

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SACRED CIVIC SPACE IN LANGLEY PARK

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The suburban setting of Langley Park, Maryland is a densely inhabited neighborhood outside of Washington, D.C. Nearly two-thirds of its residents are Hispanic but the Catholic Church struggles to serve this community because of a lack of proximate parish churches. This thesis proposes the design of a church and outreach center within the heart of historic Langley Park. The church and adjoining building respond to their suburban context in an attempt to add hierarchy and cohesion to a spatially unstructured neighborhood of garden apartment buildings. An urban plaza, defined by the proposed church, outreach center as well as the historic Langley Park mansion, begins to organize the neighborhood and give the community much needed civic resources and identity. In aesthetic expression and spatial organization, the complex speaks to the idea that the Church ought to engage the outside world and seek to minister to the unique needs of the surrounding immigrant population.

SACRED CIVIC SPACE IN LANGLEY PARK

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my wife for her patience and support throughout my architectural education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professors Kelly, Bennett and Gournay for their guidance and encouragement. Their knowledge and experience was much appreciated, and their warmth of character cherished this past year. Also, I would like to thank Mel Thompson of Grimm + Parker Architects for his archival assistance, Richard DeStowolinski of the Archdiocese of Washington for his historical expertise and Professor Bill Hanna for his authoritative understanding of the neighborhood of Langley Park. Finally, I would like to thank Father Erik Lopez of St. Camillus parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, for showing me the important outreach work done in Langley Park by him and his colleagues.

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THE SACRED & ITS CONTEXT

There are several different ways for a church to relate to its environment or context, based on the idea that the building represents a kind of threshold between the sacredness of the spiritual world and the profanity of the physical world. The difficulty, though, is that brick and mortar are not, in and of themselves, spiritual things embodying sacredness. Even the space created by their design is nothing without some kind of human ritual or belief. One must ask, how is the sacredness of a church contained? Is the church an indifferent shell, the brick and mortar constructed into a vessel of the divine? If so, the threshold exists in some condition of thickness between the church and its profane context.

This thickness represents a tension that is central to a life of faith: that of religion versus secularism, purity versus corruption, god versus man. Storefront churches are nothing more than commercial spaces enlivened with exuberant spirituality. Cathedrals can be empty caverns of blankness. But all sacred spaces are able to conjure particular qualities of lightness and weight, transcendence and gravity. Is a church a container of the divine or is it itself the threshold, a conduit to salvation? Thresholds are dynamic spaces that, by their very nature, address the profane. They are able to accommodate all of the context of the world and somehow make possible the passage into another, more perfect place.

WORSHIP/ENGAGEMENT

This thesis attempts to grapple with these ideas within the context Langley Park, Maryland, a suburban neighborhood outside of Washington, D.C. and site of this thesis' proposed Catholic church. The question of how a church relates to its context is especially important in this neighborhood given its suburban layout, demographic makeup and cultural character. The salient qualities of the neighborhood will be discussed in more detail later in this document but further exploration is warranted here in exploring the paradigm of worship versus engagement.

This thesis proposes that a paradigm exists in sacred architecture, with two opposing ideas of the degree to which a church relates to its surroundings. At one end, the church is a place of worship apart from the outside world; at the other end, the church facilitates engagement among its congregants and with the world at large. The validity of each idea as an architectural expression can only be established by understanding the church's context and how it might best relate to it.

CHURCH OF WORSHIP

One way to understand the question of threshold is to view the church as a spiritual sanctuary, isolated from the baseness of the world. The building acts as a retreat against the pressures of daily secular life. Just as accused men

and women of the Middle Ages used to flee into churches to avoid punishment for worldly crimes, so, too, do monks retreat into remote monasteries in order to shut out distraction and the temptation to sin. When the threshold of the church is crossed, it provides a world unto itself, sanctuary that blocks out the outside world, thereby allowing the visitor to establish a connection to the divine not otherwise possible. Within this framework, there is an inherent connection between ideas of purity versus contamination, simplicity versus complexity, and absence versus fullness, with the church acting as the threshold between the opposites. We can see these ideas expressed architecturally in churches that are designed as a kind of sanctuary.

This understanding of the role of the church can be further explored by examining the physical environment in which the church sits. The way this notion of sanctuary is expressed as architecture is necessarily influenced by the type of environment from which it seeks to insulate the visitor. For example, sanctuary churches set in urban centers attempt to shut out sensory pollutants like sound, motion, and heat, as well as the vices of city life, pollutants of the soul. Those in more rural settings still seek to create a world apart but are more closely connected to their natural context.

Urban

One example is Christ Church (2000) in Vienna, Austria by Heinz Tesar. A pure black steel cube with small circular punched windows, the church appears as a kind of bunker against the hustle and bustle of the city. The interior is finished with light pine paneling on all surfaces, a further attempt to asceticize the visitor's experience by emphasizing a stark interior/exterior paradigm.¹ The smooth, monotone paneling is meant to symbolize a depravity of the senses, a pregnant absence against the empty fullness of the physical world.



Fig. 01, The ascetic interior offers few clues of the outside world. *Fig. 02, The black steel cube stands out sharply in the urban context.*

¹ Heathcote, p. 138

Rural

A different type of church as sanctuary can be seen in the Oberrealta Chapel (1993) by Christian Kerez with Fontana & Partner AG in Oberrealta, Switzerland. It is set in a remote mountainous location, perched on a crest of countryside with views of the valley below and mountains



above. Simple and small, the chapel acts as a sensory overload of the natural world. Once inside, the unfurnished concrete interior deprives the visitor of select sensations (e.g. views of the outside world) but this depravity only serves to amplify other sensory experiences connected with light and sound. The crudeness of the chapel also achieves the same ascetic goals of Christ Church in Vienna, but emphasizes them through deliberate sensory experiences: the cold feel of concrete against skin; the wind blowing through the sole articulation in the walls, a single vertical slit.

Fig. 03, Journey is central to a sanctuary from the civilization and nature.



Fig. 04, The ascetic interior offers few clues of the outside world.

Also central to the idea of a sanctuary church in an isolated rural location is that of journey and destination. Precisely because it is so remote, the church must be sought out, traveled to. Presumably, pilgrims would have to endure physical hardships during their journey, like a monk climbing a mountain to reach his monastery. This only serves to heighten the role of church as sanctuary².

Suburban

Somewhere in between these two extremes, the Church of the Light (1989), by Tadao Ando Architect & Associates, represents the same paradigm but in a suburban setting, specifically Osaka, Japan. Because of the way the typical twentieth-century suburb has developed, in the United States and abroad, as a romantic expression of the countryside, this kind of sanctuary church tends to imitate the rural sanctuary church. There is relatively little hustle and bustle to shut out in these sleepy subdivisions and so often times the church is designed in an attempt to artificially recreate these ideas of remoteness, the pastoral, and journey. Ando set the Church of the Light back from the roads on the corner lot, installing a buffer of trees to obscure but not completely hide the church beyond. The typical visitor approaches the church via a winding path. This establishes in a persuasive way the experience of a pilgrimage in what is decidedly not a rural setting.

² Heathcote, p. 100



Fig. 05, The material choice is stark and simple, eliminating distraction and asceticizing the experience.

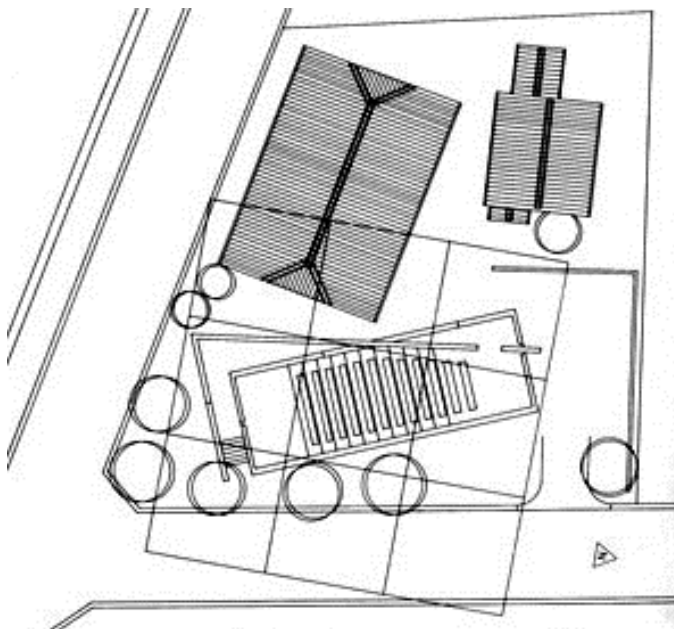


Fig. 06, The church is set back from the street to emphasize isolation and idea of journey.

CHURCH OF ENGAGEMENT

A different, indeed opposing, understanding of the way a church can relate to its environment blurs the distinction between the two. The sacred and profane become mixed, less distinct. Whereas a sanctuary church has a stark delineation between the outside and inside world, the threshold of an engagement church becomes stretched or more nebulous. One could argue that this type of church more directly addresses the Catholic Church's imperative that it is through faith *and* deeds that salvation is earned. An engagement church architecturally expresses, through spatial organization, material choice and many other ways, a desire to reach out to the outside world and engage it in order to make it better. This kind of engagement is manifested by social services, spiritual outreach and political advocacy.

Urban

It makes sense, then, that an engagement church would be suited for an urban setting. This type of involvement is, inherently, social. Without people, there is no one to engage or administer to. Church of San Giovanni Rotondo (2004) by Renzo Piano Building Workshop is in such a setting. Located in Foggia, Italy, it is the pilgrim church of Padre Pio, a 20th century Catholic saint. At first, Piano declined the project because he thought that the surrounding urban environment was already ruined.³ Knowing it would have to accommodate large numbers of visitors, Piano was uncomfortable with the

³ Amelar

project's mixing of the sacred and profane. He eventually relented, though, and designed a church that embraces a large plaza overlooking the city. Expansive limestone arches, the primary structure of the church, are set at various heights and spans, creating an open atmosphere under a low-slung dome. The elliptical plan of the building is completed by the plaza, drawing in visitors and blurring the threshold between exterior and interior space, the sacred and the profane. This engagement with the urban environment is symbolic of Padre Pio's work among the poor during the saint's life, as it is symbolic of the Church's greater mission to administer to the community.



Fig. 07, A pilgrimage church, the plaza is meant as a public gathering place.



Fig. 08, The plaza draws in visitors seamlessly into the church.

Rural

Even in a rural setting, this paradigm can exist after a fashion. Consider the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut (also called “Ronchamp”) by Le Corbusier. The small chapel’s east side porch contains an altar and pulpit, allowing for larger outdoor services for special occasions. It is a simple gesture but one that expresses a desire to engage the outside world. This type of architectural feature begins to suggest that the sacred is not contained to the inside of the building, but that the body of the church is composed of its members, wherever they are. The outside world, then, is the main sanctuary of the church, and the building proper serves as the altar and pulpit from which the Church’s message is communicated to the world at large.



Fig. 09, The east porch is meant for outdoor public mass.

Suburban

Bethany Community Church by Miller Hull Partnership exists in a suburban neighborhood of Seattle. The architects placed the church along the property edge closest to the street grid. The main worship area of the church “was designed with large windows to create visibility between the congregation and the neighborhood.”⁴ Additionally, the lobby acts as a kind of social hall that “opens out to the terrace and residential street, further reinforcing Bethany's connection to their neighborhood.”⁵ By creating a glass lobby, the church draws worshipers in as well as communicates the interior activity outwardly as way to demonstrate metaphorical transparency.



Fig. 10, The glass lobby invites visitors in and establishes connection to neighborhood.

⁴ www.millerhull.com

⁵ www.millerhull.com

THE CASE OF LANGLEY PARK

So the question remains: where on this continuum of worship/engagement should a church in Langley Park fall? The answer can be found by looking more closely at the characteristics of Langley Park as a suburban immigrant community with dynamic qualities that call for a nuanced balance between worship and engagement.

Worship

The layout of Langley Park is typical of certain post-war suburban developments all across America. The spaces formed by the sea of garden apartment buildings leak and bleed across the landscape. There is a form of organization but little hierarchy and the sameness creates a kind of blankness reminiscent of a maze. This lack of definition and hierarchy creates a spatial cacophony that is disorienting as one attempts to navigate through the neighborhood on foot or by car. This spatial noise recommends a church of worship within Langley Park, giving its residents a clearer delineation of layers of space. In order to create a sacred place, there needs to be strict threshold that provides relief from one space to another.

Engagement

Throughout the 20th century, the Catholic Church has cultivated a tradition of political engagement in many Latin America countries, such as El Salvador, Chile, and Peru. This has come to pass because of the political instability, lack of development and income inequality that has plagued this area of the

world. The poor and indigenous people of these countries have often been the victims of fascist states, living in fear of kidnappings, torture and murder. The Church has often (though not always) emerged as an advocate for these victims, preaching ideas of solidarity, social justice and political organization, all tenets of a set of doctrine called *Catholic Social Teaching*. It was not uncommon for priests to actively organize against and engage with the state in order to achieve political goals.⁶ At times, they were assassinated for their efforts.

