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# Public Policy and the Non-Secular: How Non-Profit Organizations Preserve Inner City Historic Sacred Places

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# Public Policy and the Non-Secular: How Non-Profit Organizations Preserve Inner City Historic Sacred Places

## **Abstract**

Historic sacred places represent a pattern of American culture. The sheer abundance of churches, temples and synagogues across the country demonstrate the presence of religious freedom, and the public statement conveyed by sacred places in their craftsmanship, architectural styles and strategic locations in residential neighborhoods. The many ways a community relates to an historic sacred place are representative of how people value cultural resources and what impact these resources can have on community revitalization. When a strong partnership exists between a congregation and community members (whether congregant or not) the outcome is more beneficial to the preservation of a sacred place. This thesis proposes that a healthy partnership can be achieved by non-profit organizations collaborating with urban congregations, to effectively impact their communities and preserve their historic sacred places. The three case studies present exemplary partnerships between congregations and nonprofit organizations in Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit, where historic congregations are impacting the surrounding community by the preservation of their urban religious properties.

## **Keywords**

Historic Preservation; Public Policy; Inner City; Sacred Places

## **Disciplines**

Architecture | Historic Preservation and Conservation

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**PUBLIC POLICY AND THE NON-SECULAR:  
HOW NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS PRESERVE INNER CITY  
HISTORIC SACRED PLACES**

**Jacqueline R. Wiese**

**A THESIS  
in  
Historic Preservation**

**Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in  
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**2010**

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mom and dad,  
for all the reasons in the world.

*“Teach, your children well”*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The content of this thesis would be insignificant without the participation of the generous minds who were willing to tell their stories. Thanks especially to Ann Belletire, Don West, Richard Kirk, Motoko Huthwaite, Gianfranco Grande, and Robert Jaeger for their efforts, time and words of wisdom.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Historic sacred places represent a pattern of American culture. The sheer abundance of churches, temples and synagogues across the country demonstrate the presence of religious freedom, and the public statement conveyed by sacred places, in their craftsmanship, architectural styles and strategic locations near residential neighborhoods.

The many ways a community relates to an historic sacred place are representative of how people value cultural resources and what impact these resources can have on community revitalization. When a strong partnership exists between a congregation and community members (whether congregants or not) the outcome is more beneficial to the preservation of a sacred place. This thesis proposes that a healthy partnership can be achieved by non-profit organizations collaborating with urban congregations, to effectively impact their communities and preserve their historic sacred places.

Changing demographics and a modernizing religious world have affected the stakeholders of historic sacred places, especially in America's inner cities. While many stable neighborhoods benefit from the presence of historic sacred places that remain within the urban infrastructure, struggling neighborhoods must often form community development corporations in efforts to address revitalization efforts, utilizing places of worship as centers for community meetings and outreach. And for areas that have experienced extreme disinvestment, many places of worship are left behind as congregations shrink, move away, or worship in less physically demanding structures, such as commercial storefronts.

Historically, because of the constitutional separation of church and state, it has been difficult, if not prohibited for any level of government to intervene. This lack of public support has left the public sector unable to directly assist struggling congregations, especially financially. Yet studies show that 81% of the beneficiaries of community programs that function through places of worship are non-congregation members. (Cohen and Jaeger, *The Public Value of Sacred Places* 1998) The condition of a community's place of worship is often reflected by its surrounding environment. If an historic church or temple is vacant or crumbling, the neighboring homes, stores, or institutions are often experiencing similar challenges. This has been brought to the attention of recent presidential administrations, with each term supporting faith-based initiatives with more and more of an overlap between secular and non-secular: Clinton's Charitable Choice provision, Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiative and Obama's White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

In 1997, Partners for Sacred Places (a national non-profit organization serving historic sacred places) surveyed over 100 congregations in six cities and demonstrated that "over 90% of the nation's historic inner-city houses of worship are "de facto" community centers that provide services to people in need, most of whom are not congregation members." The study also showed that "over 75% of all congregation-based community services take place in an historic property, emphasizing that these buildings are vital to America's social fabric." (Partners for Sacred Places n.d.)

The formation of a non-profit organization is a common first step for historic sacred places to be eligible to apply for public and private funding. By creating a separate non-

profit organization, there may be more funding sources available at local, state, and federal levels, especially for community outreach or educational and cultural programming. A typical eligibility requirement for historic sacred places applying for preservation funding is that the sacred place is on a city, state or national historic list, such as the National Register of Historic Places.

Local preservation ordinances are one method of preserving historic sacred places, but it cannot be the only method. Essential factors that contribute to the preservation of a place of worship are the support of the congregation and the community it aims to serve. Even in a time of economic downturn, individual donors make up the largest source of funding for historic sacred places. As religion evolves, many religious congregations continue to shrink in numbers. Often people feel uncomfortable donating directly to the “church” or a religious group. As a response to this, the formation of non-profit organizations can help establish strong relationships with individual donors or apply for local, state, or federal grants. In the end such partnerships can benefit many stakeholders rather than just one.

The chapter to follow explains what methodology was applied when searching for model partnerships between a congregation and a non-profit organization, and also includes a literary review to create a broader context in the major challenges facing historic sacred places in American inner cities. The case studies of this thesis will then be presented to demonstrate how and when the partnership between congregation and non-profit is the best method in ensuring the future preservation. The concluding chapter presents how this partnership relates to historic preservation in a broader scheme

and also makes some recommendations for when this, and other approaches can be considered for preserving historic sacred places.

## **CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY**

*Choosing three case studies to demonstrate how congregations with non-profits are benefiting historic sacred places and their communities.*

This thesis evolved from an interest in historic preservation as it is used in community revitalization, and a corresponding interest in the role of historic religious properties. The built environment of cities across America may differ by state and region, but there is one constant architectural component of cities that exists coast to coast: historic sacred places. As discussed in the introduction, inner city sacred places experience some of the greatest challenges based on their size and location. By examining the way neighborhoods are responding to their historic religious centers and vice versa, one can understand a community's options for revitalization, including its historical significance and assets for the future.

Caitlin Kramer wrote about some of the major challenges for inner city sacred places in her thesis, "Moving Towards Neutrality: The Establishment Clause and America's Historic Religious Places." (Kramer 2009) Ms. Kramer's thesis looked at three examples of faith-based organizations receiving federal funds (all from Save America's Treasures); Old North Church in Boston, Eldridge Street Synagogue in Manhattan, and Christ Church in Philadelphia. Through an analysis of various court cases Ms. Kramer examined the challenges at the federal level for preservation funding of religious places.

Ms. Kramer limited her case studies to nationally recognized, urban religious properties that received substantial funding through the Save America's Treasures (SAT)

program. The SAT program provides federal funds to outstanding preservation projects involving National Historic Landmarks (NHL), including religious properties. However, as Kramer's case studies demonstrate, providing public funding to religious landmarks can instigate negative feedback from both liberals and conservatives nationwide, who are concerned in maintaining our nation's separation of church and state. Religious properties receiving funding from the SAT program have often chosen to work with non-profit organizations to address such concerns, as well as for various other reasons such as: to avoid litigation, to manage fundraising or capital campaigns and to include community participation and programming.

This thesis addresses whether the pattern of working with non-profits can be applied to locally recognized historic religious properties. Local religious properties struggle to maintain similar grand architectural structures within their evolving neighborhood contexts. But without National Historic Landmark status they receive much less visibility and support from the general public outside their congregations. There are numerous examples of churches, temples and synagogues in major American cities that are vacant or demolished because of inner city demographic changes, loss of membership and deferred maintenance. But how often do non-profit organizations step in? And how often do congregations reach out to existing non-profits or create their own?

The three case studies chosen for this thesis are just three out of thousands of urban, historic sacred places across the United States. They cannot be fully representative of the best way to deal with the challenges at hand, but rather seen as a small sample of one way that congregations are successfully dealing with those challenges.

In order to identify the three case studies, parameters were defined to help identify the best case examples of a successful relationship between a non-profit and a congregation. These factors included:

- Historic religious properties with a local or national register designation (avoiding NHLs, since Caitlin Kramer's thesis looked specifically at these)
- Religious properties in an urban setting
- An active congregation
- A formal partnership between congregation and non-profit that involves community outreach
- Recent efforts towards funding historic preservation of the structure

A number of people and resources were consulted in effort to find examples that fit the above parameters. Research involved the following sources:

- Professionals in the field that may have worked with these partnerships personally- specifically National Trust for Historic Preservation, Partners for Sacred Places, New York Landmarks Conservancy Sacred Sites Program, Historic Boston Inc, Steeples Project
- Recent funding recipients of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Recommended cases by Partners for Sacred Places (PSP)
- Resources for sacred places by local historic preservation offices or local religious organizations <sup>1</sup>
- Networks of multiple churches from different denominations working together in restoration efforts, namely The Rittenhouse Coalition for Restoration of Sacred Places (This turned out to be the only example of a multi-denominational coalition that has existed for the purpose of fundraising for a similar cause.)
- Ranges of preservation funding by monetary amount, location, and eligibility requirements (i.e. The Foundation Directory and The Giving Institute)
- Interviews with active congregations and staff of affiliated non-profits
- Survey of historic urban sacred places with active websites, using keywords like but not limited to; "historic sacred place", "city", and "friends of historic church"

While the search was meant to return results from various denominations working in partnership with a non-profit, the cases of choice emerged from Protestant congregations. This does not mean to say that Catholic or Jewish congregations do not work well

with non-profit organizations, because that type of partnership also exists. However, it is evident that these partnerships include more complex factors in comparison to the Protestant congregations that the case studies explore further. In terms of ownership, the Archdiocese of the Catholic Church was listed in 2006 as the largest religious property owner in New York, with over 400 buildings. (Vitullo-Martin and Institute 2006) This dynamic between congregation and owner often has a larger affect on whether religious properties close or stay open, regardless of efforts by a separate non-profit. And in terms of fundraising, Jewish philanthropy has had a long history in America, often contributing to synagogues and welfare agencies. While this may or may not lessen the need of outside support for Jewish congregations it definitely impacts the approaches taken by these congregations and any separate non-profit organization they may be working with.

Acknowledging that the pool of possible religious properties across the United States is vast, case study research for this thesis initially focused on three large cities the author had access to; Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. Useful examples emerged in Chicago and Philadelphia. A third ideal case study surfaced out of a city facing many more challenges than New York City- Detroit, Michigan.

Indeed, New York proved to be somewhat anomalous for this case study selection in that the city seemed to have a high number of congregations that were doing preservation without the help of separate organizations. Grants Manager Colleen Heemeyer, of the Sacred Sites Program at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, confirmed that most congregations applying to the Sacred Sites Program are doing so without the help of a 501(c)3 organization. In fact, she says, "If a nonprofit is involved it is usually when the



building has closed down or the congregation has left.” (Heemeyer 2010)

Another east coast city considered was Boston which, similar to New York, also involved many congregations working alone or with the Steeples Project out of Historic Boston Incorporated. Something that the Steeples Project does that may lessen the need for non-profit organizations to work with congregations is to require training for any congregation that receives funding assistance from this program. By such training of the members of the church and owners of the religious property, they are filling in the gaps that a non-profit organization would otherwise fill. “Through targeted workshops, recipients learn how to develop a project team, hire professional consultants and contractors, involve the congregations and community, and organize a capital campaign.” (Incorporated 2008)

All of the cases researched were found via internet searches, journal articles or by word of mouth. But one thing that the three case studies featured in this thesis have in common were that they were all recommended by professionals in the field. Insight was especially helpful from the Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, and the Chicago and Philadelphia offices of Partners for Sacred Places.

The three partnership case studies investigated in this thesis demonstrate just one way that congregations are successfully obtaining funding for historic sacred places. With the help of their partner non-profit organizations they are making much-needed repairs while positively impacting the communities they serve. While these case studies were not difficult to find, cases where congregations did not use the help of a non-profit

were much more typical. Since this thesis focuses on cases where a non-profit does work well with a congregation, opposing cases were not researched in great detail but are listed in Appendix B.

**Endnotes:**

1. See Appendix A for list of these organizations and programs

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Addressing challenges in site management, demographics, and public policy*

This section of Chapter 2 examines how partnerships between nonprofit organizations and religious congregations affect building stewardship, revitalization in the community and local public policy. The history of forming non-profits and community development corporations has almost always been to fill a gap or answer needs that are not met by government. Often these organizations serve low-income residents or stressed neighborhoods. As the case studies will show, non-profits linked to religious institutions can make a substantial impact on the local population. Congregations investing in their sacred place, as well as their community, “often find that establishing a separate bank account is simply not enough for outside contributors who want reassurance that their funds won’t be used for religious or sectarian purposes.” (Cohen & Jaeger, 1996) Under these conditions, forming non-profit organizations to fundraise and encourage community participation has developed a pattern of successful partnerships for the benefit of everyone involved.

To create context for the case studies to follow, this chapter highlights the challenges facing historic sacred places. These include demanding site management, changing demographics and complicated public policy for sacred places, all of which affect the sustainability of these sites, and make them more dependent on outside funding and assistance. Higher burdens on religious properties, as opposed to other building types, also

put pressure on these sites, often resulting in abandonment or demolition. Understanding the challenges for these sacred places is the first step in taking efforts to protect them.

