

CHRIS ELISARA'S NOTES:

March 7, 2023

Before we dive into the interview and the Q&A I want to provide a loose framework for situating this conversation about religion, cities, urbanism, new urbanism, development, and design.

First, we're in an historical moment where we're having more of this type of conversation--that is a conversation that includes religious voices and perspectives, but the "plane of conversation" is very different to the positional arrangements of faith, science, and culture in past conversations.

There is still a "religious-circle" conversation. There is still a "modernist "secular-circle" conversation. There is now, however, a third type of conversation that is occurring, and that is the "post-secular" conversation in our post-secular world. The Enlightenment and Scientific Modernism didn't kill off God and end religion as that project desired and predicted. Today, approximately 70-80% of the world's population profess religious conviction. Religion still exists, which is why social scientists now refer to our era as "post-secular." People are melding the tenants of faith into fresh expressions of spiritual-religious life in response to current socio-cultural and spiritual forces being exerted on the human condition. But, the ***contours of conversation itself***, in a post-secular world, has changed.

In a world extolling diversity, religion cannot be excluded from the conversation, thus religious institutions and religious leaders who want to engage in the public square with their religious beliefs and culture, are entering/or re-entering the conversation with a new found humility as a ***contributor*** to the conversation about the human condition and the common good. We no longer have privilege in the conversation. We are no longer excluded from the conversation. We are included as part of the richness of the conversation and are expected to listen, learn, and if we have it, to make a valuable contribution.

So what do Christians have to contribute to the conversation about cities and new urbanism in the 21st Century, and what do we have to learn through our engagement? – ***Joel Kotkin: The City: A Global History***, among others, ask this very question.

The first thing I would suggest is that the Christian religious lean toward a listening and learning posture before coming forth with what we may be able to contribute. Of course it's a dialectic, but it's not going to go well if we start with, "here's the cool thing we've got to offer."

This then, is the spirit with which we entering into this conversation and sharing these church projects in this webinar—with humility and openness to critique, affirmation, and learning. But before I get to my first interview question I want to make a few more short observations.

Religious building projects of all scales have been built for millennia. For example, think of Tikal, Jerusalem, Mecca, Lahsa, Varanasi, Vatican City, etc.. The projects we are discussing, therefore,

are not unique in the sweep of human history—it’s only two contemporary religious development projects situated in the United States. On the other hand, in modern times, and in particular in our modern American context, it is relatively *uncommon to talk about* these types of religious projects. In other words, these types of religious projects happen all the time, only we don’t talk much about them in public forums. But today we are, which is so “CNU” and why I am grateful to be a member of the CNU community.

Which leads to my second point. By discussing these projects CNU is ahead of the curve once again, because the nexus of issues surrounding religion, religious properties, cities, towns, and urban design is fast emerging from obscurity as a tidal wave of church property re-development, or blight, is on the horizon and it will become a major crisis/opportunity for churches, cities, and towns to grapple with. Here’s some examples:

- ▶ Cite smallish denomination that has identified that 50% of their 6000 churches will be going under within 3-5 years. Estimated that there’s over 100,000 churches will close in the next 5-10 years.
- ▶ Cite Rome Georgia example from CNU Public Square article [A call to rethink dying houses of worship: June 2022](#)
 - The postcard for Rome, Georgia, features steeple after steeple defining its skyline. Its **tourist map for Rome depicts 15 houses of worship in its six-block long, four-block-wide Downtown** area alone. . . . **The church properties take up more than one-quarter of the developable land downtown.**
- ▶ Turner Center for Housing Innovation: UC Berkeley.

Mapping the Potential and Identifying the Barriers to Faith Based-Housing Development (2020) “We find that approximately **38,800 acres of land—roughly the size of the city of Stockton— are used for religious purposes and potentially developable.** A significant share of that acreage (45 percent) is located in the state’s “high” or “highest” resource opportunity areas, signaling an opportunity for building housing in neighborhoods with lower poverty rates and greater economic, educational, and environmental amenities. In addition, 256.5 acres of the land in higher-resource neighborhoods is located near public transit, offering some potential to build housing that meets the state’s twin objectives of expanding access to opportunity and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through improved land use.

- ▶ Cite the Georgia Tech research on Atlanta church properties: <https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/70268>
- ▶ Cite Halo Effect research (see resources below).
- ▶ Cite [The Gospel and the Future of Cities A Call To Action](#) that includes the CNU Charter and the UN’s New Urban Agenda found on [this page](#) concerning faith-based partnerships with ***UN-Habitat’s SDG Cities Global Initiative.***

Resources and Links

- Georgia Tech Report: <https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/70268>
- CNU Members Christian Caucus: <https://www.center4leadership.org/cnu-mcc.html>
- Faith Property Collaborative: <https://www.faithproperty.org>
- Turner Center For Innovative Housing: Mapping the Potential and Identifying the Barriers to Faith-Based Housing Development: https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Mapping_the_Potential_and_Identifying_the_Barriers_to_Faith-Based_Housing_Development_May_2020.pdf