So it follows that the residents of Langley Park, who hail from countries such as Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala, would be familiar or, indeed, expect a certain amount of political involvement from their local church. As it is, St. Camillus parish, the closest Catholic church, does a fair amount of political advocacy for Langley Park residents. After a recent Sunday mass, the Franciscan priests who run the parish were asking interested parishioners for their email addresses in order to more easily communicate about political issues pertinent to local Hispanics. Some parishioners were wary to give out their email address, only because they are here illegally, which speaks to the problem in the first place.

⁶ It must be noted that there is a certain amount of controversy associated with this tradition of *Catholic Social Teaching* in Latin America in the 20th century. The more orthodox understanding of *Catholic Social Teaching* disavows the socialist tendencies that certain clergy exhibited during their ministry among the poor.

Similarly, an organization called *CASA de Maryland* is headquartered in the historic mansion that sits at the center of Langley Park. *CASA de Maryland's* vision calls for “strong, economically and ethnically diverse communities in which all people - especially women, low-income people, and workers - can participate fully, regardless of their immigration status.”⁷ *CASA de Maryland's* work in Langley Park and the region sets the stage for an interesting dialogue between the church proposed by this thesis and the precedent of political engagement in Latin American communities.

This dialogue runs contrary to the way Western tradition understands the relationship between church and state. It would be accurate to say that many Americans are uncomfortable with any mingling of the two but it would be similarly accurate to point out that most Americans have not had to endure political persecution and depravity. Nor does the Church occupy as significant a cultural role in American society. But the reality is that the Church has a social responsibility, one articulated through scripture and tradition, to care for the poor and advocate for the weak. Within the worship/engagement paradigm, any church in Langley Park should strive to fulfill this role in explicit ways.

Sacred Space and Urban Ecology

This is accomplished through deliberate design decisions that signal an

⁷ <http://www.casademaryland.org/>

attitude of the institution regarding the extent to which it engages its context. Of course, it is possible to have components of the church that act as a sanctuary while others reach out to the community. Both ideas are valid and the Catholic Church has emphasized each to varying degree throughout its history. This thesis seeks to balance the two ends of the paradigm appropriately given the context of Langley Park. It is vital to offer the community a place of spiritual refuge and isolation, to provide a delineated threshold between the sacred and profane in a neighborhood that presently offers no such delineation. It is equally necessary that the church engage the community in a manner as lively and honest as the congregation it serves. By virtue of their marginalized position, the people of Langley Park need an institution like the Church as an engaged advocate.

Katie Day, in her article, "The Construction of Sacred Space in the Urban Ecology," discusses the idea that the spiritual quality of a space is created and defined not by the architectural shell in which it is contained but by the very exercise of sacred ritual in the space. In other words, it is the people and the sacredness of their actions that give the architecture its power to transcend.

She details two very different churches in a run-down urban neighborhood of Philadelphia whose humble storefront spaces, once used for commercial purposes, exude a kind of stability and peace that belie the modesty of their

surroundings. She goes on to argue that the sacred/profane paradigm is insufficient in these struggling neighborhoods because their urban context is central to their identity:

“Sacred identity is not constructed over against the context but in relationship with it. In tangible and intangible ways, that which is sacred—primarily the ritual activity of the people—spills out into the street and invites the city into its walls. The boundaries are not set, but are porous. In the interaction with context that which is sacred is not diluted but becomes more clearly defined.”⁸

Although the parameters of the site for this thesis are different (new construction versus adaptive reuse), Day’s discussion is worthwhile to consider. Her insistence that the urban context is integral to the church’s existence and identity is mirrored by a reliance of the neighborhood on the church as an institution. Langley Park presently does not have any churches, let alone a Catholic church.

⁸ Day. p. 438-9.

CATHOLIC OUTREACH AND THE URBAN CHURCH

RECENT STRUGGLES

In recent years, the Catholic Church has been forced to close parishes and schools throughout the United States. Most often, these dramatic changes have occurred in major metropolitan areas, such as Boston, Cleveland and Philadelphia. The resulting void left by the closure of these institutions is especially deep considering the density of people in the surrounding communities. These neighborhoods, above all, need the civic presence of church architecture as a mechanism for making place and identity. Without these qualities, the community's ability to worship, learn and thrive is compromised. This thesis seeks to understand the difficulties faced by the American Catholic Church and to design an urban parish that begins to solve these issues of place and identity through thoughtful design

The reasons for the phenomenon of parish closure are various and complex. One of the more overt causes has been the recent sexual abuse scandals involving Catholic priests, brought to the forefront in 2002 with certain abuses coming to light in Boston. Since then, other urban dioceses throughout the U.S. have experienced similar episodes of abuses made public, most recently in Philadelphia.⁹ In order to settle these very high-profile class-action lawsuits, the Catholic Church has been forced to pay hundreds of millions of

⁹http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/roman_catholic_church_sex_abuse_cases/index.html

dollars in settlements in the United States alone. An immediate consequence of this has been cost-cutting measures in the form of school closings (St. Louis) and the consolidation of parishes (Cleveland, San Francisco). Certain dioceses have handled the need to close their schools by merging them with the local public school system. In places like New York City and Washington, D.C., the imperiled Catholic schools have successfully become charter schools with only minor adjustments in the classroom. The Catholic Church, then, relieves itself of the cost of educating a significant portion of the school-age population without a major disruption in the community. Other dioceses have simply chosen to close schools, often selecting the schools that are the most expensive for the diocese to help maintain.¹⁰ The schools tend to be urban, poor and low achieving.

Another complicating factor for the Church has been the declining number of new priests. The number of Catholics in the U.S actually continues to increase, in large part because of the steady growth of the Hispanic population. But with fewer and fewer American men entering the seminary to be trained as diocesan priests, the Church must increasingly turn to foreign-born priests to act as first-world missionaries in order to meet the sacramental needs of American Catholics. The number of vocations to the priesthood in places like Africa remains relatively robust. Consequently, the Catholic Church may place these priests in the U.S. where the number of church-going

¹⁰ Lenz

Catholics holds steady. The resulting phenomenon is not uncommon in a place like the archdiocese of Washington: an African priest is placed in a suburban white parish with a burgeoning Hispanic portion of the congregation.

But even with these adjustments, the Catholic Church has had to close some parishes in major metropolitan areas of the U.S. The result is that those Catholics who live in these urban areas (albeit in dwindling numbers) need to travel to the suburbs in order to connect with parish life. Additionally, many of these old parishes have churches of historical value that require preservation. These buildings are expensive to maintain and occupy land of high real estate value given their inner-city location. The temptation to sell is high but the Church stands to lose architectural landmarks as well as the history of communities that shaped their spiritual and educational lives around these parishes. Developers, though, jump at the chance to buy these churches, despite the awkward task of repurposing. In the Boston area, churches have been developed into condominiums and, even, a bar. And, finally, urban parishes provide necessary social services, regardless of religion, for a community that is often marginalized and disadvantaged. The state has come to rely on (and often works with) these non-profits organizations; without their presence, the difference between low-density suburbs and high-density urban neighborhoods will only become more pronounced.

HOPES AND PLANS

The Archdiocese of Washington has managed to avoid all of this but the implicit question remains: how might the Church begin to conceive of its urban parishes differently in order to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon? The answer lies in the church's ability to create a sense of place thereby providing and tapping into the identity of the neighborhood.

St. Camillus

In the mid-1990s, St. Camillus parish established a mission in Langley Park called the Mother Teresa Center. The center is located in offices off of Merrimac Drive that provide language and computer classes, after-school tutoring, prayer groups, summer programs for children, alcohol support and recovery groups and assistance with immigration matters.¹¹ These types of services are crucial for the surrounding community given the cultural and socio-economic difficulties particular to the population. Priests from St. Camillus and other personnel minister to the residents of Langley Park in ways that celebrate the Central American (specifically, Salvadorian and Guatemalan) traditions of its congregation; religious plays and processions native to Latin American take place throughout the year. Mass is celebrated once a week, Sunday mornings, in the gymnasium of Langley Park/McCormick Elementary School, located at the intersection of Merrimac Drive and 15th Avenue. The Archdiocese rents

¹¹ Hayes.



Fig. 11, Fr. Larry Hayes of St. Camillus parish ministers to the residents of Langley Park.



Fig. 12, Mass is celebrated once a week in the gym of a local elementary school.

the gymnasium, which is too old and undersized to comfortably house the 500 people who now attend mass there. The liturgy, though, is boisterous with upbeat music and a spirit that is reminiscent of mass back home.

William Hanna, professor at University of Maryland and activist within the Langley Park community, acknowledges St. Camillus' potential as an agent for positive change when he stated in a 1999 analysis of the neighborhood,

“St. Camillus Catholic Church...is potentially a major force for positive change in Langley Park. It has already taken many important steps, [such as] developing a church project targeting Langley Park, offering mass in the Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School, and mobilizing a coalition of agency representative interested in the community. The distance of approximately 1 ½ miles between St. Camillus and the center of Langley Park constitutes a major barrier to the residents' participation in church life and community formation, and the great need is for permanent church presence within the community.”¹²

The Boys & Girls Club

In 2004, the Archdiocese of Washington, Matthew Carter, then president of the Boys & Girls Club located directly across Merrimac Drive from the Langley Park Community Center, and Sawyer Realty Holdings, which owns the three-acre property, came to an informal agreement: the property and building housing the Boys & Girls Club would be donated to the Archdiocese and developed into a small church, gymnasium and outreach center. The outreach center would have offices and classrooms for the Boys and Girls

¹² Hanna, William. “Langley Park Project.” Ch. 13, pg 11.

Club and other local non-profits serving the community. An architecture firm, Grimm & Parker, was hired and a robust schematic design was developed; construction was slated to begin in fall, 2005. Mr. Carter died, though, and the new Boys & Girls Club president, Julie Moses (his daughter?) did not want the Archdiocese's plans to go through for fear that the services offered by the new facility would unfairly favor Catholics in the community.¹³ The Boys & Girls Club has a 99-year lease on the property thereby denying Sawyer Realty Holdings ability to donate it to the Archdiocese.

The proposed plans called for a two-story, 63,000 ft² building complex and recreation fields costing \$11.8 million. The Archdiocese would have funded most of the project although officials sought to secure \$2 million from the state of Maryland and \$1.5 million from Prince George's County. Then-Maryland governor, Robert Ehrlich, had committed \$550,000 for the design and construction of the gymnasium while the federal government had contributed \$400,000 towards the health clinic.¹⁴ Programming would have included a 600-seat church, gymnasium, health clinic, classrooms for English language instruction and offices for family and job services. Social services non-profits like the Spanish Catholic Center and Catholic Charities, now spread throughout the community, would have moved into the new building.

¹³ Ly

¹⁴ Szczepanowski

After protracted litigation, the plans for the Mother Teresa Center were jettisoned. At present, there is nothing the Archdiocese can do given the lease agreement between Sawyer Realty Holdings and the Boys & Girls Club.

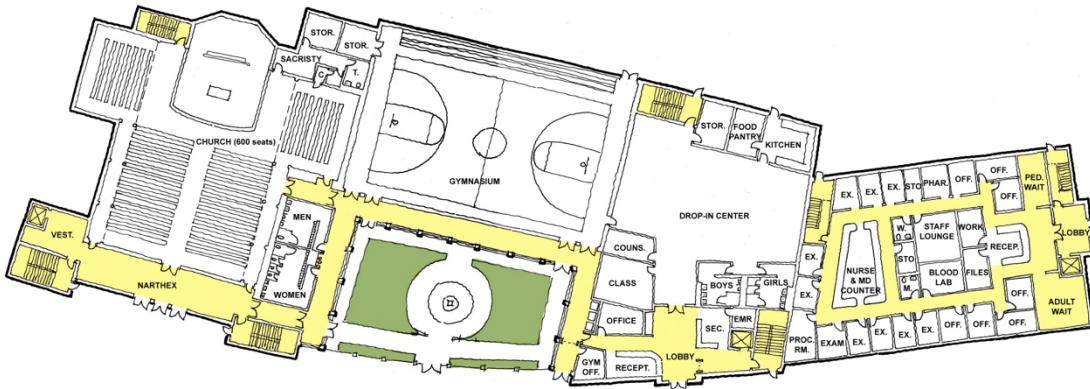


Fig. 13, The unrealized scheme by Grimm + Parker Architects for the Archdiocese of Washington.