*What makes a place sacred?* Various religious faiths consider different things sacred. In a diverse nation founded on the freedom of religion, the sacred places of American cities can vary widely. It is common for local congregations in the same neighborhood to have different attitudes towards the spaces in which they gather to worship. Therefore there are a number of ways congregations may conserve a sacred place or a sacred space - which may or may not include the maintaining the aesthetics of a structure which can “mediate the presence of God.” (NTHP 1990) Congregations often make alterations to their sacred places to make an unspoken statement about their faith through architectural or structural representation. Many properties of historic or architectural significance represent “God’s transcendence”, while converted warehouses, old theatres and storefront churches may represent “God’s immanence and call to servanthood with less concern for the grandeur of the sanctuary.” (NTHP 1990, p.1)

#### **Property and site management issues for historic sacred places**

The property owner of a church, temple or synagogue faces significant challenges due to the grandiose size and unique architectural features of many of these impressive structures. Some congregations take great pride in the architectural fabric and what that building means in its community landscape. Other congregations have dwindled to a size that leaves them without adequate resources, and struggling to pay operational bills, let alone provide community service or building preservation.

Over thirty years ago, the nation's leading preservation advocacy organization, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, began publishing short books on preserving historic religious properties. In 1990 they addressed questions of managing what was "sacred" in their *Information Series* publication, *Conservation of Urban Religious Properties*. This explored the challenging physical problems associated with religious properties, most often being water infiltration. The building envelope – the roof, walls, windows and foundation – is affected most severely as the result of water damage and deferred maintenance. But roof and drainage system repairs are no quick fix. "In the Archdiocese of Chicago, building rehabilitation projects by priority are roofs, asbestos removal, boilers, masonry and windows. In some instances, small scale rehabilitation efforts are discouraged by the potential of triggering municipal building code inspections when permits are sought for construction." (NTHP 1990 p.3)

These challenges have not gotten any easier in the 21st century. Building additions for handicapped access is a common needed upgrade for these sites, adding to operating budgets and structural alterations. On top of meeting ADA requirements, religious institutions are currently being asked to consider environmentally safe restorations.

Fortunately, some religious intuitions are interested in being more efficient and progressive, while also being sympathetic to the historic building envelope. Landmark West! of New York City hosted a *Green Theology Seminar* to address the needs and concerns of historic sacred places in the Fall of 2009. One common topic was how traditional congregations and faith-based organizations were viewed as being averse to change. Sometimes this stigma is true, but out of over sixty representatives of the various reli-

gious communities present at this seminar, the majority felt differently. “They expressed a deep wish to be at the forefront of technology and eliminate the view that places of worship are stuck in traditional, close-minded ways.” (Owen 2010) Many have embraced technology to improve operations as well as attract new members - by using sustainable technology like solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling systems, or more simple energy efficient upgrades for existing HVAC systems. Still, many of these upgrades are out of the price range for struggling community-based churches. This increases the need for more local incentives or sustainability initiatives that are willing to work with sacred places.

Recognizing that the stewardship of these buildings is very much affected by the congregation’s traditions and beliefs, we must understand the goals and objectives of those that use the space if we hope to preserve it. The National Trust states that “we can never assume that we understand anything more about the perspective of a particular congregation on these issues than that the congregation will view its sanctuary and related buildings primarily as a means for proper service to God... Understanding congregational identity is the key to discovering the principles of stewardship that motivate its attention or lack thereof to property.” (NTHP 1990 p.2)

Reverend Dr. Thomas F. Pike, previous chair of Partners for Sacred Places and an advocate for religious property conservation, stated the following; “Buildings say something about who we are, where we have been, and that we are here to stay...They can be the context in which we reach out; they can be places where the community is reshaped. They can be the places where one celebrates the ebb and flow of life in cities

and neighborhoods.” (NTHP 1990 p.5)

Not every congregation will agree that the historic preservation of these spaces is a priority. In the past some members, clergy and leaders have accused the historic preservation movement of emphasizing “buildings, not people” being more worth our time, money and effort.

Diane Cohen and Robert Jaeger <sup>1</sup> have worked with Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust to understand how congregations and preservationists might find a common ground. Many of the most recent publications by the National Trust that speak to the issues of “Conserving Urban Religious Properties” have been written by Cohen and Jaeger. They argue the preservationist’s view when they write that “tangible evidence of a congregation’s heritage - including the rich layering of symbols, memorials, embellishments, and improvements associated with an older or historic building - can have great meaning and importance to churches, synagogues, meetings, and other spiritual communities.” (Cohen and Jaeger 1996)

The preservation of a property’s sacredness is often interpreted as ethical. And arguments may be made for, or against proper conservation methods. For instance, if a preservationist cares to preserve a historic place of worship for its place in community history or its Tiffany stained glass windows, the congregation might rather want to feed the homeless, representing very different goals.

In the *Conservation of Urban Religious Properties*, the National Trust states that maintenance planning is a usually low priority for congregations, due to lack of professional guidance (architects, engineers experienced with older buildings), or contractors

unfamiliar with proper repair and rehab methods, and a lack of on-site supervision of repair work. Additionally, maintenance staff are usually untrained or even absent in these large, older structures. Even the clergy is often part-time, which affects the extent of the property's preservation. All of these factors together can allow undetected minor problems to escalate into crisis situations, necessitating major repairs and major expenses.

**Urban Challenges for historic sacred places: demographic, social and economic factors**

*“Older and, in some cases, historic religious properties throughout the country have reached a critical state of disrepair. ..The religious community is confronting complex and severe issues relating to its stock of properties, while simultaneously responding to demands for expanding human services and community outreach programs.” (NTHP 1990)*

In the past 50 years, federal support of social services in the United States has lessened dramatically, putting heavy pressure on religious institutions to take care of the underprivileged. Urban places of worship play a vital, “yet largely unappreciated, role in public life - the meeting of human needs.” (Cohen and Jaeger 1996) Communities at risk of sickness, poverty and neglect have often found older religious properties to provide affordable, flexible space; serving more than the congregation when they include services like child care centers, AA meetings, hot lunch programs, shelters, literacy classes and recreational activities.

Diane Cohen and A. Robert Jaeger expanded publicly on these issues in the National



Trust booklet *Strategies for the Stewardship and Active Use of Older and Historic Religious Properties*. This was published 18 years after the National Trust published its first book on religious properties. It was evident to preservationists that congregations with changing memberships and declining resources were struggling to maintain their historic structures. But as of 1996 (and following that year) the number of local programs serving congregations with historic religious properties began growing. Educational conferences and a national information clearinghouse were “encouraging signs that the special needs of religious property owners (were) slowly gaining recognition.” But at the time the connection between preservationists and religious leaders were still “the exception, not the rule.” (ibid p.2)

A 1998 study of 111 congregations by Partners for Sacred Places showed that “91 percent of all surveyed congregations with older buildings open their doors to the larger community, Congregations with older buildings host 76 percent of their community services in their own facilities, and 25 percent of all the congregations studied are facing the expense of major structural work on their buildings” (Cohen 1998). These numbers affirmed what advocates for the preservation of historic religious properties had been saying for some time now: sacred places are at risk. They are at risk because of the structural and site management issues mentioned before and for increased community needs, but also because these inner city neighborhoods are in another cycle of demographic evolution.

Urban demographic changes were greatly influenced by suburban development, but for those mainline congregation memberships that have stayed in cities, many are run-

ning out of resources, compelling them to close or merge. Since populations of earlier European immigrants have moved to suburbs of towns and cities, this has created a large change in owners of religious properties. African American, Latino and Asian populations in urban areas have been purchasing “many of these older buildings (since) the 1950s to the present day.” (Cohen and Jaeger 1996)

In a recent book, *Streets of Glory*, author Omar McRoberts looks at the trend of “religious districts” developing in underserved inner city neighborhoods. In areas that have experienced a loss of population and tax base, he noted the obvious: crime and poverty often flourish. He studied the relationship between 29 community churches and residents of the Four Corners area of Dorchester, Massachusetts, where low property values and high vacancies in commercial corridors allowed for a high concentration of “store front churches.” These are common in many struggling communities, where congregations would rent space to worship but often not live in that neighborhood. Only five of the 29 churches McRoberts studied were not located in storefronts, two of which met in converted houses. Only three churches in the Dorchester community were free-standing historic sacred places.

This presents an issue that only inner city historic churches are facing. When so many of these “niche” churches, as McRoberts called them, were located in one neighborhood, the competition for membership created many small groups rather than any large ones. The storefront churches also reversed hope for revitalization efforts when the congregations were not using the large historic places but rather coming in from other communities to rent cheap retail space on old commercial corridors. Instead of

storefronts that could be open to the public for regular business hours 5-7 days a week, storefront churches were generally only opening their doors for a few hours on their day of worship.

In a chapter entitled “Church-based activism”, the author of *Streets of Glory* compares churches to other voluntary associations that must adapt to changing environments to survive. “Otherwise they die, to be replaced by innovative entrepreneurial entities... Churches may change in response to shifts in the environmental demography. Churches also change with the installation of new leadership and in response to new members with novel needs and interests. When faced with environmental or internal shifts, churches may adopt new approaches to changing the world. It is important to understand how these changes take place, especially in an antipoverty policy environment that increasingly asks churches to develop new relationships with the state and with nonmembers.” (McRoberts 2003)

Similar to the Four Corners neighborhood in Dorchester, North Philadelphia experiences the “storefront churches” trend along its historic Germantown Avenue. In a current study entitled *Faith on the Avenue*, Dr. Katie Day<sup>2</sup> seeks out all of the religious congregations on Germantown Avenue and highlights the ways they contribute to the surrounding community. In four city blocks, from 2750 to 3040 Germantown Ave, there are 16 practicing congregations. One of these is a historic Quaker Meeting House that dates back to 1883 and Quaker Burial Ground that dates to the 17th century. Surrounding this National Register historic site, other religious groups meet in various residential buildings and commercial storefronts that recently housed a television shop, restaurant

supply store, plastics factory, heating and air conditioning supplies and an electric store. (Stroud, 2009) Within walking distance of these storefront churches are two vacant historic churches: St Bonaventure's Catholic Church (built in 1889) and St. Boniface's (built 1868-72). Both of these churches were listed on the 2010 Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia's Seventh Annual Endangered Properties List as examples of "endangered church properties".

### **Preservation partnerships and local policy for religious properties**

As mentioned in the introduction, communities often organize themselves when there is some threat to their public values or needs unmet by current policy. Because the missions of community advocacy groups and religious institutions so often serve similar populations, it is not surprising that secular and faith-based organizations have increasingly begun to collaborate.

One of the first advocacy groups to notice the importance of these partnerships was the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation, founded in 1979. This private, nonprofit membership organization created an Historic Religious Properties Program in 1986. "The goal of this program (was) to provide technical assistance to congregations who are stewards of older worship buildings, and its first activity was to document all of the city's historic houses of worship" (Goulet, 1991). This expansive survey documented location, size, architectural significance and contacts for more than 700 churches and synagogues in Philadelphia and the low-income communities of Camden, New Jersey and Chester, Pennsylvania. The database of this information is still used today in the fil-

ing system at Partners for Sacred Places , almost all of which has also been saved digitally.

The Historic Religious Properties program did continue after 1986 up until the mid 1990s, when the program was turned over to the newly established non-profit Partners for Sacred Places (PSP). The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia (which grew and merged from the original Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation) has continued an interest in African American historic churches and there is a data base of those churches on (their) website. (Cotton, 2010)

Around the same time as Partners for Sacred Places was founded (1989) by Diane Cohen and Robert Jaeger, the New York Landmarks Conservancy Sacred Sites Program was also formed under the direction of Diane Cohen. While Sacred Sites focused its efforts more locally (and still does today), Partners for Sacred Places continued to be “the nation’s only nonsectarian nonprofit organization promoting the stewardship and active use of older and historic religious properties.” (PSP n.d.)

Working together in Philadelphia, Cohen and Jaeger had similar interests and different background experiences, from which the two created a case for what “was then a new cause and attracted an array of leaders and supporters who continue to this day to serve Partners well.” (Jaeger 2010). In 1998, when Jaeger and Cohen published *Sacred Places at Risk*, the study of more than 100 congregations in six cities around the U.S., they equipped the preservation world with dramatic findings that historic places of worship were housing an immense amount of community services. This paved the way for other non-profits to work specifically with congregations for community development

efforts, and also made local historic commissions and historic societies take note of the role religious properties were playing in historically significant neighborhoods.

A year after PSP was founded, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched Inspired Partnerships, a program in Chicago funded by the Lilly Endowment Fund.

“Through training in property and financial management, direct technological services, an information clearinghouse, and public education materials, Inspired Partnerships encouraged the use of older religious properties as resources for community service.”

(NTHP 1990) This initiative created access and references to architectural and engineering consultants, who provided free or reduced services for congregations, without having to actually fund any religious institutions. Inspired Partnerships eventually phased out due to limited funding.

In one unique instance congregations worked across denominations for a common preservation goal. The Rittenhouse Coalition for the Restoration of Sacred Places was a collaborative effort started in 1990 by three downtown Philadelphia congregations – First Baptist Church, First Unitarian Church, and St. Mark’s Episcopal Church. This seems to be the only recorded and searchable partnership of this kind, in which different denominations joined forces to raise funds for capital repairs and restoration for all three properties. Undoubtedly this took a lot of trust and compromise. By 1999, this nonprofit organization, “run by a board composed of the clergy and members appointed from each congregation, had raised over a half-million dollars”. (PSP 1999) The Rittenhouse Coalition eventually lost the strong group of leaders it needed to continue these efforts and the partnership slowly dissolved in the 2000’s.