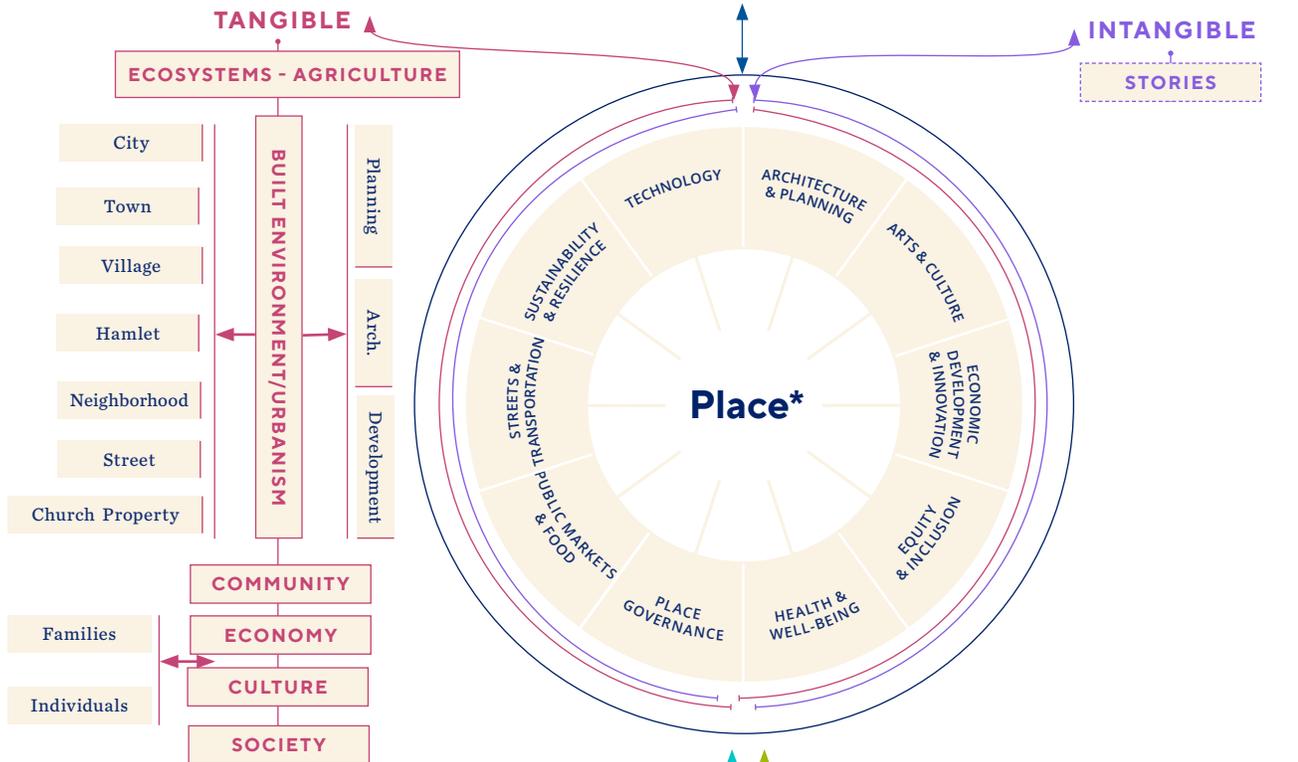
Extras:

- Cathedral District: Master plan done by Torti Gallas. <https://cathedraldistrict-jax.org>
- The Halo Effect:
 - ▶ Rural Churches <https://sacredplaces.org/info/publications/economic-halo-effect-nc-rural-united-methodist-churches/>
 - ▶ Canadian Context <https://www.cardus.ca/research/communities/halo-project/>
- Books:
 - ▶ Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred. (Philip Bess)
 - ▶ The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban (Philip Sheldrake)
 - ▶ Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today (Craig Bartholomew)
 - ▶ Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith (Eric O. Jacobsen)
 - ▶ The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment (Eric O. Jacobsen)
 - ▶ The Embrace of Buildings: A Second Look at Walkable City Neighborhoods (Lee Hardy)

A Draft Model of Christian Placemaking

THEOLOGY OF SHALOM
IS A THEOLOGY OF PLACE-BASED THRIVING

Identity & Place | Place & City | Creation/Ecology/Food | Work & Economics | Society & Culture



Church Community Gathered

DIRECT responsibility for church places and properties.

Embedded in place and community, align/design/develop church property for loving presence in community/place/city.

How Churches Manage Property

INTERNAL

- Denominational Leaders
- Denominational Experts
- Church Clergy
- Lay Leaders/Committees

EXTERNAL

- Consultants
- Developers

INDIRECT responsibility for places as stakeholders and advocates for common good places/cities for all.

Church Community Scattered

INDIRECT responsibility for places as stakeholders and advocates for common good places/cities for all.

PROFESSIONALS

- Planners
- Architects
- Designers
- Developers
- Finance
- Trades
- Private / Public Sectors

CIVIC LEADERS

- Mayors
- Politicians

CITIZENS

- Community Needs
- Policy Advocates
- Accountability

* "Place circle" adapted from PlacemakingX

Building in Good Faith

Faith Based Affordable Housing Design Studio Report
School of City and Regional Planning
Georgia Institute of Technology
Fall Semester 2022



Who's trying to build in Atlanta?

