Sacred Places At Risk

New Evidence On How Endangered Older Churches And Synagogues Serve Communities

Partners for Sacred Places

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by Diane Cohen and A. Robert Jaeger

Foreword by Dr. William J. Bennett and
U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman

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About Partners for Sacred Places

Partners for Sacred Places is a national, non-profit, non-sectarian organization founded in 1989 to help Americans embrace, care for and make good use of older and historic religious properties. Partners has three primary goals: 1) to help congregations and their communities be good stewards of their sacred places; 2) to develop an effective national network of advocates for sacred places; and 3) to enhance public understanding of the value of sacred places as irreplaceable centers that create and sustain community life.

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Foreword

by Dr. William J. Bennett and U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman

Most of us already know that sacred places — in this case, historic inner-city congregations — are important community "institutions" playing indispensable roles in areas often ravaged by drugs, poverty, and family breakdown. We know this from everyday experience. *Sacred Places at Risk*, however, provides empirical evidence. It shows what congregations do and helps explain how they do it. It confirms statistically what many of us know anecdotally: that older urban churches and synagogues save lives. They rebuild men, women, children, indeed entire neighborhoods.

Nine out of ten congregations with pre-1940 buildings provide space for community activities like soup kitchens, "latchkey" programs, music and drama activities, and food pantries. Most congregations support several such programs. On average, they provide more than 5,300 hours of volunteer support a year. These are just two findings from Sacred Places at Risk, which is based on interviews at 107 older churches and four older synagogues in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Indianapolis, Mobile, Oakland, and San Francisco. Again, common sense fortified with empirical evidence. Congregations make a difference, especially in places where differences must be made.

But there are problems. Many sacred places are in fragile physical and financial condition. Last-minute repairs alone cost the average congregation $50,000 a year. One fifth of the 111 buildings had structural damage. The congregations expect to spend, on average, $225,000 to repair their buildings. *Sacred Places at Risk* forces us to confront the possibility of a world without these institutions.

One of the most important public-policy debates of our time is whether, and in what manner, we support our religious institutions. How that issue is resolved will go a long way toward determining what kind of society we become. It is our hope that *Sacred Places at Risk* will call attention to these matters, helping to mobilize the will and resources necessary to make these places whole again. We now have compelling evidence that sacred places are shared places that serve people of all faiths and of all stations. As a sensible society, we should not be prejudiced against what works, even if what works happens to take place in a sacred place. These places should stay, for their good work endures. Their results are too important, and now all too obvious, to ignore.

Acknowledgements

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The public release of the research findings at the National Press Club would not have been possible without the strategic support and assistance of John J. DiIulio, Jr., Executive Director of the Partnership for Research on Religion and At-Risk Youth, and Douglas Dillon Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution, and Mark Alan Hughes, Vice President of Public/Private Ventures. For the "town meeting" at The Brookings Institution we want to thank E.J. Dionne, Senior Fellow in Governmental Studies and a columnist at The Washington Post. We express our gratitude to Luis Lugo, Director of the Religion Program at the Pew Charitable Trusts, and The Brookings Institution for funding and sponsoring the public launch of the findings at the heart of this book.

We are much indebted to Ann de Forest, who capably and creatively shaped this book, and Steege/Thomson Communications, who helped garner media attention nationwide. Partners' staff worked seamlessly to prepare for the Washington events; special thanks are due to Tuomi Forrest for the case examples included here.

Many people contributed to conceptualizing and guiding the research that led to this book. Advisory Committee members included Nancy Ammerman, Peter Dobkin Hall, Ellen Netting, Ginny Thornburgh and Elliott Wright. Partners' Board of Directors devoted many hours to public policy discussion, our thanks especially to Thomas F. Pike, James P. Wind and Anthony C. Wood for their leadership.

All members of our research team — Ram A. Cnaan, Gaynor Yancey, Robert Wineburg, Ken Jacobs and Mark Brack — worked above and beyond our expectations. It is their commitment of knowledge, talent and time that made this undertaking a success.

We want to thank our local partners who helped us assemble master lists of congregations with older and historic properties in each city where our study was conducted: the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage; the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana; Inspired Partnerships (Chicago); the Mobile Historic Development Commission; the New York Landmarks Conservancy; and the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

And lastly, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the 111 congregations across six cities who participated in this project. Their clergy, lay leaders and program staff gave very generously of their time and energy, as they shared their stories of sacrifice and service on behalf of communities in need.

Executive Summary

For years, Partners for Sacred Places has had to depend upon anecdotal information to make its case for the importance of sustaining and preserving America's older and historic religious properties. Thanks to the national study of over 100 congregations with pre-1940 properties in six cities commissioned by Partners and profiled in this book, we are now equipped with dramatic findings that will help us make this case much more powerfully.

Our findings demonstrate two key realities in American life: first, older sacred places are vibrant and productive centers of community service that benefit the public at large. Second, they are at risk because of their age and often fragile physical condition. At a time when government is downsizing and asking the private sector to do more to meet human needs, these facts will help leaders in the public and private sectors understand how congregations serve their communities. They also underscore the vulnerability of key resources such as the older buildings that house these services.

Partners is committed to sharing this understanding of "older sacred places at risk" and encouraging a new conversation among funders, government agencies, civic leaders and other decision-makers that will prompt new resources and partnerships. These partnerships are key to sustaining the older sacred places that benefit us all.

Letting sacred places crumble or close — failing to give them the corporate, philanthropic and other support they need to keep the walls from falling and the pipes from bursting is tantamount to losing millions and millions of dollars a year in vitally needed anti-poverty and community-building efforts.

John J. DiIulio, Jr.

Here are some of Partners' key findings:

- ❖ 93% of all surveyed congregations with older buildings open their doors to the larger community.
- ❖ On average, congregations house four ongoing community service programs.
- ❖ For every congregation member served, more than four individuals from outside the congregation benefit from the community service programs supported by churches and synagogues.
- ❖ Congregations with older buildings host 76% of their community service in their own facilities.
- ❖ Children and youth benefit from congregation-supported service programs more than any other group.
- ❖ More than 75% of congregations use their older buildings to meet basic human needs through food and clothing programs.
- ❖ The average congregation provides over 5,300 hours of volunteer support to its community programs, the equivalent of two and a half full-time volunteers stationed year-round at the church or synagogue.
- ❖ On average, the subsidy provided by congregations to their community programs is about $140,000 a year, or 16 times what they receive in return from the users of their space.
- ❖ The vast majority of community programs supported by churches and synagogues are initiated by congregations.
- ❖ Twenty-one percent of all the congregations studied are facing the expense of major structural work on their buildings.
- ❖ The average congregation will have to spend more than $225,000 over the next several years to repair its building, straining the budgets of all but the most affluent churches and synagogues.

These remarkable findings make it clear that congregations give generously to their communities, but at the expense of keeping up with the care of their buildings. Both sacred places and the programs they house are at risk. These findings are a call to action. Partners is committed to finding new ways of sustaining sacred places in the years to come.

1.

The Public Value Of Sacred Places

Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Mobile, Alabama is a handsome, 1874-vintage, red brick building located not far from the city's civic center. No blazing sign on its lawn indicates that anything very remarkable happens there. But visit the church any day of the week, and you will find a hubbub of activity behind the quiet exterior: parents dropping their children off for day care; community leaders planning a crime-watch program; neighbors taking advantage of free health screenings performed by volunteer nurses and doctors; and seniors socializing over a meal or a hand of bridge.

In name, Prince of Peace is a church; in function, it is a true community center. Its extensive programs are not limited to parishioners or even Catholics: Prince of Peace brings together black and white, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. At a time when mutual distrust all too often divides races, cultures and traditions, Prince of Peace's inclusiveness is something to celebrate.

Prince of Peace's involvement in community service may not seem all that unusual. Traditionally, churches and synagogues have always opened their doors to those in need. Until now, however, the substantiation of that public role has been more anecdotal than scientific. **Now, a major, new study commissioned by Partners for Sacred Places has documented, for the first time, how extensively and pervasively America's older congregational buildings serve the public at large.** For most of the week, in virtually every space available, America's older religious buildings are *shared* places, which bring the greater community together — linking the desire to serve with the need to be served.

Many programs in our community would not happen if we, and other churches, did not share our space. We don't have much money, but we can share our building.

The National Pattern of Community Service

Americans have long treasured the freedom of all citizens to worship freely, and to gather in a place set apart for this holy purpose. Churches and synagogues provide that place; the day of worship brings congregations together to celebrate through music, prayer, preaching and teaching.

But the history of religious properties in America is also inextricably tied with a broader vision of community. The earliest churches doubled as town halls and village centers. As those villages grew to metropolises, the religious community found new ways to design and use their buildings to serve the changing needs of growing populations.

At the turn of this century, many urban congregations adopted a "social gospel" that welcomed poor and immigrant people that had nowhere else to turn. To support that agenda, they hired the era's best architects to design ambitious, imposing facilities, some with gymnasia, theaters, bowling alleys, and meeting rooms adjacent to the main sanctuary. Now, contending with

flight, blight, and other adversities, these same inner-city congregations have adapted their properties again and again to address their communities' changing needs.

Because most congregational facilities contain a complex and flexible cluster of spaces, there are many opportunities for a church or synagogue to share its older property during the week. And most congregations have taken steps to take advantage of those opportunities, resulting in a remarkable pattern of service, as follows:

Congregation-hosted community service is universal.

Sharing their own resources and facilities is the primary way that congregations translate belief into action. Indeed, **93 out of 100 congregations actively serve the larger community and make their buildings available to outreach programs,** a pattern so pervasive that it crosses denominational, racial and regional lines.

Congregation-hosted community service is substantial.

The average congregation supports no fewer than four ongoing programs that serve people in need. Hyde Park Union Church in Chicago, just one example, houses a Parent Support Network, several self-help groups, a chapter of Habitat for Humanity, a youth orchestra, the Black Oral History Project of the University of Chicago, a seminary-sponsored African American Leadership Project, and several recreational programs. These ongoing, regularly scheduled, and long-term programs are offered in addition to the many occasional, one-time programs and services, such as couples counseling or community meetings, that occur as needed.

Congregations with older buildings host most community service on-site.

Indeed, **76% of all service and outreach offered or supported by congregations takes place solely in their older properties.** The Rev. Susan Johnson, pastor of Hyde Park Church, puts it this way: "Many programs in our community would not happen if we, and other churches, did not share our space. We don't have much money, but we can share our building."

More often than not, "sharing our building" means offering a cluster of spaces of varying sizes and capacities, including parish halls, Sunday School rooms, auditoriums and offices. These spaces, originally constructed at a time when urban populations were growing and religious institutions had ambitious social agendas, have proved infinitely adaptable to today's needs: religious education classrooms now serve public school systems; large meeting rooms double as community theaters; fellowship halls are converted into day care centers.