In 1993, the Boston preservation non-profit, Historic Boston Incorporated, formed The Steeples Project to provide matching funds for historic sacred places that needed preservation planning, major repairs and exterior lighting projects. Since its foundation, the Steeples Project has awarded “more than \$1.4 million (in grant funding) to 51 congregations throughout Boston’s diverse neighborhoods.” (HBI 2010) Like other initiatives serving sacred places, the Steeples Project forms partnerships with architects, preservation consultants and contractors. In this way the nonprofit can provide services and matching funds to a project team rather than a congregation, which can often be more attractive for the non-profit in its own efforts to gain funding and donor support.

Non-profit organizations like the ones mentioned in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Boston are just a few among other similar preservation initiatives geared towards urban and historic sacred places nationwide. Similar programs that were found in the research process for this thesis included those in Kansas City, Cleveland and Indianapolis. Like the Steeples Project that functions out of Historic Boston Inc., Friends of Sacred Structures is a program that functions out of the Historic Kansas City Foundation; the Center for Congregations out of the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana; and the Sacred Landmarks Assistance Program works out of the Cleveland Restoration Society in Ohio. These examples provide a pattern of extending services from within an already functioning city or statewide non-profit organization, which can be easier than starting up a separate organization from scratch.

### **Legal Challenges to Preserving Historic Sacred Places**

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing historic sacred places with respect to public funding or support is the result of their constitutional right: the separation of church and state. While this religious freedom is greatly intertwined with American history, the separation of church and state has limited funding and support by governments for places of worship. This has caused a number of problems for preservationists and congregations alike.

For example, in 1990 the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission battled St. Bartholomew's Church in court after they denied the church's proposal to replace its adjacent community house with a fifty-nine story glass office tower. The case went to the Federal District Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals, where the church claimed economic hardship and that they were denied free exercise of religious beliefs and activities (arguing that designation was against the First Amendment). The church lost this argument and today the St. Bartholomew's case still sets a legal precedent because the court established religious organizations as "subject to historic preservation ordinances of local government, and that such regulations are not a violation of the First Amendment separation of church and state."

For many preservationists, the response to a threatened historic property is to use legislative powers to ensure future preservation of historical landmarks. However, to designate a religious property "historic" is often a more controversial designation than that of any other type of property. To place such a type of regulation on a place of worship has been challenged in court by developers and religious property owners as



a denial of the right to free exercise of religion. Though courts have upheld the right of municipalities (preservation commissions or departments) to make such historic designations,<sup>3</sup> “churches can be among the most vocal and active opponents of historic designation.” (Tyler, Ligibel and Tyler 2009) This further suggests that understanding a congregation’s goals and beliefs is necessary for the future of a historic sacred place and a healthy relationship between community and congregation.

Religious groups like the Catholic Archdiocese have not been fond of landmarking and historic district designations that consist of regulation and restrictions to what they can do with their historic properties. This is especially relevant for inner city religious properties that are experiencing real estate pressures to sell the property for a profit. One case example of this is from Chicago, where owners of one historic church pressured their alderman for his support of religious freedom by requesting an amendment to the Chicago Landmark Ordinance. Alderman Burt Natarus answered the requests within his ward by proposing and passing an Owner Consent Clause in the city’s Landmark Ordinance in 1987, to “protect religious freedom” for all houses of worship. After the enactment of the clause, the owners of the historic church in this neighborhood were able to reverse their Landmark status and undergo a multi-million dollar remodeling, without any public preservation oversight.

In 2005 when Alderman Natarus tried to correct this legislation and return the Landmark Ordinance to pre-1987 status, he faced fierce opposition from the Archdiocese of Chicago and other denominations. Currently, in Chicago designated historic districts, owners of religious properties are allowed to refuse Landmark designation. In order to

prevent demolition of significant historic sacred places, preservationists will often argue that it should be in the power of the Landmarks Commission to designate properties regardless of their religious status, since the State has enabled these commissions as local governments for the purpose of designating properties worthy of cultural and historical significance.

In the end it is in the hands of the congregation and the community using the space to decide the future of the historic sacred place. It must be important enough to both owner and user, to prevent demolition or decide how the site may be redeveloped. The formation of a non-profit organization can only help preserve the space, especially if it offers a communal and religious purpose that is valued by multiple stakeholders.

### **Final Notes**

It is quite easy to become lost in the general threats that exist for historic sacred sites. It is important to note the different approaches congregations are using to overcome their challenges. In some cases multiple congregations are combining and sharing space, leaving other structures empty, selling structures for redevelopment, or adaptively reusing their spaces. As the next three chapters will highlight, successful examples of a historic sacred place surviving with an active congregation can be linked to some type of non-profit organization or friends group. This is important to the prosperity of these places of worship when the challenges, or lack of expertise beyond the congregation itself, are fulfilled by this partnership. Larger non-profit organizations serving historic sacred places, like those mentioned earlier in this chapter, are essential in providing ser-

vices and technical assistance to congregations who themselves work with site-specific nonprofit organizations, as well as congregations who are working alone to provide community outreach and maintain their historic sacred place. In chapters 3-5, partnerships with site-specific non-profit organizations will demonstrate one way a congregation can preserve their historic building, as well as a place in its historic community.

#### Endnotes:

1. Robert Jaeger holds a Master's degree in preservation planning from Cornell University and an MBA from the University of Michigan. Prior to co-founding Partners for Sacred Places in 1989, Bob worked with the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation as Senior Vice President for the Historic Religious Properties Program. Diane Cohen was co-director at PSP for over twenty years but has recently moved on to other endeavors.
2. Dr. Katie Day is the director of the "Faith on the Avenue" study and Charles Scheiren Professor of Church and Society at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.
3. The major difference between a local and national designation is significant. Local nominations are made by local preservation commissions, which are enabled by state legislature to function as legislative bodies of government when designating something (building, site or district) "historic", therefore placing legal protection over it. A National Register designation is administered through the National Park Service and has no regulatory power. If a building or neighborhood is placed on the National Register this usually is to create awareness about the history and value of that site, often in hopes of initiating sources of support and funding.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH &**  
**FRIENDS OF HISTORIC SECOND CHURCH, CHICAGO, IL.**



Figure 1: Front entrance, Second Presbyterian Church.  
Source: [chicago-architecture-jyoti.blogspot.com](http://chicago-architecture-jyoti.blogspot.com)

**HISTORIC FACTS & SIGNIFICANCE:**

- Gothic Revival + Arts and Crafts
- Exterior by architect James Renwick, interior by Howard Van Doren Shaw and Frederic Clay
- Completed in 1874, Fire in 1900, followed by interior reconstruction
- Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974
- Designated a Chicago Landmark in 1977

Second Presbyterian Church has a long history of growth. The Second Presbyterian congregation of Chicago formed an organization in 1842. And while the current building at 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Michigan Ave was finished in 1874, James Renwick was actually first commissioned to erect their Gothic church at Wabash Ave and Washington Street in 1850.

“After the organization of the church was completed and the enterprise fairly launched, it became necessary to find a place for worship.” (Chicago, Second Presbyterian Church 1892) Renwick was commissioned for this project in 1848 with a budget of \$25,000. (ibid) The “Spotted Church,” (Figure 2) as it was called, was similar in design to the current Gothic exterior of Second Presbyterian Church, with “three

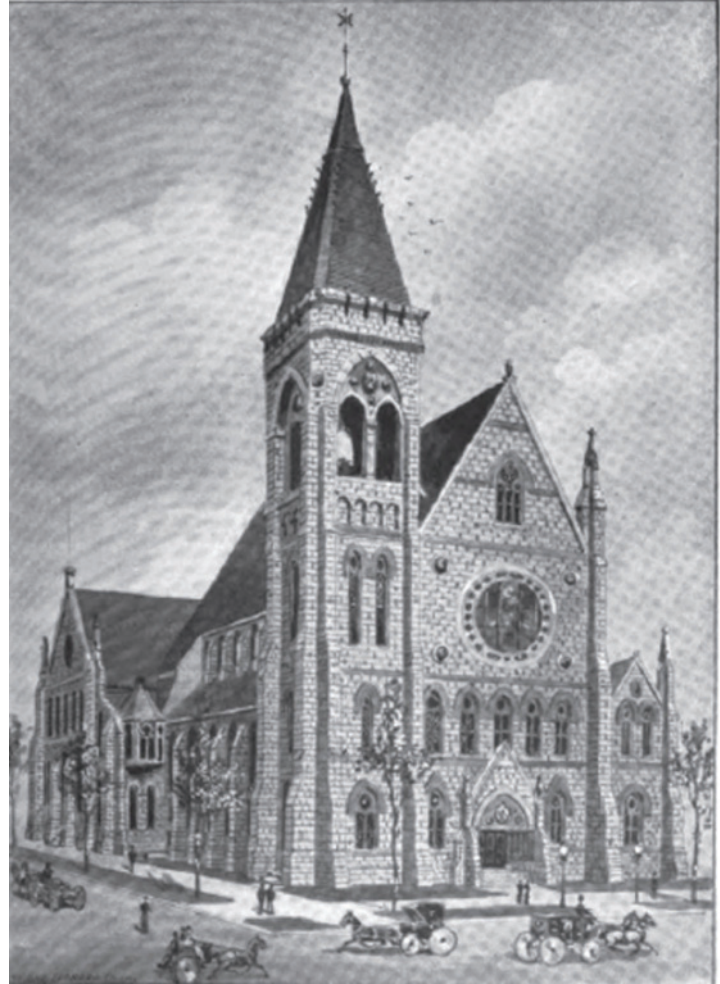


Figure 2 - The original “Spotted Church,” pre-1871  
Source: Chicago, Second Presbyterian Church 1892

entrances in front, opening into a large vestibule. The roof and side galleries were supported by large semi-clustered wooden columns, with its large columns, Gothic arches, traceries and partly timbered roof was, in its general outline and beautiful proportions, an acknowledged and attractive feature of the church.” (ibid, p.34) This original church was completely destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and plans for a new church were prepared immediately, again by James Renwick, but also with the help of John Addison of New York.

The location of the new church was just two miles south of the original church and

the design was based on early English Gothic examples, with a high-pitched gable roof, a rose window in the east wall, and a corner bell tower. The Church Society voted to again use Joliet limestone quarry (same as the original church), but the stone for the newer church was quarried



Figure 3 - Second Presbyterian Church after 1900  
Source: 2ndpresbyterian.org

at a greater depth, minimizing the spots that were so prevalent on the original structure. (ibid)

Sculptural features on the exterior are minimal but include the Four Evangelists and the head of Jesus on the Michigan Avenue entrance and gargoyles in the bell tower. Before 1901, the interior was also designed in the Gothic style, with pointed arches leading to the side aisles, slender iron columns supporting the balcony, and extensive stenciling adorning the walls. But when another fire broke out in 1900, all of the interior features were destroyed, including the roof and nave. Rather than reconstructing as it was,



Figure 4 - Arts & Crafts interior today  
Source: [2ndpresbyterian.org/worship/](http://2ndpresbyterian.org/worship/)

architect and church member Howard Van Doren Shaw collaborated with his friend and muralist Frederic Clay Bartlett, to design a new interior based on English and American Arts and Crafts motifs. The result that survives today is a unique juxtaposition of an Arts and Crafts interior (Figure 4) within a Gothic Revival church.

### **Neighborhood Context**

Second Presbyterian Church is located at 1936 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago's Near South Side community area. This area became part of the city limits after 1853. During this last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago's business district expanded south of the downtown loop to include the Near South Side. Wealthy families built mansions here on

Prairie, Indiana, Calumet, and Michigan Avenues south of 16th Street. (Chicago Historical Society 2005)



Figure 5  
Second Presbyterian Church in proximity to Prairie Avenue Historic District  
(Source: Google Earth)

Well known

Chicagoans like the Pullmans, the Fields, and even Mary Todd Lincoln and her son attended Second Presbyterian Church. It was a much different community when the church was first built. Money was available, as evidenced by the fact that the church was still thriving after the 1900 fire, allowing the congregation to immediately rebuild. In fact, when the congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1892 membership was peaking near 800 members. (Chicago, Second Presbyterian Church 1892) But by 1920 the south loop started becoming industrial, bringing rail, manufacturing, warehouses, and some working class residents. As the overall amount of residents declined in number and the neighborhood's tax base decreased, the area struggled with vacancies and disinvestment right through the second half of the twentieth century. (Chicago Historical Society 2005)





Figure 6 - Second Presbyterian Church in Near South Side community context  
Source: Google Earth

### **Local Preservation Policy**

Today the neighborhood is a mix of commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings with some residential blocks scattered between. Large public and private developments have included expansions at the Science and Industry Museum campus, Soldier Field football stadium, Northerly Island concert venues and the city's largest convention center, McCormick Place, which are all in the vicinity of Second Presbyterian Church. The church itself is west of the Prairie Avenue Historic District (a National Register and Chicago designated historic district) (Figure 5) which includes other historic sites such as the Glessner House by H.H. Richardson, and the Clarke House (one of Chicago's oldest buildings). Since much of the area immediately surrounding Second Presbyterian Church has changed drastically, the church is not included in any local historic district. It is however,

listed individually as a Chicago Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places.