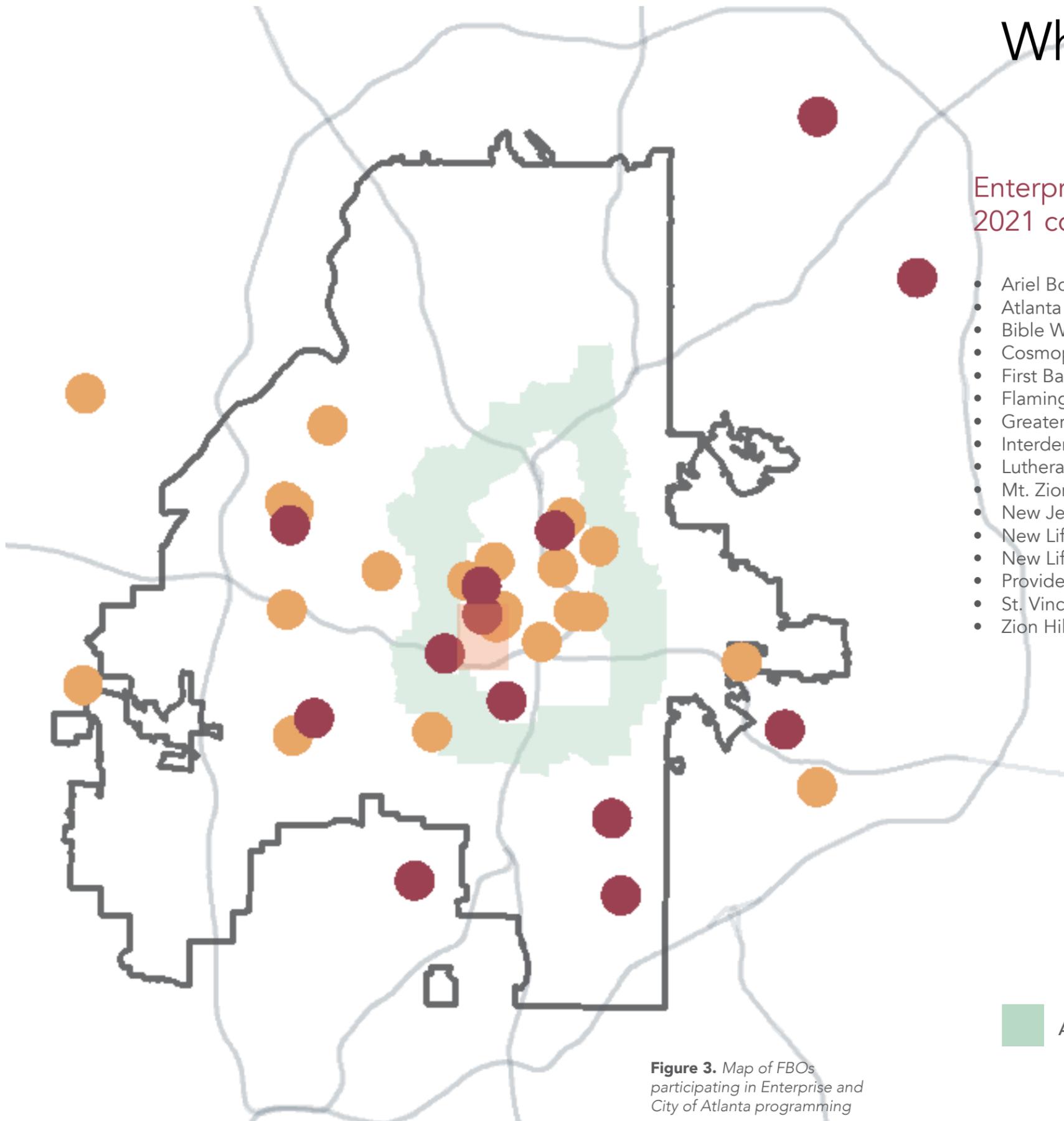


Figure 3. Map of FBOs participating in Enterprise and City of Atlanta programming

Enterprise Community Partners 2021 cohort

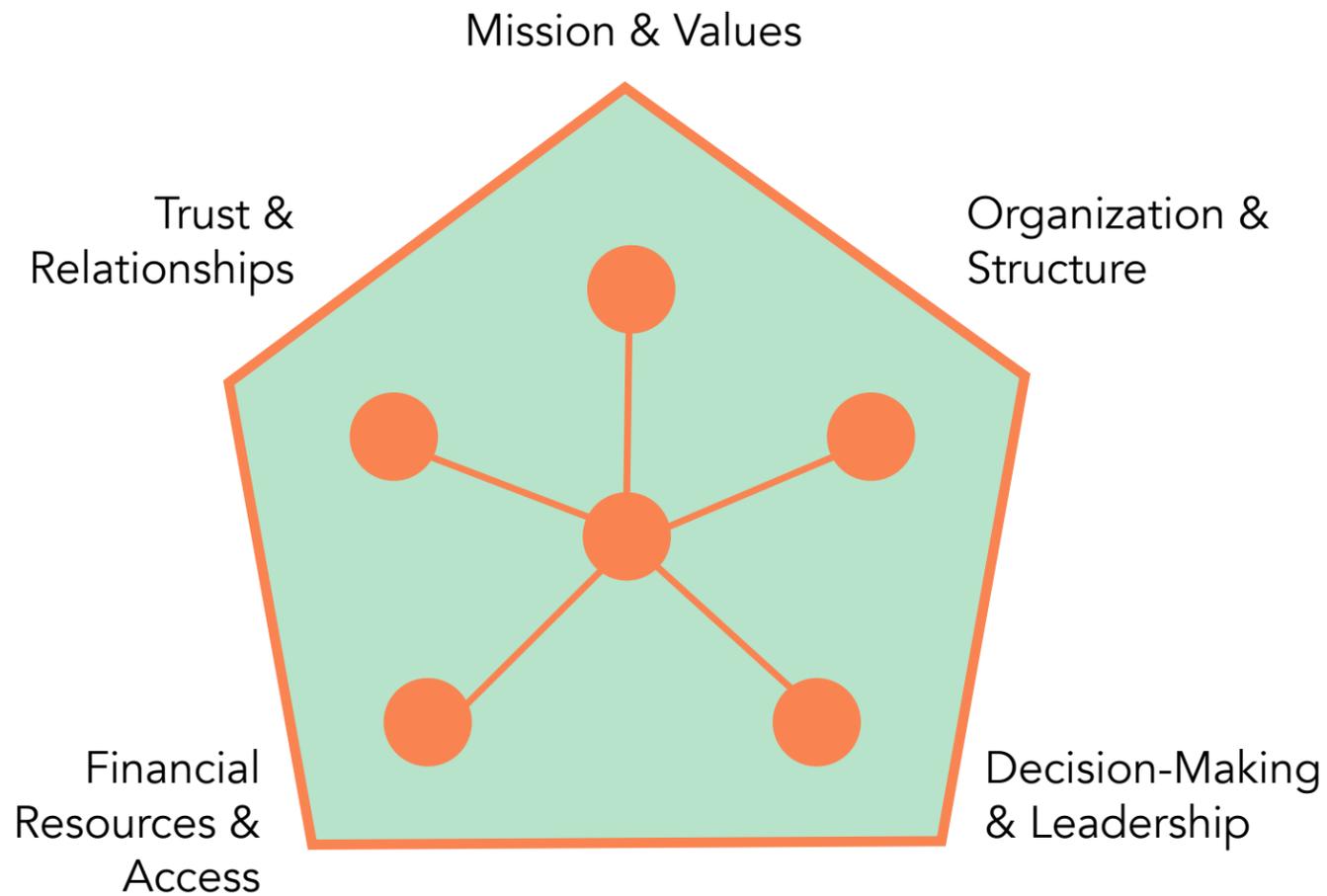
- Ariel Bowen United Methodist Church
- Atlanta Good Shepherd Community Church
- Bible Way Ministries, International
- Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church
- First Baptist Church Gresham Road
- Flaming Heart Ministries
- Greater Turner Chapel A.M.E. Church
- Interdenominational Theological Center
- Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Carey Park
- New Jerusalem SDA Praise and Worship Center
- New Life Presbyterian Church
- New Life Tabernacle Church of God in Christ
- Providence Missionary Baptist Church of Atlanta
- St. Vincent de Paul Georgia
- Zion Hill Community Development Corporation