In many cases, these spaces come complete with "staff": administrative and custodial staff are often available to provide support to the various groups and individuals who make use of the property, and lay volunteers, who feel comfortable and familiar with their own church or synagogue, often like to pitch in to help in a building to which they have such strong connections.

Congregation-hosted community service is selfless.

"The church is not a museum...it belongs to the people in the neighborhood. The congregation is the custodian of the buildings, not 'owner'," states the Rev. Peter Larson at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. Many urban congregations share his view. The result: **among people who benefit from community programs housed in congregational buildings, non-members outnumber members of the host congregation by a ratio of 4.2 to 1.**

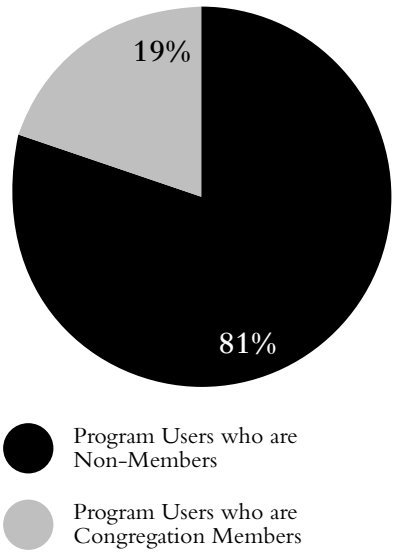
This statistic is especially notable considering that congregations increasingly draw their members from well beyond the immediate neighborhoods where their buildings are located. When it comes to outreach, even churches and synagogues with "commuting" memberships remain neighborhood-centered. A religious property's presence in a community, therefore, has a substantive impact on those who live and work nearby; they are the prime beneficiaries of a congregation's compassion.

Our Shared Stake

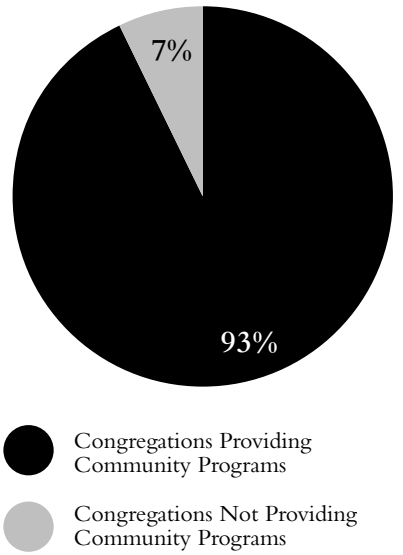
That so many congregations serve so many people in need so generously is an overlooked and important reality. Modestly, almost invisibly, America's congregations with older properties go about their daily business, providing the lion's share of their community services in their own facilities. Together, they form the nation's broadest network of community centers.

Sacred places are a "natural" resource, central to the life of cities, towns and neighborhoods across this nation. Like other natural resources, they are ubiquitous and essential, nurturing and inspiring, available to all. Like other natural resources, they are also fragile and irreplaceable. Now that we know how vital sacred places are to the shared life of the community, we also know that the larger public shares a stake in their survival.

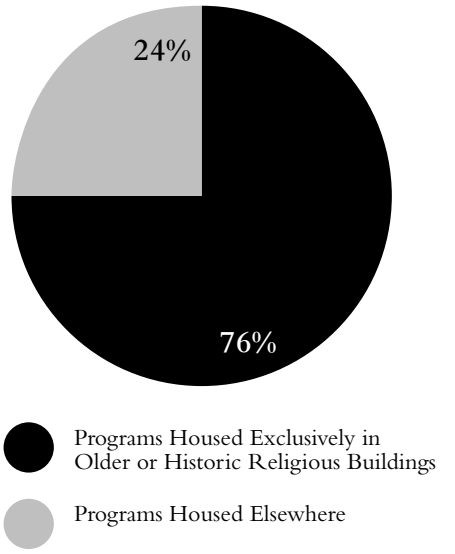
Beneficiaries of Community Programs: Congregation Members vs. Non-Members



Congregations That Provide Community Programs



Percentage of Congregation-Supported Community Programs Located in Older or Historic Sacred Places



2.

Who Benefits From Older Sacred Places?

In the soup kitchen at historic Allen Chapel A.M.E. in Indianapolis, 350 people eat dinner every Wednesday evening. Seven women do the cooking. Says one of the cooks: "we serve people as if they were our own families and we never give less than we would eat ourselves." The description is typical. Any day of the week, in older congregational buildings nationwide, similar programs are being offered in the same generous spirit — without judgment or prejudice. Young or old, healthy or ill, rich or poor, lonely or contented — all are made welcome.

The majority of congregations — some 93% of those included in Partners' study — open their doors for community service programs of the kind described here. Congregations make use of their older buildings to house, on average, four major programs, in addition to the more informal and impromptu services many offer. When our interviews began, we could only guess at what the range of these programs might be. In the end, we found an astonishing variety: from a list of 200 possible programs, there is hardly an area in which congregations are not active. This diversity attests to congregational ability to respond to the very particular needs of their individual communities, to reach every sector of our society, and to address the most pressing social issues of our day. Here are some highlights from our findings:

- Specific populations congregations serve include families, seniors, children and youth, the poor and the homeless, refugees and immigrants.

- Congregations tackle difficult civic and social issues, through services ranging from prison ministry to urban improvement projects and housing rehabilitation.

- To serve seniors, many congregations pair the homebound with a buddy; over 40% of our congregations provide this service.

- From latchkey programs to "Mother's Morning Out," many congregations assist families juggling the demands of work and child care.

- Health programs serve people of all ages, focusing on everything from substance abuse to nutrition, from developmental disabilities to HIV, providing health education, health screening, and full-service medical clinics.

- Adults can take advantage of literacy classes, GED and ESL programs, along with occasional job training and job placement.

While there is great diversity in the types of programs offered, certain trends are clear. Congregations typically house programs in their older buildings that:

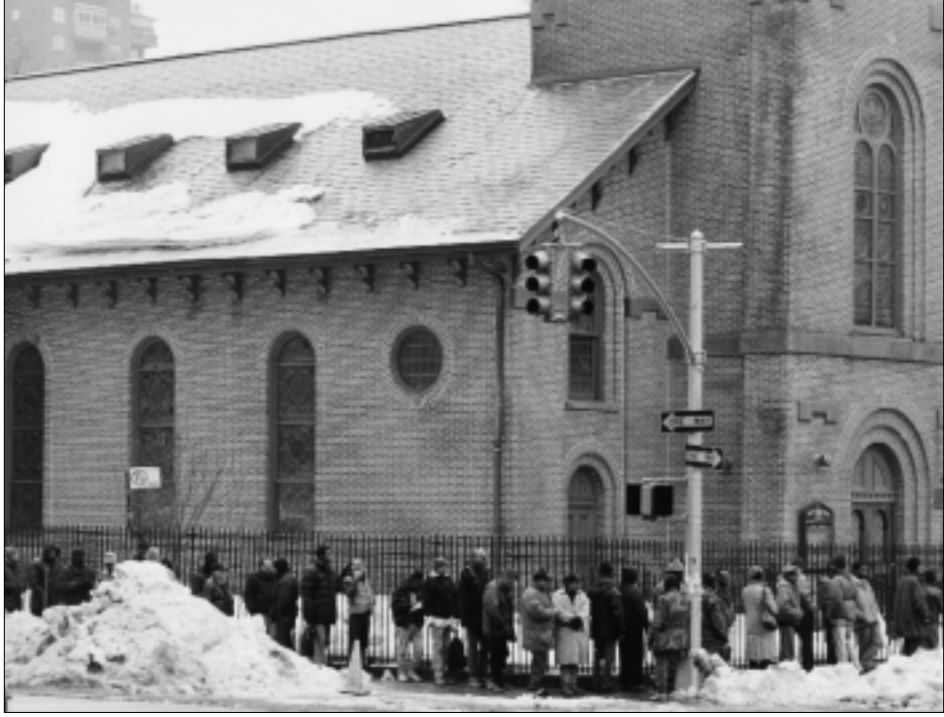
- meet basic human needs,

- serve families — especially children and youth,

- bring the arts into local neighborhoods,

- serve as centers of culture for immigrants and ethnic groups, and

- provide space for innumerable community or neighborhood-based organizations.



Any day of the week, in older congregational buildings nationwide, programs are offered with a generous spirit and without judgment or prejudice. Young or old, healthy or ill, rich or poor, lonely or contented — all are made welcome.

Congregations use their older buildings to meet basic needs.

Allen Chapel A.M.E. is one of many congregations working to fill the gap as government assistance programs for the poor are receding by meeting needs that revolve around day-to-day subsistence. We found that over 60% of our study congregations operate food pantries, just over 50% have clothing closets, and over 40% run soup kitchens. Almost a third provide services and support for homeless men and women.

These are no-frills programs — meeting the most basic of human needs. Taken together, they paint a picture of life in our study communities — and in inner-city communities elsewhere. The North Philadelphia neighborhood which is home to the turn-of-the-century, Gothic-style Mars Hill Baptist Church, for example, has suffered a severe loss of both population and jobs. Mars Hill's pastor says his "main purpose" is to change the area for the better. His congregation welcomes 300 to 400 people every week to its soup kitchen — one component in the larger effort by congregations to repair the social fabric.

Congregations use their older buildings to serve families, especially children and youth.

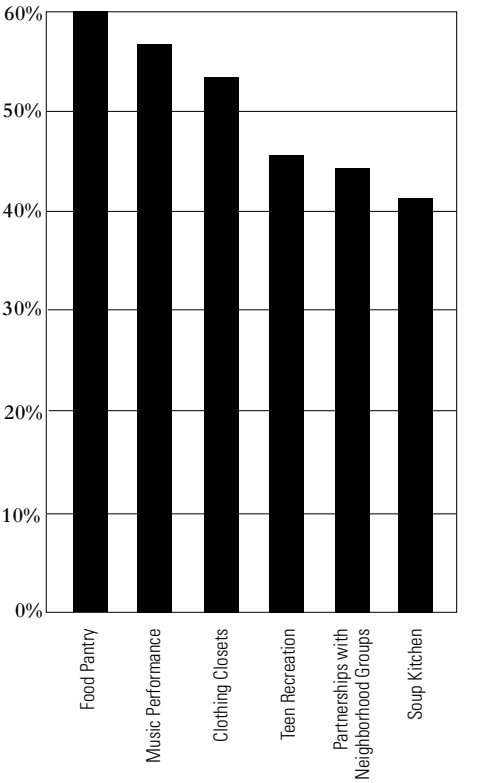
Children and youth — more often than any other population — benefit from the programs and services congregations house. Day care, tutoring, summer camp, and after-school activities that are both recreational and educational are among the wide range of programs offered. Of our study congregations, 45% have recreational programs devoted to teens and 42% for younger children. Congregations also have a major presence in areas such as pre-school day care, which is offered by 25% of our study congregations.