As mentioned previously, a listing on the National Register does not offer any legal protection of a place. In most cities, local historic designation of a property (by a local government, usually a city preservation commission) requires that any project involving that property must adhere to design guidelines and review procedures set by a local preservation ordinance. This type of designation can often protect a property from demolition or inappropriate alteration, or at least allow time for all stakeholders to consider other options. As mentioned in the Literature Review, Chicago is among those cities across the United States with an Owner Consent Clause<sup>1</sup> in its local preservation ordinance. This Clause allows for religious property owners to refuse or reverse landmark designation.

Fortunately, the Second Presbyterian congregation is in favor of the church's historic designations. One way the church gained community support and funding in the first place was by nominating the building for the National Register and gaining Chicago Landmark designation in the 1970's. Today the congregation supports efforts by the Friends of Historic Second Church as they plan to nominate the church as a National Historic Landmark.

### **History of Friends of Historic Second Church**

From after the Great Depression all the way through the 1990's, the church frequently considered closing its doors. Ann Belletire, Secretary and Tour Coordinator for Friends of Historic Second Church, claims that the church's endowment, along with a tenacious membership, has managed to keep Second Presbyterian open. Even before any 'Friends'

group formed, leaders of Second Presbyterian have often initiated community membership and participation. As the neighborhood was changing during the 1950's some of the laity even went door to door reaching out to a new and largely African American population. (NTHP 1990)

In the 1980's a small church committee called the *Angels Foundation* formed to focus on facility repairs. The committee was made up of only a few people from within the church's formal structure. With limited personnel the Angels could not meet regularly. "Over their 15-20 years of existence, they often met only once a year." (West 2010) This was not enough, but it was something. When Second Presbyterian Church was mentioned in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Information booklet on the *Conservation of Urban Religious Properties*, it was said that; "The success of this committee is its opportunistic outlook rather than its systematic approach. Although future repair and rehabilitation projects are ranked in order of priority, this ranking is treated with the flexibility of a wish list." (NTHP 1990)

The Angels committee had thought for some time that a separate organization may be a more efficient way to carry out their "wish list" and obtain funding and grants available to secular non-profits. But it wasn't until 2006 that the Angels officially reorganized as a 501(c)3 organization: The Friends of Historic Second Church.

The lower governing body of the Presbyterian Church, called *Session*, is composed of the pastor and a body of elders elected by the members of a particular church. Session of Second Presbyterian Church had to approve the proposed Bylaws for Friends of Historic Second Church in order for Friends to form. Session also approved allowing

Friends to conduct the church tours, that the church elders had previously been doing. This helped track the amount of funds generated by the tours.

The core group of Angels members became the first Board of Friends, along with other members of the congregation. Friends of Historic Second Church have since diversified their board by adding professionals in construction, art history, architecture and historic preservation. *“We have an active working board. Everyone on it works. We could use 5 or 10 more good working members but we have expanded slowly.”* (Belletire 2010)

Reverend Coleman Gilchrist is an ex-officio board member, which enables him to keep up with what Friends is doing. Because Friends has no legal authority over the building, it needs approval of Session and the Reverend for projects to move forward. Funding for a project must get everyone’s approval and the members of Friends give a full report to Session monthly. In addition, two representatives from the board are from Session, representing a necessary communication link between the two partners that is critical to its success.

### **Current Efforts**

Because Friends of Historic Second Church and the congregation of Second Presbyterian collaborate, they can plan and execute fundraisers and renovations to reach shared goals. Friends is essential in advising Session what projects may need priority, as well as fundraising for those projects. This organization also serves as a vehicle for community members and people not part of the congregation to offer input and expertise for the preservation of Second Presbyterian Church. All constituents must maintain clear communication, an open mind and follow up with frequent discussions to identify projects

and determine which will be undertaken by Friends, which by the congregation, or if both will share the load.

While the Board is strictly volunteer-led, Friends of Historic Second Church have recently been able to hire a contractual employee, under the title of Historic Preservation Manager. Alison Stubner works in this position roughly 12-15 hours a week, which may seem minimal but is still representative of the organization's steady progress.

The Friends operating budget depends on board contributions, grants, and memberships. Currently, there are 6 different tiers of membership from which they receive about \$7,000 a year. Tours are given as frequently as possible, bringing in around \$5,000 a year. (Belletire 2010) Friends also publishes a quarterly newsletter called "The Herald" and organizes public tours and lecture series, on the topics such as arts & crafts style art and architecture and stained glass.

The strength of the Friends Board of Directors is instrumental to connecting to networks and funding sources. For instance, the Vice President of Friends of Historic Second Church recently wrote and obtained a \$22,000 grant for a mural restoration within the sanctuary.

Non-profits often compete with many other organizations for the same limited funding. It is common for these types of organizations to struggle with fundraising when they are up against organizations with similar missions or programs. Like other non-profits, funding for Friends of Historic Second Church must come from multiple sources in order to make significant progress. The largest need right now is to make the building ADA accessible, for which Friends is searching grant opportunities. (Belletire 2010) Most recent-

ly, note-worthy preservation efforts and grant awards include:

- Funding from a Second Presbyterian Church Capital Campaign which replaced out of date boilers in the church and the deteriorating windows in the second floor community gym.
- A newly renovated office in the church, thanks to a grant and board member pledges. Friends of Historic Second Church share this space with a church market day group and pay the church an annual rental fee.
- A \$35,000 gift from a private family foundation that wishes to stay unnamed. This money has gone towards a preliminary Historic Structures Report, by Architect Ann Sullivan, to develop short and long term preservation plans.
- A lecture series sponsored by the Terra Foundation Grant.
- Restoration of two murals, one of which was funded by Chicago Conservation.

Although the neighborhood continues to change, “there is a lot of new construction, and good new infill in the adjacent Prairie Ave Historic District. The neighborhood as a whole is on an upswing but this hasn’t really been reflected in membership.” (Belletire 2010) The congregation membership has remained small at roughly 120 individuals. As some members of the congregation do still live in the neighborhood, others do not travel from very far.

### **Community Outreach**

Friends of Historic Second Church is a foundation “that exists to preserve, restore, and educate.” Their mission as stated on a 2008, IRS 990 tax form<sup>2</sup> states:

“The Friends of the Historic Second Church is a volunteer membership organization whose purposes are to secure funds for the on-going restoration, preservation, and maintenance of Second Presbyterian Church’s architecturally significant building and its exemplary collection of art in the form of its windows, murals, and furnishings and to promote a wider awareness of that art and its world-wide significance as important and

singular among works of the American Gothic Revival and English and American Arts and Crafts movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century through programs, special events, performances, and education programming.”

By Friends of Historic Second Church being dedicated to the preservation of the church’s extraordinary art and architecture, the congregation of Second Presbyterian Church is better able to focus its efforts on serving community members (that may or may not be members of the Church) through a number of outreach programs like:

- Distributing lunch bags to homeless in the area
- Basketball Program
- Central City Housing Ventures
- Spring and Fall rummage sales
- Perspectives School
- Exercise Classes
- Partnerships with South Loop area schools
- Support of the Chicago CROP Walk
- Partnerships with over a dozen Chicago community organizations

Second Presbyterian Church also prides itself on being a multicultural Christian Community. Their website provides options to translate any of the pages in Spanish and Korean. *“In our worship and ministry together you’ll find friends who will share “warm hearts and open minds.”* (Gilchrist 2010)

### **Final Notes**

A number of things contribute to the working partnership between Second Presbyterian Church of Chicago and the Friends of Historic Second Church. The first is an active congregation. Although relatively small in number, the congregation at Second Presbyterian Church is committed to their sacred place and community. Leadership in the congre-

gation has historically benefited the sustainability of the church and allowed for working with a partner non-profit organization.

Being recognized on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as being a Chicago Landmark has brought visibility to Second Presbyterian Church by enabling its inclusion in Landmark profiles accessible on the Chicago Landmarks website<sup>3</sup>, and its being featured in various publications like; “The Architecture of Howard Van Doren Shaw” by Virginia A. Greene, “Church Decorations by Frederic C. Bartlett,” by Virginia Robie, “Chicago Stained Glass” by Erne R. and Florence Frueh and “Chicago’s Crown Jewel of the Arts and Crafts Movement: Second Presbyterian Church,” by Paul Waggoner. The congregation and Friends of Historic Second Church have also received technical assistance from the Chicago Architecture Foundation.

By having an up-to-date website<sup>4</sup> the church and non-profit organization are also increasing visibility and making themselves more publicly accessible. The Second Presbyterian home page opens with a message from the pastor that invites residents of all backgrounds to enter in a church with a long history of faith and service. The church also stakes its claim in Chicago history on its “Arts & History” page. This gives a quick history of the building, highlighting the art and history of the windows and murals as well as the significance of its architect. The page also introduces the Friends of Historic Second Church as a separate non-profit which “strives to raise funds for the preservation and restoration of the church’s art and architecture”. An online “Window Gallery” has an inventory of the church’s impressive stained glass windows by Louis C. Tiffany, William Fair Kline, Sir Edward Burne-Jones and McCully & Miles.



Finally, as noted in the case study to follow, shared space and open communication between the congregation and its surrounding community are essential in fulfilling the missions of the church as well as the non-profit. By opening spaces in the church for external programming and events, Second Presbyterian Church indirectly educates the neighborhood about the building's history and worth. In this way Second Presbyterian Church is also meeting the needs of the community for services and usable community space. This is key for a building located within a neighborhood that has evolved a great deal since the church's foundation. The building remains relevant to its location because there are still demands that can be met by both the congregation and the Friends of Historic Second Church which benefit everyone involved. Don West, President of Friends, highlighted this in an interview (West 2010):

*"Sometimes churches are not the best vehicle if what you are trying to save is the church as a treasure rather than for a community program. But to create an independent organization outside of the church allows us to reach out to stakeholders who might contribute to the church's future."*

As this South Chicago community area continues to be subject to redevelopment in the coming years, it will continue to be important to understand the balance between this historic sacred place and its surroundings. Even as the city changes over time, Second Presbyterian Church can adapt to remain part of the larger context, while still offering its newer neighbors a glimpse into the past.

## Endnotes

1. The Owner Consent Clause was an amendment by Alderman Burt Natarus in 1987 to “protect religious freedom” for all houses of worship. However, after the enactment of the clause, the owners of one historic church in Alderman Natarus’ ward reversed their Landmark status in order to undergo a multi-million dollar remodeling. In 2005 when Alderman Natarus later tried to correct this legislation and return the Landmark Ordinance to pre-1987 status, he faced fierce opposition from the Archdiocese of Chicago and other denominations.
2. The Friends of Historic Second Church 2008, IRS 990 is publicly accessible on Guidestar.com
3. <http://webapps.cityofchicago.org/LandmarksWeb/landmarkDetail.do?lanID=1422>
4. <http://www.2ndpresbyterianfriends.org/index.html> and <http://2ndpresbyterian.org>

**CHAPTER 4**  
**CALVARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH &**  
**CALVARY CENTER FOR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY, PHILADELPHIA, PA**



Figure 7 - Calvary United Methodist Church at 48th and Baltimore  
Source: forum.skyscraperpage.com

**Historic Facts & Significance**

- English Gothic Revival
- Architects; Brown, Gillespie and Carrell
- Completed in 1906
- Early example of the Akron Sunday School plan in Philadelphia
- Two signed Tiffany stained glass windows (largest in Philadelphia)
- Contributing historic resource in the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1998

Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1896, followed by the construction of a church building contracted by Philadelphia architects, Dull and Peterson, in 1904. For reasons now unknown, this original chapel and church house were demolished in 1905 and New York architects, Brown, Gillespie and Carrell were hired to replace

them. (Kirk 2010) The new church was built by Brown, Gillespie and Carrell from 1906 to 1907. Today it appears as it did then, with its tall Gothic tower, (Figure 8) random ashlar stone, limestone trim, decorative arched windows, belt courses and buttresses.

The English Gothic revival exterior was common for this period in American church construction and would usually have been accompanied by a long narrow sanctuary leading to the altar. However, Calvary's interior is uniquely lofty and trapezoidal, presenting an early example of the Akron



Figure 8 - Calvary tower  
Source: blackbottom.org

Sunday School plan. (Figure 9) This school plan was developed in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “as a type of building that was adapted to a variety of architectural and decorative styles. Early examples were usually constructed in the Victorian Gothic style for large urban congregations...” (Jenks 1995) Calvary is exactly that, and contains the main feature of the Akron Plan: a large open “rotunda” in the main sanctuary, surrounded by flexible classroom-size spaces on two levels. While these classrooms may have been used originally for religious educational purposes, today these rooms change func-

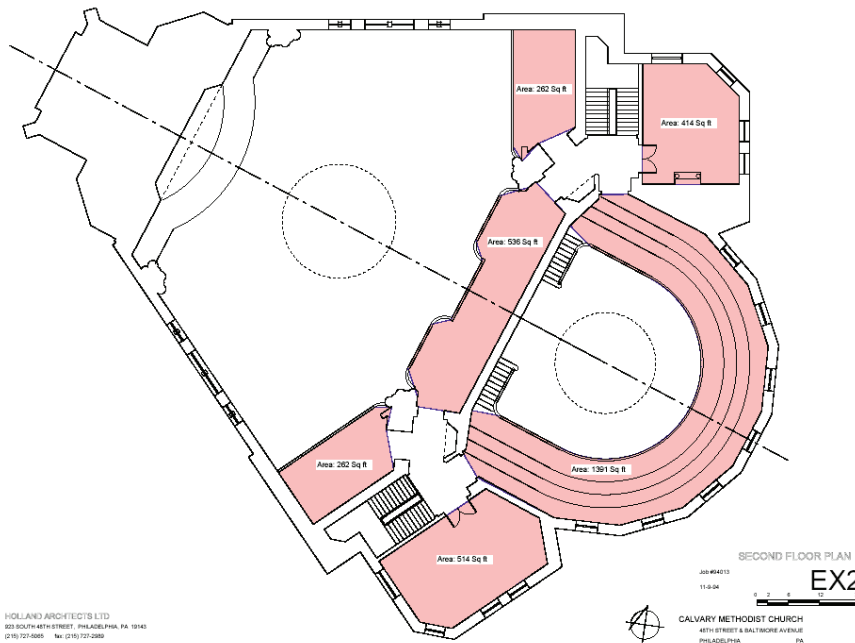


Figure 9 - Second Floor Akron Plan showing classrooms adjacent to main sanctuary  
 Source: [www.calvary-center.org/buildingmap.html](http://www.calvary-center.org/buildingmap.html)

tion based on their different users, from administrative to organizational and for community meetings. One of the rooms is still reserved for Sunday School, but even this space is shared by other members of

the community. “Although many Akron Plan Sunday Schools still exist, most have been modified to accommodate contemporary needs. Most frequently, rotundas have been adapted for use as social halls, day-care centers, theaters, or musical recital halls. The numerous classrooms surrounding the central space often house church offices or social service counseling rooms.” (ibid)

While this pattern in adaptation is also true for Calvary United Methodist Church, almost all of the overall layout and original plan of church is preserved. The main sanctuary still features its Brothers O’Dell organ, original decorative woodwork, scagliola columns, hand-painted murals, more than a dozen leaded and stained glass windows, two stained glass domes and the two largest Tiffany window ensembles in Philadelphia. (CCCC 2005) The church is most well known for these signed Louis Comfort Tiffany

stained glass windows, but the structure in its entirety has been a physical focal point in West Philadelphia for over a century.

