's mission. But talk to a professional.

**MJC:** How can the art become a way of expressing the sacred for the faith community?

**KD:** I think it gets a faith community to think about the root or tenets of their faith. In terms of the art expressing the sacred, they might see it as we are all made in God's image and we are all different. The congregation is supporting the artists to express their view, to tell their story, lifting up their individual image. We do a workshop with congregations and artists about their mission and vision, and while they are reporting back to us, we write down words on a big piece of paper that express similar ideas on both sides. These are the things that resonate with both. It's about a shared vision. From my vantage point, each side is trying to make the world better than the way they found it. That might take the form of bringing laughter into people's lives, or inner peace. So a congregation might share these values with a landscape artist, or someone who paints still lifes. The work might provide us with a connection to the earth, where we all have to live and coexist. As an artist, this might be a way to express your joy with the Creator. This is present across denominations, can be found among them, as part of our shared human experiences.

**MJC:** Through partnerships between congregations and artists, how might the sacred be extended into the civic realm? In other words, how is it possible for the greater community to experience a sense of the sacred through the arts?

**KD:** "Sacred" means different things to different people. For me, when I went to college the theater building became my sacred space. The experience could be similar to sitting in a pew and seeing your shared community of people around you. Artists tend to gravitate towards sacred spaces because they are beautiful. They have an appreciation for the art, the care, the craft, and the detail that goes into sacred spaces and places, especially historic ones that have existed in a community for many years. When you have shared experiences in those kinds of spaces, I believe you are in a way extending that sacredness into the civic realm. Maybe the church becomes a castle-like backdrop for a theatrical performance. Maybe it has the only cared-for garden space in a neighborhood that people can enjoy. Maybe the sacred building is illuminated at night as a glowing landmark for the whole community. A lot of new buildings are just big boxes (I call it "lazy architecture"). But these older buildings are special, and they have that dimension of sacredness. ■



# Sacred and Civic Synergy

*Christ Church's dramatic transformation of its Neighborhood House into a community asset*

By Chad Martin

Images courtesy of Voith & Mactavish Architects

The transformation of Christ Church's Neighborhood House in the Old City neighborhood of Philadelphia powerfully exemplifies the aims of the *Sacred Places/Civic Spaces* project. The central premise of the project, "That underutilized space in historic sacred properties throughout Philadelphia can be activated in ways that expand the civic commons, serve a larger secular purpose, and strengthen communities," is clearly exemplified in design sensibilities, program practices, and values of the parish.

I recently had the opportunity to talk about Christ Church with architect James Timberlake, FAIA (founding partner at KieranTimberlake and a congregant at Christ Church who headed the building committee), Rector Tim Safford, Barbara Hogue (executive director of the Christ Church Preservation Trust), and Daniela Holt Voith, FAIA (founding principal at Voith & Mactavish Architects, who designed the project). Design played a very important role in this transformation, making the entrance transparent and welcoming and providing easy access to the entire space for artists and community residents. We discussed the church's work to enliven the building via the arts and open it to the larger community.

Today Neighborhood House is utilized throughout the year for rehearsal and performance space by an eclectic mix of arts groups, and is typically bustling with community activities. For several years more than 150 performance events have taken place there. Philadelphia Fringe Festival, First Person Arts, Pig Iron Theater, and Tempesta di Mare have produced works in the gymnasium-turned-theater on the fourth floor. Meanwhile, the Great Hall on the third floor is often occupied by community groups, 12-step programs, and social service agencies. A few years ago Christ Church Preservation Trust also took over



*A welcoming, glassy entry invites visitors to explore the facilities at Christ Church's Neighborhood House. An addition to Neighborhood House was shoe-horned between two wings of an existing building (inset photo).*

management of the weekly farmer's market on the nearby lawn. Add to this the hundreds of thousands of annual tourists visiting the church and burial grounds, and Christ Church is generally bustling everyday. But this was hardly the case a little more than a decade ago.