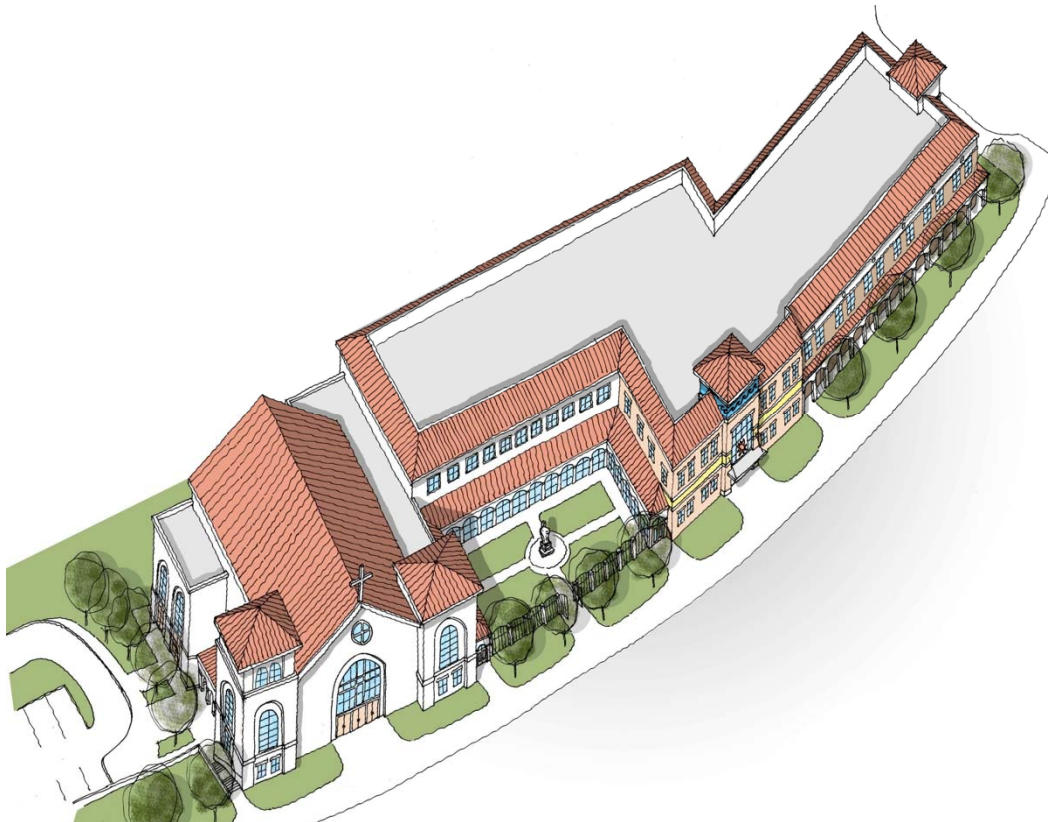


Fig. 14, The design involved a courtyard scheme with a church, gymnasium and classrooms.

CHURCH AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCALE

The failure of the Grimm + Parker scheme to come to fruition only reinforces the great need that exists in Langley Park for more substantial and permanent Catholic ministry infrastructure. It is especially important given the public nature of the work done by the Church in Langley Park already. Presently, the offices occupied by the St. Camillus mission exist in two first floor apartment units rented out of one of the hundreds of apartment buildings in the neighborhood. As a kind of public face for the Church in the community, they are wholly insufficient in representing the symbolic heart of the neighborhood as well as in hosting the religious rituals practiced by Latin American Catholics. These kinds of religious rituals, such as outdoor mass and processions need to be accommodated by the church at a larger, neighborhood scale.

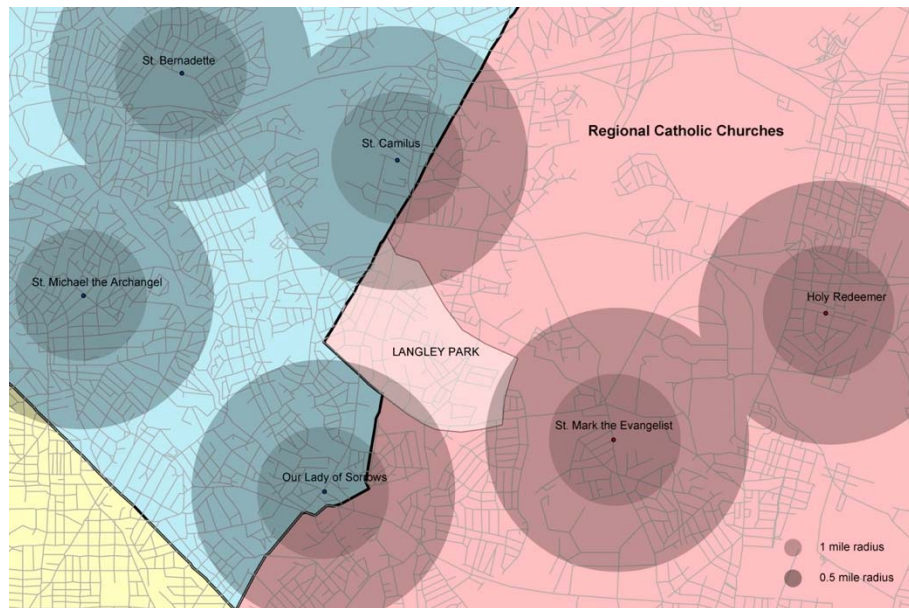


Fig. 15, Area map showing nearest Catholic churches.

RITUAL OF PROCESSION

The church must acknowledge the particular rituals associated with the different immigrant expressions of the Catholic faith. In particular, several religious celebrations of Salvadoran, Mexican and Guatemalan tradition take the form of a public procession. These processions are communal demonstrations of faith, tradition and identity. These processions take place on religious feast days and have also been embraced by each culture as to engender nationalistic pride, even among immigrant populations abroad. Designing a church that can accommodate these processions, both inside and outside, not only will facilitate cultural connection among homogenous immigrant groups, but also among the community as a whole that now has a shared, public venue for spiritual expression.

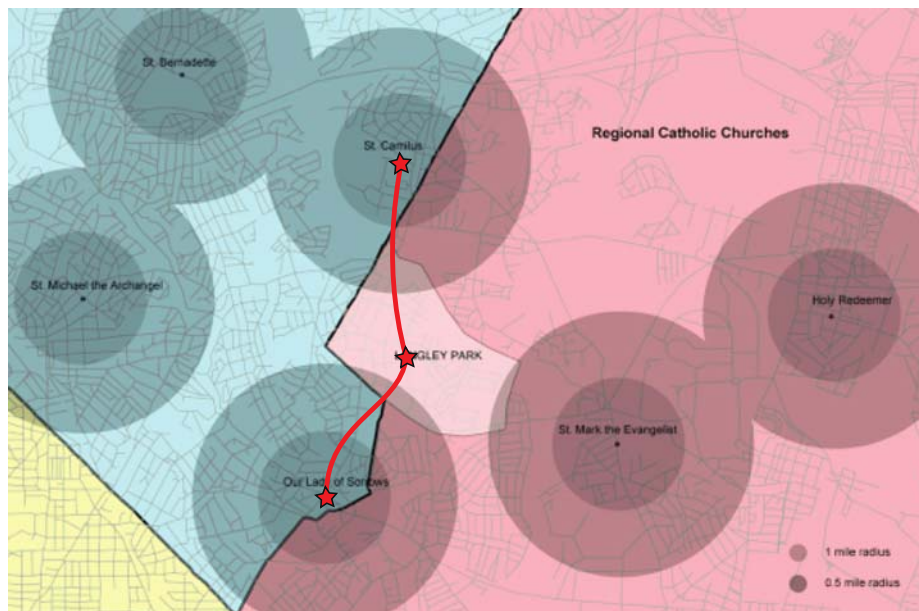


Fig. 16, Area map showing route of Good Friday procession from Our Lady of Sorrows parish to St. Camillus parish

An example of this type of procession is a Good Friday Stations of the Cross procession conducted every year, beginning at Our Lady of Sorrows parish, passing through Langley Park, and ending at St. Camillus parish. Thousands of people participate, preparing elaborate decorations for the occasion.

El Salvador

Las Fiestas Agostinas (August Festivals) in early August celebrate the holiday of the patron saint of El Salvador (“The Savior”), Jesus Christ the Savior. In San Salvador, there is a procession through the city streets with a statue of Jesus carried by throngs of people. Upon reaching the main cathedral, the statue is lowered into a globe at which point it emerges, dressed in white, symbolizing the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ.



Fig. 17, The patron saint of El Salvador, an image of Christ is processed through the streets



Fig. 1, A transfigured Christ figure emerges from a globe.

Mexico

The feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12) is of special importance in Mexican culture. The holiday commemorates the appearance of the Virgin Mary to an indigenous peasant farmer, named Juan Diego, in Mexico in the 1600s. Today, Catholics celebrate this feast day with a procession, carrying an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on a bed of roses. More elaborate parades include costumed Aztec dancers, Spanish horsemen, Mexican caballeros and floats. Native mythology and culture is incorporated into the celebration because, when she appeared to Juan Diego, the Virgin Mary was dressed as an Aztec maiden. The procession culminates in a celebration of a Catholic mass.



Fig. 19, A celebration of Mexican culture.

Fig. 20, Procession of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Guatemala

The Feast of the Immaculate Assumption (August 15) celebrates the Catholic belief that the Virgin Mary's body was assumed into heaven. In Guatemalan culture, this is the chief religious procession of the year. A large float with a devotional statue of the Virgin Mary atop is carried by dozens of men through the streets. In the parade, elements of Mayan culture are incorporated such as indigenous dress, dance and music.

Fig. 21, Men carry a massive float with the statue atop.



Fig. 22, Flower petals and painted rice decorate the procession.



LANGLEY PARK

The neighborhood of Langley Park is situated only a few miles outside of Washington, D.C. and sits on the border shared by Montgomery and Prince George's counties. It is a working class neighborhood of Hispanics; most are recent immigrants, many of whom are illegal. It is full of garden apartment-style buildings, varying in height, from two to four stories, but in little else. The street layout is characterized by dead-ends, courtyard parking lots and a general lack of connectivity. There are miles of sidewalks that try desperately to organize the neighborhood but only result in a dizzying maze of pedestrian footpaths.

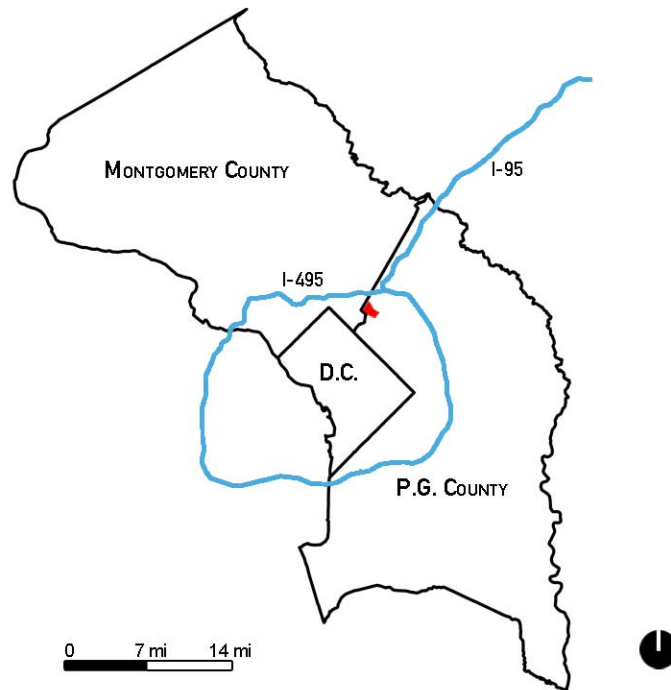


Fig. 23, Langley Park in relation to Washington, D.C.

The residential portion is hemmed in to the south and west by strip mall commercial and two major thoroughfares, New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard. This, too, inhibits vehicular access to the neighborhood. The relative density of the neighborhood, compounded by the fact that many of the families share one and two-bedroom apartment units with other families, gives the neighborhood an urban feel. People are constantly walking around, no matter the time of day, and so there is a definite emphasis on pedestrian movement despite the fact that cars clog the streets and parking lots.