### **Neighborhood Context**

Calvary United Methodist Church stands tall in its residential setting, but it does not stand alone. It is among fourteen churches that were built for the growing population of suburban West Philadelphia, making it an important part of

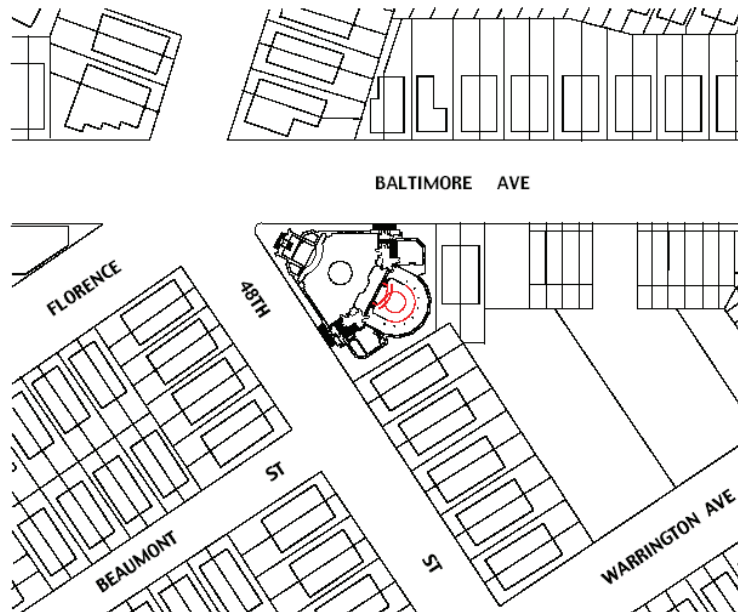


Figure 10 - Calvary surrounded by residential lots  
Source: [www.calvary-center.org/buildingmap.html](http://www.calvary-center.org/buildingmap.html)

a largely intact, present-day neighborhood.

In 1854, Philadelphia’s Act of Consolidation brought West Philadelphia into city limits. Bridges into Center City, along with horse car lines improved transportation throughout the late nineteenth century, until the incorporation of the electric streetcar in 1894. These trolley lines enticed families and city dwellers to build apartments, row houses and most commonly, Queen Anne style semi-detached houses, in communities west of what is now the University of Pennsylvania campus (which ended at 40<sup>th</sup> Street). Different contractors constructed homes in groups of six to twelve units, each with similar architectural details and with unique motifs. “Fine churches were built in the early 1900’s to serve the growing community. Calvary was the home church for the area’s Methodist bishop and the striking stone mansion at 48th and Springfield was purchased for use as

his residence.” (Wolfe and Wells 2010)

By 1910 nearly every parcel of available land reaching to 63<sup>rd</sup> Street had been developed and some mode of public transportation was “available within a two block walk of every house in the district.” (Brent Glass 1997, Section 8, page 13) Development continued up until the 1930’s, ending with the Great Depression. Eventually the transportation boom that had brought the streetcar suburb to its prime, evolved again; this time it was the automobile that attracted West Philadelphians further out. While the neighborhood began to decline, east of 40th Street experienced great changes from University expansion and federal funding for education development projects. Surrounding Calvary United Methodist Church, middle class families continued to move out, including many members of the congregation.

Over time many homes, churches and commercial buildings lost owners and property values. The area was just far enough from the University campus that it did not receive investment from redevelopment. As an indirect result of this, the neighborhood was, if in poor condition, nevertheless well-preserved. The 1997 National Register of Historic Places form for the *Suburban Streetcar Historic District* (Figure 11) states that “the district’s buildings have changed little in form, shape or setting with minimal alterations to the original fabric, and retain a high degree of architectural integrity” (Brent Glass 1997). Amidst an historic district containing hundreds of contributing properties, only 3% of the district’s buildings were listed as non-contributing resources. The majority of the buildings are said to “contribute to the period of significance” which ranges from 1850-1930. (ibid)



Figure 11 - Streetcar Suburb Historic District (with arrow at 48th and Baltimore)  
 Source: University City Historical Society

While residents of the neighborhood around Calvary continued to change, decades of deferred maintenance and structural problems at the church led to a decision to sell the building in 1990. The selling price was said to be less than that of the homes next door. Even then, no one was interested in buying the building, illustrating the lack of investment in this part of West Philadelphia, as well as an awareness of the challenges that would face any future owner of Calvary United Methodist Church. The building continued to deteriorate, causing the church to make another offer - this time in efforts to sell the two treasured Tiffany stained glass windows separately. This represented a turning point for the preservation of Calvary, in that it surfaced a group of concerned



community members who organized themselves as the Friends of Calvary.

### **Local Preservation**

To date, Calvary United Methodist Church has not been recognized as a local landmark by the city of Philadelphia or by any listing on the National Register. But during the process of preserving this sacred place for everyone to use, the neighborhood itself was designated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 as the *Streetcar Suburb Historic District of Philadelphia*. This designation also included it on the State of Pennsylvania Register of Historic Places.<sup>1</sup>

The National Register of Historic Places, while legally binding, does give historic neighborhoods public recognition, creating awareness of their value within the community. In the same year that the historic district received official designation from the National Park Service (who administers the National Register), Calvary received a Keystone Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, as well as a Technical Assistance Grant from the Historic Religious Properties Program.

Earlier in this thesis the Historic Religious Properties Program and Survey was described, including its documentation of urban sacred places in Philadelphia and Camden, whether or not they were considered historically significant by any local historical commission. This was the first survey of its kind in the United States. Many of the files that resulted contain only a 1-page document for properties recorded - including: architectural info, a reference and ID number, and a significance rating. But since 1986, Calvary's file has grown to two folders of records, letters, studies and photos documenting the

many grants, repairs, plans and studies undertaken by the congregation and the Friends of Calvary (now called the Calvary Center for Culture and Community).

“Today increased foot traffic has increased safety. There is a new diverse, young community bringing new life to Cedar Park”. (Kirk 2010) The support of historic properties in the West Philadelphia community area is demonstrated today through organizations like those started at Calvary United Methodist Church, along with others such as the University City Historical Society, Cedar Park Neighbors and the Baltimore Avenue Coalition. With a recent upswing in the area, commercial Baltimore Avenue is again thriving. The preservation of this community came not from individual historical designations but an awareness of the neighborhood’s larger significance as a whole.

#### **History of Calvary Center for Culture and Community**

Today the presence of Calvary in the community impacts the entire district. When the church building was up for sale in the 1990’s and no one was buying, Richard Kirk, current Executive Director of Calvary Center for Culture and Community (CCCC) and founding member of the Friends of Calvary, called the Bishop of the Methodist Church at the time and successfully pleaded with her to stop the process of sale in order for the community to have a chance to explore the options for a future at Calvary. “Then the question was how to do it!” (Kirk 2010) Friends of Calvary was never incorporated as a non-profit organization. But during their time advocating and planning options for Calvary, they held over a dozen focus groups with all interested constituents of the community. All of these focus groups came to the same conclusion- they wanted more community space, culture and arts programming, and for Calvary to remain a church.

The process took several years, but the decision was finally made in 2000 to form Calvary Center for Culture and Community (CCCC), a 501(c)3 organization, with the mission to renovate and redevelop the property for multiple uses. This was the best way to allow involvement by both the community and the congregation, a goal defined by the original “Friends of Calvary,” that is still being met by the current nonprofit organization. The nonprofit’s purpose, as stated under Article Two of its Bylaws, includes three main points:

- a) Preserving, restoring, renewing, and maintaining the historic Calvary Methodist Church building, including the gables, masonry, and artistically significant sanctuary, paintings, organ, and windows, especially the stained glass domes and largest Tiffany windows in Philadelphia
- b) Nurturing and supporting efforts to improve the quality of urban life
- c) Encouraging creative and performing arts that enrich the community

Today these goals are met by approaches such as: setting a long range restoration plan, fundraising, providing for an apprenticeship program to teach technical preservation skills, and providing performance space as a venue for, among others, emerging groups and artists.

In its incorporation as a 501(c)3 organization, CCCC took over full responsibility of all renovations to the building as well as managing community programming and outreach. It is helpful that Calvary continues to be located in a dense residential neighborhood, in a diverse community with many social needs. This particular mix of things creates a high demand for the space and services offered at Calvary. With the support of the congregation and the community, CCCC has raised more than a million dollars since 2000 in capital campaign funds, project grants and foundation grants for restoration efforts and structural repairs. As of 2009, completed projects relative to preservation include:

- Feasibility study, architectural assessment, masonry condition report, sanctuary restoration study
- Stained glass restoration
- Roof and gable replacement
- Upgrades to mechanical systems and installation of safety lighting and emergency electrical systems
- Replacement of the 48th Street sidewalk

In-progress and planned restoration projects include:

- Sanctuary restoration
- Replacement of Baltimore Avenue sidewalk
- Tower structural repair
- Classroom construction, ventilation, and electrical repair
- ADA compliance, elevator installation and electrical upgrade

These efforts in rehabilitating and restoring Calvary have made it possible for CCCC to fulfill two other parts of its purpose: enhancing the quality of urban life and serving the creative and performing arts. Since completing masonry repairs in 2006, CCCC has begun to install lighting for the incomparable Tiffany windows, as well as three street lamps which create a safer environment along the church's prime corner at 48<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore. A number of programs bring residents together, such as the Calvary Spring Arts Festival, poetry readings, artist showcases, puppet shows and most recently performances and a Shakespeare workshop for teens, taught by Calvary's newest partner, the Curio Theater Company. Curio joined the CCCC in 2008 and uses the grand main sanctuary for its theatrical performances. Before Curio came to Calvary this space had not been open to the public in 35 years. (CCCC, About Calvary 2010)

**Community Outreach: *If you build it they will come***

One of the greatest strengths at Calvary is the space that is made available to multiple congregations and community groups. Calvary United Methodist congregation is

one of five congregations that worship here, the others being Grace Chapel Pentecostal Church, Kol Tzedek West Philadelphia Synagogue (which was founded at Calvary), Thompson Temple of Faith, and West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship. This is an extraordinary example of shared space, and not something that many historic urban religious properties are taking advantage of to this degree. However, when congregations can share a building like Calvary, this centralizes outreach efforts, benefitting all groups involved. CCCC also serves as an incubator for new businesses and organizations, which have used Calvary's address and meeting spaces temporarily during their own organizational growth. (CCCC, About Calvary 2010)

Organizations that meet or hold events at Calvary are:

- University City Historical Society
- Cedar Park Neighbors
- Prometheus Radio Project
- Literacy Center of Philadelphia
- Mariposa Food Co-op
- Crossroads Music Series
- Curio Theatre Company

The Calvary Center for Culture and Community could not be successful without the flexibility of its congregations, whom are willing to share so much with each other and the community. Such extensive collaboration makes the site a positive influence and an essential part of Cedar Park and the University City District. Since renovations have begun at Calvary, roughly six new restaurants have opened in the area. This summer, a solar project, organized by community activists who meet regularly at Calvary, will study the impact of solar panels and energy efficiency in West Philadelphia homes. A pre-school organized by community members will also be in the summer season, providing

child care services to West Philadelphia families in the basement level of the church.

(Kirk 2010)

### **Current Challenges**

While Calvary is grand in size and full of architectural detail, its challenges are also not small in number. The most pressing current project is to add an elevator to make the building ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. The elevator will cost \$150,000 and the electricity upgrade needed beforehand will be another \$140,000. CCCC is pursuing funding tactics (like special events) for reaching this goal and has recently established the John Jerry Greene Memorial Fund, which is dedicated to ADA accessibility.