City of Atlanta's Faith Based Development Initiative active congregations

- Allen Temple A.M.E Church
- Antioch Baptist Church
- Atlanta First United Methodist
- Big Bethel A.M.E. Church
- Cathedral of Faith
- Central United Methodist Church
- Crown of Glory Missionary Baptist Church
- Faith and Prayer Pentecostal Church
- First Mt Pleasant Baptist Church
- Fort Street United Methodist Church
- Friendship Baptist Church
- The Grove Community Development Corporation
- Hillside International Truth Center
- Holy Spirit Missionary Baptist Church
- New Horizons Baptist Church
- Norwood Tabernacle Baptist Church
- Quest Community Development
- St Mark United Methodist Church
- Trinity United Methodist Church
- Turner Chapel A.M.E. Church
- Victory International Center (Redeemed Christian Church of God)
- Virginia Highland Church
- West Mitchell C.M.E. Church

And other statewide denominations with local churches

5-Part Model for FBO Development



Houses of worship develop differently than other organizations. Understanding where these differences lie can help promote communication and strengthen partnerships. This model was developed through conversations with organizations around the country, reading case studies, and synthesizing existing literature on faith based development.

Each of these five areas of development has its own tools, expected challenges, and inspiring examples. FBOs will vary in their comfort level in each area. Still, understanding where an organization is on each of these five areas can help to move development forward while ensuring that the final product aligns with a congregation's mission, values, and capacities.

In the next section, each of these five areas will be expanded upon to provide pointers, tips, and areas of caution that we have gathered in our research.

Unpacking the 5-Part Model

1. Mission & Values

Description

FBOs come to development with different, sometimes incompatible, objectives. Values and mission can consist of broad development guidelines or project-specific intentions. Cosmopolitan A.M.E.'s development principles, for example, are broad enough to allow for flexibility but give the church a united narrative to present to partners and hold itself accountable. Building consensus and documenting values are important ways to track a project's mission.

Scripture is and remains an important source of values for many FBOs. From "biblical economics" in Exodus 22:15, which forbids earning a profit off of credit to the poor, to the Hebrew Jubilee, a 50-year event in which leased land reverted back to its original owner and unpaid debts were forgiven, to the forbidden practices of *Riba* (usury/interest), *Gharar* (speculation), and *Maysir* (gambling) in Islam, religious values in housing extend far beyond instructions to shelter the poor. Non-Abrahamic religions and culture similarly have long-established histories of community finance and ownership that allow resources to be distributed equitably and fairly among a community of members.

Challenges

FBOs are often called to build in places "where the market won't," as Bethel New Life's Mary Nelson describes it. In these situations, challenges are guaranteed to emerge. Many FBOs rely on prayer, collective consensus building, and faith in the face of risk to chart a path through these challenges. Vision and mission can and will change throughout the development process as a result. Developing with partners who respect and honor these processes and provide expertise with integrity can help surmount inevitable roadblocks and produce unexpected results.

Tools

Request for Proposals (RFP): a public announcement of your goals to allow prospective partners to apply to work with you.

Master Development Agreement (MDA): a formal agreement with development partners to define expectations, scope of work, and mission.

Internal expertise: legal counsel, planners, developers and accountants within an FBO can serve as informal "translators" of mission for external partners.

Visioning tools: committees, workshops, referenda, and development plans can help formulate and communicate mission and values.

Prayer



Congregation Shearith Israel (CSI) is an egalitarian, conservative synagogue located in Atlanta's Morningside neighborhood. Relationships are at the center of the synagogue's ministry, as is education of both children and adults in Jewish values, history, and language. CSI was founded in 1904 by Eastern European immigrants. The synagogue was named Shearith Israel meaning "Remnant of Israel" to acknowledge their status as pioneers. After WWII, the congregation followed the migration of the Jewish population northward, eventually settling at its current location on University Drive in 1949. Not only was CSI the first synagogue in DeKalb County, its current site formerly housed a school run by the Ku Klux Klan - a drastic transition!