## NEIGHBORHOOD 'JEWELRY BOX'

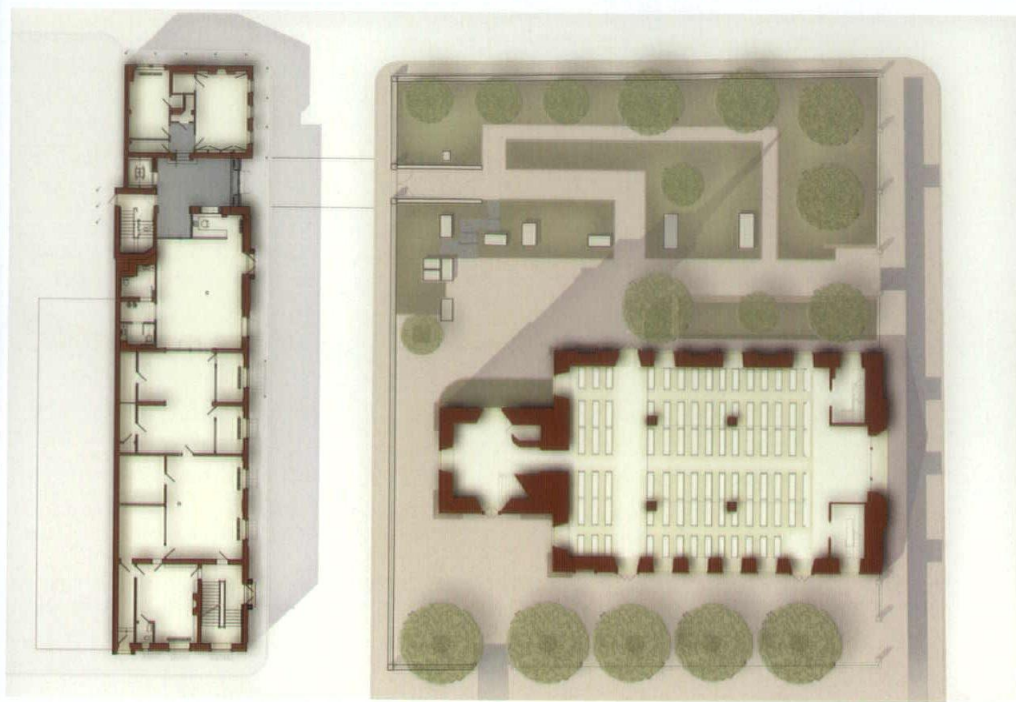
Timberlake remembers this transformation better than most. It's not just that he is a member of the parish or that he provided vital leadership to the project. He has been hanging out at Neighborhood House since he first came to Philadelphia for graduate school in the 1970s, including playing basketball in the old gym. "Neighborhood House was one of

those sort of jewelry boxes where you lost the key in a way," observes Timberlake. "You lost the key a hundred years ago or more. It looked beautiful on the outside and everybody knew it was kind of useful. But it was one of those jewelry boxes you can't really use."

Neighborhood House was built to function as a civic gathering space beginning nearly a century ago. According to Safford, the moniker "Neighborhood House" was intentional. In contrast with the more typical "parish house," this name conveyed clearly that it was built to serve the needs of families nearby who worked in the factories and had little space for recreation--a place for the neighborhood. Years later as Old City became home to a growing

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*Plans of the Christ Church physical plant, with Neighborhood House west of the historic church building, its new entrance on axis with church garden to the north. Section of the two-story entry volume reveals a tight yet potent space.*

arts community, Christ Church began opening its doors for performances. But without an elevator, air conditioning, or sufficient restrooms, the building remained underutilized.

So Christ Church set out to update the space, asking Voith & Mactavish Architects to provide the key to unlock this gem. Voith's team designed a connector between Neighborhood House and a historic residence next door, filling in what had been a small courtyard. The connector houses an elevator to all floors of both buildings (vital to the fourth-floor performance venue), provides space for restrooms and gathering, and creates a more transparent and welcoming main entrance. The street-facing entrance is all glass from ground level to roofline, introducing a modern touch and a flood of natural light into all levels of the building, literally opening up the building to the green spaces and courtyards on the north and south sides of the main church building.