Other issues identified in the various structure and documentation reports that the CCCC has undertaken include re-plastering columns in the main space which are currently stabilized. The stained glass dome in this space is being stored off site due to structural damage. The main sanctuary space was recently re-opened for theater use (Curio Theatre Company) after over 30 years of being closed to the public. With more activity comes the greater need for more site management. Richard Kirk, is a project manager, member of the Calvary United Methodist congregation and the president of CCCC, so his job responsibilities are made up of a little of everything. He claims there is always open communication from the start between congregations and CCCC, which helps to move projects forward and allows for many things to be happening at once. For instance, a few members of the Methodist congregation governing board are also board members of CCCC . This overlap keeps constituents on both ends aware of pressing issues and offers complete transparency.

### **Shared Space, Flexibility and Progressive Partnerships**

This partnership works well to ensure the future of an historic sacred place, especially when both the nonprofit organization and a congregation have common goals. Calvary United Methodist Church believes in “Bringing Spirituality and Justice Together” and works towards goals that overlap well with CCCC, specifically: Empowering our neighborhood through programs of education, human services, cultural activities and economic development. (CCCC, About Calvary 2010) The most recent Methodist pastor even took a pay cut to come work at this location in Philadelphia, “He was inspired by everything going on.” (Kirk 2010) “(This) has become a model.” Mr. Kirk stated in an interview. He has been sharing the challenges and successes of Calvary, speaking to communities as far away as St. Paul and Quad Cities Minnesota.

### **Final Notes**

It is important to remember that it is not just the United Methodist Church that has become a key player in impacting the community. CCCC, along with the numerous congregations and neighborhood groups demonstrate a willingness to share space with a variety of people from the neighborhood, bringing a lot of attention to a space that needs it. These active congregations working together at this historic sacred place allow the Calvary Center for Culture and Community to serve as model of a robust non-profit, managing fundraising and repairs to create a new identity for Calvary. The decision of all congregations to share this space rather than worship separately in storefronts or outside of the neighborhood is a statement in itself that this place is worth using and worth

saving.

The church's location in a neighborhood setting helps define that identity and catalyze growth within a tight network of historic residential buildings and original urban infrastructure. Technology and online marketing also becomes a vehicle for congregations and CCCC to organize and reach out to the community. Calvary Center for Culture and Community even has a Facebook<sup>2</sup> page that links to their website and shares news and events with the general public. While the website<sup>3</sup> of CCCC is currently being revamped (and should be by summer 2010), both Calvary United Methodist Church and the Calvary Center for Culture and Community refer to each other's web pages in headings and sidebars, linking services, news and programs for greater visibility to website visitors.

Each case study in this thesis demonstrates representatives of a congregation and a nonprofit organization striking a balance in community outreach and historic preservation. In the summer of 2009, Calvary United Methodist Church made the front page of Sacred Places magazine, highlighting how this "twenty-year partnership helps revitalize a community and save a Neighborhood Beacon." This partnership is unique for the factors discussed in this chapter (multiple congregations, intact historic district, non-profit handling both building renovations and community outreach). Yet Calvary is neither individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places nor recognized locally. Calvary's position within a whole scheme of things has allowed this historic sacred place to take care of the community and has let the community return the favor.



## **Endnotes**

1 The policy and practice of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is and has been that properties listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places shall constitute the Pennsylvania Register of Historic Places. (Pennsylvania 2010)

2 <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=58190271632>

3 <http://www.calvary-center.org/>

**CHAPTER 5:**  
**FORT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH & OPEN DOOR, DETROIT, MI**

**Historic Facts & Significance**

- Completed in 1855
- Decorated Gothic Revival style
- Architects: Octavius & Albert Jordan
- Designated to National Register of Historic Places, 1971
- Registered site on the Michigan Historical Marker Program, 1971

Similar to the Chicago case discussed in Chapter 3, Fort Street Presbyterian Church was founded by the Second Presbyterian Church in the mid-19th century. Leading Detroit architects (and brothers) Octavius and Albert Jordan were chosen to build a church at this location, which was dedicated in 1855. Local quarried limestone from Malden, Canada was used to build in a Decorated Gothic style. “Its lacy look comes from elaborate stone tracery, towers, pinnacles, flying buttresses, carved stone faces and a generous



Figure 12 - Fort Street Presbyterian Church  
Source: bridgettesdetroitwedding.com

sprinkling of crockets - those small projecting ornaments that look like foliage.” (Church, The Building 2001)

The spire of the church rises 265 feet and sits on a tower comparable to that of St. James Church of English in Louth, England. (Figure 13) A north facing, central stained glass window illuminates the sanctuary while side windows fill the nave with even more light. These side windows are a special 13<sup>th</sup> century type of stained glass known as Grisaille, which consists mostly of white glass,



Figure 13 - St. James Church, Louth England  
Source: wunderground.com

bordered with colored glass. “The surface is ornamented with delicate patterns in painted line scroll work. The effect of this old glass is very beautiful, and in time, has become itself a treasure.” (ibid) Other structures built by the Jordan brothers around this time were the Gothic Revival chapel in Elmwood Cemetery (Detroit, 1850-57), the Victorian Gothic St. John’s Episcopal Church (Detroit, 1861) and the Renaissance Revival District Court House in Windsor, Ontario (1856).

Details and design influences of these buildings can be compared to Fort Street for a comprehensive look at the architectural techniques used by the Jordan brothers.

Like many older churches, Fort Street has had to rebuild after fire, once in 1876 and then again in 1914. The first fire destroyed the interior, causing the roof and spire to collapse. The structure was completely rebuilt and later experienced a second, less devastating fire when the building was undergoing extensive repairs and improvements. The second fire (1914) was fortunately confined to the attic and lower portions of the church. Plans to rebuild were again immediately implemented.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the church had already shifted from aristocratic to democratic, thanks to Reverend Edward Pence. By 1911, the church's monthly newsletter focused on social service as "a big phrase, and getting bigger. We want to make it vital and save it from being merely academic. It defines a big duty. The Church should be the social conscience in every community." (Church, Three Score and Six (Brief Historical Review) 1915) Fort Street even became a kind of a health club, with gymnasium equipment installed under a newer Church House. "More than 80 men and boys, and 60 women and girls, were enrolled in gym classes by 1911." (Moran 2001) This shift is important to note, especially considering that social service is still Fort Street's main priority almost a century later.

In the 1930's membership had peaked at over 1,600 members, although the number of memberships started to decline soon after. Prior to 1942, Fort Street leaders were planning to combine downtown congregations and build a new "Presbyterian Cathedral" and close down the expensive sanctuary but when many Americans went to war, plans were put on hold. The church responded to wartime by converting the gymnasium into dorms for soldiers in passage and serving over 50,000 service men by 1946. (Moran

2001) In 1947, Pastor Dr. Ratz coined the phrase that the church continues to use today, describing Fort Street as “a spiritual beacon in the heart of Detroit.” Detroit has seen its ups and downs since then, with an all-time peak in auto production in 1955, followed by a 1958 recession shortly after. Fort Street has remained at its original location amidst population decline, neighborhood blight and the construction of a Freeway just

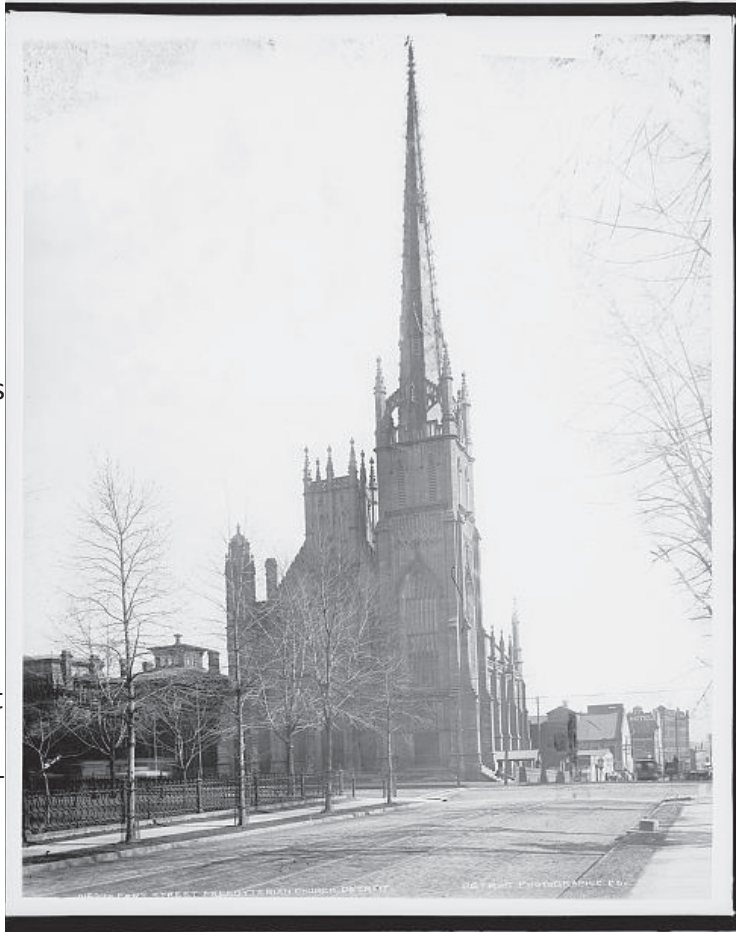


Figure 14 - Fort Street and surrounding neighborhood (between 1900-1906)  
Source: Detroit Publishing

blocks from the church. Today Fort Street Presbyterian Church edges Detroit’s business district but sees little visitation from nearby residents or employees.

### **Neighborhood Context**

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this church was the tallest structure around and located within an aristocratic mansion district with families and streetcars. Today, “everything around this church building has changed significantly; but if you go to the corner and look only at the church proper, you will see a small slice of Detroit

almost unchanged from halfway back in the city’s history.” (Huthwaite 2010) Fort Street Church was not surrounded by this strong neighborhood for long. Unlike the other cases discussed in this thesis, it was not the Great Depression or World War II that drastically changed the congregation or neighborhood around Fort Street Presbyterian Church. The 1915 publication, *Three Score and Six*, in which the Fort Street congregation celebrated 66 years at this location, noted that a large proportion of the membership was already traveling more than two or four miles to attend church at Fort Street Presbyterian, highlighting that many members would “pass from ten to twenty other churches on the way.” (Church 1915, p.3) Early on it was clear that Fort Street did not need to rely on existing within a tight-knit community based membership to sustain its church. They

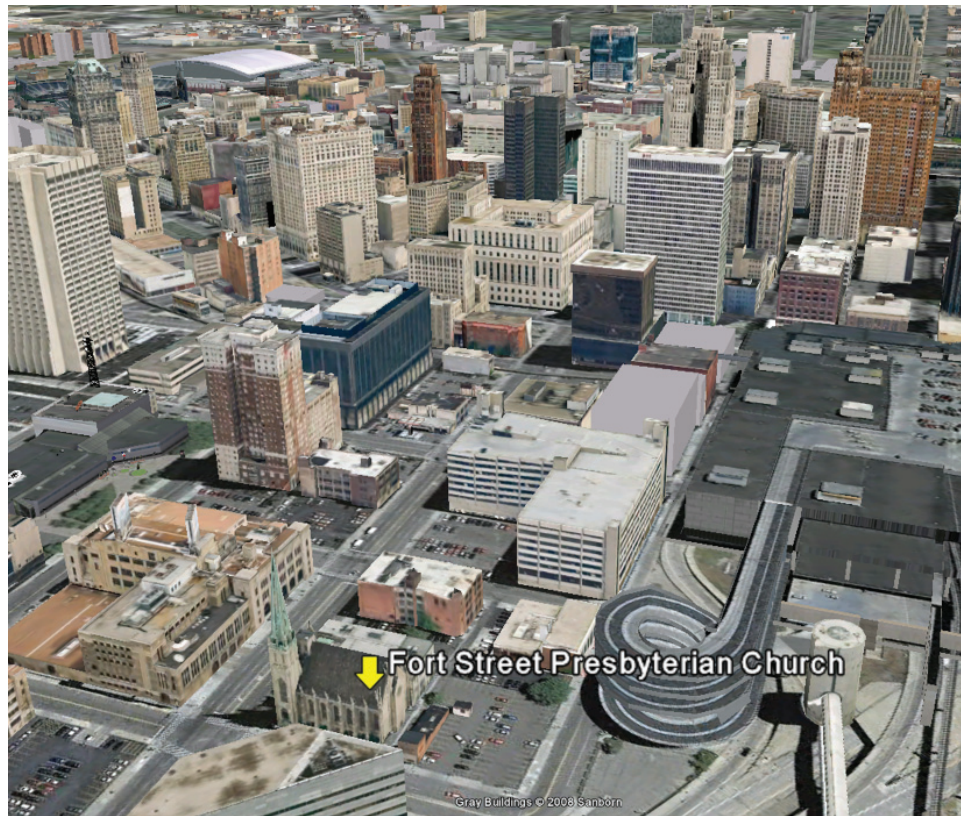


Figure 3- Fort Street Presbyterian Church and Downtown Detroit  
Source: Google Earth

had accepted that downtown Detroit was on the rise, and they were going to use that to further their mission in serving people in need. Later in the report the congregation described the area in saying; “the residential glory of the old days has departed from this neighborhood... Today our location is surrounded immediately by manufacturing and mercantile establishments, railroad stations, hotels, rooming houses and stores.” But the congregation at Fort Street Church saw this challenge as an opportunity. “We are to be congratulated on our location, not commiserated. The most effective church work in America today is being done in locations such as ours.” (ibid, p. 9)

This optimistic attitude has been essential in keeping people coming to Fort Street. Like many other churches, the congregation at Fort Street Presbyterian has diminished with changing economies, it also has continued to attract members from as far as Canada and points north, traveling over a half an hour each week to be a part of Fort Street. (Huthwaite 2010)

“If the sanctuary walls could talk, they would speak of challenge, and privilege, and sudden death, and the city’s changing shape and nature. More than that, though, they would speak of people - the people this church influenced in the city; the leaders it sent out to the nation and the state; and the effects that have streamed from the corner of Fort and Third to affect a great metropolitan area.” (Moran, Fort Street Presbyterian Church: It Happened Here 2001)

Outside of Fort Street, things may not be viewed so positively. The decline in the automotive industry in Detroit and throughout Michigan has affected not just congregation size but overall population loss in the city which has been difficult for everyone. But

the current trend in Detroit makes the demand for community service even higher. This is true especially for organizations that use space provided by Fort Street, such as Open Door, serving homeless all across Detroit's downtown.