CSI is governed by an appointed president and an executive board who together decide on congregational matters. The rabbis of the synagogue, who work on five-year contracts, wield influence but have no formal discretionary power. Although the congregation's membership has declined in recent years, members feel closely involved in the synagogue's direction and future..



Existing Uses



Existing Ministry

The Ben H. Zimmerman Religious School Building (2), designed by A. Ten Eyck Brown in 1917, is the oldest building on the campus. Its current tenant is a daycare program. Previously, it also housed a Hebrew school. Just outside of the building are the daycare's playgrounds.

The Sanctuary Building (1) dates back to 1957 and houses CSI's worship activities. Two wings, the Zimmerman Hall extension (7) and the administrative wing (4) were added in the 1980s and house meetings, offices, and a library.

Rebecca's Tent is a seasonal women's homeless shelter (November to March) located in the lower level of the Sanctuary (1). CSI created the program in 1983 as one of the first women's shelters in Atlanta and the nation's first synagogue-based shelter.

The parsonage (3), originally constructed as the rabbi's residence, is a single-story cottage at the site's NE corner. In recent years, rabbis have opted to live off-site, so CSI leases the parsonage as a single-family home and source of revenue for the congregation.

Desired Future Uses



Appropriate worship spaces: CSI's buildings do not meet its current worship needs. CSI desires a mid-sized worship space for smaller attendance and an outdoor space to host larger events.



Expansion of uses: CSI has commissioned a master planning committee and the firm Lord Aeck Sargeant to oversee the first major campus change in 40 years.



Stable revenue: Decreased membership has increased reliance on other revenue to fund synagogue functions. Once the daycare's contract expires in five years, new income sources will be needed.



Expand housing: Morningside is becoming increasingly unaffordable to synagogue members. CSI hopes to provide affordable housing to stabilize membership.

Conclusion

To actively call on faith leaders to contribute to housing production and stabilization, earnest policy changes are required that recognize the unique assets and challenges associated with FBAH.

Reflections on the FBAH Studio

Housing is a core component of all urban systems – financial, legal, social, political, economic, cultural, familial, and individual. Decent, stable, affordable housing is essential for individual and communal wellbeing. And yet housing is incredibly complex to build, maintain, and rehabilitate. In Atlanta, the traditional systems for housing delivery continuously underperform and treat rapid displacement, gentrification, and unaffordability as the unavoidable outcome of a housing market “in high demand.” At the same time, political leaders proclaim that widespread housing precarity and exclusion are not components of a sustainable, just city. Faith based leaders in Atlanta have been called on to be agents for good – to contribute to the changes that would allow for better, more stable, more inclusive housing. As our report shows, many faith leaders have heard the call.

If developing and operating affordable housing is difficult for traditional developers, it is even more cumbersome for FBOs that lack the experience, institutional connections, legal structures, legitimacy, and profit motivation to compete in the housing market. Throughout our research and work, we have noted how and where faith leaders develop *differently* than others. We have shown how their patience, deliberation, and relationship to prayer and risk lead them to make decisions unthinkable to orthodox developers. We have outlined common knowledge gaps, while also emphasizing the many assets that FBOs bring to the table. Our goal was to encourage FBOs to value their assets as serious contributions and to not let them be taken for granted. Moreover, we have demonstrated many examples where the “rules” of law, finance, organizations, and politics have appeared as unmovable barriers only to be bent and broken by strategic, driven faith leaders willing to do things differently. Despite the many inspirational examples of

FBOs’ work, we also documented moments where political and economic actors have abused FBOs and the trusting relationships they have with their parishioners in order to make a quick gain.

To actively call on faith leaders to contribute to housing production and stabilization, earnest policy changes are required that recognize the unique assets and challenges associated with FBAH. As we worked with our faith partners, we were able to critically reflect on the policy environment in which they were being asked to act. While we commend the Mayor’s Faith Based Development Initiative for its nuanced understanding of the needs of many FBOs in the earliest stages of development, we have compiled a collection of policy recommendations that we believe would facilitate more houses of worship to see their developments through. Ultimately, these recommendations aim to ensure that FBOs are able to pursue their missions through housing – not just that they are asked to contribute their land to someone else’s vision.



Figure 21. Group Members at the November 16th presentation.

Policy Recommendations

ZONING

Zoning rewrite: The City of Atlanta is currently undergoing an ambitious rewrite of its decades-old zoning code. For the next year, community workshops will be held that solicit input and allow the public to raise issues. **Faith leaders** need to organize and be at the table. and get involved in the rewrite process.

Rethink R-4: **FBOs** should advocate for moderate flexibility in R-4 zoning during the rewrite. Many FBOs located in R-4 zoning can only build housing by blurring the boundaries of what they can legally consider their “mission.” It should not be on FBOs to take on this legal risk.

Zoning overlay: Pasadena, CA and Seattle, WA each passed FBAH zoning overlays that grant minimum density of 32 units/acre to FBO-owned land building affordable housing. The State of California is considering similar legislation. Noting that FBOs are valuable partners whose longevity, sensitivity to headline risk and faith-driven mission impact their approach to housing over the long term, the **Atlanta City Council** should consider a similar overlay to advance the FBDI.

Rezoning: **FBOs** that seek zoning variances to build affordable housing should make their religious affiliation visible. Leaders who wear collars and a critical mass of respected members of the congregation should be in attendance for community events, NPU meetings, and review boards.

TDRs: The current TDR code is effectively non-functional. The zoning rewrite process has not given much public attention to what will happen with the TDR ordinance. The zoning rewrite process is an opportunity **FBOs with landmark status** to bring TDRs to the attention of the rewrite team. Some TDR rules will have to be changed at the state level. In particular, TDR usage to build affordable housing should be

added to existing state legislation.