The ease with which Neighborhood House and residential buildings have been physically knit together belies how complicated the project was. As Voith explains, "We were trying to unify two buildings with different scales and finishes. We wanted to draw attention to the entrance without competing with the two historical structures." Then there was the functional challenge of a top floor that was a 1930s addition to Neighborhood House, a second floor with exceptionally high ceilings, and interstitial floors all needing to be connected to the residential scale of the secondary building. Add to that building in a small space between to historic structures—the foundation had to be dug by hand—and it made for what

Voith describes as, "One of the tiniest, most complicated projects we've done."

#### DESIGN IN SERVICE OF MISSION

But the hard work and nimble design has paid off. Reflecting on how the project has enhanced the use of the space over the last decade, Timberlake notes that it is light-filled most of the day. At night when there are services or programs going on, "that space is a kind of lit beacon to those who are arriving." The new entry hall and elevator made the whole parish inclusive of every youngster, aging senior, and disabled visitor. "I could make an argument that if we'd done that strategy any other way than to make that entrance there, that it wouldn't have made the same difference that it has over the last 12 years," Timberlake believes.

Safford expands upon how the design has enhanced the mission of the parish. He explains that reimagining Neighborhood House to make it accessible "...changed the way we see everything. Prior to this it was almost like Neighborhood House was not part of Christ Church." Reorienting it made it much more accessible to the church building entrance. Stafford adds that enhancing the building's service to the community "...made us much more aware that *all of this* is meant to serve the community."

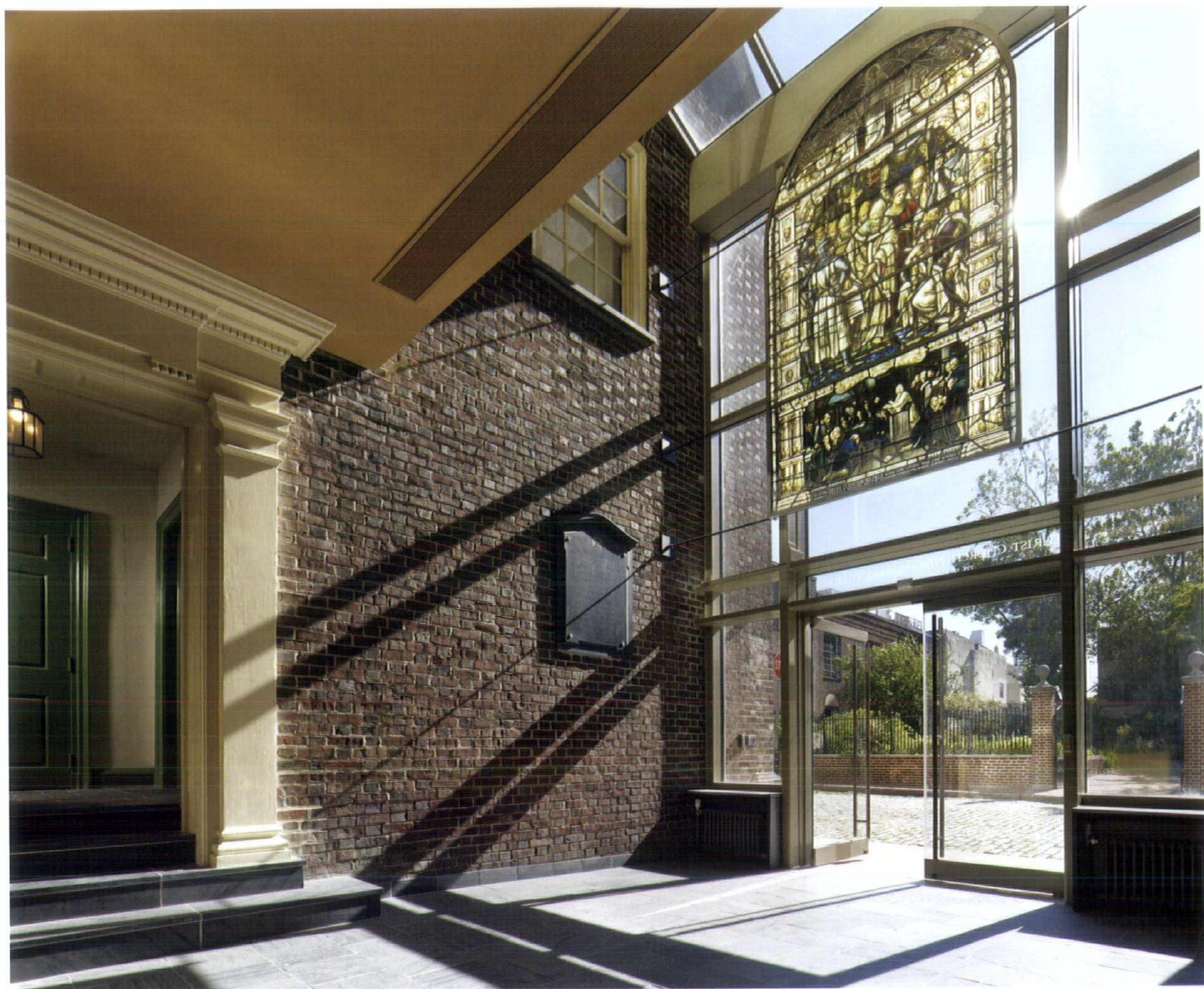
Whereas previously one could arguably divide the complex into distinct spaces for distinct purposes—Christ Church for the sacred, and Neighborhood House for the civic—the relationship now is much more synergistic and interconnected. With a decade of hindsight,