A glance at these programs makes clear that they reflect the needs of today's many families with two working parents, as well as single parents. These are programs families depend on to provide for the care of their children close to work or home. Families also look to congregations for parenting classes, which 35% of our study congregations offer.

Many of the programs for children and youth provide opportunities for young people who could be described as at-risk. Victory Memorial United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, for example, runs a summer program called the Fountain Square Youth Corps. Here young men learn about concepts such as teamwork, communication and self-control. The same kind of learning takes place at Mars Hill Baptist Church. In an after-school conflict resolution session, kids learn to "focus on the positive attributes of another person, to learn from their negative feelings, to control their actions and build their self-confidence."

Although congregations host a significant fraction of scouting and other traditional recreational programs (such as those sponsored by police athletic leagues) they do not take place in the same numbers as other services. Thus, these activities — traditionally associated with congregations — are not, in fact, as common as other programs serving children.

Programs Most Frequently Hosted by Congregations



Congregations with older buildings provide homes for the arts.

About 80% of our study congregations are involved in arts programming, a significant contribution likely to be overlooked in the midst of so many core human services.

Partners' study found that close to 60% host music programs, a statistic that did not surprise us given the extraordinary space that older congregational buildings offer for both rehearsal and performance. But we were surprised by the extent to which congregations are involved in other areas of the arts, such as dance, poetry, and community theater, and how congregations open their older buildings not only for performances but for classes, exhibitions, and lectures. In particular, we learned how important congregations have been as incubators for the arts. New York City's historic St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, built in 1799 on what was once the estate of Governor Peter Stuyvesant, for example, has helped nurture at least two major programs that have a national reputation: The Poetry Project and The Danspace Project.

We were particularly interested in the impetus behind arts programs for children. Chicago's Berry United Methodist Church, for example, began its Children's Art Project to supplement a declining arts presence in the public school curriculum. Likewise, at Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, a professional violin teacher, a member of the congregation, began a music program for neighborhood children at the request of several parents.

Congregations serve as centers of culture for immigrants and migrants alike.

Throughout their history, sacred places have provided a safe place where the culture, music and language of national and ethnic groups could be honored and preserved. Countless Catholic and Orthodox churches, synagogues and African American churches, for example, have provided space for schools, social clubs and other activities that brought — and continue to bring together — people with a common faith and heritage for mutual support in a larger world that has often been indifferent or hostile.

Congregations welcome and provide meeting space in their older buildings for all kinds of local organizations.

Congregations are extremely community-minded. Close to 45% of the congregations in our study say their buildings are the hubs for neighborhood organizations and causes which meet on a regular basis. This is in addition to the many self-help groups, such as AA, NA, OA, and Al-Anon, which are standard daily or weekly fare for congregations.

The variety of meeting spaces available within a single older church or synagogue building makes it possible for congregations to house many different kinds of organizations along with their own programs. Still, this kind of meeting space can be scarce. Since its parish hall burned down several years ago, St. John the Evangelist Church in San Francisco has had to turn groups away. According to its rector, the church is literally "booked by the hour."

From Danspace at New York City's St. Mark's Church to Allen Chapel A.M.E.'s soup kitchen, these programs demonstrate that inner-city congregations with older buildings are reaching out to welcome people from all walks of life, meeting the full scope of human needs and strengthening their communities in the process.

3.

Sacred Places…Plus

Canon F. B. Williams, rector of the Church of the Intercession in West Harlem, New York, recalls a meeting he had with Pernessa Seele, a community leader. It was 1989. Many members of the parish had died from a spreading disease called AIDS. "She came to my office and challenged me in the name of God to do more about this crisis." For Canon Williams, that conversation was a turning point. Responding to her challenge, lay and clergy leaders worked together to organize the Harlem Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS. That event led to significant new initiatives in reaching out to people with AIDS. In hosting and housing such programs, the church has done much to help those with the disease.

While the physical facilities provided by the Church of the Intercession for AIDS outreach are significant, the services would not exist without a full array of other resources the church brought together. **For the first time, Partners' study pinpoints the enormous subsidy that congregations provide when they bring together space, people, financial support and other resources on behalf of programs serving the larger community.** We can also say that churches and synagogues receive very little in return, except for the satisfaction of knowing that they have lived out their mission to serve people in need.

Providing Full Service

You might say that America's urban congregations are "full-service institutions," providing an in-depth package of connected resources essential to the success of their community service programs. The Church of the Intercession is one example of the depth and complexity of a full-service congregation. Tabernacle Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis is another. With most of its congregation living outside the neighborhood, Tabernacle could have easily uprooted as well, relocating to some more affluent section of the city. Instead, the church chose to stay in its finely-crafted, 1920's-vintage building. Today, it brings its considerable array of resources to bear on the social problems of its original neighborhood.

The sprawling "Tab" complex welcomes the children who come for recreation or tutoring, the poor who are counseled by its legal clinic, and the hungry who receive food at its soup kitchen. But those who benefit from the church's outreach receive much more than a space to gather in. The church draws from its 1,050 members for volunteers to help oversee, staff and fund these programs — as well as from the community at large. The church's staff — everyone from pastors to secretaries and custodians — also provide support to in-house programs. The church also subsidizes programs' utility costs, and, in some cases, provides direct funding.

This cluster of congregational resources provides enormous "added value" to the space that community programs share with congregations. Those who share space with congregations often declare that these places are warm, welcoming and nurturing. That warmth and welcome come from a rare combination of architecture and humanity. The beauty of the building spaces — complemented by the compassion and generosity of the congregation itself — has moved users ranging from dance troupes to the homeless to testify that these environments have had an enormously powerful effect on their work and their lives.

Space, people, time, money — what do these inter-related resources add up to? To assess the full value of sacred places, Partners examined and evaluated each component separately — building space; professional staff support; volunteer support; financial contributions; and in-kind support.

Space in the Building

When it was designed in 1914, the dignified Gothic Revival Church of the Intercession included an ambitious layout of rooms with varied functions: a gymnasium, large kitchens, classrooms, exercise space and a stage for theatrical productions. It was designed by one of the nation's leading architects — Bertram Goodhue — and beautifully crafted from stone, wood and stained glass. Today, those same spaces accommodate current neighborhood needs by housing child care centers, AIDS support programs, and tutoring activities, among other programs.

If Intercession were to shut its doors tomorrow, the community programs it houses would have a difficult time finding comparably affordable, well-located, well-laid out and welcoming space. Some would be forced to cut back on their services; others would go out of business. **Our study asked program managers to estimate what it would cost them to rent space in a comparable location. Their answer: a total of about $27,000 each year for all four programs hosted, on average, by the study congregations.**

Staff Support

Jermaine Quick, the coordinator for education outreach at Mars Hill Baptist Church in Philadelphia, has been the catalyst behind several programs that serve children and youth in its declining neighborhood. The tutoring program he initiated offers guidance on math, reading and science homework, plus special sessions on conflict resolution. Now he is pursuing plans for a computer center to teach urban kids how to catch up in a high-tech world.

Quick is one example of how a congregation's staff is integrally involved in conceiving, managing, coordinating and troubleshooting for the community programs housed in its property. Quick's job is to provide community outreach. For others on the staff, involvement in community service programs is not necessarily included in their job description. However, everyone from the clergyperson to the janitor tend to get caught up in a wide range of matters related to programs present in the building.

This new level of responsibility can become — as Susan Johnson, pastor at Hyde Park Union Church, has observed — "a whole new burden.... The sexton or janitor will have more work to do. The phone will ring all the time and the calls will be for space-sharers in the building, or about them, even if they have their own phones.... " Like a family, when new members are added to the congregational "household," the responsibilities of those who own and manage that house multiply!

And what then is the dollar value of this staff contribution? **Based on the estimated wages of clergypeople, custodians, secretaries and other staff members at the average congregation, Partners estimates that the staff time a congregation contributes to support community service programs is worth almost $33,000 each year.**

Volunteer Support

Pernessa Seele, a neighbor of the Church of the Intercession who helped to jump-start new initiatives serving people with AIDS, is but one example among countless others who contribute time, energy, and expertise to their congregation's service programs. **In fact, the average congregation, during the course of a year, provides over 5,300 hours (or 132 weeks) of volunteer support to community programs. It's as if two and a half full-time volunteers were stationed at the church 52 weeks a year. The dollar value of this contribution is estimated to be $62,382 annually.**

For a city like Philadelphia with over 700 older churches and synagogues, the subsidy congregations provide to make community programs possible amounts to over $100 million annually.

Direct Funding

Although congregations make it clear that other resources — buildings and people — are easier to contribute than funding, they can and do provide modest grants or contributions from their "mission" budgets to a range of the programs they house. Hyde Park Union Church in Chicago, for example, has given $1,200 for its "Open Kitchen Cooking" program in one recent year, and Berry United Methodist Church in Chicago has given $1,200 to its Children's Art Project. **On average, the congregations in Partners' study give over $17,000 annually to support the community programs they house.**

Utilities and In-Kind Support

Lastly, congregations often cover other costs associated with carrying out activities that serve the larger community. Their furnaces provide heat and hot water for the full array of activities in their buildings, and the energy costs associated with community programs are usually paid for by the host congregation. A congregation's office may also lend its photocopier, postage meter, telephones and other equipment to programs it houses, not to mention janitorial supplies and other necessities for day-to-day operations. **On average, the studied congregations give over $14,000 in this kind of support each year.**

Total Value of Congregational Resources

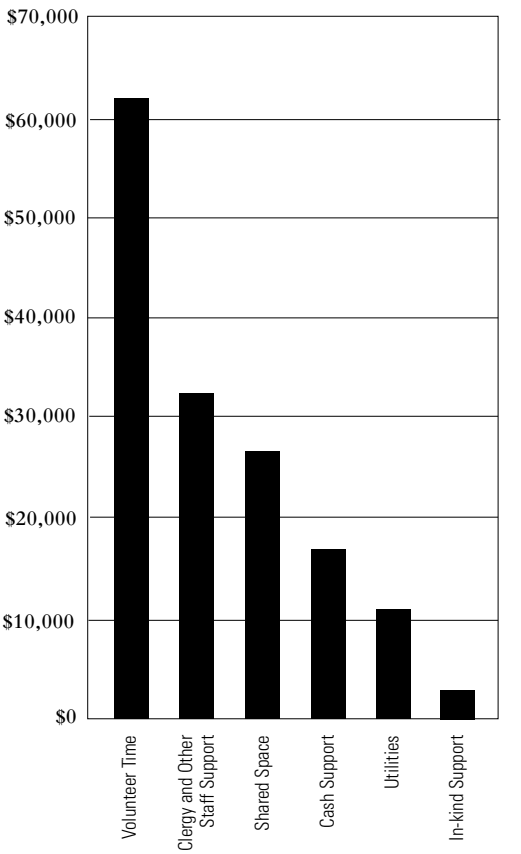
If you tally all the contributions that congregations make, the total subsidy they provide their communities is over $140,000 a year. (The average congregation provides almost $3,000 in value to each of four programs it supports each month, for a total of $12,000 each month or $144,000 each year.) For a city like Philadelphia with over 700 older churches and synagogues, this subsidy amounts to over $100 million annually.