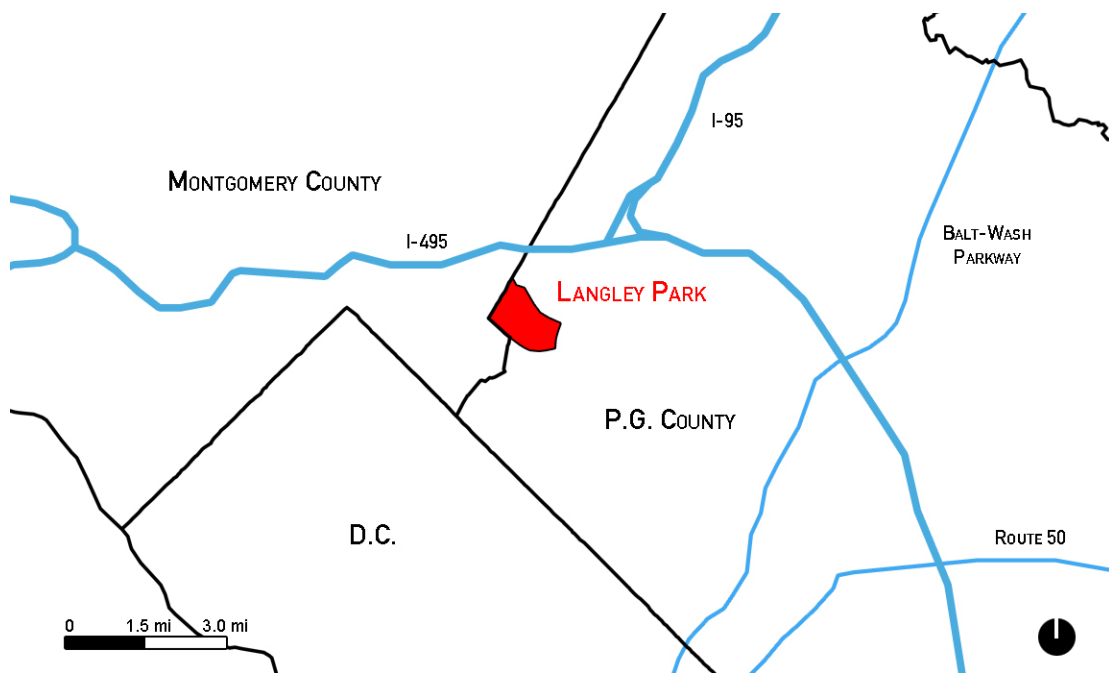


Fig. 24, Langley Park in the region.



Fig. 25, Site within Langley Park.



Fig. 26, Langley Park in relation to county line.



Fig. 27, Hierarchy of area streets.

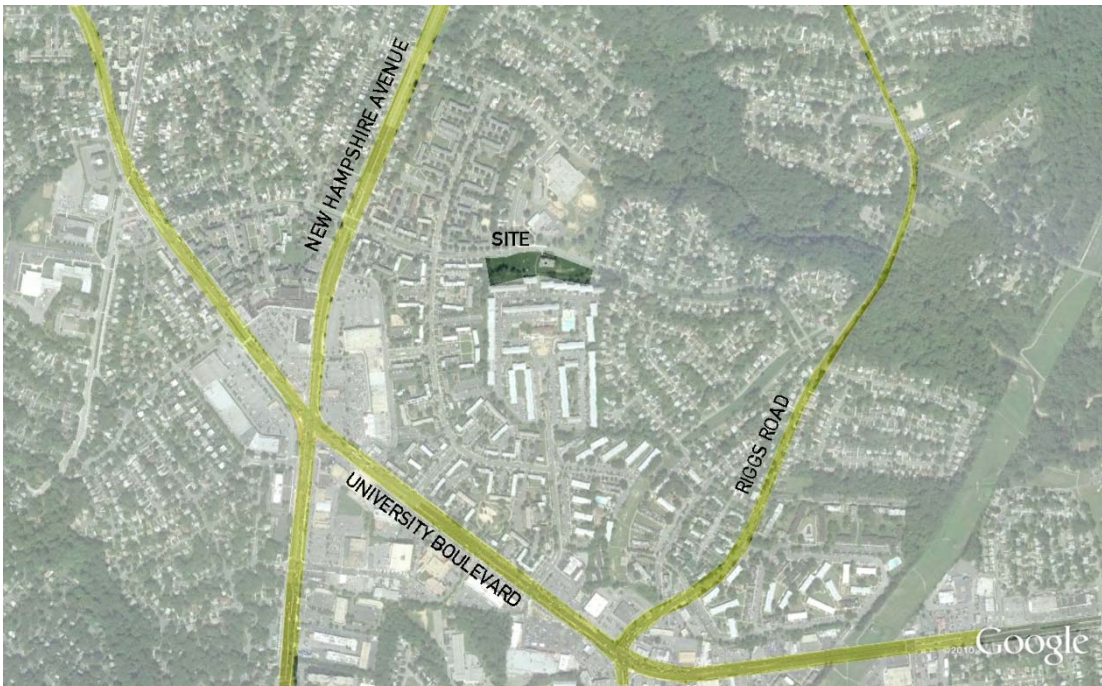


Fig. 28, Major vehicular arteries in Langley Park vicinity.

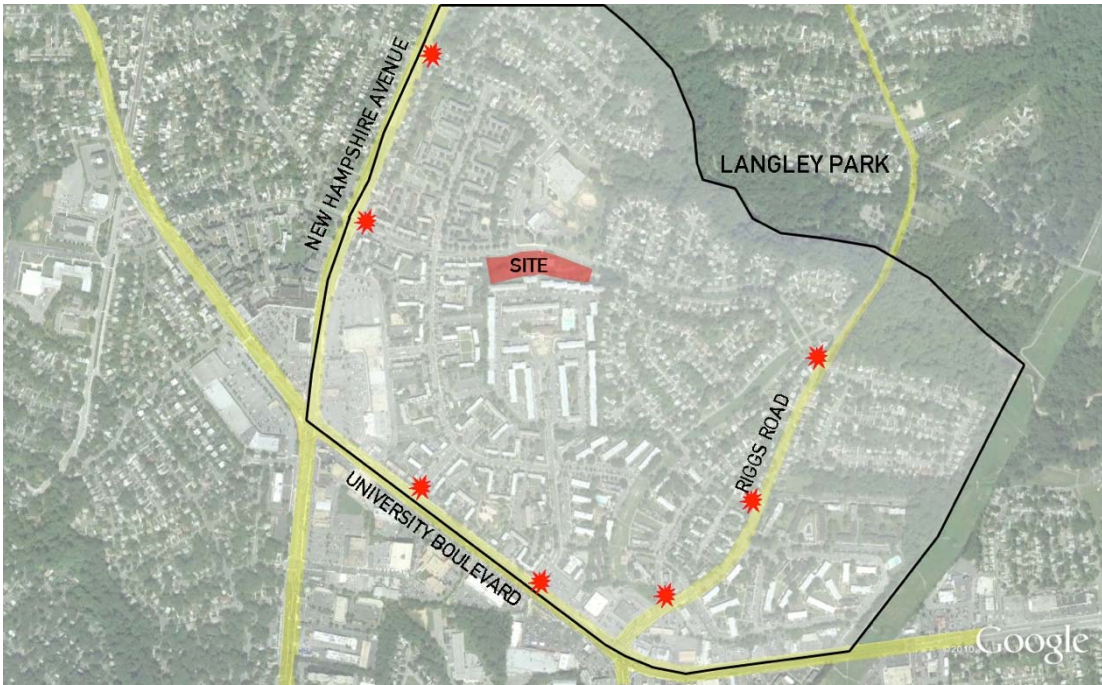


Fig. 29, Major vehicular entry point into Langley Park.



Fig. 30, Typical garden apartment building in Langley Park.



Fig. 31, Play equipment is scattered throughout neighborhood.



Fig. 32, Two-story version of typical apartment building.

Because of this density and active pedestrian environment, there is potential for a dynamic urban environment. But presently there lacks any cohesion in the built environment. This thesis proposes that the church act as a catalyst for an improved sense of civic space within the community.

HISTORY

The development in Langley Park dates back to the early 1920s when Frederick and Henrietta McCormick-Goodhart, both from prominent families in the area, presided over the rural 566-acre family estate. The architect of the estate's mansion was George Oakley, known for designing several embassies in Washington, D.C. At the time, "the property included a lake, stables, carriage house, and polo grounds" (where the elementary school is presently located).¹⁵

By 1947, Frederick and Henrietta's sons had taken control of the estate and had begun to sell off portions to private developers. Most of the single-dwelling units and the garden apartments were built during the 1950s. At the time, many people were moving from the District of Columbia into the suburbs, and so demand for cheap housing was high. The land that included the mansion, though, they sold to the Eudist Fathers, a Catholic religious

¹⁵ Hanna, William John. Langley Park: a preliminary needs assessment. ch.2 p. 1-2.

order.¹⁶ The neighborhood has stayed virtually the same since then with the eventual addition of the Elementary School and Community Center.

A “THERE” THERE

“To many Langley Park residents as well as outsiders, there is ‘no there there’ – that is, there is little to distinguish Langley Park as a place, and especially as a place for which one can be proud.”¹⁷

It is safe to assume that most area residents, even those who are familiar with the neighborhood of Langley Park, have never ventured within its borders.

There is no destination unless a visitor is seeking assistance through CASA de Maryland. There are no occasions for passing through because the streets do not connect well to the neighborhood of single-family houses to the east. The challenge of this thesis is to try to establish a space of civic presence in Langley Park for the benefit of its residents as well as the greater community.

Site Selection: Historic Heart

Earlier explorations focused on this idea of creating a central place for Langley Park. Most of the existing civic infrastructure is both inadequate in stature and fractured across the landscape. The school and community center have a run-down feel and are located to the north of the mansion, outside the center of the community. And yet it cannot be denied that they

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hanna, William. Langley Park Project: Developing Community and Reaching Out to Young People, p. 43.

are important structures and are more accessible to the outside community given their more removed placement. Because of this fact, earlier studies were conducted to analyze the possibility of creating a string of civic buildings, leading from the elementary school to the mansion. The church would act as a kind of link, drawing outsiders into the center of Langley Park.

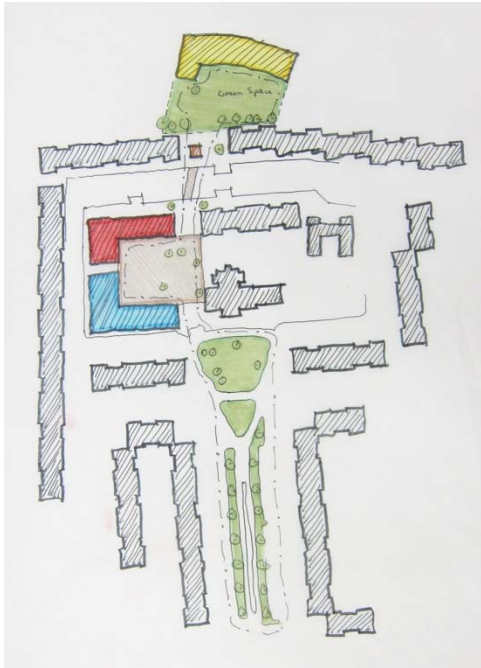


Fig. 33, Study of the site placement linking mansion with community center.

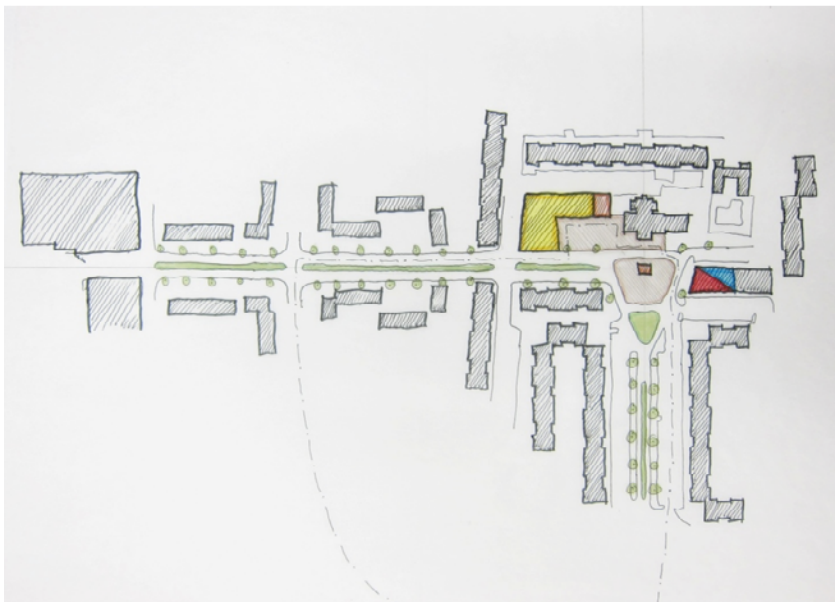


Fig. 34, Study of the site placement linking mansion with commercial center.

But that proposition seems tenuous. For a neighborhood that already lacks cohesion, trying to establish a connection between disparate institutions may only add to the cacophony of spatial noise.

Langley Park needs a central space, well defined and cohesive. “The residents of Langley Park need places for outdoor public socializing. Unfortunately, the school, the [community] center, and the [Boys & Girls] club have not made the necessary effort to fill this need; and these three institutions are a block or more away from the population heart of the neighborhood.”¹⁸ Any risk of burying the central space of the neighborhood away from the outside community is counteracted by the establishment of a destination compelling enough to draw in visitors who would not ordinarily enter the neighborhood. Additionally, Langley Park has enough pedestrian activity to activate an outdoor space of this size. Though welcome, outside presence is not needed to ensure a vibrant atmosphere.

Other ideas put forth have embraced the idea that the heart of Langley Park exists already at the commercial intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard. The logic suggests that this is already the part of Langley Park most often visited by non-residents, both as pedestrians and drivers.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 48.