after years of expanded programming taking place in the building, one can see how vital the commitment to thoughtful design was to this community-building purpose. Here the desire for a more inviting entrance was at least as important to the success of the design as the functional need for a more accessible space. Had the latter been the overriding consideration, a less engaging approach could have been taken to incorporate an elevator near the original entrance at the corner of the building. Instead, the bold entrance invites people inside with a glass and steel facade distinct but thoughtfully connected to the historic buildings. The glow of interior light that pours out in the evening illumines the way to enter. "That sense of light and air are really important," Voith underscores. "Pulling in the views and connecting to the city was important."

This inviting space has facilitated ease of movement functionally as well as metaphorically. Now parish members more frequently use Neighborhood House for church activities. Increasingly the historic sanctuary building is used for arts programming. The whole campus more fluidly shifts between sacred and civic functions, contributing to how Christ Church has been activated to expand the civic commons in recent years. Thoughtful design of built spaces informed by and aligned with parish and organizational mission and core values has been critical to this expansion.

Rector Safford points out that performance events have taken place in the church's archive, the burial ground, and the sanctuary itself—not just in the dedicated performance space. "From the church's perspective it's all just

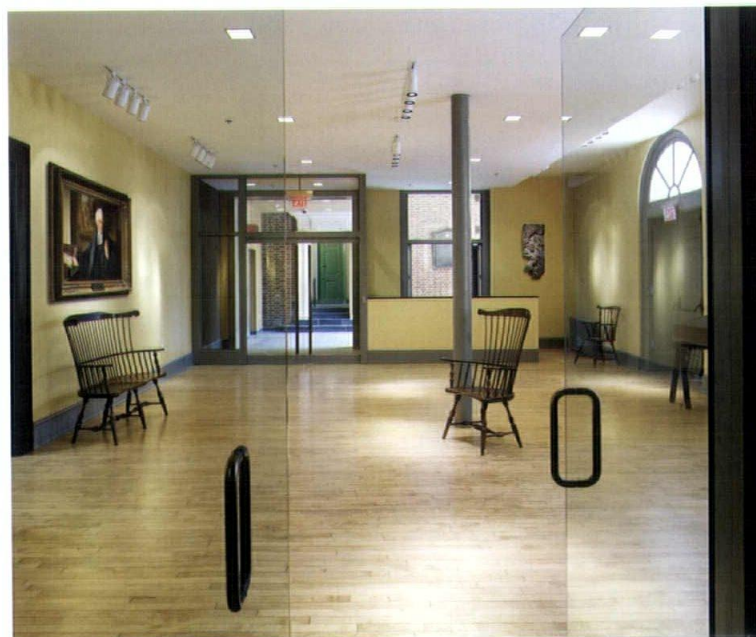




Christ Church,” yet he is quick to add, “One of the things we’ve done smartly is not put church people in charge”—meaning the arts and community programming. “In a sense [these activities speak] back to the church about what it needs to become.”