This subsidy takes into account the fees and in-kind services that congregations receive back from programs that share space — on average, only $9,400 per year. In other words, congregations give 16 times more than they receive.

The total contribution congregations make is often equal to their full annual budgets. In effect, for every dollar received by the average congregation for its annual operations, it may be giving a full dollar of value back to its community.

The building administrator at K.A.M. Isaiah Israel in Chicago has summed up this extraordinary story of sacrifice and generosity well: "We have a tradition of doing things for the community-at-large. The temple considers itself a community center... (We) provide kids, parents, life, noise. It is good."

Annual Value of Goods and Services Provided by the Average Congrgation



4.

Why Congregations In Older Sacred Places?

In 1974, St. John the Evangelist Church in San Francisco celebrated 117 years at its present location with only 11 remaining members in its early 20th century building. This tiny congregation, believing their church could have a positive impact in the city's struggling Mission District, created the Educational Thresholds Center. More than two decades later, the tutoring program continues to thrive, serving some 300 neighborhood children year-round and leveraging the support of at least 25 community organizations and many volunteers.

Congregations with older and historic buildings are deeply-rooted in their communities, as the story of St. John's attests. The congregations included in our study have been at the same location on average for 80 years or more. Only seven have ever contemplated moving away, and only one actually relocated (shortly after our study was completed). The oldest congregation dates back to 1677; the youngest, although housed in an older building, was founded as recently as 1991.

The buildings themselves — many historic and built to be visual landmarks on their streetscapes — help create that sense of rootedness. They are powerful places, resonant with memories of faith and family. Members of the congregation may move away, but these historic sacred places keep drawing them back to their old neighborhoods. In a society as mobile as ours, such rootedness is significant, especially when it blossoms into a commitment of time and resources to care for communities in need.

Partners' findings show how integral congregations with older buildings have become to the delivery of programs and services in their communities. Congregations are the prime initiators and incubators for the array of programs their older buildings house, and they are catalysts for volunteers — their own members as well as people from the greater community.

Other charitable organizations, of which there are many, share the commitment of congregations to do good. But congregations, rooted in the neighborhoods they serve, reaching out to the people in need who live right beside them, exemplify what we have come to know and value as "direct-service" organizations. Moreover, these congregations, motivated to take action, move quickly, even though they may be short of funds or other resources.

What Congregations Do Best

Traditionally, congregations have been among the most welcoming and nurturing of helping institutions, their older buildings beacons for the needy. Faced with escalating needs, however, they have increasingly become activists — initiating, encouraging, incubating and housing new programs and services that communities, for good reason, now depend on. Here is what we learned:

- ❖ Congregations are responsible for initiating the majority of community service programs their older buildings house.

- ❖ The impetus for most of these programs comes from both leadership and membership. Clergy helped to initiate over 40% of the programs studied. Individual congregation members played a role getting programs underway in 38% of all cases. Most programs are initiated by a combination of clergy and congregants, with additional input from lay committees and staff.

- ❖ While congregations frequently partner and share space with outside groups to provide services, it is rare for these groups to initiate these relationships. Our study congregations report that human service organizations played a role in initiating only 3% of the programs housed in sacred places.

These findings clearly tell us that, without congregations' initiative, communities would have far fewer programs and services.

Incubating and Nurturing

Congregations welcome a mix of community groups into their older buildings. Most of these groups — neighborhood organizations, town watch, and other local civic and improvement associations — pay little or nothing for the use of space. The religious community has a long tradition of welcoming many groups, such as AA and other self-help organizations, who have learned they can depend on the open door of the local church or synagogue.

Congregations are the prime initiators and incubators for the array of programs their older buildings house, and they are catalysts for volunteers — their own members as well as people from the greater community.

Less well known is the role congregations play in incubating and housing new organizations — often from their conception and through their infancy. Many of these fledgling groups begin by meeting or using space in older congregational buildings and ultimately spin off on their own. Some groups have become regional or national models. **More than 50 of the congregations in Partners' study report they have helped found close to 100 new organizations, or about two new spin-off organizations per congregation. These organizations, to name just a few, include:**

- The Philadelphia Committee for the Homeless (by First Reformed Church);
- the Wabash YMCA (by Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church in Chicago);
- the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra (by Robert Parks United Methodist Church);
- the Hyde Park Food Pantry (by K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple with a coalition of other congregations in Chicago).

While some of these organizations move on to space of their own, others continue to share buildings and resources with their founding congregations, such as the Educational Thresholds Center of St. John's. The long-lasting relationships established between incubated groups and their hosts reflect both the need for and the strength found in the nurturing environment congregations provide. They also reflect the flexible and affordable space congregations with older buildings have to offer.

The Role of Volunteers

The day-to-day survival of community service programs housed by congregations with older buildings depends upon the staff and volunteers that congregations can supply. Over half of all the programs reported by our study congregations rely on clergy and congregational staff to make up their workforce. This is in addition to support from volunteers, which 75% of the programs depend on.

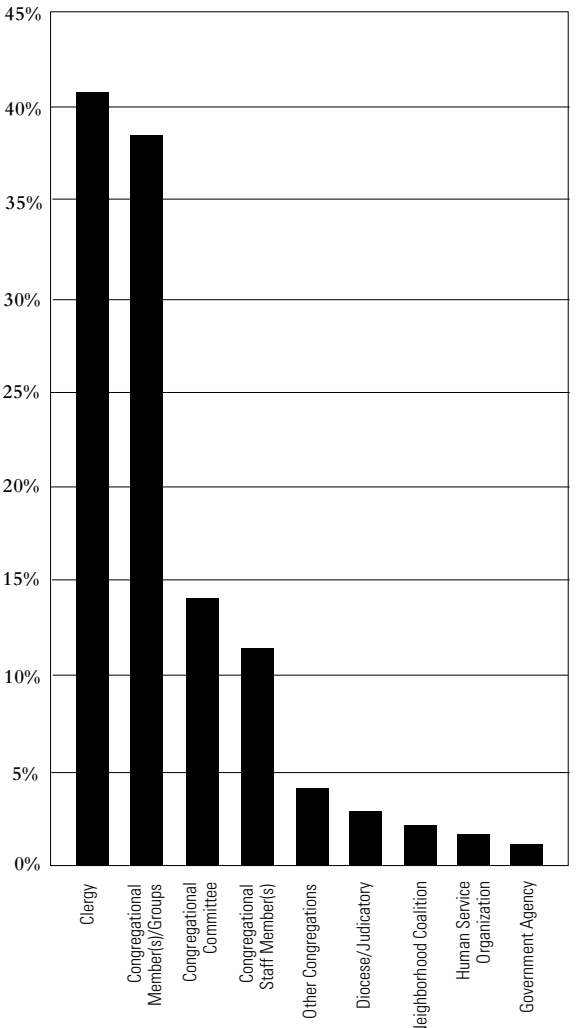
This volunteer workforce is comprised of congregation members as well as people from the greater community, although volunteering congregation members slightly outnumber community volunteers. These findings suggest that while congregations are very successful at mobilizing their own members, they are almost as effective in attracting community members who look to local churches and synagogues for meaningful volunteer opportunities. **Congregations, therefore, are catalysts for neighborhood or community involvement.**

In addition, volunteer efforts tend to have a snowball effect. We found an impressive number of instances where individuals who had benefited from particular programs returned to serve others. Many of the youth who participated in the Educational Thresholds Center, for example, have come back to the Center as tutors.

Responding to Changing Needs

When we asked congregations why they created various programs and services, we received a simple answer: they saw specific needs and they responded. This responsiveness is further evidence of congregations' capacity to be both flexible and highly attuned to the dynamic of change around them. As we questioned them further, congregations acknowledged that the needs they respond to are often the result of broader changes in their community or larger society. Indeed, the impetus for one third of their programming can be attributed to community change. Members of Chicago's Hyde Park Union Church, for example, began the Vigil Against Violence in direct response to an increase in neighborhood crime.

Initiators of Community Programs Supported by Congregations



Few congregations, however, would describe their actions as responses to changes on the regional or national level. We specifically asked congregations if they had developed programs and services because of government cutbacks at federal, state and local levels. They reported that diminishing government services accounted for only 78 out of 449 programs.

This finding reveals something important about the nature of congregations and their social service delivery. Grounding their actions in their faith traditions, congregations perceive the impetus for community service as coming from within. And, while the needs they see may stem from government initiatives or other systemic problems far removed from their own neighborhoods, they focus their desire to serve locally, looking first to the lives and needs of people in their own backyards, mobilizing resources in-hand, including older buildings.

Indeed, congregations focus so intensely on meeting the needs of their community, that they often disregard the impact such programming has on already tight budgets, overburdened staff and volunteers, or, especially, building wear and tear.