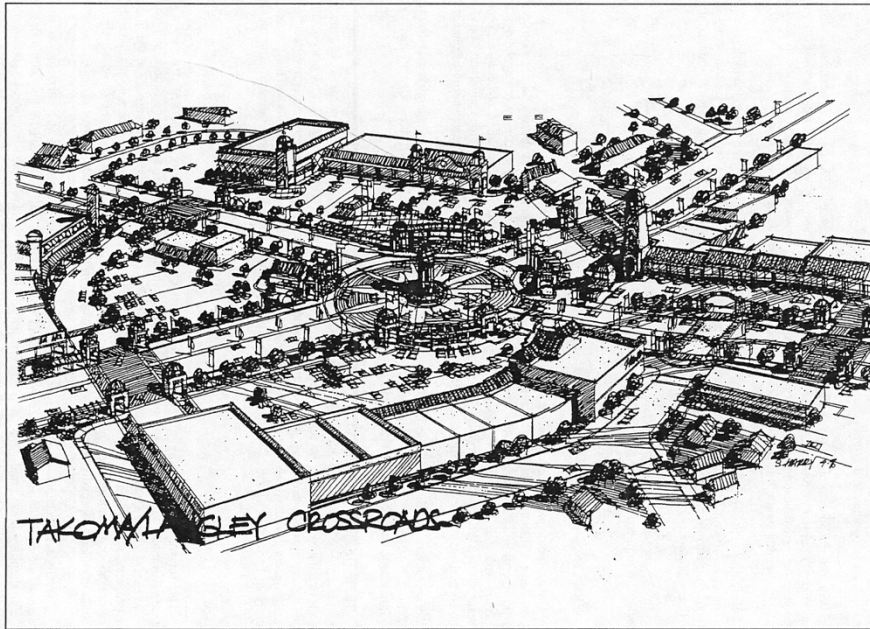


Figure 10: A Possible Central Plaza, by Seth Herby

Fig. 35, An artist's rendering of possible town center at intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard.

This notion, though, fails to create a truly civic space. Big-box retail and fast-food chains do little to inspire civic pride and establish cultural identity.

Hanna, again, articulates the need for a more meaningful creation of space:

“There is no identifiable central place. We think that a ‘place’ might help to create identity and provide a setting for socializing. A plaza, reflecting the heritages of many are nationalities, might be ideal.”¹⁹ The creation of a plaza in front of the Langley Park mansion is a perfect solution given its social importance. Placing a church next to it lends the space a civic presence that will finally create a “there” there for Langley Park.

¹⁹ Hanna, Maryland’s International Corridor: 1996 Working Paper, p. 25



Fig. 36, View of axial approach to historic center.



Fig. 37, Front façade of Langley Park mansion.

Zoning

The site is designated as Residential zoning (R-18) established by Prince George's County. R-18 zoning, which characterizes the majority of Langley Park, is defined as multifamily, medium density residential that provides for multiple family (apartment) development of moderate density. Standard lot size for apartment buildings is 16,000 square feet. The maximum dwelling units per net acre for Garden apartment buildings is 12.²⁰

There are several Special Exceptions to the R-18 zoning in the neighborhood such as the elementary school and community center to the north.

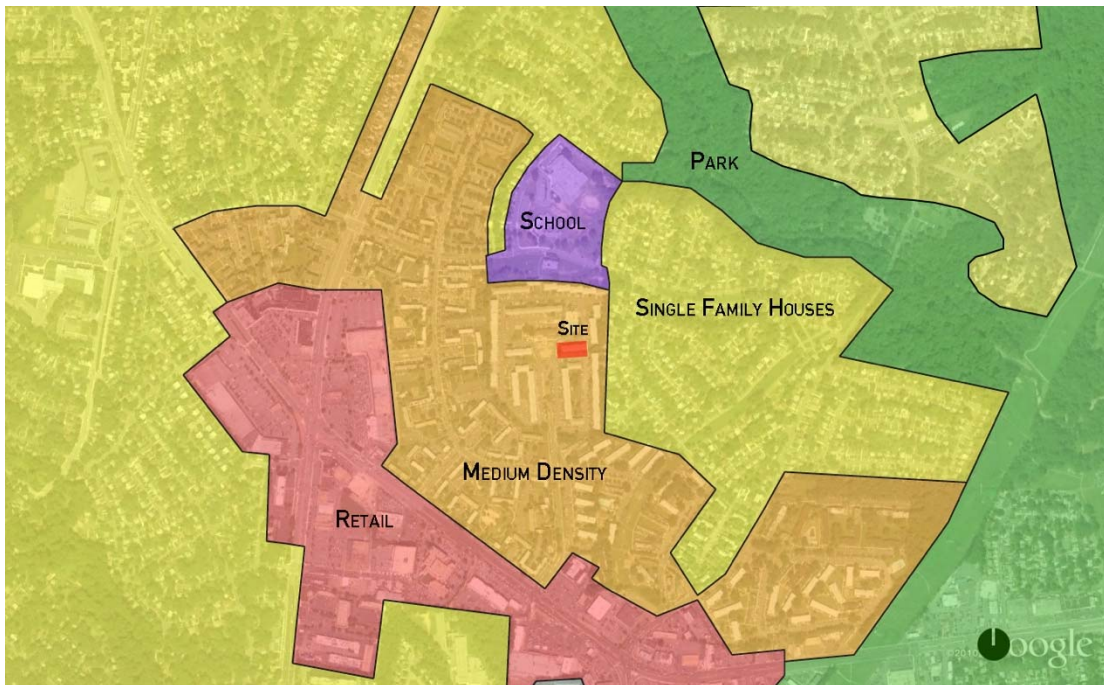


Fig. 38, Area zoning.

²⁰ Prince George's County Planning
http://www.pgplanning.org/Resources/Guide_to_Zoning_Categories/Residential.htm

THE PURPLE LINE

History

In the early 1990s, the Maryland Department of Transportation began a series of studies that led to the eventual proposal of a light rail transit line from Bethesda to New Carrollton, connecting four branches of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's subway system. The project, named the Purple Line, is still in the process of being developed with a scheduled completion of its planning phase between 2013 and 2015. It has generally enjoyed popular and political approval. Its supporters tout energy independence, the creation of jobs, higher property values, reduced traffic, and a cleaner environment as its major benefits.²¹

Maryland State officials claim that the Purple Line "would provide better...transit service, particularly for lower-income workers who can't afford cars, and would revitalize older communities."²² One of these older communities through which the Purple Line would pass is Langley Park. The proposed route runs west on University Boulevard, crossing over New Hampshire Avenue and Riggs Road on its way to College Park (see figure). The transit center planned at the intersection of University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue is less than a half-mile from the site.

²¹ Purple Line *NOW!*. online. www.purplelinenow.com, 22 August 2011

²² Shaver, Katherine. "Purple Line Foes Offer No Ideas, And No Names." The Washington Post. 13 July 2008. Online. 23 August 2011.

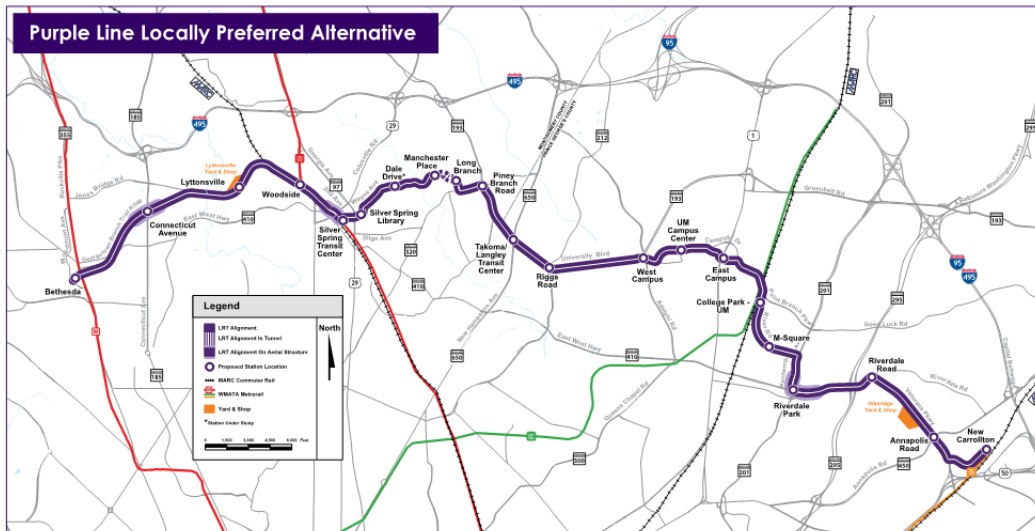


Fig. 39, Purple Line route.

Implications

The land upon which the McCormick Mansion developments presently stand would, undoubtedly, become much more valuable. Purple Line Now!, a nonprofit organization advocating for the Purple Line, states that “neighborhoods along the Purple Line will be revitalized as people seek housing that is close to Purple Line stops - a trend that is expected to grow over time.”²³ A boon for many communities, higher property values may disrupt the community fabric of Langley Park.

The Coalition for Smarter Growth, a Washington area nonprofit that advocates for the Purple Line, specifically articulates the potential benefits and risks posed by the introduction of a light rail system in Langley Park:

²³ Purple Line NOW!. online. www.purplelinenow.com, 22 August 2011

We believe that a high quality light rail investment will strengthen property values and business opportunities [within Langley Park]. However, we ask that the State and local governments provide low-wage workers, renters and small businesses protections and assistance to help them stay in communities to be served by the Purple Line. While a healthy mix of incomes is good for neighborhoods, ensuring that low-wage families can continue to live and work near the Purple Line requires intentional policy and funding actions at the local and state levels.

We are working to ensure that Prince Georges County provides housing preservation help to renters and assistance to small businesses, so that everyone can share in the benefit from the Purple Line. We are asking that the State of Maryland set aside funds to assist the County in this effort...²⁴

While William Hanna, Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Maryland, acknowledges the great benefit that the Purple Line would have on the area and the region as a whole, he shares some of the same concerns. This kind of transit-oriented development (TOD), in the form of mixed-use commercial and residential space, may come at the expense of the local residents. If the existing affordable housing stock is decreased in order to make way for more expensive apartments and condos, existing residents would be displaced because of the higher housing costs.

Transit-Oriented Development

The debate surrounding the development of the Purple Line raises an interesting question about the potential role of housing on the site. Though

²⁴ The Coalition for Smarter Growth. online. www.smartergrowth.net. 23 August 2011

unusual, there is precedent for close collaboration (word choice) between churches and residential development, especially in urban settings. In her article, "'Prophets-for-Profits': Redevelopment and the Altering Urban Religious Landscape," Nadia Mian states that in contemporary western society, "churches are no longer centres of spirituality, worship and social service. They are providers of housing, creators of retail establishments and administrators of extensive programmes that may or may not be secular in nature."²⁵ She goes on to explain that in the recent past, churches in New York City have sold the air rights above their buildings to be developed into market-rate and affordable housing. The development of such projects can benefit the community at large. For instance, the church can use the revenue from the sale in order to provide additional social services within the community.²⁶ Additionally, real estate development often times increases housing value in the surrounding area. (It must be noted, though, that these transactions increase the value of the church property as well.)

But, as discussed earlier, such development can have the negative effect of gentrification if the existent population can no longer afford the new property values. In order to mitigate this, the Church can enter into an agreement with the developer that stipulates that all or a certain percentage of the residential units must be affordable. Though the profit margin may be smaller, the

²⁵ Mian, p. 2153

²⁶ Mian

church is able to ensure that large swathes of the community are not displaced, thereby fulfilling the social component to its mission.

Within the parameters of this thesis project, such measures may seem crass or overreaching to those who view the Church as solely a sacred institution. And yet the Church has been involved throughout history and the world in politics, economics and real estate. Perhaps American notions of separation of church and state add to uneasiness provoked by a church taking aggressive action outside its immediate mission. But modern-day reality is that the Church cannot not afford to continue its *modus operandi* of the past century if it hopes to maintain its cultural position in the United States, particularly in urban centers. Mian frames this idea within the relationship between churches and their environment by stating that, “In true ecological form, it is about survival of the fittest. Churches that adapt to changes in their environment survive. In order to deal with decrepit buildings and a lack of members, churches must change in order to obtain money, membership, legitimacy and information.”²⁷

Of course this must be achieved without compromising fundamental values held by the institution. If real estate development provides revenues for increased social services, but also indirectly causes gentrification, which, in turn, displaces the very demographic targeted for such social services, one

²⁷ Mian, p. 2155

has to question the good being done. And yet these kinds of developments are an opportunity as well. If done right, the church can advocate for the marginalized population by ensuring that affordable housing be provided while creating dynamic urban spaces.

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The resulting design proposal for the church draws on the history, culture and context of Langley Park in an effort to create a cohesive public plaza and church that provides intimate worship space while providing opportunity for engagement. Within the church, there are spaces for sacramental rituals that reference traditional practice with new interpretations.

