

The Big Update 2025

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance
hrballiance.org.uk

Partners for Sacred Places

At the Intersection of Faith, Heritage and
Community in America

Bob Jaeger, President
June 2025



Born Out of Crisis: Opposition of Landmark Designation



St. Bartholomew, NYC.

- Preservationists in reactive mode: responding to demolition threats, religious opposition
- Prime case in New York: St. Bartholomew's proposal to demolish parish house designed by Bertram Goodhue (who partnered for many years with Ralph Adams Cram).
- Designation and regulation is located at the municipal level. St. Bart's project was opposed by the New York Landmarks Commission; city upheld by U.S. Supreme Court

Growing Sense of Urgency



Fire Damage of Shrine of the Christ King and the Sovereign Priest, Chicago, IL. Tom Schaller.

- Many congregations facing serious repair issues costing more than they can afford
- Increasingly at risk of closure or dismemberment
- Almost complete absence of response from denominational leadership; most initiatives coming from the preservation community

1989: Partners is Born



- Partners' birth comes out of meetings of preservation leaders from New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and New Mexico
- Co-Directors – Bob Jaeger and Diane Cohen – represented a coming together of leadership from across the nation
- Original funding from J.M. Kaplan Fund, Lilly Endowment, National Trust and Henry Luce Foundation

The DNA of Partners

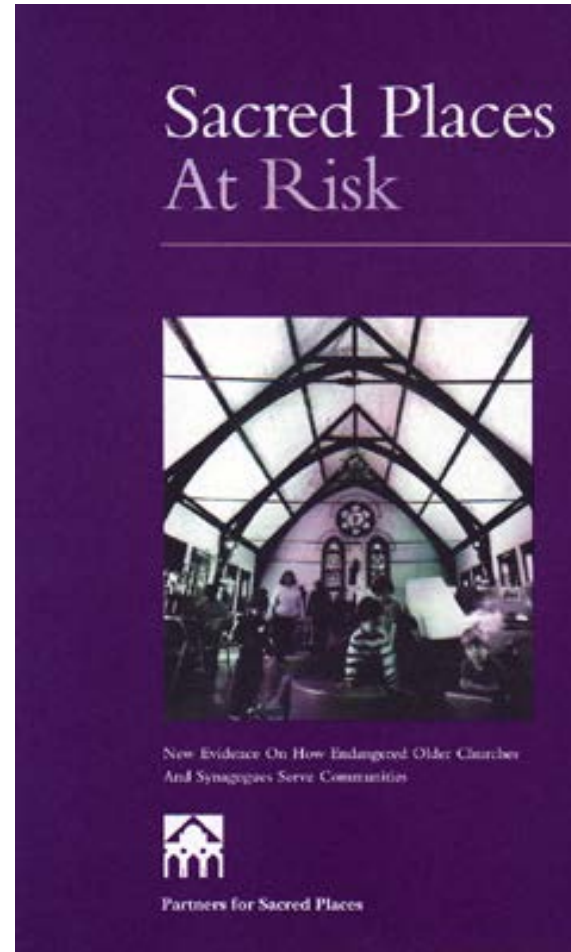
- Resource, not constraining. No role in landmarking.
- Responding primarily to mission and purpose, not architecture; parallel with Main Street.
- Emphasizing function over preservation. Moving away from the “comfort zone.” Respected by preservation but something different.
- Encouraging stronger, healthier communities.



Growing Questions

- Who is served by the programs housed in sacred places?
- Do congregations open their buildings sacrificially?
- What cultural value do they bring to the community?
- Do sacred places strengthen and stabilize their communities?

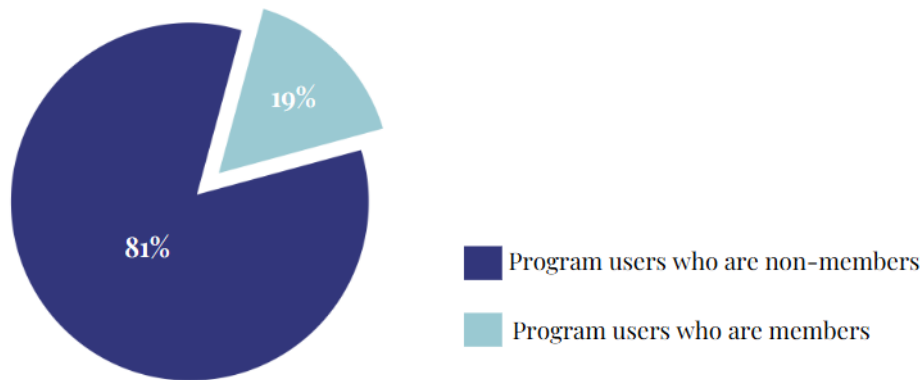
Sacred Places at Risk



- National attention for research in six cities on the “public value” of religious properties
- The project is the first unbiased look at how congregations share space for community services
- Published in 1998