Implications for the Future of Sacred Places

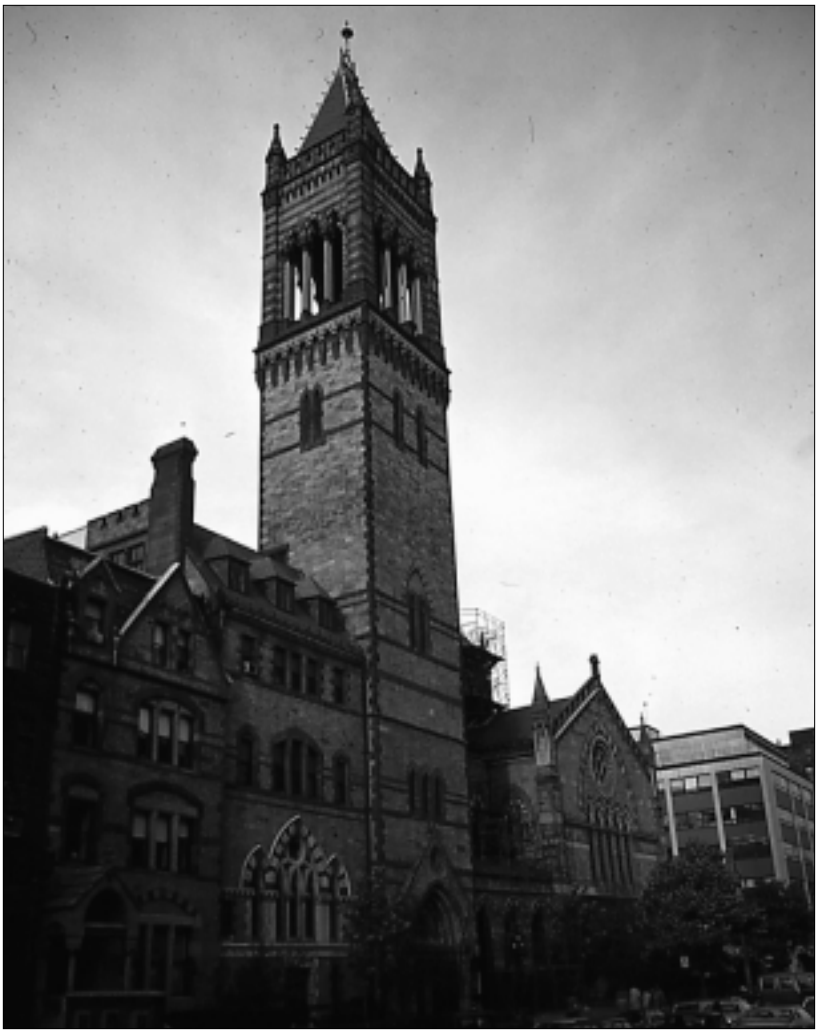
When congregations like Mars Hill are coping with the increasing number of people coming to their feeding programs, the deteriorating condition of their building is only a secondary concern. As the leaders of First Congregational Church in San Francisco explained what motivates them to house community services: "There is a sense that the building is one of our primary means of doing mission and one of our best resources. Our own use of the building is very small by comparison." But as government — national and local — tacitly or explicitly relies on congregations to do still more, the issue of infrastructure cannot be ignored.

Congregations are already responding to changing community needs; they have been doing so at great cost and sacrifice for the last 30 to 40 years. With a failing physical infrastructure and a dearth of outside support — and increasing social need — it is uncertain how much longer they can continue to do so.

Partners proposes a new public discourse that acknowledges the role congregations and their older buildings play in community life. In the course of that dialogue, we need to take a closer look at the strengths and limitations of congregational resources. Building on our study's revelatory findings, we need to identify new ways of providing support for these invaluable institutions, without changing the character — or diminishing the spirit — in which they serve.

5.

Marking Streets, Marking Lives



In 1923, the Irish priest of St. Ita's Church in Chicago was contemplating the design of a new parish building to serve his burgeoning congregation. He approached his bishop for guidance. The bishop, who was of German background, suggested the French Gothic style. With its high, pointed tower and elaborately carved limestone details, the building, completed in 1927, became one of the city's great landmarks, and remains an outstanding example of Medieval-revival architecture. But, like the Gothic cathedrals it emulated, St. Ita's appearance continued to evolve.

When Cuban immigrants began to worship there, a sculpted tableau depicting a miraculous event in the history of the Cuban church was added to the sanctuary. Still later, when Mexican-Americans joined the parish in larger numbers, a place was made for an image of the Virgin of Guadeloupe. Now the church named after a sixth-century Irish abbess is a richly-layered expression of no less than four cultures reaching across several generations of migration and settlement.

St. Ita's is not alone. All across America, countless religious buildings tell — through their physical form and ornament — an important story about the cultural life, ethnic origins and nationalities of the peoples who have settled here. Taken as a whole, a community's churches, temples, synagogues and meeting houses, often found within blocks of each other in a single neighborhood, express the living legacy of religious tolerance that first brought settlers to the New World more than three centuries ago. Indeed, these historic religious properties are the most important physical evidence of the ethnic, racial and religious pluralism that defines our national character. They are embodiments of America's unique history.

Sacred places symbolize perseverance amidst rapid change, permanence amidst decline, dignity amidst devastation.

In studying congregations with older properties, Partners also looked closely at the architecture itself. The study confirms that America's sacred places are distinct from other buildings — in form as well as function. As architecture, their powerful physical presence in a community contributes significantly to the lives of those who live and work nearby.

Marking the Landscape

Rooted in a neighborhood, a church, synagogue or meetinghouse touches the lives and hearts of many thousands of people. Some may have been married there, or have had their children baptized or bar mitzvahed there. Some may have gone there for scout troop meetings or child care, or for recitals and concerts. And some may simply have walked or driven by the building countless times and come to love the dignity and beauty it brings to its neighborhood.

Even the most worn sacred places inspire awe, especially in the inner city. Sacred places symbolize perseverance amidst rapid change, permanence amidst decline, dignity amidst devastation. They bear witness to the faith, sacrifice, and significant achievements of generations past. Built over decades and centuries, these places express a community's deepest yearnings and aspirations. Today these buildings maintain their power, transcending barriers of culture and belief to bring beauty and wholeness where it is needed most.

As community catalysts, religious properties — and the congregations who own them — may "bring change to neighborhoods," as Rev. Isaac Smith of Mars Hill Baptist Church in Philadelphia notes. But sacred places also powerfully affirm that both individuals and communities can survive change.

Partners' study affirms that, just by their physical presence, churches and synagogues make a number of significant contributions to the quality of life in our neighborhoods and communities:

Sacred places are often highly-visible anchors of community that give identity and dignity to city centers and far-flung neighborhoods.

A church or synagogue's sheer size, height and prominent location make it a landmark by which we mark the daily rhythm of our lives. Many Catholic parishes occupy a cluster of buildings that form a kind of "village within the city," where both parishioners and community members come together to serve and be served. And while these monumental structures may "elevate" residential neighborhoods, in the downtowns of our larger cities, amidst multi-story office towers, religious buildings often reinforce the more human scale of the streetscape; and their courtyards and graveyards provide valuable open space and greenery.

Sacred places are often the most important local repositories of publicly-accessible fine art and craftsmanship.

Furnishings and ornaments — rows of stained glass windows, ranks of carved pews, high towers or domes, mosaics and masonry — dramatically embellish spaces designed for worship. Taken as a whole, they make for a breathtaking experience. In any given community, the local churches and synagogues contain artistic treasures that rival the collections of local galleries and museums.

In Chicago, for example, Second Presbyterian Church, a congregation included in Partners' study, is a virtual museum of Tiffany stained glass. Another, Sacred Heart Church in Camden, New Jersey, displays a stunning interior including a full set of ceiling murals and imported stained glass windows.

Sacred places represent the finest work of America's architects.

From the earliest days of America's founding to the present, the nation's finest designers have applied their skills to the creation of sacred places. Grace Episcopal Church in New York City, for example, is one of architect James Renwick's masterworks. He was among the first to bring the Gothic Revival style to America from Europe in the 19th century. Similarly, Kehilath Anshe Ma'ariv Congregation in Chicago commissioned Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, the latter perhaps best known as the father of the American skyscraper, to design its synagogue in the 1890s. This building is now the proud home of Pilgrim Baptist Church.

Sacred places are places of refuge and meditation that feed the soul.

Although it can be said that sacred places fulfill their purpose best when filled with activity, they also have great power and beauty in quieter, more solitary moments. Many congregations keep the doors of their worship spaces open during the week. A lone visitor can sit in the darkened sanctuary, amidst glowing windows and shining woodwork. Perhaps the organist is practicing or children can be heard playing down a hallway. No matter what one's belief, one can claim in this tranquil space a much-needed respite from the world's clamor — a moment of peace.

Such is the power of sacred places to mark our lives.

6.

Older Sacred Places At Risk

You could call it a "tale of one city/two congregations." Arch Street Meeting, in Center City Philadelphia, is a recognized historic property that serves both as a Quaker meetinghouse and a conference center open to all. Several miles north and west, Christ Temple Interdenominational Church serves a much needier community, with much more limited resources.

When Arch Street Meeting's leadership learned that important roof timbers in the meetinghouse were failing — endangering the entire building — they managed to draw on Quaker philanthropic sources to raise the more than one million dollars required for repairs. But when Christ Temple's small congregation faced over $300,000 in major repairs — a figure several times the annual budget for building upkeep, they were forced to abandon their main building. Currently concentrating all worship services and community outreach in an adjoining building, the congregation now contemplates having to demolish the main building, which would eliminate forever its enormous potential as a community resource.

After decades of deferred maintenance and postponed repairs, many of America's older sacred places are facing serious repair needs and urgent renovations that put both buildings and programs at great risk.

The fact is that urban congregations like Arch Street Meeting and Christ Temple Church typically face enormous repair needs that are increasingly overwhelming their ability to keep up. Community and preservation leaders are seeing a growing pattern of property "dismemberment," where portions of religious buildings are demolished or vacated when funds are unavailable for repair. The implications for the service programs that congregations host are profound.

Partners' research demonstrates that, after decades of deferred maintenance and postponed repairs, many of America's sacred places are facing serious repair needs and urgent renovations that put both buildings and community programs at great risk.

From Band-Aids to Benign Neglect

Sacred places were built to last. Any experienced architect can testify to the fact that church roof beams tend to be cut more broadly and walls built more thickly than necessary. Like a road or bridge or any other piece of infrastructure, however, sacred places will eventually sag and crumble if repairs are postponed year after year. Religious properties are also fragile places, vulnerable to the wear of time and weather.

However, most church and synagogue leaders are not equipped or prepared for effective, professional-level property management, despite the importance of sacred places in the life, mission and finances of congregations. Clergy do not, as a rule, receive seminary training in property administration. They tend to learn on the job with little if any guidance or assistance. Custodians, too, receive little or no guidance or education in property care, and are often stretched thin simply keeping up with routine cleaning and small fix-it tasks. Volunteer lay property committees usually have more enthusiasm than expertise, and the frequent rotation of committee members can undermine the consistency essential to managing and maintaining an aging property.

Despite their inexperience, congregations cannot help but be aware of the most glaring repair problems they face. **Over a third acknowledge that their buildings have serious roof and gutter repair needs, which can lead to chronic water penetration, the most serious and pervasive repair problem faced by any building. One in five congregations also face structural problems — such as cracks in walls, or separating roof beams — that can threaten the stability of a building and pose serious threats to the safety of people within.**

Churches are sacred way stations, places of refuge in the storms of life. Now, these historic places themselves need lifesaving.