The public plaza is the outdoor sanctuary of the church at the neighborhood scale. Mass can be conducted outside with the church as its backdrop in a public celebration of religious faith. The benches mimic interior pews in materiality and proportion. The vertical, wood-clad ceremonial entrance is a memory of the backdrop to the altar within. The plaza also plays host to the Good Friday procession of the stations of the cross. Langley Park can finally proudly accommodate the throngs of people this feast day brings into the neighborhood. But the plaza is not simply a religious stage; it provides a venue for political rallies for CASA de Maryland in front of Langley Park mansion. It is the scene of informal commerce: pupuseria carts and fresh-cut mangoes are sold daily. And, of course, it facilitates casual interaction among friends and neighbors. Children kick a soccer ball across the pavers while old friends catch up in the shade of trees.

Upon entering, a visitor is greeted with a view down the south aisle. It tapers slightly, using the difference between the geometry of the neighborhood and

the geometry of the Church to draw visitors in. The masonry wall of the south façade angles slowly downward as one enters the church, enhancing the tapering effect. The stained glass system consists of both vertical colored glass familiar to most church-goers as well as horizontal shelves of colored glass that helps to knock down direct sunlight as well as add an extra layer of tone as the light filters through the two panes of glass. The resulting brilliance of light cast in the south aisle increases as one moves along the south wall, chatting with a friend before or after mass. It is a generous space, providing a gathering place within the church and yet spatially apart from the main volume of the sanctuary.

The main volume of the sanctuary is shaded completely in white in order to contrast with the colorful light coming from the southern façade. This contrast also helps the volume to read separately, driving home the idea that it is a more sacred space, insulated from the outside world by a ring of other programming. The materials are simple, familiar and yet proud. The skylight overhead brings in light which is redirected to wash over the white exposed ceiling and structure. It directs the visitor's gaze to the altar, where the priest prepares for mass in hushed concentration.

SACRAMENTAL RITUALS

People often experience their spiritual lives in brief, intimate acts of sacramental ritual. These moments can be the most emotionally meaningful and can come to define a person's religious identity. In this design proposal,

these acts reference Catholic tradition and yet attempt to redefine them in fresh ways.

Baptism

The baptistery is a simple volume, immediately to the left as one enters the daily entrance. It reads very self-contained in proportioning, harkening back to the days when the baptistery was separated from the main church sanctuary. This was done to signify the symbolic spiritual separation one experiences until granted entry into the Church through baptism.

The baptismal font is a simple pedestal that draws on the holy water fountain used by the congregation upon entering as they dip their hands in to bless themselves. Crowded around are the family and extended relatives who usually attend this ceremony in Hispanic culture. The baptistery is generously sized to accommodate this culturally specific ritual.

Reconciliation

On the north side of the church, the Reconciliation rooms provide a quieter side to the church in contrast with the more exuberant light of the south side. These niches are a far cry from the phone booth-like closets usually dedicated to this sacrament. Claustrophobic and dark, they do little to assuage the usual anxiety and restlessness that accompanies the unloading of spiritual baggage.

The redesigned niches have two spaces: an anteroom, small but light-filled that acts as a preparation area for the confessional. A simple bench and window invite quiet meditation as the congregant collects her thoughts. After her completion of the sacrament, she may decide to do her penance in the same spot, bringing the ritual full circle.

Stations of the Cross

Prominent stations of the cross line the plaza and provide for community-scale practice of the prayer ritual. The first ten stations of the cross are in this public venue but the last four, which occur in sequence after the death of Jesus on the cross, are placed behind the church in a more secluded green space. It is quieter there, away from the activities of the plaza, allowing for introspection and reflection during the recitation of these more somber prayers.

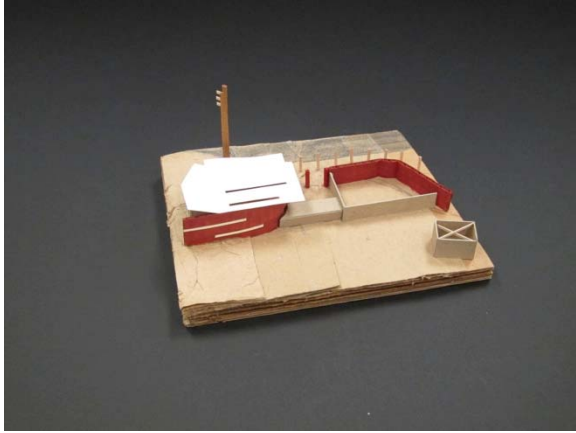


Fig. 40, Study model.

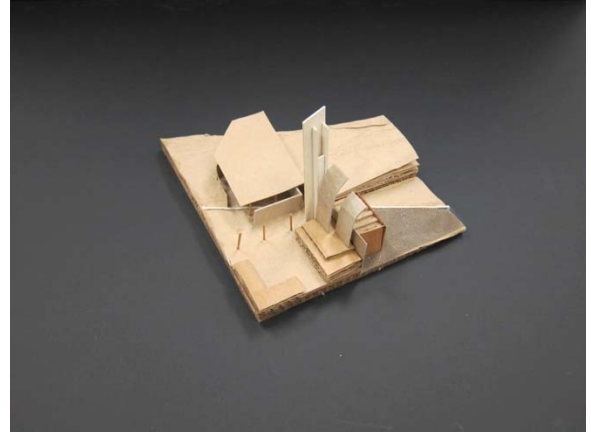


Fig. 41, Study model.

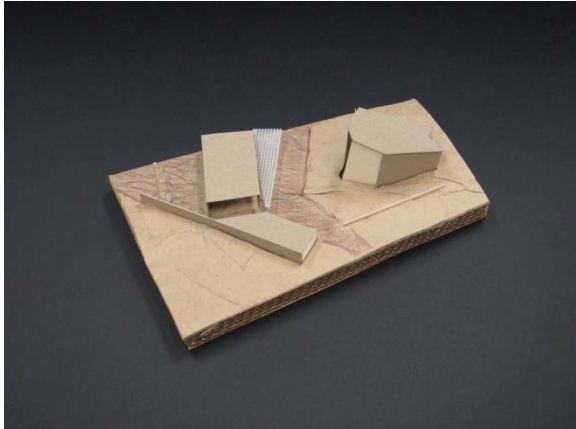


Fig. 42, Study model.



Fig. 43, Study model.



Fig. 44, Study model.

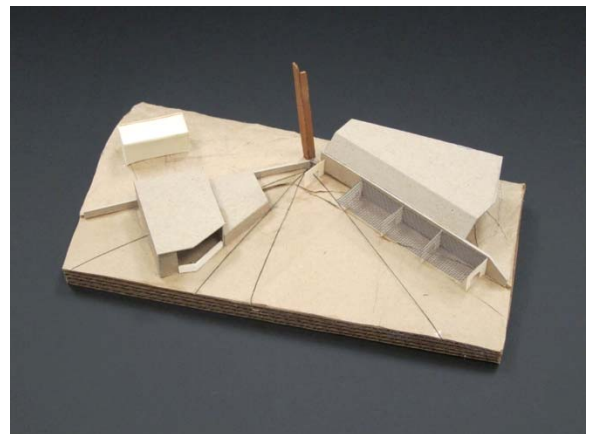


Fig. 45, Study model.