#### OPENNES, CURIOSITY, DEDICATION TO COMMUNITY

The artful design of the space has opened new possibilities in recent years. But the success of programming at Christ Church has also come from an ethos of openness, curiosity, and dedication to community benefit on the part of staff, artists and patrons alike. “One of the main things artists will say about why they come back here is because it really is a community space,” says Barbara Hogue. “There is no gate-keeper.” This spirit of community partnership and openness underscores the fact that even highly utilized sacred spaces can—with a mix of innovative design and savvy leadership—be more fully activated to expand the civic commons and serve community benefit.








*Left, top: Eastern light streams into the new Neighborhood House entry/connector, through an historic stained-glass window.*

*Left, below: Revived Neighborhood House reception space, adjacent to new entry/connector beyond.*

*Above: New entry to Neighborhood House aligns on axis with the historic church's garden at the corner of North American and Filbert streets.*

A new project by Christ Church is a fitting example. Recently, the church installed a new pipe organ in conjunction with a project to stabilize the iconic steeple. Based in part on lessons learned at Neighborhood House, from the onset the parish asked, in Safford's words, "How do we make it not just an organ for the church, but also for the arts community?" This led to a grant from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage to commission a new work from the New York-based International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). The piece, inspired by the nearly three centuries of life at Christ Church, will employ a variety of place-based instruments and technologies, and will have the audience traversing the entire grounds—including part of Independence National Historic Park. "We've built a public organ," Safford concludes. "We could have built a church organ, but we built a public organ."

Guided by this vision and sentiment, the civic realm stretches across both sides of this little stretch of North American Street, serving the civic good of the city now and into the future. 



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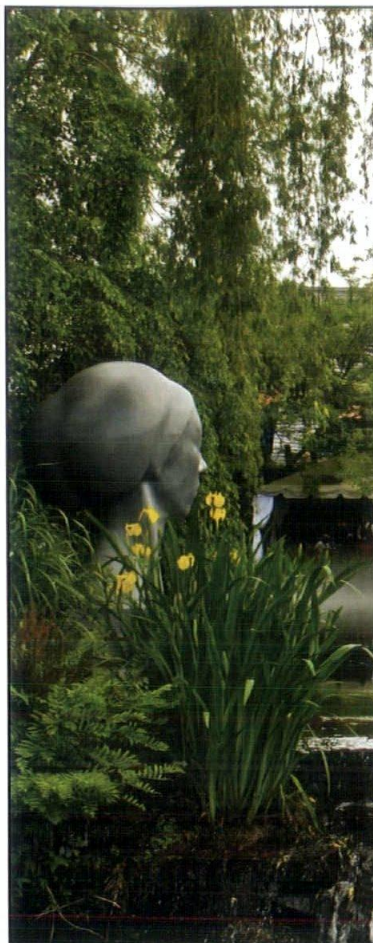