Rev. Christopher M. Hamlin

If funds for repair are difficult to raise, congregations often decide to "live with" their building problems, particularly if they don't appear to pose any immediate risk. In general, congregations tend to underestimate the problems they face, which makes it difficult to monitor, recognize and treat repair needs as they appear and grow.

Partner's study shows that many congregations are unaware of hidden crises that have not yet shown major symptoms — such as poor heating systems, obsolete electrical systems, and life safety improvements.

The Costs of Sustaining Sacred Places

Congregations are already struggling to pay for routine property upkeep and heating costs. Partners' study found that they spend, on average, almost a third of their annual income on property care, while no fewer than a quarter of the studied congregations spend 40% or more of their income on property care.

Repair costs strain already limited budgets even further. Partners' study asked congregations to total the cost of all repairs and renovations over and above routine maintenance and utility expenses they have made in the last five years. Our finding: the average congregation has had to spend over $285,000 over that period, an average of $57,000 each year. No wonder that many congregations lurch from one repair crisis to another, stretching to raise funds for one but no better prepared for the next. No wonder that precious few resources are left over for other priorities in congregational and community life.

Partners' study also assessed the imminent repairs and renovations that congregations are facing in order to bring their buildings up to a reasonable level of good repair over the next five years. Major challenges range from the replacement of roofs (costing $250,000) at St. Patrick's Church in Indianapolis and the stabilization of a tower (costing $50,000) at Third Spanish Baptist Church in the Bronx, to pointing of masonry at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Mobile (with a price tag of $100,000).

Anticipated repair needs will cost over $225,000 for the average congregation — and congregations in earthquake-prone areas will have to spend much more. Such extraordinary levels of repair need will strain the budgets of all but the most affluent churches and synagogues in future years. The burden of these repairs will have a significant impact on the community services these congregations provide.

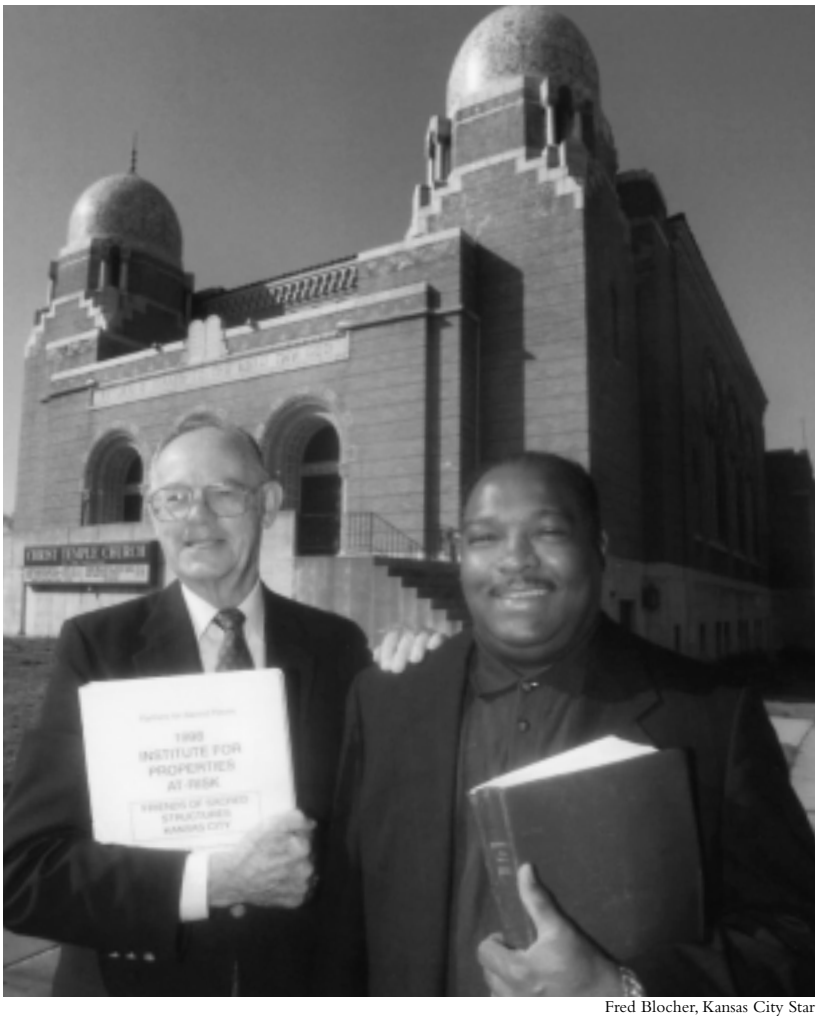
Meanwhile, congregations continue their balancing acts, supporting community outreach while also maintaining the property infrastructure that houses it. Some, like Christ Temple Church, may not succeed. Others, with the resources of an Arch Street Meeting, still have hope.

Perhaps most typical is a third example in our "tale of one city": North Philadelphia's Mars Hill Baptist Church, which has been forced to "mothball" two floors of its mammoth church house. Broken plaster, swaths of peeling paint, and antiquated plumbing and electrical systems make the former classrooms in the church house useless; neglected, the deterioration just gets worse. However, the church leaders refuse to give up. Working closely with non-profit helping groups, they have managed to keep the building's exterior in good repair and are now pursuing plans to reclaim the church house space for a computer training center for neighborhood youth. These plans depend on successfully attracting new supporters beyond the church's own membership.

Like thousands of other congregations across the nation, Mars Hill Church embodies an ironic disparity — between how much communities depend on their sacred places and how little community leaders contribute to keeping these invaluable places in good repair.

7.

Where Do We Go From Here?



Fred Blocher, Kansas City Star

The findings presented in this book will, we hope, fuel many new discussions about the role of faith-based institutions in the life of America's communities. Indeed, Partners for Sacred Places urges key sectors of American society — government, philanthropy, business and religion — to come together and discuss their shared stake in the future of sacred places that make possible so many programs of benefit to the greater community.

This new conversation must not overlook the urgent capital needs of older sacred places. In responding to Partners' findings, funders and other new partners no doubt will be moved to support the many worthy programs and services that congregations offer. Although this kind of support is extremely important, funders must also consider what it will take for congregations to sustain these services. The long-term care of their buildings is crucial to program survival. These buildings' current, almost universal, state of disrepair puts many programs and, in turn, communities at risk.

To bring about change in the way sacred places are cared for and supported, we need to overcome certain obstacles that prevent or discourage key sectors from getting involved, including:

- constraints that limit government support for sacred places;
- real or perceived limitations on the ability of private foundations and corporations to support 1) the public or community service role of congregations and 2) their accompanying capital repair needs;
- inexperience of congregations in approaching potential outside supporters and in meeting expectations for financial and administrative accountability.

We can provide new information that will enrich and shape the evolving conversation among these sectors by:

- Helping congregations more effectively tell their stories of sacred places in community service and social impact.
- Promoting models where congregations and other community-based providers work successfully in partnership to attract broader support from government, business and the philanthropic community.

- ❖ Disseminating "best practices" derived from the handful of highly-successful, local programs that provide technical and often financial assistance to help congregations with the care and stewardship of their older properties. These programs attract significant support from foundations, individuals, and corporations.

- ❖ Encouraging more state-funded grant programs — created by bond acts or legislative appropriations — that support capital work on historic religious properties and provide public dollars directly to religious institutions.

Some of the proposals we can consider to support the care and active use of older sacred places include:

- ❖ New funding vehicles to encourage government and philanthropic support. A "National Fund for Sacred Places" and a "Percent for Capital" program are two possibilities. The Fund would provide seed grants for repairs and renovations to older buildings serving a public purpose. The "Percent for Capital" program would set aside a portion of every dollar donated for community service toward repairing physical infrastructure.

- ❖ Legislation that would make possible government support for capital repairs to sacred places that serve the public.

- ❖ An affinity group for grantmakers to draw together foundation, corporate and business leaders that have an interest in broadening support for faith-based institutions and the sacred places they depend on for community programming.

- ❖ A national coalition of key stakeholders and advocates — representing religion, human services, the arts, community development and historic preservation — charged with developing and implementing a long-term strategy to sustain America's sacred places.

- ❖ Increased technical assistance and grants to local organizations that can help congregations with the care and use of their older buildings. Such pioneering programs in Philadelphia, New York, and New Mexico have been in place now for more than a decade.

A Call to Action

Sacred Places at Risk — its findings and recommendations — constitutes a bold, new call to action. Partners is committed to a campaign which demonstrates that older sacred places are a major public asset and part of the nation's infrastructure that cannot be sustained without broader recognition and support. Partners can help facilitate deliberation and discussion that will lead to changes in the way sacred places are cared for and supported, but we cannot do it alone. Here are ways for you to get involved:

If you are a religious leader or congregation member in need of help, reach out to local organizations involved in historic preservation or community development, as well as civic leaders and elected officials.

If you are part of a local preservation or community development organization, bring people together to discuss the creation of a new sacred places assistance program.

If you are a civic leader, partner with congregations to meet neighborhood needs, and bring your community together with others that are trying to find solutions.

If you are a funder, revisit your grantmaking policies and guidelines to make room for supporting sacred places serving a public purpose.

If you are a government leader, convene your constituents to explore new options before sacred places are lost.

Partners is asking leaders in religion, government, business, philanthropy, human services, the arts, historic preservation and community development to respond to this call to action. We invite you to join us to help safeguard the sacred places that serve us all.

Postscript

The findings documented in *Sacred Places at Risk* were first released at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on October 30, 1997. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn) and Dr. William J. Bennett (former U.S. Secretary of Education) shared the podium and joined Partners in calling for a broad campaign to help sustain the public contributions of sacred places.

On December 2, 1997, The Brookings Institution hosted a forum moderated by E. J. Dionne, Jr., Brookings Senior Fellow in Governmental Studies and Columnist for The Washington Post, entitled, "Sacred Places, Civic Needs: Church, State and Social Policy," which explored the role of government in supporting religious institutions.

By early December, over 500 copies of the report had been distributed and its findings reported in national and local media, from *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* to the *Mobile Register* and *The Chicago Tribune*.

> What would many neighborhoods be like if there were only rubble-strewn empty lots or another batch of fluorescent-lighted fried chicken outlets where these weathered Romanesque and Gothic Revival structures now stand?
>
> *The New York Times*

One article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* focused on Mars Hill Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, one of the case studies profiled in this book. Within days the public had responded to the congregation's needs with three offers: the donation of computers for the congregation's youth program, a new heating system for the church hall, and a cash contribution of $10,000. The pastor declares, "we told our story and we've been blessed. As other congregations tell their story, they too will have blessings."

Many congregations and local organizations have called to request copies of the study findings and Partners has heard that the findings are being widely discussed and preached from the pulpit.