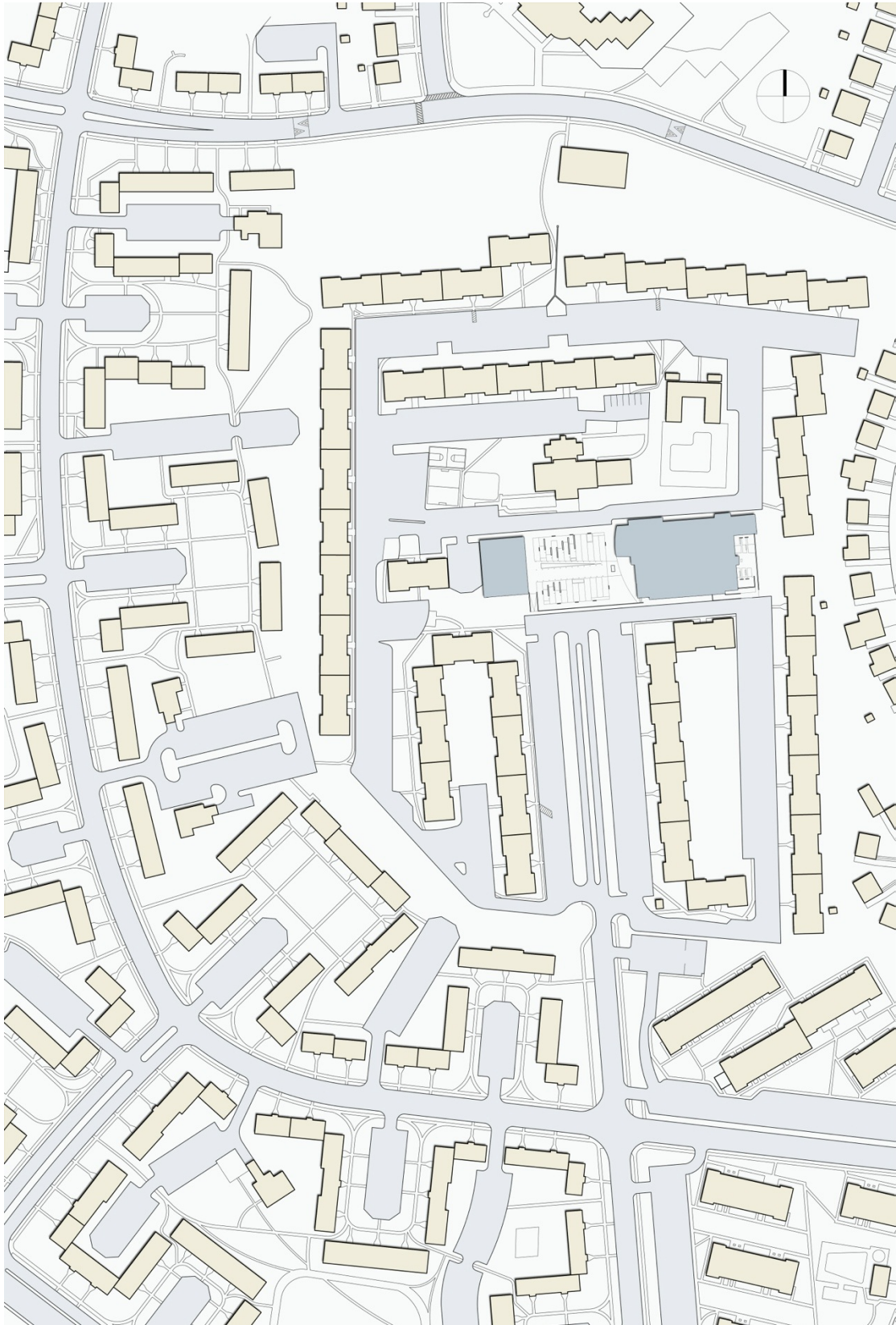


Fig. 46, Site Plan



Fig. 47, First floor plan and plaza

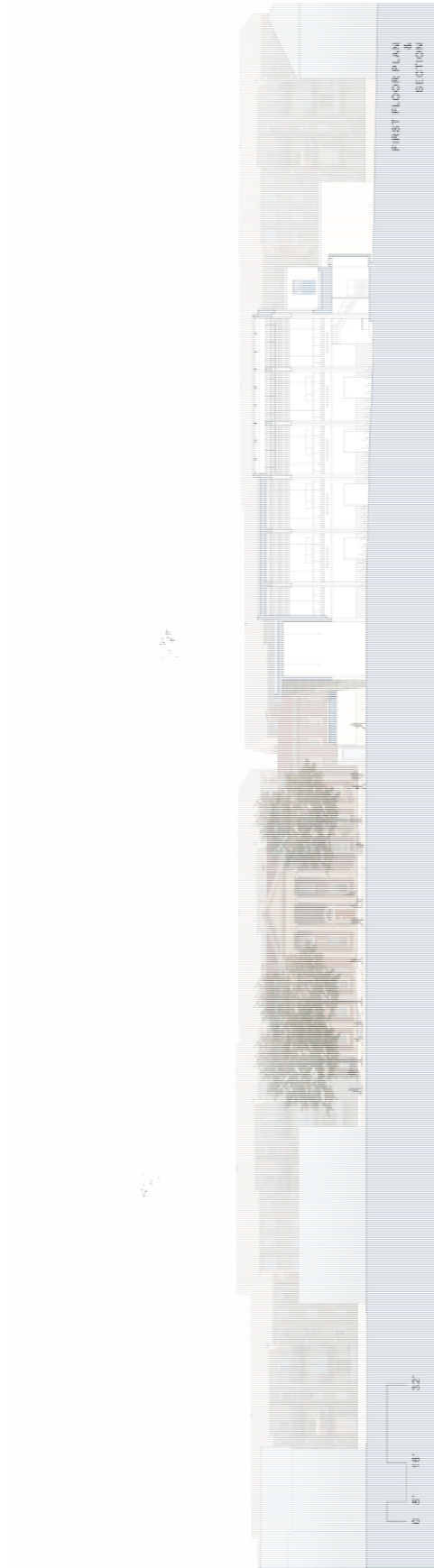


Fig. 48, Longitudinal Section through plaza

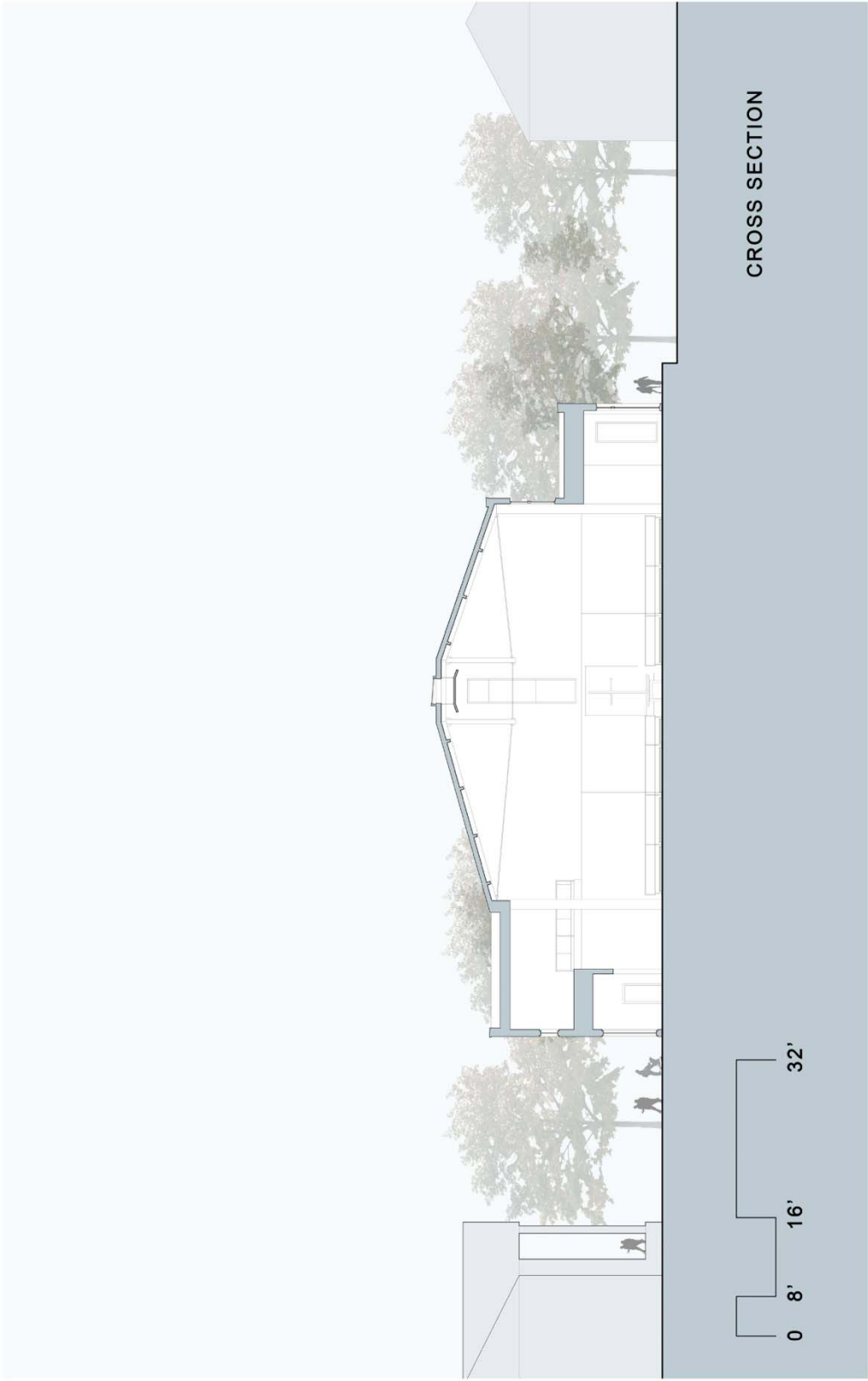


Fig. 49, Cross section

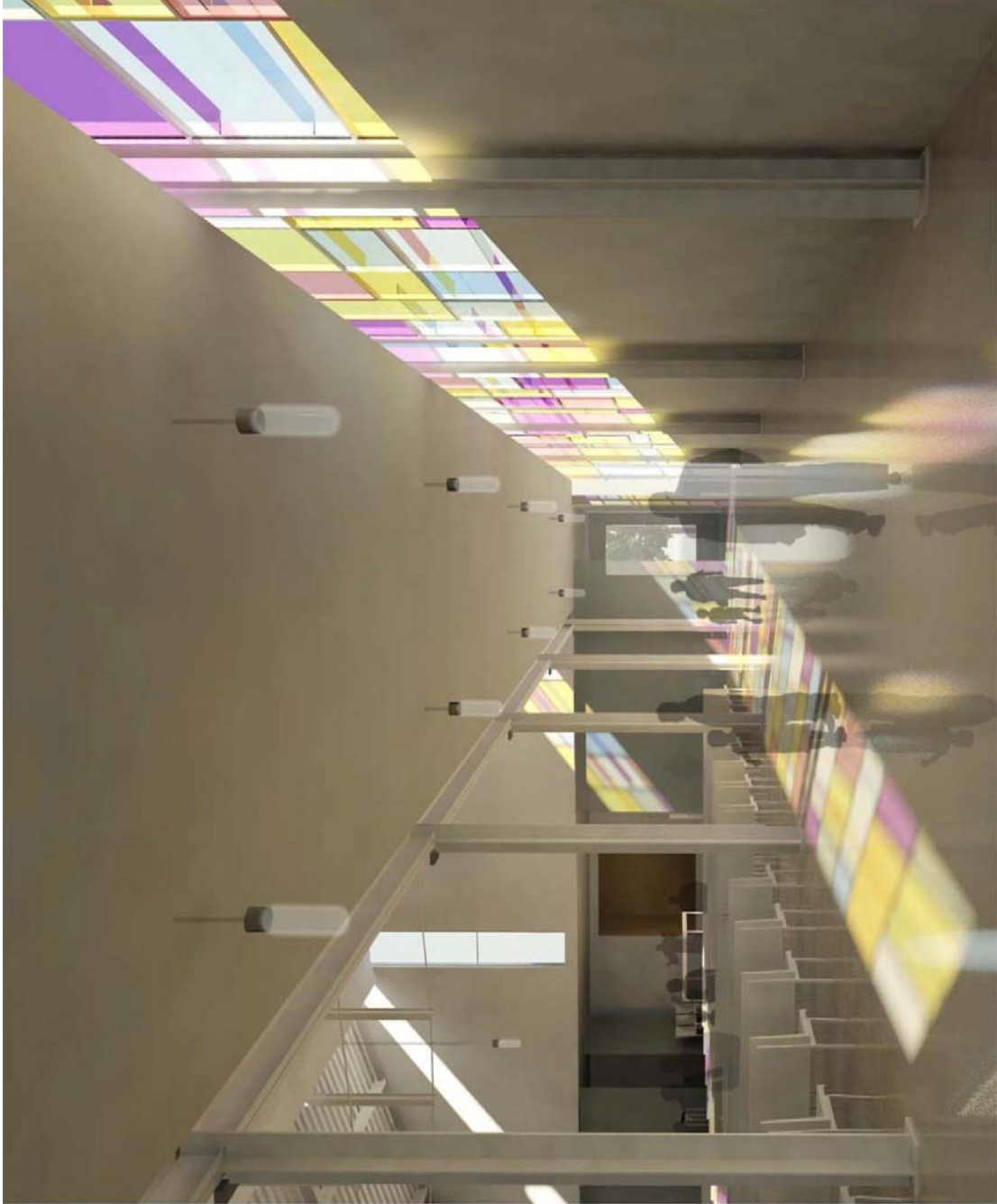


Fig. 50, View of south aisle upon entry

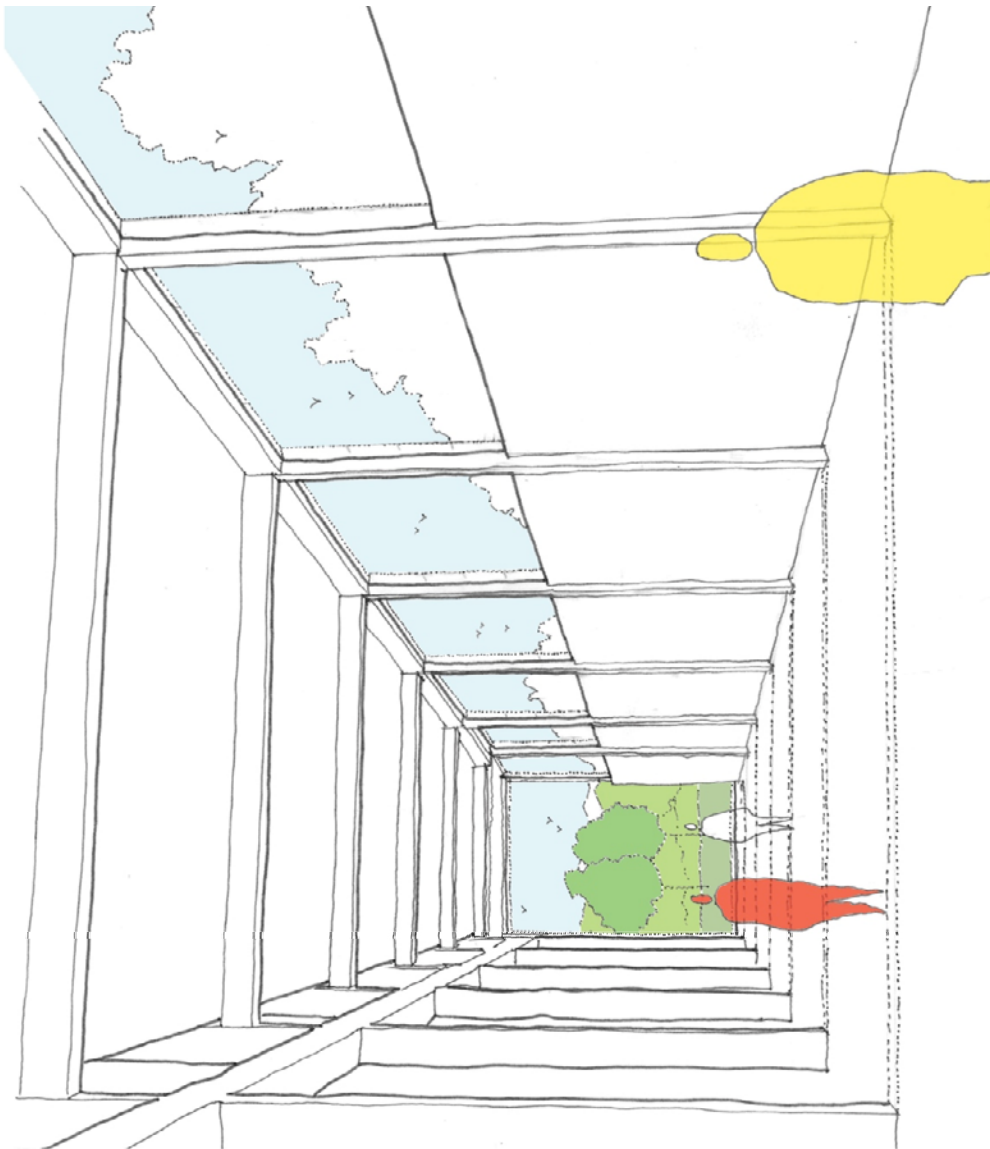
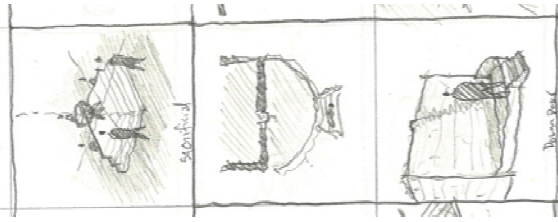