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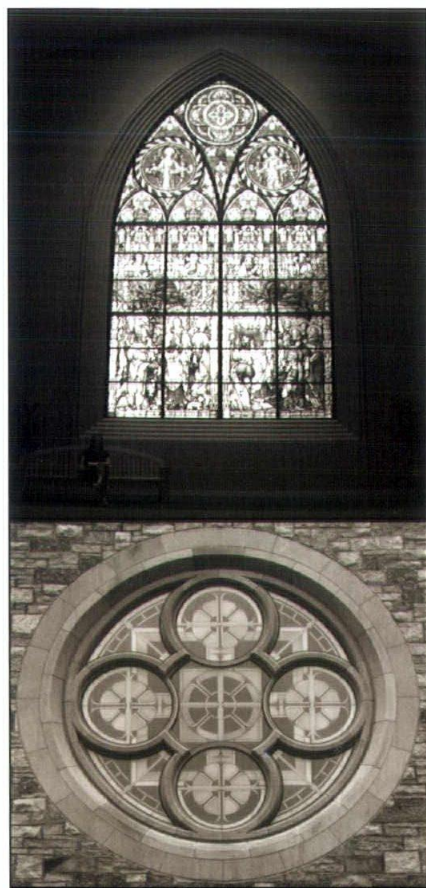
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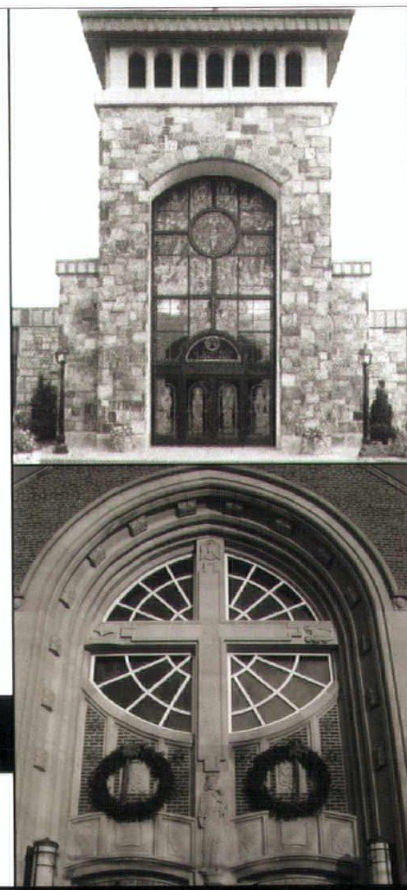
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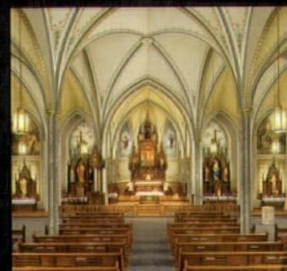
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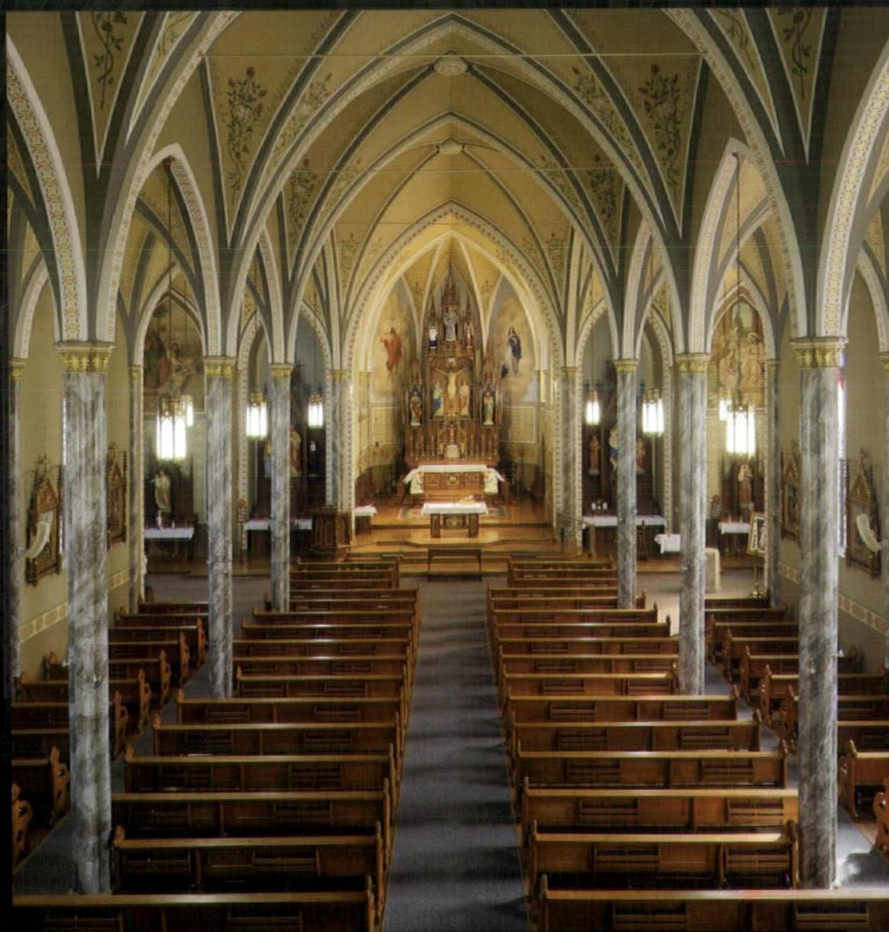
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