The Rev. Christopher Hamlin, pastor of the historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was inspired to undertake a self-assessment of his congregation's own community outreach and service. Here is what he found over the course of a single week:

"We welcomed more than 600 visitors to our visitor and tourist ministry that describes the role of Sixteenth Street in the Civil Rights movement. Our twenty five volunteers were available to assist visitors who toured the Civil Rights District and the church. We hosted the Morehouse College Glee Club in concert one evening and the choirs from Alabama A & M and Alabama State Universities the next day at noon. We distributed funds through our Benevolent Fund and received non-perishable food items for Greater Birmingham Ministries. In one of our conference rooms, we welcomed six international visitors from European nations and engaged in a roundtable discussion about race relations that included the pastors of two other Birmingham churches. By week's end, we invested 45 hours of community service and donated approximately $1,500 in space and other resources."

Not every congregation offers programs and services as broad in scope or as large in numbers. But, what they do offer is as valuable to their own neighborhoods — and it can be documented and made a part of the story they share with potential new supporters and partners in their own backyards.

Pastor Hamlin speaks for congregations nationwide when he says: "Churches are sacred way stations, places of refuge in the storms of life. Now, these historic places themselves need lifesaving."

Study Methodology And Consultant Team

This book is based on an in-depth study commissioned by Partners for Sacred Places of over 100 congregations with older and historic religious properties (constructed prior to 1940) in the following six cities: New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Indianapolis, Mobile, and the Bay Area (Oakland and San Francisco).

The sampling of over 100 congregations was randomly selected to be representative of different faiths. Consequently, it includes Catholic, mainline Protestant, historically Black, Jewish and evangelical traditions. Only four synagogues are represented, reflecting the significant post World War II out-migration from many inner cities of the Jewish community.

Each congregation participated in a series of in-depth interviews. First, participants were asked to identify the full range of community service programs housed in their older buildings. Then, the interview focused on one to five of the congregations' major community service programs.

The study had three research components, as follows:

The first component of the study explored how congregations use their buildings to house services and programs that benefit the greater community. Dr. Ram A. Cnaan, the principal investigator for this component, is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania. He is widely-published and considered a national authority in the social work field on services provided by non-profit, voluntary organizations. He is a national leader in the Association for Research in Nonprofit and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), and serves as Deputy Editor of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly.

Dr. Cnaan's research director was Gaynor Yancey, M.S.W., who is a doctoral candidate in social work at the University of Pennsylvania. Ms. Yancey is an Assistant Professor at Eastern College in St. David's, PA. Previously, she was Executive Director of the Greater Philadelphia Food Bank and former social ministry coordinator for congregations within the Greater Philadelphia Baptist Association.

Dr. Robert Wineburg served as project consultant to Dr. Cnaan and Ms. Yancey. Dr. Wineburg is Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and has conducted extensive research into the role of congregations in supporting the work of social service agencies.

The second study component explored property conditions and repair needs of 28 congregations drawn from the larger sampling. This component was carried out by Ken Jacobs, architect and project manager for the Vitetta Group, a nationally-known architectural and planning firm based in Philadelphia. Mr. Jacobs is also project manager for the rehabilitation of Independence Hall, sponsored by the National Park Service.

The third study component explored the cultural and architectural significance of 22 congregations selected from the larger sample. Mark Brack, Professor of Architectural History at Drexel University, was the lead architectural historian. He was assisted by Dr. Bruno Giberti and Nancy Fee.

Case Examples

Sacred Places, Public Places:
Prince of Peace Catholic Church, Mobile

If you hear the click of a pool cue and the excited shouts of several children when you enter Prince of Peace parish hall — don't be too surprised. As part of an after-school program, this inner-city Mobile church is providing a safe haven for neighborhood children in its newly renovated parish hall. Indeed, Prince of Peace has long been involved in community affairs.

Programs now offered on church property or by members include: counseling for couples; meals, visitation, and transportation for senior citizens; a day care and nursery school; health screening; visitation for the homebound; blood drives; nutrition programs; various arts events including tours, classes, exhibits, and concerts; and a neighborhood crime-watch.

At Prince of Peace, community outreach and building stewardship go hand-in-hand. With a freshly painted interior, new stained glass windows, restored marble altar, plaster repairs, a spruced up parish hall, and an historical marker outside, this 1874 Gothic Revival church has become even more of a beacon in the neighborhood. As former Pastor Paul Oberg realized, there is "a lot of family history" at Prince of Peace. In 1970 the parishes of St. Vincent de Paul, a predominantly white congregation, and St. Peter Claver, a predominantly black congregation, merged. Since then, the congregation has become predominantly African American.

The church's recent restoration became a means of renewing old ties — as the congregation forms new ones. "We get letters [from former parishioners] from around the country" states Oberg. More tourists and passersby stop in after seeing the historical marker; old members who had moved to other parts of the city return for visits — and some have made generous, and unsolicited, donations for further improvements — including a ramp for handicapped accessibility.

Most important, the building's physical improvements allow Prince of Peace to run its outreach programs more successfully. "The renovation led directly to our providing new programs for community residents" states Oberg, who helped create the new after-school program as well as many of the others. At Prince of Peace, sound building stewardship has allowed the congregation to care for the past in service to the future.

Congregations Serving Families:
Hyde Park Union Church, Chicago

As night falls on Chicago's South Side a crowd quietly gathers in a deserted lot. Illuminated by flickering candlelight, this somber yet defiant group begins to recite the names of the city's most recent victims of violence, while in the background waves an eight-foot long banner stitched with the names of the fallen. The community members collected for this Vigil Against Violence perform this remembrance both to honor the dead — "52% of whom are children" says the Rev. Susan Johnson — and to show resistance against this senseless destruction.

Started five years ago by members of Hyde Park Union Church, this anti-violence grassroots initiative has both brought the church into the wider community and the community into the church. Although the monthly candlelight remembrance is not held on church property or attended exclusively by church members, Hyde Park's support for this program has had a catalytic effect. The State Attorney's Office decided to house its Support Group for Victims of Violence in the church's buildings. Likewise, the church also now displays the banners with the victims' names in its sanctuary where the family members are free to visit — and to receive comfort from the support group.

This use of church space in support of the community is typical of Hyde Park. The 1906 Romanesque Revival church was supplemented by a separate education building in 1929. As Johnson explains: "It's part of our mission to offer programs that stabilize family welfare. We don't have much money, but we can share our building." She elaborates: "There are parts of the building that we might not use — but many programs in our community would not happen if we, and other churches, did not share our space."

And the church does indeed share its space with numerous groups, including: a Parent Support Network, various Twelve-Step groups, a local Habitat for Humanity chapter, Tai-Chi and Yoga instruction, a youth orchestra, the Hyde Park Korean United Methodist Church, the University of Chicago's Black Oral History Project, and McCormick Theological Seminary's African American Leadership Project, among many others. Hyde Park Union Church offers its own programs as well. One of the programs that Johnson is most proud of is its 89-year-old day-care center that now serves 50 neighborhood (non-congregation) children. "It's a big commitment of space, but an important extension of the church into the community."

Johnson sees her church and others like it as some of the "most durable institutions in the neighborhood — more so than many businesses or [even] public schools." She will add one caveat to this assumption however: "If we keep our buildings in repair, they're our greatest asset in community development." In the past several years the church, typical of many congregations with older religious properties, has put hundreds of thousands of dollars into repair and restoration of its buildings.

Full Service Institution:
Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis

The Rev. Peter Larson tells one of his favorite stories about Tabernacle's outreach efforts. Through its free legal clinic, Tabernacle, a predominantly white congregation, took a Korean-American law student as a volunteer, and he in turn helped an African American storefront church keep its space in a landlord/tenant dispute. This church may well have been evicted if not for Tabernacle's program.

For Larson, this is a model of how the church effects positive change in a collaborative, interfaith manner. The legal clinic has had 24 lawyers offer pro-bono services to well over 100 clients in the past two years. Additionally, Tabernacle started a medical clinic that has since incorporated as a separate non-profit group. The clinic, open six days a week, is staffed with both volunteer church members and paid personnel.

The medical and legal clinics are only part of a large array of successful services that are offered by this congregation. For example, over 2,300 kids a year are served by the congregation's recreational and tutoring programs. Tabernacle uses its own extensive athletic facilities — fields, baseball diamonds, and gym — to run many of these programs. But though this Gothic Revival church, constructed from 1921 to 1928, had many excellent facilities, more were needed.

"Lack of space has hindered our programs" explains Larson. And so the church bought an office complex (now the Allison Christian Community Center) across the street that houses a number of the community outreach efforts, including the medical and legal clinics. "The cost of providing services is absorbed by the church" states Larson. We have an endowment, but we also rely on our congregation of 1,050 to provide most of the support."

Though Tabernacle generally has enough money to have "dedicated space" for outreach and religious ministries, it also has the "goal to invite the community into the building." And so the church has literally opened its doors to its neighbors. "Tab always has run a soup kitchen, but it was a take-out style; the doors of the church were locked and chained. We've unlocked the doors and invited people in for food and fellowship. We do not see them as 'clients', but as friends, brothers and sisters."

The church has been lucky to have more resources than many — and so the community benefits. "We [at Tabernacle] want to know how to give what we have. We do not see the church as a fortress, but want to find creative uses for a beautiful older building... it belongs to the people in the neighborhood. The congregation is the custodian of the buildings, not the 'owner'."

Responding to Community Needs:
Church of the Intercession, New York

As both the quantity and quality of Harlem's affordable housing had decreased significantly in recent years, the Church of the Intercession decided to intervene in this "urban disaster." For Canon Frederick Williams, that decision was a "matter of institutional survival, faithfulness to our vocation, and wholeness and health for our people." As part of that response, Intercession helped form one of the most successful church-based, ecumenical housing development groups in the country. Since its inception, Harlem Churches for Community Improvement, Inc. (HCCI) has developed over 2000 units of low and moderate income housing in a variety of neighborhoods.

In fighting one type of "urban disaster" Intercession also became involved in one of international scope: the AIDS epidemic. Intercession's AIDS ministry in fact is inextricably linked with its other community service programs: the church has developed over 40 units of housing in cooperation with HCCI and the Black Leadership Council on AIDS and the church cooperates with the renowned program, God's Love We Deliver. As Williams explains, when a local AIDS activist "challenged [area churches] in the name of God to do more about the crisis, we said yes!"

Williams considers the "multi-cultural ministry that reaches out and honors the diversity of this community" one of Intercession's most important functions. That community includes "American-born blacks, West Indians, Dominican and other Spanish cultures, Indians from the south of the sub-continent and the Egho from Nigeria."