Key Research Findings

Beneficiaries of Community Programs:
Congregation Members vs Non-Members



- 93% of urban congregations open their doors to serve
- 81% of people using space are not members
- Value of space and resources put into programs is \$140,000 per congregation
- 76% of all services in congregations' own buildings

New Dollars/New Partners (2003)



- Capacity-building training program that transforms how congregations see themselves and their place in the neighborhood.
- Faith and lay leaders learn to identify, cultivate and leverage new relationships.
- Graduates are able to unleash their unique heritage as a tool for restoring their infrastructure, recruiting supporters and revitalizing their community.
- ND/NP Programs have served over 100 judicatories and other sponsors, training over 1,000 congregations.

New Dollars/New Partners



- Groups of 8 to 12 congregations commit to 8+ months of training, homework and planning
- Each congregation is represented by a team of leaders, including the senior clergyperson and 3 lay leaders
- Each team learns how to discern and articulate the church's civic or public value and write a three-page case statement
- The training also includes a how-to on "asset based community development," which entails identifying the strengths and capacity of the building and its site
- Training culminates with guidance on community-wide capital fundraising

Capital Campaign Consulting

- Partners provides comprehensive consulting services that address both the internal and external components of a campaign.
- Beginning with prospect research and continuing campaign evaluation, Partners provides congregations the consultation and support they need to ensure their campaign success, including:
 - Building and recruiting for an effective campaign infrastructure
 - Case Statement assistance
 - Donor Identification and solicitation training
 - Potential grant identification
 - Strategic visioning and planning to integrate campaign into congregation's continued development
 - Community engagement and fundraising training
 - Financial stewardship training to increase annual giving

Community Engagement Consulting

Partners provides a range of services to help congregations make the most of their buildings in partnership with their communities:

- Asset-Mapping with community leaders, to help identify new stakeholders and develop strategies for connecting congregational assets with external programs and partners
- Design workshops and charrettes, to find creative ways to adapt spaces to new and growing community uses, working with designers and architects
- Congregational capacity-building, to help congregations learn how to articulate their civic value and broaden their financial support
- Shared space planning and matching, to help congregations evaluate current and potential uses, to maximize the value of space in furtherance of mission.

Economic “Halo Effect” of Sacred Places



Wesley Chapel UMC, Godwin, NC.

- Sacred Places at Risk looked only at the economic value of space used by social service programs
- The Halo Effect evaluates more than dozens of factors that describe a sacred place's contribution to the community – from green space to the effect of capital projects
- In partnership with Dr. Ram Cnaan at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy and Practice

National Study - Urban

Average Annual Economic Halo Value per Congregation

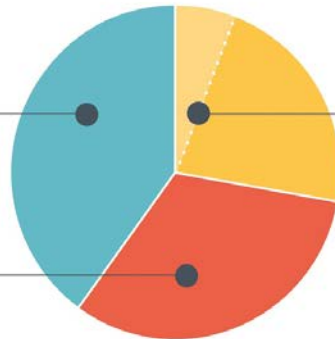
\$ 1,707,249

\$679,511

education (40%)

\$549,073

direct spending (32%)



\$478,665

catalytic (28%)

\$100,296

invisible safety net (6%)

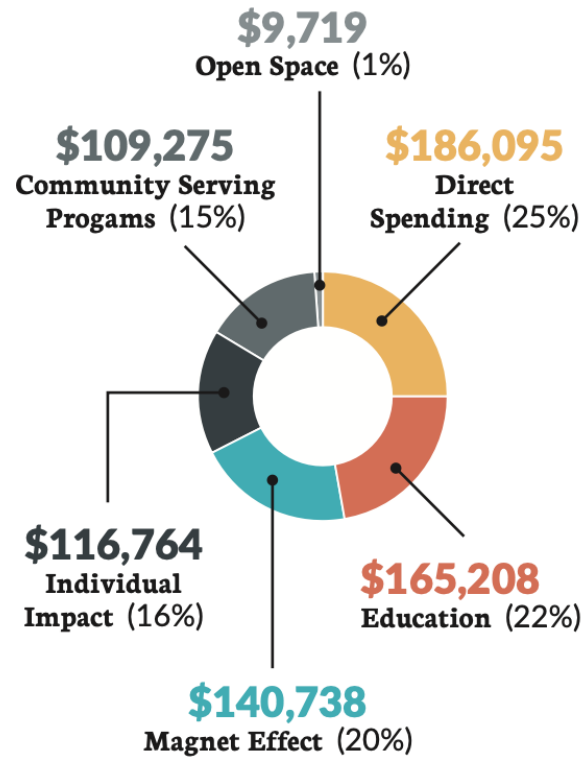
\$375,944

magnet effect (22%)

Note: Invisible safety net: 5.9%, recreation space: 0.1% (\$2,425)

- Partners conducted an in-depth analysis of 90 urban congregations in Philadelphia, Chicago, and Fort Worth.
- Our research found that the average older sacred place in an urban environment generates over \$1.7 million annually in economic impact.