### **Recognizing History at Fort Street**

The National Register of Historic Places has been a way to record and celebrate historic sites on a national level since 1966, with the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act. Just a few years later Fort Street Presbyterian Church was nominated and then added to this list on March 3, 1971. It is unclear what may have motivated the nomination of Fort Street Presbyterian Church to the National Register of Historic Places in the early 1970's. The historian at Fort Presbyterian, Tim Moran suggested that "it might have had something to do with planning for the 125th anniversary of the church (1974), which was quite an important celebration." (Moran 2010) At this time the congregation had also begun fundraising to pay for the installation of an elevator and renovation of the Donlin Room in the church basement, which were part of the church's efforts towards handicapped accessibility. (Moran, Independent Writer 2010)

Some states consider any site that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places to be also eligible for listing on a State Register. Michigan has a separate process in which sites on the National Register are not automatically state recognized historic sites (or vice versa). Like local registries, state registries vary nationwide. The State Historic Preservation Office of Michigan keeps a State Historic Register in the form of a survey of designated historic sites, which are then commemorated through the placement of a historical marker. This Historical Markers Program<sup>1</sup> started in 1955, and is still administered



by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Fort Street was recognized on this state register with a plaque erected in 1971 that reads:

*Second Presbyterian Church was organized in 1849 by the Reverend Robert K. Kellogg and twenty-six charter members. The present limestone building dedicated in 1855, was designed by Octavius and Albert Jordan in Gothic Revival style. Renamed Fort Street Presbyterian Church, it has survived two severe fires, in 1876 and 1914. Still substantially unchanged, it is one of Detroit's oldest churches. (Brennan 2009)*

#### **History of Open Door at Fort Street**

“The Open Door which operates today differs greatly from its early years.” (Crilley 2010) In May of 1967, Reverend Deirn Geard took notice to an increasing number of elderly members at Fort Street and started an outreach program which invited senior citizens to weekly dinners. Initially starting with only eight members, “The Over Fifty Club” eventually grew to a steady fifty members in a short span of two months. A turning point for this outreach program came when a younger homeless man came to ask for food and joined in the meal. “Subsequent weekly occasions grew in numbers until the program soon was attracting a hundred or more regulars.” (Crilley 2010)

With thirty years of slow and steady growth, the organization has become Open Door - a separate entity, functioning with a staff, budget and revenue stream all its own. The ability of the organization to function this way allows it to use spaces at

Fort Street Church (which include the basement gymnasium, restrooms, and back door entrance from the parking lot) and also apply for funding to support the service provided. Over time Open Door has grown from providing a few meals on Thursday nights to serving over almost 600 people every week with food, clothing, showers, medical services, and haircuts. Volunteers come from all over and assist in sorting and distributing clothing, and serving food. The non-profit has also grown into a more separate organization from the church, keeping some distance in order to receive grants, funding and individual gifts. With a Program Director position the organization is better able to organize fundraising events, publish newsletters, solicit funds from individuals and major donors, and work efficiently to provide more services to more people. Benjamin Ogden has served as Open Door's Program Facilitator, as well as the Social Worker/Case Manager since 2003. Since his involvement began, service has grown from a once-per-week program to one that now operates at satellite sites in two other cities. This organized approach along with support offered by congregation members and space available at Fort Street, Open Door is growing strong enough to expand their outreach further.

**Volunteer-led Preservation Efforts: *Raise the Roof***

Major improvements to the facility first occurred in 1982 with an elevator installation and renovation to rest rooms on the first floor. In the late nineties, the Sunday School area was also refurbished. (Crilley 2010) But when the sanctuary roof began to leak in 2005, one very active congregation member, Motoko Huthwaite<sup>2</sup>, tried to research how to fix this problem without dipping into an endowment or taking out a loan. With her

perseverance and support by the pastor, the Facilities Committee and Finance Committee, Ms. Huthwaite signed up Fort Street Presbyterian Church in a fundraising and training program offered by Partners for Sacred Places (PSP), called *New Dollars/New Partners*. This program requires the congregation participating to have a community outreach representation at their church, which in Fort Street's case is the impressive Open Door Program. The training for New Dollars/New Partners was led by the Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) and Partners for Sacred Places (PSP). Along with a team that included her Pastor, and representatives from both the Finance and Facilities Committees of Fort Street, Ms. Huthwaite participated in this program, which focuses on finding "resources inside and outside our congregations, to help restore our historic buildings to keep our ministries to the community alive." (Huthwaite 2010)

With a small seed money grant from the Lilly Foundation the group returned to their church with plans for a feasibility study and ideas for a capital campaign. Once a survey of Fort Street constituents was taken and a fundraising campaign consultant was chosen, the Let's Raise the Roof Committee was formed within the congregation. Quite often the launching of a capital campaign may not be feasible for a congregation, especially without the help of a separate organization or fundraising professional. But the commitment of the Facilities and Finance Committees has made progress for Fort Street.

Fort Street represents a different type of partnership than the first two case studies for its work with outside preservation non-profits like MHPN and PSP, and sharing space with a community-based organization like Open Door. While Open Door is a separate

non-profit that shares only space with the congregation, both this community service organization and the capital campaign efforts by church committees gives a certain balance to Fort Street Presbyterian Church, creating an identity at Fort Street that makes it stand out from others.

Although the congregation is nowhere near its 1000+ peak membership, Fort Street does attract around 350 members which increases the number of dedicated volunteers to serve on building committees. The Let's Raise the Roof Committee is a volunteer led effort, with two co-chairs. This committee has been working diligently since 2007 towards a goal of \$500,000 to pay for a new roof on the sanctuary and thermal insulation to decrease energy loss. As of December 2009, the committee had raised \$464,000 towards their campaign goal, which they aim to reach by April 2011. (Callas March 2010)

While the replacement slate roof and insulation take current priority, the next big repairs will address stone masonry. Besides *Let's Raise the Roof*, other fundraising tactics are in place, like music and chorale concerts, membership development and marketing committees, development of planned giving, the Major Maintenance Fund and the Organ Endowment. The Facilities Committee also holds a weekly Monday evening "fix-up, paint-up and clean-up" activity for regular building maintenance. "There are a lot of mission outreach programs that go on during the week, so the facility is a working building and not simply a beautiful place to worship on Sunday." (Neuman Spring 2010)

#### **Current Challenges:**

With its congregation not centered in one Detroit neighborhood, Fort Street faces challenges in attracting younger members to commit to community service or volunteer-

ing. Because the neighborhood that Fort Street is located in is downtown Detroit, it is hard to reach residents that do not live near the church. In order to fundraise or invite people out to an event the church must have neighborhood gatherings just to get the word out to the surrounding community. There is also a missing partnership with nearby Wayne Community College, which could benefit from community service opportunities or art and architectural history studies. These are assets of Fort Street that have not yet been tapped into. (Huthwaite 2010)

Additionally, because the Facilities Committee is charged with maintaining the structure they are limited to the capacity of the congregation. The Facilities Committee has had no luck in getting grants for actual bricks and mortar, “even though it is recognized and listed as an historic building.” (Neuman, Facilities Chair 2010) Unlike the other case studies presented, Fort Street faces more challenges in fundraising for this reason. Top priority projects tend to be things we need to do to preserve the structure and keep it functional. Other major items include:

- Steeple renovation
- Tuck-pointing
- preserving and painting the exterior wood trim,
- renovation of the stained glass windows

Long term goals are: plaster work, painting the sanctuary, organ renovation, and sanctuary ceiling cleaning. An Historic Structures Report would be welcomed if funding were available. (Neuman, Facilities Chair 2010)

### **Final Notes:**

While the other two partnerships discussed between nonprofit organization and congregation are slightly intertwined, the partnership between Open Door and Fort Street

Presbyterian is based primarily on shared space. Its existence at this location makes the structure itself more useful to its surrounding context, which also contributes to the church's significance. And what makes Fort Street unique is their additional work with outside non-profits like PSP and MHPN.

Besides the elevator installation and repairs to the basement level, Fort Street Committees did recently received a grant to document and record the history of Fort Street Presbyterian Church – which has been compiled in the form of four lectures by Historian for Fort Street Presbyterian Church, Tim Moran. These lectures are available online on Fort Street's website: [www.fortstreet.org](http://www.fortstreet.org). With links to research like Tim Moran's lecture series, the website for Fort Street offers a way for site visitors to learn the church's history along with everything else going on at Fort Street and Open Door. There are pages of information on staff committees, church mission, music and Chorale events and opportunities to donate time or money. Making these things available online helps an urban congregation like Fort Street that needs to reach out further than its surrounding community.

Strategic planning has made a big difference in the recent expansion of volunteer led fundraising efforts at Fort Street. Professional training, by way of the New Dollars/New Partners mentioned previously, led by PSP and MHPN, has created a plan-driven capital campaign to assist the congregation in preserving a place that matters to them, and one they have been worshipping in for 145 years.

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network, a statewide nonprofit, is fully supportive of their efforts and claims they have set a great example for urban religious

properties. “They are an amazing group of people and the church building is incredible. They get more done with a small core of volunteers than many churches get done with whole armies.” (Thackery 2010) This active and dedicated congregation provides an impressive amount of volunteers to fill in the gaps when money is an issue (and money is always an issue).

Although Fort Street Presbyterian Church remains without any historic designation by the City of Detroit, the 1971 National Register and Michigan State historic designations have demonstrated an awareness of the church’s historical significance in downtown Detroit for almost 40 years. The congregation’s loyalty to this location, even when the membership of Fort Street Presbyterian Church “comes from close to 100 zip codes” (Huthwaite 2010), is testament to an ongoing desire to continue worshipping at this historic sacred place. In this case, the congregation’s dedication to the site, and reaching out to available resources, has been a successful method of preservation.

### **Endnotes**

1 <http://www.michmarkers.com/default.asp>

2 Motoko Huthawhite moved to Michigan in 1969 and joined the congregation at Fort Street Presbyterian. Today Motoko is a very active member of the church, editor of their newsletter, The Steeple, a deacon, church elder, and Sunday School teacher.

## **CHAPTER 6:** **CONCLUSION**

Simplified, places of worship are one of many building types, built by and for a specific group of people. In response to the spiritual and cultural values of that specific group, sacred places were often built of grand architectural style with detail in craftsmanship, and by well-known architects. As an expression of congregational and denominational beliefs and aspirations, such structures physically communicated the presence of the congregation in the greater society. With time, the public value of many of these places has changed, in some cases even becoming irrelevant, but in other cases becoming relevant in new ways, especially when the surrounding community uses a sacred place for more than worship.

The cases presented are representative of those challenges facing sacred places in American cities, specifically those resulting from a change in demographics and neighborhood context. All three sites are in urban settings that have experienced decline, specifically within the years of 1920-1990. The three non-profit organizations were all established during or following that period of decline.

The proposal at the beginning of this thesis was that a healthy partnership can be achieved by a non-profit organization collaborating with an urban congregation to effectively impact their communities and preserve their historic sacred places. These three case studies demonstrate successful examples of this partnership, each using a different approach.



For instance, in one case a non-profit focuses its efforts on the art and architectural preservation of an historic sacred place, thereby enabling the congregation to work harder to provide services and programs to the community. In another case, the roles are reversed, where a nonprofit community service organization working out of the historic church, is enabling the congregation to focus on physical restoration and preservation. There is also an example, in which a non-profit works to fulfill all responsibilities regarding building renovation as well as community outreach. This range demonstrates just how versatile and flexible these partnerships can be. The fact that each congregation has decided to work with a non-profit organization in a different way confirms that there is no single formula for the best way to use or conserve an historic sacred place, only a broad array of techniques.

While the approaches may be different, there are similarities in the internal and external factors influencing what efforts are taken. Each partnership was created as a response to overwhelming challenges that congregations or church committees were facing at a time when building conditions were unstable. And, as a result, these partnerships have allowed for additional uses of the church building, beyond solely traditional ones.

This type of compromise involves a careful balance and takes time to prosper. For example, at Calvary United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, it took over twenty years for community programming and building preservation to become an accomplished mission of the Calvary Center for Culture and Community. This is perhaps the best national example of how the partnership between a non-profit organization, and in this case

also various congregations, can ensure the future of a locally significant sacred place. The collaboration between all parties involved has allowed for the restoration of the roof, windows and interior spaces. This pattern (showing gradual progress over time) is seen in the other two cases as well. In Chicago, Friends of Historic Second Church has only been a 501(c)3 non-profit organization since 2006, but the church committee (The Angels Foundation) was well aware of the need for help in organizing restoration efforts much earlier on, since they began meeting in the 1980's. And in Detroit the non-profit organization, Open Door, has informally worked out of Fort Street Presbyterian Church since 1968, the organization did not develop as a separate organization until late 1990's.