More TDR recommendations can be found on page 59.

Density Allowances: The **City's Office of Permitting** should simplify the process for obtaining density permits, especially for FBOs in growth areas. Each of our projects would have required a rezone to successfully build affordable housing.

Parking: For growth corridors like Ponce, which are walkable and transit-adjacent, parking reduction or elimination should be allowed. The City's **Department of City Planning**, together with the **Atlanta Department of Transportation** and the **Mayor's Office of Sustainability** should publish a “carless Atlanta” plan that invests significant federal money from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill to reduce car dependency in the City. This plan would signal to financial institutions that they can underwrite parking reductions with the City's commitment.

Tiny Homes: DeKalb County ordinances currently allow homes on single-family sites with small footprints (less than 800 sqft.). However, other spatial requirements such as lot sizes, setbacks, and width are set by the zoning designation. **DeKalb County** should create a consistent Tiny Home ordinance like in Decatur or Clarkston would create better cohesion between building, lot, and neighborhood.

A precedent example is Ordinance 677-Pertaining to Tiny Houses passed by Spur, Texas in 2016. This ordinance permits tiny homes in the city by right, but established that variances are needed for tiny homes to be built in certain subdivisions. This ordinance does not allow tiny houses on wheels and requires each tiny house to have a foundation.

FINANCE

Non-LIHTC sources: Too many FBOs are expected to rely on LIHTC funding to pursue affordable housing. Atlanta's LIHTC funds are limited, extremely competitive, and give preference to developers with LIHTC

experience. Asking FBOs to participate in LIHTC is financially risky and requires them to partner with developers whose missions may not be aligned. Moreover, reliance on federal funds limits FBOs' ability to select their own tenants – often a priority for congregations seeking to provide opportunities for parishioners to age in place. **The City of Atlanta** has promised for years to develop a local affordable housing trust fund to provide major cash infusions into the city's affordable housing ecosystem. To date, no programs have been announced with enough scale to make an impact. The City needs to create this Trust Fund and develop rules of the program with FBOs who already have the land, vision, and partnerships to move forward. Washington D.C.'s trust fund may serve as a good prototype. The trust fund should provide substantial funds for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse.

LIHTC diversification: Current LIHTC rules are structured to fund two types of developments: 80-100 unit projects at 50%-60% AMI and 200+ unit projects at 50%-80% AMI. Most FBOs do not have the space or desire to build such large projects, instead preferring moderate-footprint, 10-50 unit developments that scale better to their existing buildings. By providing application assistance, fee waivers, **Georgia DCA** and **Invest Atlanta** could reduce the fixed costs of a LIHTC application enough to make smaller projects viable. Diversifying LIHTC-funded projects may also represent a more efficient use of program funds.

LIHTC condominiumization pilot: The City of Atlanta's **Housing Innovation Lab** should launch a pilot to demonstrate how to use LIHTC funds for only part of a development. FBOs often want to mix affordable housing with parishioner housing, administrative functions, or commercial spaces. Although creating separate “condominiums” for each of these uses is common practice in California and Illinois (among other places), it is rarely done in Georgia. The City can serve as a partner to test and share this process with FBOs.

Charitable Choice: As more municipalities look for ways to combat the rise in housing, the **federal government** should revisit the Charitable Choice provision of the Community Services Block Grant program for ways to streamline the process for faith-based organizations to receive funding towards sustainable long-term affordable housing projects.

OTHER

Permitting: Many FBOs are not experienced developers and yet are required to undergo the same bureaucratic processes as traditional developers. The City's **Office of Building and Permits** should develop an expedited permitting process for affordable housing, and a case manager system for FBOs could reduce lawyer and consultant fees needed to navigate administrative systems.

Coalition building: Cities like Los Angeles, Pasadena, London, and Atlanta in the past show that when FBOs join into coalitions, they are most effective at pushing for policy changes. **FBOs** should find venues to discuss vision, funding, and policy together. Many grant programs in recent ambitious federal legislation are available to non-profit organizations. Atlanta FBOs should join together to identify upcoming sources of money, found an eligible receiving organization, and develop a vision to mobilize funds. **The City of Atlanta** should expand their current FBDI programming to actively encourage coalition forming among participant FBOs.

Private Finance: Developing differently often begins with convincing a bank that financing your project is worth risking the unknown. **Financial regulators** should encourage banks to participate in FBAH and change their underwriting standards to account for the different type of organization that an FBO is. Over time, FBAH projects may be seen as auto-qualifiers for certain types of financial objects. Although a recent comment period for CRA changes has ended, this may be a subject for future updates of the law.

A TURNER CENTER POLICY BRIEF - MAY 2020

Mapping the Potential and Identifying the Barriers to Faith-Based Housing Development

AUTHORS:

DAVID GARCIA, POLICY DIRECTOR

EDDIE SUN, GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCHER

Introduction

As cities grapple with where and how to build more affordable housing, identifying land that could support new development has become a top priority. One option that offers a potential solution: expanding the ability of religious institutions to build housing on their land. Churches, as well as other faith-based organizations, often own underutilized land and/or structures which could be used to expand the supply of affordable housing. Doing so would provide significant untapped benefits for the organization, from supporting the organization’s charitable mission to providing revenue that can stabilize the organization’s finances.

Yet faith-based organizations face significant challenges in leveraging their property for housing, including limited financing options, regulatory barriers, and limited real estate knowledge. To ease and streamline the process, California policymakers are proposing new rules at the local and state levels to support housing development on religious land. For example, the City of San Diego has lowered parking requirements for this type of development. And in the state legislature, two bills have been introduced in the 2020 legislative session that would ease parking and zoning restrictions for housing built on such land: [Assembly Bill 1851](#) and [Senate Bill 899](#).