Intercession can accommodate such diversity, thanks, in part, to "the genius and vision of the architect and the builder," says Williams. The spaciousness, sturdiness, and versatility of the 1914 edifice enables Intercession to dedicate the majority of its space, classrooms, stages, basement, and gymnasium, to much needed community service. And every inch of the church's historic building is used. Intercession hosts art exhibits, day care and after-school programs, child and teen mentoring programs; senior citizen social programs, and Girl Scout troops. The renowned Boys Choir of Harlem also calls Intercession home, as does the Children's Museum of the Native American — the only institution of its type in the city.

Of course, such a large and aging structure "has many [repair] needs that cost a lot" says Williams. Intercession is currently fixing a leaking roof to "the tune of $500,000." Ten years ago the church completed a "Fund for the Future" campaign, a proactive maintenance program initiated in order to "avoid future emergencies which are endemic in an aging facility."

Raising capital funds has become one of the church's highest priorities, second only to raising operating money for its ministries and community programs. "This is not a wealthy congregation," Williams states, "It never has been." But support for Intercession has ranged far beyond the congregation. Local community groups, foundations, the Sacred Sites Program of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, elected officials, and individual donors all have "responded to our calls." Says Williams: "people love this place and are learning to give."

The Challenge of Property Care:
Mars Hill Baptist Church, Philadelphia

Jermaine Quick, the Education Coordinator at Mars Hill, knows that "computers often are not accessible to urban kids." He plans to remedy this deficiency. If renovated, the second floor of the church's fellowship hall, now in disrepair and unused, would make an ideal computer center. Quick sees beyond the peeling paint and cracking plaster to a place that would welcome and stimulate the children of the community, a place where they could learn, explore, and, in Quick's words, "have something to look forward to."

Nurturing, challenging education programs are nothing new at Mars Hill. The church's after-school and summer programs already serve more than 100 youth, both from the local neighborhood and the congregation. Quick initiated a daily tutoring program that includes, along with guidance in math, reading, and science homework, a half-hour session on conflict resolution. He has drawn on his experience working in the Philadelphia school system to develop a curriculum that helps "teach kids to focus on the positive attributes of another person, and to learn from their negative feelings," thereby building self-control and self-confidence.

Reverend Isaac Smith, the pastor of Mars Hill, bought this large 1891 Gothic-style building from the Episcopal Church in the early 1970s because his congregation needed a larger space. Since that move, Smith has seen the precipitous decline of the church's North Philadelphia neighborhood, through the loss of population and jobs experienced in many American cities. It is this rent social fabric that Mars Hill is in the process of repairing; Smith claims his "main purpose" is to change the area for the better. In addition to the youth education programs, Mars Hill also offers an extensive feeding program, which provides hot meals to 300-400 people a week.

As he has worked to serve the community, Smith has sought to shore-up the structure's many physical problems and simultaneously use the expansive space to house the church's outreach programs. Smith has followed a remodel-as-you-go philosophy, fixing problems as money is raised from the congregation and outside sources.

Through the years, Smith has been able to turn to the Historic Religious Properties Program run by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia as a source of advice, inspiration, and funds. This program, founded in 1986, provides on-site surveys by an architect, professional references, and small grants for restoration and repairs. Mars Hill has received three grants from the program, and has used the money to make both interior and exterior repairs to the building. Despite the challenges in managing this property, Smith has no plans to leave. He intends to use his building to help further his mission of "bringing change to North Philadelphia."

Innovative Outreach:
St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, San Francisco

When the Rev. David Norgard wanted to open St. John's to the "many people who walk by but may never stop in" he came upon a novel idea, even for this Mission District church with an exemplary record of creating innovative community programs. St. John the Evangelist is now home to the Divine Rhythm Society, which is not — as one might think — a typical church-housed choral/classical music group. "Some would call it a rave," Norgard explains. "It's an all night dance party, held every other Friday, and attended by hundreds of people."

And the diversity of the attendees mirrors the heterogeneity of urban San Francisco. The crowd, aged from their mid-twenties to late-fifties, is a group of all income levels, gay and straight, and multi-racial. While opening the church to this crowd contains "an explicit spiritual intent," it has had practical results as well. Though, for the most part, this event is not a money making venture, several people first introduced to St. John's through the Rhythm Society gave pledges, many in excess of $1,000, to the church's most recent capital

campaign. However, Norgard claims that the event could take place more easily "if we had money to take care of the building's poor lighting and electrical systems."

Indeed, despite looking structurally sound, the stately Gothic Revival structure, rebuilt in 1909 after the earthquake of 1906, needs quite a bit of work. So, Norgard has a multi-point plan of attack: a new roof, new shingles on the exterior, window casements, electrical systems, fire alarms, security systems, and garden repairs (a popular meeting space) are all planned. Renovations of the church are vitally necessary. Six days a week it hosts a variety of community events, including the Educational Thresholds Center, which offers programs for over 300 neighborhood youth. The offerings include academic tutoring, "Kid Smarts" classes in urban self-defense, and summer school programs in areas such as urban design.

When the kids in the urban design program realized that the northern Mission District did not have a single park, they decided to create one. The neighborhood participants in the classes are actually helping reclaim a vacant lot and turn it into a pocket park — with the city's help and blessing. Of course, the neighborhood's adults help plan and protect their district too; St. John's also hosts the Julian Street Neighborhood Association and the Neighborhood Watch.

Despite its success with such programs, lack of space has forced the church to turn away deserving groups. "Because of our space limitations we can't host as many neighborhood groups as we'd like" sighs Norgard. To make matters worse, St. John's parish hall burnt down several years ago and the church does "not have enough money to build a new one." Norgard continues: "we used to host quite a few AA meetings but have stopped doing so because we did not have enough room for our tutoring programs. We also want to offer the group Intersection for the Arts exhibition and practice space, but we're booked by the hour, and haven't been able to offer them the necessary time and space."

List of Participating Congregations

Addison Street Baptist Church,
Chicago

All Saints Episcopal Church,
Mobile

All Saints Episcopal Church,
San Francisco

Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church,
Indianapolis

Arch Street Friends Meeting House,
Philadelphia

Ashland Place United Methodist Church,
Mobile

Beech Grove United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Berry Memorial United Methodist Church,
Chicago

Bethlehem Lutheran Church,
Oakland

Broadway United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Calvary Episcopal Church, Germantown,
Philadelphia

Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul,
Indianapolis

Catholic Church of St. Philip Neri,
Indianapolis

Central Christian Church,
Indianapolis

Christ Temple Interdenominational Church,
Philadelphia

Church of the Advent of Christ the King, Episcopal
San Francisco

Church of the Ascension, Episcopal
New York

Church of the Intercession, Episcopal
New York

Congregation Beth Elohim,
Brooklyn

East 10th Street United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Emanuel A.M.E. Church,
Mobile

Etz Chaim Sephardic Congregation,
Indianapolis

First Baptist Church, Theodore,
Theodore, Alabama

First Chinese Baptist Church,
San Francisco

First Congregational Church,
San Francisco

First Corinthian Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

First Presbyterian Church,
Chicago

First Samoan Congregational Christian Church,
Oakland

First Spanish Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

First Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church,
Oakland

Fourth Universalist Society,
New York

Golden Gate Lutheran Church,
San Francisco

Goodwill Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

Government Street Presbyterian Church,
Mobile

Grace Episcopal Church,
New York

Greater Canaan Church of God in Christ,
Philadelphia

Greater Straightway Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation,
New York

Holy Rosary Catholic Church,
Indianapolis

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church,
Chicago

Hyde Park Union Church,
Chicago

Irvington Presbyterian Church,
Indianapolis

Joy of All Who Sorrow Church,
Indianapolis

K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple,
Chicago

Live Oak Missionary Baptist Church,
Mobile

Mars Hill Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

Mars Hill Free Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

New Comfort Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

New Jerusalem Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

New Mt. Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church,
Chicago

New St. Paul Church,
Oakland

New Utrecht Reformed Church,
Brooklyn, New York

Old First Reformed Church,
Philadelphia

People's Progressive Community Center Church,
Chicago

Phillipian Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church,
Chicago

Reformed Episcopal Church of the Atonement,
Philadelphia

Roberts Park United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Sacred Heart Catholic Church,
Indianapolis

Sacred Heart Catholic Church,
Camden

Second Presbyterian Church,
Chicago

St. Andrew and St. Monica's Episcopal Church,
Philadelphia

St. Anthony's Catholic Church,
Indianapolis

St. Augustine Episcopal Church,
Camden

St. Augustine's Episcopal Church,
Oakland

St. Bridget's Catholic Church,
Whistler, Alabama

St. Cecilia's Catholic Church,
Mt. Vernon, Alabama

St. Francis at the Point Episcopal Church,
Point Clear, Alabama

St. Francis Episcopal Church & St. James Phillipian Independent Church,
Chicago

St. Francis Lutheran Church,
San Francisco

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church,
Mobile

St. Hugh of Cluny Catholic Church,
Philadelphia

St. Ita Catholic Church,
Chicago

St. James Presbyterian Church,
New York

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church,
San Francisco

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church,
Indianapolis

St. Joseph Baptist Church,
Philadelphia

St. Luke Lutheran Church,
Chicago

St. Luke's Episcopal Church,
New York

St. Margaret's Catholic Church,
Bayou LaBatre, Alabama

St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, Episcopal,
New York

St. Martin's Episcopal Church,
New York

St. Martin's Episcopal Korean Congregation,
Philadelphia

St. Mary's Catholic Church,
Beaverville, Illinois

St. Mary's Catholic Church,
Indianapolis

St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church,
Indianapolis

St. Patrick's Catholic Church,
Indianapolis

St. Paul's Episopal Church,
Oakland

St. Paul's Memorial Church, Episcopal
Staten Island, New York

St. Paulus Lutheran Church
San Fransisco

St. Peter Lutheran Church,
Chicago

St. Peter's Episcopal Church,
Philadelphia

St. Peter's Lutheran Church,
Indianapolis

St. Philomena Catholic Church,
Chicago

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church,
Citronelle, Alabama

St. Vincent dePaul Prince of Peace Catholic Church,
Mobile

State Street A.M.E. Church,
Mobile

Tabernacle Presbyterian Church,
Indianapolis

Temple Sinai,
Oakland

Third Spanish Baptist Church,
Bronx, New York

Trinity Baptist Church,
New York

Trinity Episcopal Church,
San Francisco

Twin Beach A.M.E. Zion Church,
Fairhope, Alabama

University Heights United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Victory Memorial United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Washington Square United Methodist Church,
New York

Washington Street United Methodist Church,
Indianapolis

Waters Memorial A.M.E. Church,
Philadelphia

Wissahickon Presbyterian Church,
Philadelphia

Woodland Avenue United Presbyterian Church,
Philadelphia

Zion United Church of Christ,
Indianapolis

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