In addition to achieving building repairs and community outreach these partnerships have also created new identities for Second Presbyterian, Calvary United Methodist and Fort Street Presbyterian. Besides their "historic" identity, individually or located in an historic district, each case has benefited from new activity and new users in their historic spaces. The partnerships between congregation and organization has obtained press, visibility, community pride, support and funding for places that people use, need and care about.

Recently, partnerships between the congregations and non-profit organizations in these case study churches have expanded to include more collaborators. Calvary obviously has been at the forefront of this as it works with five congregations and over a half dozen community organizations. Friends of Historic Second Church is currently planning on how they might partner with nearby Columbia College to engage in a neighborhood based school program, using Second Presbyterian Church as a vehicle to learn about

theater, art, or stained glass windows. And Fort Street Presbyterian Church has completed New Dollars/New Partners, a four day training session that provides “practical help to congregations with older and historic buildings on how to broaden and diversify the circles of donors and partners who can support the care and good use of their property” (PSP 2009).

Such emerging trends underscore the point that incorporating a new non-profit organization is not the only method for linking historic preservation and community outreach. There may be existing non-profits that can provide technical assistance or funding opportunities. Many congregations located in cities that have programs in place like the Sacred Sites Program in New York or the Steeples Project in Boston are less apt to form new non-profit organizations when they already have access to training, grants and technical assistance through these existing organizations. Other options of preserving an historic sacred place may include hiring a consultant or adding a development position to handle internal fundraising, grant-writing or gaining support by preservation-based organizations. There may also be local institutions, museums, or community development corporations that are willing to work together with an accessible place of worship. In fact, researching case studies for this thesis brought up a number of CDCs that were linked to sacred places. One example was Genesis Housing Development Corporation in Chicago, a faith-based, 501(c)3 organization formed by three historic African-American churches: Holy Angels Catholic, St. Elizabeth Catholic, and Blackwell Memorial AME Zion. Their mission is “to maintain strong communities by building net worth for local families through affordable housing, financial and credit education, business development and

job placement assistance". (GHDC 2009)

Non-profits are an important part of American society, so it is important to understand the role a non-profit may have with any historic site. Even more interesting is the role a non-profit organization has with a religious property if one considers how religion has historically been based on a charitable mission. Further research related to this topic may include how church-based activism (and extroverted forms of religious presence) has benefited sacred places in terms of congregation members, as well as people that do not belong to the church. Even further, the social, economic and philosophic ideals that have contributed to the evolution of religion, have in turn affected the life and death of American places of worship. Books like "The Churching of America" (Finke and Stark 2005) represent the external factors that have had an impact on historic sacred places nationwide.

### **Recommendations**

Several basic recommendations emerge from the research and case studies this thesis presents. First, partnerships between congregations and nonprofits, should only be considered when compromises can be made and when time will give progress a chance. These are collaborations that cannot be rushed but rather must be evaluated and planned strategically. A mutually supportive mission must be defined for both the congregation and nonprofit, in which cooperation is a common goal and open communication by both parties can clearly identify responsibilities for who does what and how they do it.

Secondly, statewide preservation offices, and national nonprofit organizations like

the National Trust for Historic Preservation, or Partners for Sacred should continue to focus funding, services and training for congregations that are incorporating community service in their programming. Models to follow are the Steeples Project administered by Historic Boston Incorporated and Partners for Sacred Places' New Dollars/New Partners Program, both of which emphasize training congregations to be more self-sustaining. This means teaching members of the congregation, church administration and church leaders to deal with contractors or write a strong case statement for funding support, or how to launch a capital campaign. By giving congregations skills rather than just funding, these preservation groups are supporting historic sacred places for the long term instead of supplying a quick fix.

Finally, advocates of historic sacred places should be open to communicating the significance and value of these places in their communities to local politicians. If churches continue to close, it will become strikingly evident that many religious properties are lessening the financial burden on cities by supplying human services and outreach to the city's children, young adults, parents and elderly, as well as the poor and hungry. Beyond the services and sacredness that these places of worship provide, these are the steeples that have spotted the landscapes of American cities since their foundation.

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## **APPENDICES A, B, & C**

### **APPENDIX A**

Measuring responses to threats for historic sacred places: A list of advocacy groups, publications and non-profit organizations serving sacred places (as found during thesis research phase).

- Center for Congregations, Indianapolis, IN  
<http://centerforcongregations.org/index.aspx>
- Center for the Documentation and Preservation of Places of Worship, MN  
<http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00590.xml>
- Church in the City Partnership Program, Cleveland Restoration Society and the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland  
<http://www.clevelandrestoration.org/churchinthecity.php>
- Church Urban Fund- London, UK  
<http://www.cuf.org.uk/>
- Faith And Form Magazine  
<http://www.faithandform.com/>
- Friends of Sacred Structures,  
Historic Kansas City Foundation, c/o Westport Presbyterian Church, KS
- Historic Boston Incorporated Steeples Project, MA  
<http://www.historicboston.org/info/steeple/index.html>
- Historic Seattle Sacred Sites Program, OH  
<http://www.historicseattle.org/advocacy/sacredsites.aspx>
- Interfaith Coalition on Energy, PA  
<http://www.interfaithenergy.com/>
- National Churches Trust (United Kingdom)  
<http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/research.html>
- National Trust for Historic Preservation  
[www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)
- New Haven Historic Preservation Trust, CT  
<http://nhpt.org/>
- New Mexico Cornerstones Community Partnership, NM  
[http://www.cstones.org/About\\_Cornerstones/Board\\_of\\_Directors\\_and\\_Staff/index.html](http://www.cstones.org/About_Cornerstones/Board_of_Directors_and_Staff/index.html)
- New York Landmarks Conservancy: Sacred Sites Program, NY  
[http://www.nylandmarks.org/programs\\_services/grants/sacred\\_sites\\_program/](http://www.nylandmarks.org/programs_services/grants/sacred_sites_program/)
- Partners for Sacred Places, Philadelphia (Regional Offices: Chicago & Texas)  
<http://www.sacredplaces.org/>
- Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation: Historic Religious Properties Initiative, PA  
<http://www.phlf.org/programs-and-services/historic-religious-properties-program/>

- Prairie churches of North Dakota, ND  
[http://www.prairieplaces.org/prairie\\_churches.cfm](http://www.prairieplaces.org/prairie_churches.cfm)
- Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia: African American Church Inventory, PA  
<http://www.preservationalliance.com/publications/CoopermanInventory%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- Sacred Landmarks Assistance Program, Cleveland Restoration Society, OH  
[http://www.gruberdesignllc.com/crs/sacred\\_landmarks/index.php](http://www.gruberdesignllc.com/crs/sacred_landmarks/index.php)
- Save America's Treasures  
<http://www.saveamericastreasures.org/funding.htm>
- Western Religious Heritage Initiative (through PSP Texas Office)  
<http://www.sacredplaces.org/WRH.htm>

## **APPENDIX B**

These brief profiles present alternate partnerships and scenarios found during the thesis research phase that may be considered for further research relative to how congregations are dealing with challenges to historic sacred places in American inner-cities.

### **1. Thriving: Quinn Chapel AME Church, Chicago, IL**

Quinn Chapel houses Chicago's first African American congregation with roots dating back to 1844. The current structure was built in 1892, in the Romanesque Revival style, by architect Henry F. Starbuck. The church was designated a Chicago Landmark on August 3, 1977, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 4, 1979. (Chicago Landmarks 2003)

Even amidst challenges in the community, its historical significance and strong membership has been substantial, allowing for the congregation to run its current capital campaign, which is aimed at raising funds for restoration. This is a good example of a congregation working successfully without the help of a separate non-profit organization.

For more information: <http://www.quinnchicago.org/>

#### Sources:

"Chicago Landmarks - Quinn Chapel" Chicago Landmarks Historic Survey. City of Chicago 2003. <http://egov.cityofchicago.org/Landmarks/Q/QuinnChapel.html> (accessed 2009).

### **2. Threatened: St. Procop's Catholic Church, Cleveland, OH**

Built in 1899-1900, St. Procop's was designed by local Cleveland architect Emil Uhlrich in a highly-decorated Byzantine/ Romanesque style. "Once a bustling parish filled

with Czechs who lived in the neighborhood, (last year's membership) was down to about 370 parishioners." (Sterpka 2009) The Cleveland Catholic Diocese announced in March of 2009 that 52 Catholic parishes would be closing or merging by June 2010. This list included St. Procop located on the city's West Side. Although the Diocese was met by protests from church members to U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich who stated that, "the deeds of title to the churches belong to the Diocese of Cleveland, but the rich cultural, ethnic and religious history belongs to the people of Cleveland," (Turner 2009) the doors of St. Procop were closed in August 2009.

To date, the church has not yet been demolished, but the neighborhood around St. Procop's is still in a period of decline. The parish is part of the 40 percent of parishes operating at a deficit for the Cleveland Catholic Diocese. (Staff 2009)

Sources:

Staff Writer, Fox 8 News." Cleveland Catholic Diocese reveals churches to close, Cleveland City Council wants to fight to keep them open." March 15 2009. WJW-TV. 2010. <http://www.fox8.com/news/wjw-cleveland-catholic-diocese-closings-prinz0314,0,1776747.story> (accessed 2010).

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### **3. Demolished: Bay Ridge Methodist Church, Brooklyn, NY.**

Also known as Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, or "The Green Church", Bay Ridge United Methodist Church was built in 1899 in the Romanesque style, by George W.

Kramer. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. It was demolished just ten years later, making room for new development on the site, which includes seventy-two condos and a new church.

Although a 60-member community group, “Save the Green Church,” surfaced after redevelopment plans were publicly released in 2007, this did not stop the United Methodist Church from continuing with the multi-million dollar sale of the property. This case highlights the common real estate pressures that inner-city markets put on congregations that have survived among high rises and commercial development. In a place like New York, there must be much more than a “Friends” group interested in the preservation of a site. To save a church in this kind of neighborhood the collaboration between the religious property owners and the community must be outstanding- with leaders of the congregation at the forefront.

For more information - <http://www.forgotten-ny.com/bayridgechurch.html>

Sources:

Ryley, Sarah. “United Methodist Church Fight Continues.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. May 18 2007. [http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category\\_id=27&id=12975](http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category_id=27&id=12975) (accessed 2009).

## **APPENDIX C**

Literature Review Timeline - A chronology of sources and noteworthy events based on research for this topic.

**1976** – Chicago Churches and Temples Survey: surveyed 28 target areas designated by “Model Cities/CCUO Program” in efforts to understand how congregations were affecting communities in need of social services.

**1978** – National Trust publishes its first book on preserving historic religious properties (re-released in 1996)

**1986** - Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation forms the Historic Religious Properties program, producing a survey and database of over 700 churches and synagogues in Philadelphia and low-income communities of Camden, New Jersey and Chester, Pennsylvania

**1987** – Chicago Owner Consent clause in the city’s Landmark Ordinance allows religious property owners to decline Landmark designation

**1989** – Partners for Sacred Places, the nation’s only non-sectarian non-profit organization dedicated to stewardship and active community use of America’s historic religious properties, is founded in Philadelphia

**1990** - New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Vs. St. Bartholomew’s Church set legal precedent against First Amendment challenges, when U.S. Court of Appeals denied St. Bartholomew’s claim to economic hardship and argument that Landmark designation on a religious property was against its right to free exercise of religious beliefs.

Three Philadelphia congregations – First Baptist Church, First Unitarian Church and St. Mark’s Episcopal Church – form the Rittenhouse Coalition for the Restoration of Sacred Places

National Trust publishes “Conservation of Urban Religious Properties” in Information Series- Discusses challenges and complexities of defining “sacredness” and managing religious properties.

“Inspired Partnerships” starts in Chicago funded by the Lilly Fund- This initiative developed pools of architectural and engineering consultants to provide free or reduced services for congregations

**1996** – Charitable Choice Clause of Welfare Reform Act passed by Clinton Administration - allowed for direct United States government funding of religious organizations to provide social services

**1998** – Sacred Places at Risk, study released on churches and their social impact- involving more than 100 congregations nationwide.

**2000** – Faith Based and Community Initiative – Under the Bush Administration(using

provisions of Charitable Choice), this initiative sought to strengthen faith-based and community organizations and expand their capacity to provide federally-funded social services.

**2003** – “Urban Houses of Worship” listed on the National Trust’s “11 Most Endangered Historic Sites” list (nationwide)

Streets of Glory is published, exploring the trend of “storefront churches” and religious districts in a struggling Dorchester, Massachusetts neighborhood.

**2006** – Texas regional office of PSP opens in Fort Worth area

**2008**- White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (Obama Administration’s version of the Faith Based Community Initiative )

**2009** – Chicago regional office of PSP opens in January to answer large need in Midwest and Chicago metropolitan area.

Thesis by Caitlin Kramer “Moving Towards Neutrality: The Establishment Clause and America’s Historic Religious Places.” – Discusses legal challenges against landmark designations and federal funding for religious properties, includes three case studies of Save America’s Treasures recipients.

**2010** – “Vacant Church Properties” listed on Philadelphia’s Seventh Annual Endangered Properties List created by the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.



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