This brief uses county assessor data to quantify the total amount of land currently used for religious purposes in California as well as estimate how much of that land could be suited for housing. In addition, interviews with affordable housing developers and representatives from faith-based organizations provide context on the challenges that will need to be overcome to build lower cost housing on this land.

We find that approximately 38,800 acres of land—roughly the size of the city of Stockton—are used for religious purposes and potentially developable. A significant share of that acreage (45 percent) is located in the state’s “high” or “highest” resource opportunity areas, signaling an opportunity for building housing in neighborhoods with lower poverty rates and greater economic, educational, and environmental amenities. In addition, 256.5 acres of the land in higher-resource neighborhoods is located near public transit, offering some potential to build housing that meets the state’s twin objectives of expanding access to opportunity and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through improved land use.¹

While our research shows that the potential for siting new homes on religious land is significant, we also find that there are several barriers that limit this potential. First, ownership of this land is quite fragmented, representing 10,440 different parcels and potential land owners. Second, there are no uniform land use rules governing the development of religious lands, and local regulations such as minimum parking spaces (for both the religious use and new housing) and maximum density and height restrictions limit the development potential of these parcels. Third, there is no straightforward source of financing for housing on religious land, particularly for affordable housing. Lastly, most faith-based organizations have little to no real estate development experience.

After providing a methodological overview, this paper presents detailed findings of our analysis, examines the barriers facing religious institutions seeking to build housing, and concludes with recommended policy actions that could help religious institutions overcome those barriers.



The Oldest Newest Neighborhood

Cathedral District Jax is growing a leafy, vibrant neighborhood in the heart of Downtown Jacksonville. Anchored by five historic churches, the 36-block Cathedral District will include businesses, residential housing, neighborhood schools, public art, employment opportunities and more.

Our goal is to create a community with love at its core. A thriving enclave where residents of all ages, backgrounds, interests and abilities can live, work, and play together.

The transformation is underway! To learn more, read our [Master Development Plan](#) or check out our [News Page](#). You can also support public art in the district [here](#).

View our State of the District 2022 Update



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW](#)

Our Goals



Live.

Enjoy a high quality of life in a leafy green neighborhood with diverse residents.



Work.

Take advantage of a variety of housing options close to where you work.



Enjoy.

Restaurants, shops and entertainment will only be a short walk away.



Community.

Join your neighbors for recreation, entertainment and worship.

Cathedral District Stats

5

Historic Churches

310

Apartments Under Construction

1500

Residents

\$42MM

Capital Investments

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About CNU-MCC

Our mission is to support CNU by extending the concepts and practices of New Urbanism to the Christian community.



The CNU Members Christian Caucus (CNU-MCC) is an affinity group of Christians who are members of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU). CNU-MCC identifies a nexus of overlapping concerns and values that are central to both Christian faith and New Urbanism:

- social justice
- creation care/environmental sustainability
- urbanism that begets community flourishing and wellbeing

We, therefore, prioritize our work in these areas. To learn more about the CNU, click [here](#).

Vision, History, and Guidelines

How are we organized?

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Leadership Committee

Who are we?

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Our vision & mission

Faith Property Collaborative (FPC) is a community of practice for **leaders working with faith communities and their properties**. Our purpose is to strengthen and advance expertise in the field of property asset management within the emerging movement of sacred-civic placemaking. We foster conversations aimed at the discovery of common mindsets, tools, skills, resources and guidelines. We encourage and sharpen each other as friends and colleagues on a challenging yet hopeful journey.



Partners for Sacred Places

Partnering with Congregations and Communities For 30 Years

Partners for Sacred Places is the only nonsectarian, nonprofit organization dedicated to sound stewardship and active community use of older sacred places across America.

We provide capital campaign training and fundraising strategies, along with technical assistance, and grants to congregations and other local organizations across the United States via our **National Fund program**.

We have many exciting programs ranging from **Arts in Sacred Places** to **Playing and Preserving**. We also have customized regional programs where we provide congregational trainings, consulting, and convenings.

Want to work with us? Request information from Partners for Sacred Places.

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2021 BY THE NUMBERS



626

Sacred Places received direct support (from Partners for Sacred Places)



46

U.S. states where Partners strengthened historic sacred places



9,174

Views of Partners' Publications

EVENTS & RECENT POSTS



\$20M in Capital Grants to be Awarded to Historic Congregations through the National Fund for Sacred Places

February 24th, 2023

Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are delighted to announce that Lilly Endowment Inc. has renewed its support for the National Fund for Sacred Places.

[Read More >](#)

His Light Shines in Our House

January 10th, 2023

PART TWO OF TWO Stained glass window in the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia. Christopher S. Hunter Every building, regardless of its use, has a story to tell. This [...]

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A Dying Church's Gift Inspires a Young Congregation to Help People Experiencing Homelessness

February 10th, 2023

The Rev. Sara Wolbrecht speaks before a baptism at Salt House church in Kirkland, Washington. John Lok By Julia Duin, Journalist A dying Lutheran church in the Seattle suburb of Kirkland [...]

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Houses of Worship Central to Disaster Recovery

January 16th, 2023

In August of 2017, the city of Houston braced itself for a hurricane named Harvey making its way toward landfall. Houstonians are no strangers to major storm systems, but none expected [...]

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16th Street Baptist Tells Its Powerful Story

February 7th, 2023

On the morning of September 15, 1963, a bomb exploded at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. In the ladies lounge in the basement of the church, a number of young [...]