Fig. 51, Process sketch of view of south aisle upon entry

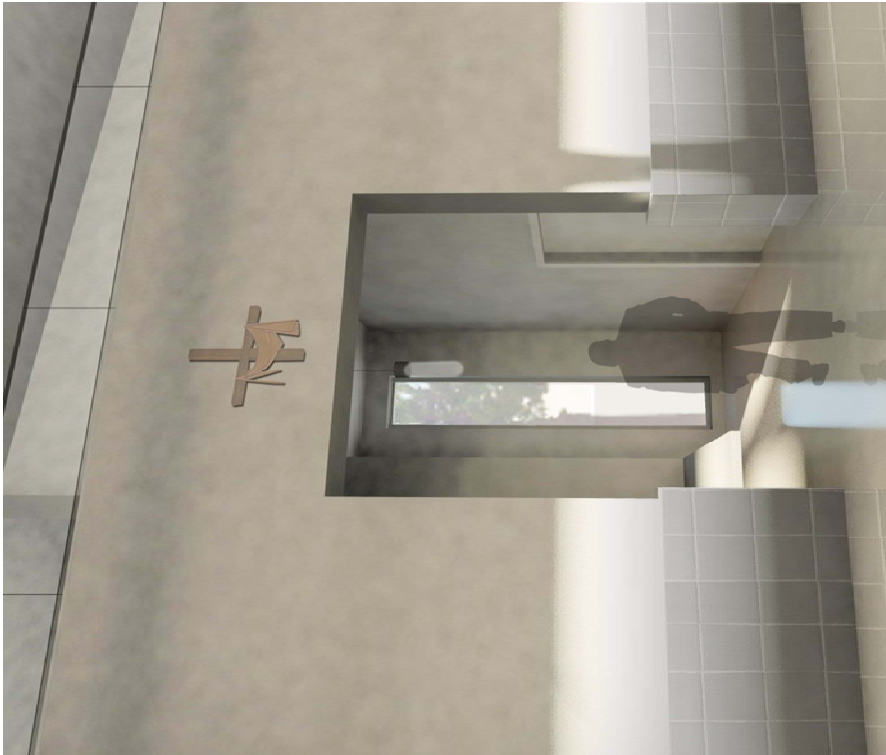


Fig. 52, Reconciliation Rooms



Fig. 53, Baptistry

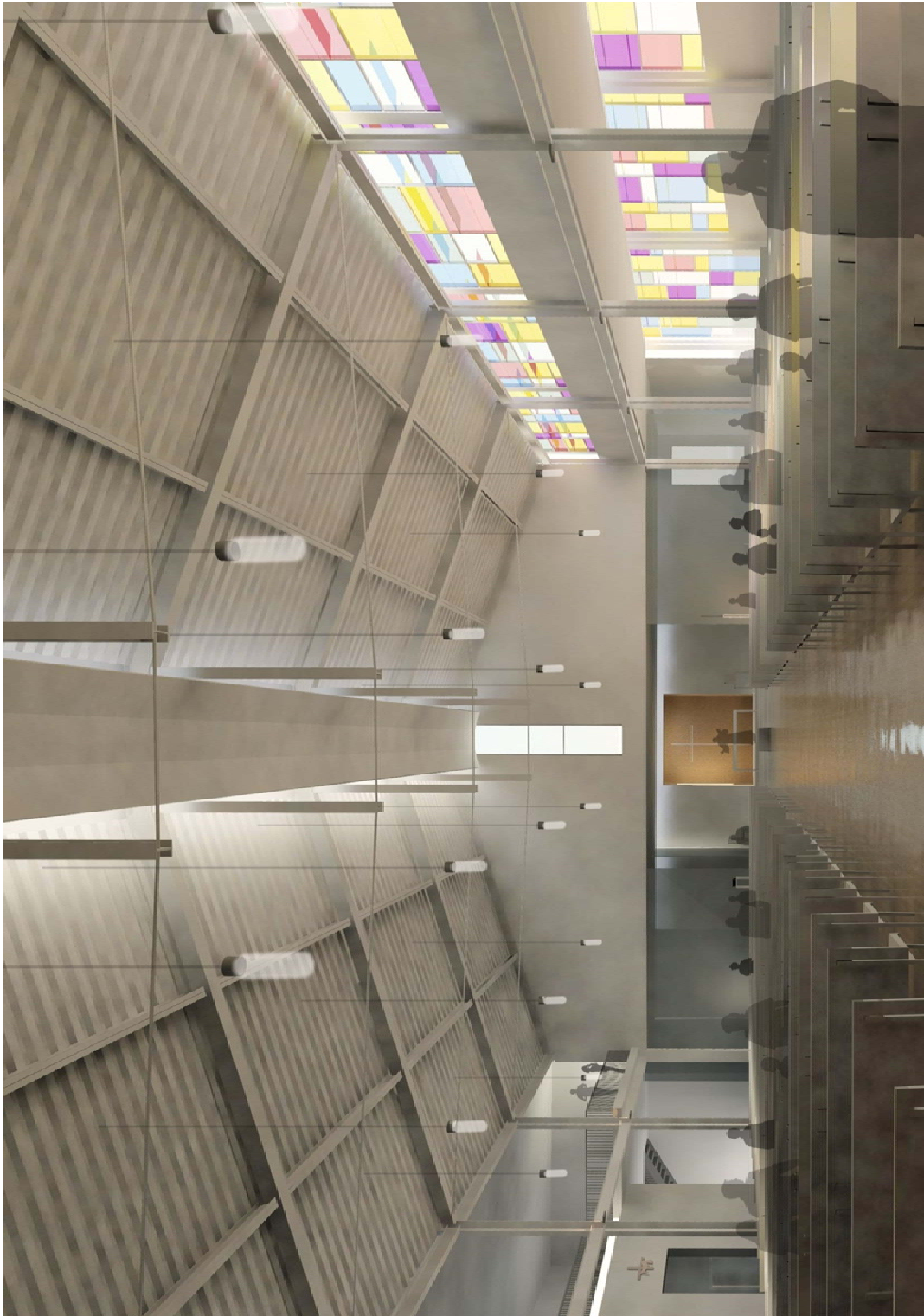
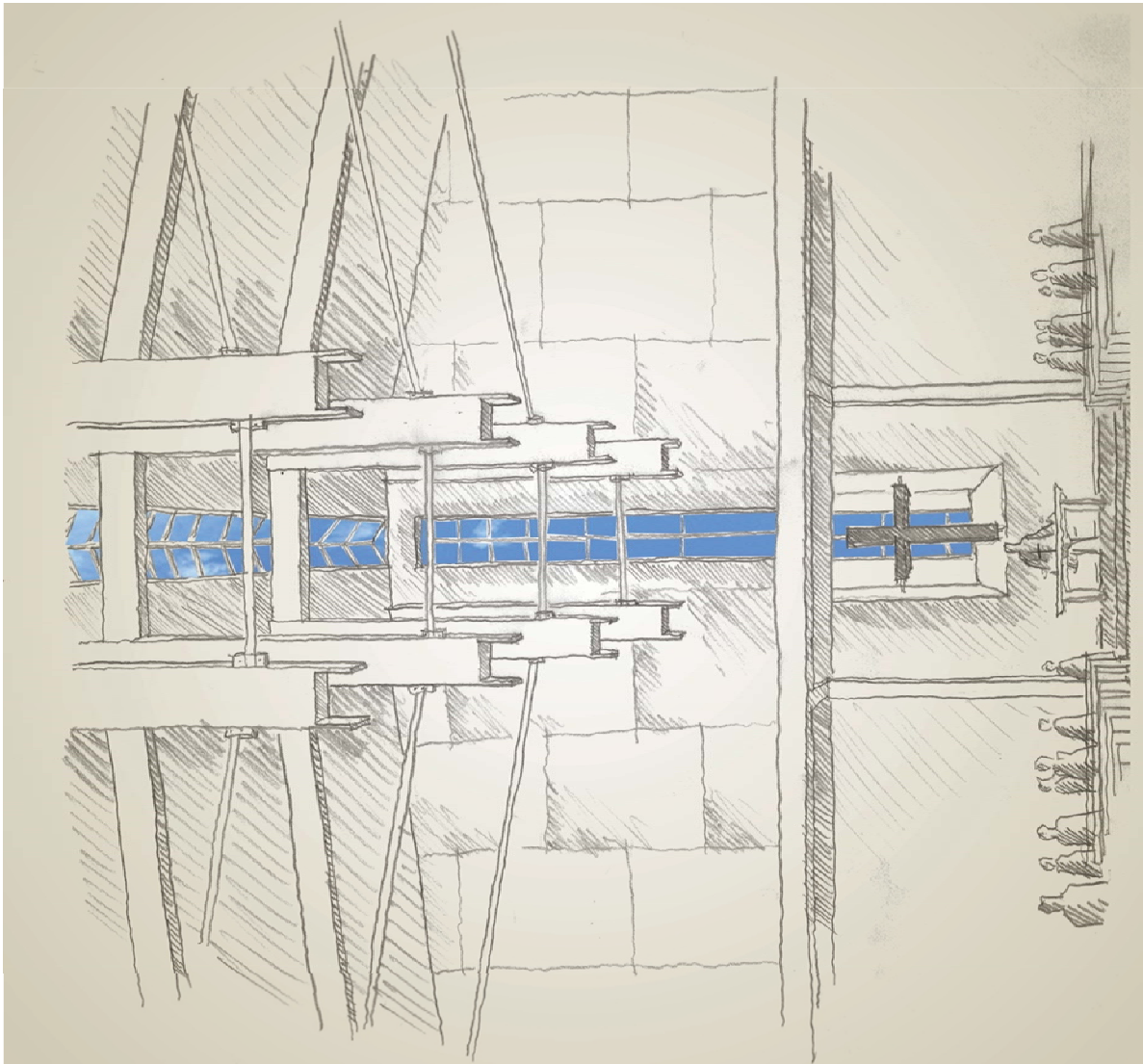
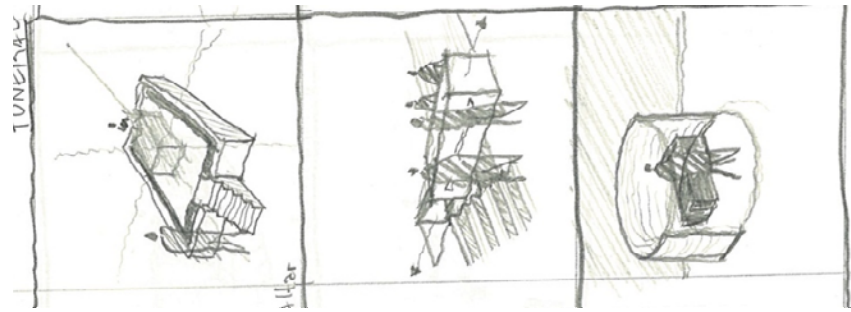


Fig. 54, Looking down nave towards altar.

Fig. 55, Process sketch looking down nave towards altar.



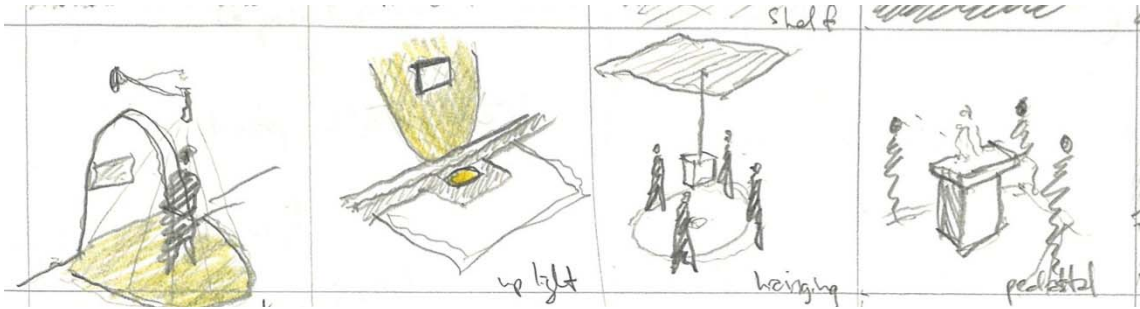


Fig. 56, Sketch vignettes of station of the cross.



Fig. 57, View of garden in rear.



Fig. 58, View of plaza at dawn during mass.



Fig. 59, View of plaza at dusk during gathering.

Conclusion

Just as it is vital for the residents of Langley Park, most of them recent immigrants, to be able to identify themselves within a broader understanding of the community and nation as a whole, it is equally important that they are able to have a similar, larger framework for their spiritual lives. It is comforting to know that you have a shared spiritual identity not only with your immediate neighbors but also with a larger body of people around the world. The church becomes a backdrop for public religious celebration, whether it be an outdoor mass or holiday procession. The church promotes a kind of engagement with the community and the Catholic church (with a capital “C”) as a whole.

On a more intimate scale, the church provides several layers of space that insulate the places where its more sacred rituals are practiced. This allows for retreat and detachment from the public activities of the church community. The church strives to strike a balance between the shutting out of the profane and the necessity of the Church to engage the world for betterment.

And, lastly, the church and its plaza provide a much-needed civic space that gives the neighborhood hierarchy and identity. The placement of the church next to the mansion and the articulation of a cohesive space within the plaza help to create a well-defined place in a neighborhood whose spaces tend to leak and bleed.

Perhaps, one day, someone passing through the area may find himself drawn into the neighborhood in a way that naturally vibrant neighborhoods invite casual interaction among residents and visitors alike. Drawn up the hill towards a plaza well populated with people on a fine summer night and flanked by proud and intimate buildings. It is a place for the community to gather, organize and celebrate the daily joys of life together.

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