North Carolina Study: Rural (United Methodist)



\$735,800

Average annual Economic Halo value per congregation



Current Programs

Space Matching



Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, NY.

- Congregations who occupy older buildings may have large amounts of unused space
- Help congregations find and develop a sustainable relationship with arts, food/environment and social service organizations looking for an affordable home
 - Identification of potential tenants
 - Guidance on best practices for sharing space
 - Lease development and negotiation

National Fund for Sacred Places



Dover Friends Meeting House, Dover, NH. Jean Schnell.

- Will provide \$65 million in capital grants over 13 years to 200+ congregations
- Planning grants to help hire architects and other consultants
- An array of consulting and training services to help congregations plan and execute successful restoration projects
- In collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Nordic and Appalachian Churches



Bewley Chapel Church, Russellville, TN.

- With support from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Partners has been working with Nordic and Appalachian churches over the last several years.
- The Nordic project established an inventory of Nordic heritage churches in the upper Midwest, and enabled us to work with churches to sustain their presence in the community and carry out repair and restoration projects.
- Similarly, the Appalachian project provided training, support for community engagement, and capital grants for historic churches in the region.
- Later phases of these projects have enabled churches to commission new folk art work that would engage their communities.

Playing and Preserving



St Paul's Episcopal's Organ. Joseph E. B. Elliot.

- Assessing the vulnerability of historic organs with a survey of approximately 50 historic organs in sacred places
- Technical assistance to promote repairs and conservation, and fundraising help for ongoing maintenance for 10 sites, including a professional assessment of their historic pipe organ
- Over \$300,000 in matching grants for repairs
- Three community concerts in partnership with Astral Artists, Play On Philly!, and St. Mary's, Hamilton Village

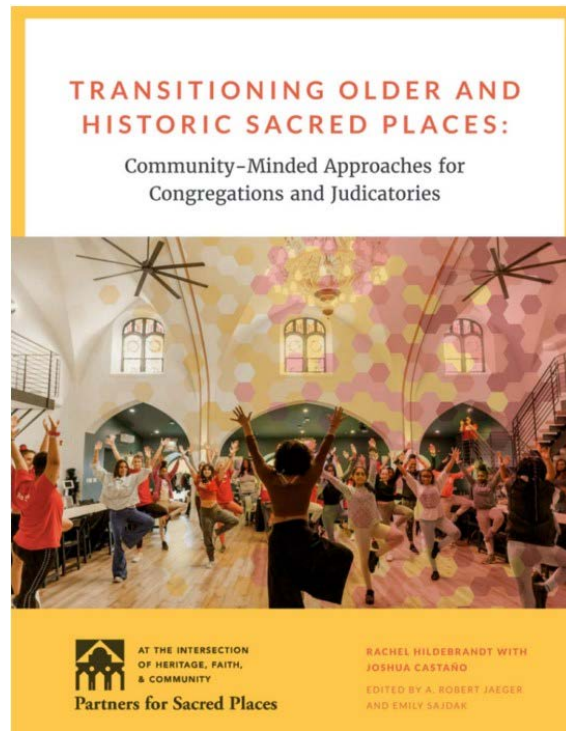
Pipe Organ Festival



Philadelphia Organ Festival. Daniel Kontz.

- The second phase of Playing and Preserving included the region's (and the nation's) first citywide pipe organ festival
- Partners worked with congregations, the Organ Historical Society, the American Guild of Organists, prominent musicians, music production experts and communications consultants to plan and execute 8 concerts over a week's time.
- Several concerts were sold out, and all promoted Partners' work

Transitioning Sacred Places



- Recognizing that many congregations are experiencing changes in the way they relate to their buildings, Partners published a Guide for Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places.
- The Guide is a resource for congregations interested in sharing their buildings in larger ways, or reconsidering the ownership of their buildings
- With support from the Murdock Trust, Partners hired its first Director of Transitioning Services
- Partners has been organizing workshops, training programs, and consulting services with a special emphasis on the Pacific Northwest

National Convening



National Convening. Chris Kendig.

- For the first time in America, Partners brought together leaders from philanthropy, government, religion, academia, architecture, historic preservation and the media in 2024 to discuss the value and vulnerability of the nation's sacred places.
- The convening was designed to encourage new thinking and new initiatives that would lead to resources and support.
- The Convening report calls for new funding, new research, programs to build congregational capacity, and communications initiatives to tell the story of civic value

For more information

Contact Bob Jaeger at bjaege@sacredplaces.org

Website is www.sacredplaces.org