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Community Partnerships Enliven Indiana Churches

January 24th, 2023

St. Paul's will use a challenge grant from the Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships program to restore the belltower of its historic Gothic Revival building in LaPorte. The [...]

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The timing of [the site] visit was perfect. Really, Partners for Sacred Places helped us figure out the right questions to ask... Definitely that was a turning point for all of us.

Downtown Church, Memphis, TN

HALO PROJECT

Faith communities have a lot to offer to society and to the common good.

How do you measure a city's social infrastructure?

Any city's social infrastructure includes several factors. Key among them would be local religious congregations. It has long been known in Canada that churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples have social, spiritual, and communal value. But what if we could measure the value of what they contribute to the common good in their neighbourhoods and communities? That is the jumping off point [The Halo Project](#).

Inspired by similar research in the United States, the Halo Project began to examine and measure how religious congregations fare as economic catalysts. The first phase of this research examined 10 local congregations in Toronto. What we found was that those congregations all make significant common good contributions that have remarkable economic value when measured by traditional economic development tools.

But just how much economic good do those congregations do?

The 10 congregations we looked at in Toronto spend a little more than \$9.5 million per year in their direct budgets. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. The actual common good value those congregations produce, their "halo effect", through weddings, artistic performances, suicide prevention, ending substance abuse, housing initiatives, job training – and a whole host of other areas that make cities so much more livable – is estimated to be more than \$45 million per year.



Every dollar a congregation spends could create \$4.77 worth of service a city does not have to provide.

Applying that ratio just to the 220 parishes of the Roman Catholic archdiocese in Toronto yields a potential annual contribution of \$990 million in common good services, and this represents only one religious tradition. The full impact of all religious congregations in Toronto would be staggering.

How did we come to our conclusions?

Through the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016, The Halo Project performed an initial study of ten local congregations in Toronto. Data were collected through interviews and self-reporting made by senior clergy, lead administrators, and key lay leaders. The results of this phase of research suggest that economic valuation of local congregations is possible within the Canadian context.

Subsequent study and further refinements in methodology are needed to offer further validation, and potentially lead to a more streamlined means of helping municipalities and congregations assess the "halo effect" in their particular settings. The ratio of budget spending to public good value may vary across congregational types, sizes, community types and sizes, or other variables that have not been captured in the initial pilot study.

[Click here to read more about the Halo Project, and Phase 1 \(Toronto\).](#)



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The Economic Halo Effect of Rural United Methodist Churches of North Carolina

A Rural Methodist Church in North Carolina Brings, On Average, an Annual Economic Value of \$735,000 to its Local Economy

Research confirms:

- Seventy-two percent of those benefiting from programs housed in United Methodist Churches are not members of those congregations. In effect, rural Methodist churches are de facto community centers, as is the case with urban congregations.
- Congregations generate value because they spend locally and hire locally; they host events that bring people to the community who spend money there; they share space in their buildings, at low cost or no cost; and they provide needed resources and services to the community.

Partners for Sacred Places has known for over a decade that the value of sacred places extends to the larger community around them. Two rounds of previous research by Partners on the [Economic Halo Effect of churches and synagogues](#) have demonstrated the outsized civic value of sacred places – i.e., the value they bring to the larger community. Until now, however, that research was focused on urban sacred places.

From the Urban to Rural Study

Partners for Sacred Places, in partnership with the Duke Endowment and UNC Charlotte Urban (Institute), conducted a study to better understand **the local economic impact of rural churches**, specifically examining the impact of United Methodist Church (UMC) congregations in North Carolina's small towns and rural areas. The study examined who benefits from the presence of these congregations and what contributions these churches make to the lifeblood of their communities as conveners, trusted partners, and service providers.

Partners and UNC Charlotte conducted extensive interviews with leaders of 87 rural churches and then monetized and assigned a numerical value to six areas. These areas include:

- Direct spending
- Education & childcare
- Magnet effect
- Individual impact
- Community serving programs
- Outdoor recreation space

The study found that Methodist churches are not just for Methodists alone. This is an important finding, because civic leaders – mayors, foundations, business leaders, arts organizations, community groups – need to see our churches as places that serve everyone.

Small churches can make a big impact because congregational size and economic impact are not always correlated.

Examples include:

Franklinton United Methodist Church

- Has an active membership of 25 but an annual Halo impact of almost \$1.2 million annually
- Hosts an early childhood education program serving over 40 families and supports a myriad of other programs that provide food and serve the youth of the area

Trinity United Methodist Church

- Congregation composed largely of older adults and retired individuals
- Generates 742 hours of volunteer time and \$2,400 in donated goods to support a food program for low-income children
- Generates \$20,000 each year via the food program

[READ THE FULL STUDY AND ITS FINDINGS](#)

This study was conducted by Partners for Sacred Places with the [UNC Charlotte Urban Institute](#).

Partners for Sacred Places is the only national, nonsectarian, nonprofit organization dedicated to the sound stewardship and active community use of America's older religious properties.

The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute is a nonpartisan, applied research and community outreach center at UNC Charlotte. It provides services and research and analysis around economic, environmental, and social issues affecting the Charlotte region.



**Click on Book Image to View
The Economic Halo Effect of Rural United Methodist Churches of North Carolina**



What if we could measure
the socio-economic impact of
religious congregations in
Canadian society?

In Canada, the social, spiritual and communal value of local congregations to their surrounding neighbourhoods has long been accepted.

The economic value of these communities of faith is a different matter altogether.

Since 2016, the Halo Canada Project has studied this question in close to 100 Canadian congregations. And for every dollar these congregations spend, research suggests that they are contributing \$3.92 to the common good of Canadians.

Religious congregations contribute
\$18.2 billion to Canada's social economy