

BRICKS & MORTALS

Presentation at the African American Faith Leaders Summit
March 21, 2024



We help houses of faith not just to *survive*, but *thrive*.



BRICKS & MORTALS



OVERVIEW OF TODAY



Bricks & Mortals

1. **Why** Bricks and Mortals?
2. **How** Bricks and Mortals can help your congregation
3. **Benefits** of becoming a B&M Member

WHY BRICKS AND MORTALS?



THE WHY



Bricks & Mortals

- **Scale:** +5,600 religious properties in NYC and >92 million square feet of land
- Membership (income) **decreasing**
- Cost to maintain property **rising**
 - For example: *Local Law 97* (3 trainings provided!)
 - Often in *landmarked* buildings
- NYC is expensive
- **Increasing** financial needs - especially with COVID
- FBOs are **essential** to the fabric of society + need to maintain their physical presence

OUR MISSION



Bricks & Mortals

We are a **nonprofit, multi-faith, membership** organization.

We believe that faith-based organizations should be **empowered** to **maximize and monetize their real property** to support **mission**, benefit the **community**, and continue their **good work**.

WHO WE ARE



Bricks & Mortals

- Grassroots membership-driven organization
 - faith-based institutions
 - the real-estate community
- Focused on NYC
- We never charge for our services
- Impartial
- Unbiased



[Biannual Report 2021-23](#)

THE HOW



Bricks & Mortals

We ensure that faith-based organizations have the knowledge, connections, access to resources, and advocacy they need to:

- **Manage their real properties** in service of their missions and communities;
- **Understand and address new realities** that affect faith communities and their real estate;
- **Build resilience**; and
- **Take charge** of their own destinies and legacies.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO



Bricks & Mortals



HOW WE HELP YOUR CONGREGATION



THE HOW



Bricks & Mortals

- *Knowledge;*
- *Community and Connections;*
- *Access to resources; and,*
- *Advocacy*

WHAT WE DO: KNOWLEDGE



Bricks & Mortals

- **Advise** FBOs, including via one-on-one consultation
- **Document strategies** for FBOs to sustain themselves + continue to provide their essential services
- **Bimonthly Membership** meetings (resources + case studies)
- **Mapping** FBOs at risk
- **Developing resources:** 101s, how-tos and guidance

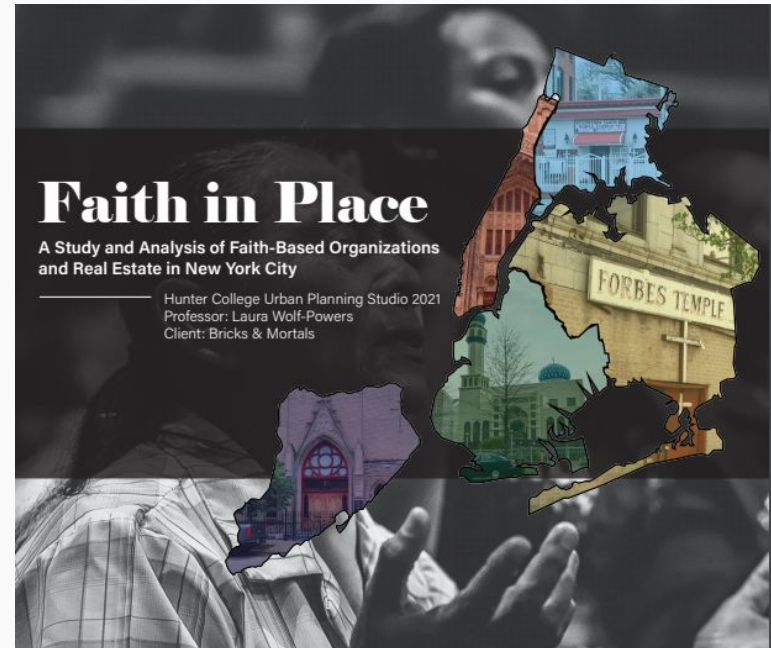
KNOWLEDGE: DEVELOPING RESEARCH



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Hunter College Urban Policy
and Planning Graduate Studio
Team explores faith-based real
estate in NYC:

[Faith in Place Report](#)



KNOWLEDGE: DEVELOPING RESEARCH



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Hunter course created a **Stressor Index** that quantifies the financial health of congregations by aggregating information on tax liens, building violations, risk of gentrification, and whether the building is landmarked or in a landmarked neighborhood.

Percent of FBOs that Qualified as Highly Stressed

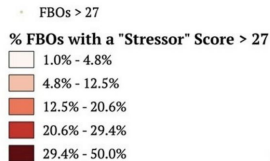


Fig. 3.9. Shows the percentage of FBO's in each NTA that has a Stressor Index Score greater than or equal to 27.



Fig. 3.8 CARTO Map, which displays the individual FBO's stressor index scores.

KNOWLEDGE: GUIDANCE

QUESTIONS TO ASK A VENDOR



Bricks & Mortals

- Are they a Member of Bricks and Mortals?
- Have they worked with faith-based organizations before?
 - Have they worked with non-profits or other mission-based organizations?
- How do they structure their fees?
 - Monthly or flat rate? Are they tied to deliverables?
 - If needed, can these payments be paid after closing?
 - If “free”, from where are their fees derived? E.g. from the developer’s fee?
- How will they work with you to provide you with information and advice and facilitate the decision making process?
- Is a license required, and are you licensed?
- How long have you been practicing?
- What specifically is your scope of work, and what is your expected timeline?
- What is NOT included? What other services or professionals will I need?
- Specific concerns or challenges they foresee with your project.
- Do they have any or foresee any conflicts of interest with your project?

KNOWLEDGE: GUIDANCE

BEST PRACTICES TO FIND A VENDOR



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1. Get a minimum of three quotes for any job.
2. Get references - and call them!
 - a. *Ideally* these will be from other faith-based organizations with whom they have worked, and *ideally* on similar projects
3. Don't be pressured to sign or agree quickly.
 - a. If they are trying to tell you that the deal won't last long, this is a marketing tactic. Take your time and speak to your own lawyer.
4. Get an attorney.

WHAT WE DO: COMMUNITY



Bricks & Mortals

- ***Gather*** faith-based and real estate communities
- ***Bimonthly meetings***
- ***Networking*** events
- ***Member directory*** of faith and general members:
 - Find a match for your needs
 - Signed Ethics Pledge
 - References from Faith organizations

WHAT WE DO: ACCESS TO RESOURCES



Bricks & Mortals

- **Trainings** and events
- **Real estate** listings (short- and long-term)
 - Space sharing website: [Venuely.org](https://www.venuely.org)
- **Connections to resources**
 - Funding (e.g. organizations offering pre-development funding)
 - Knowledge (government agencies, academic partnerships)

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: MEMBERSHIP MEETING TOPICS 07/21-06/23



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- Applying for **FEMA Aid**
- Information and Guidance on **Lien Sales**
- **Tax Exemptions** for Houses of Faith
- Tax Exemption **Renewal** for Faith Organizations
- Covid **Space Use** Analysis
- Introduction to and Guidance on **Local Law 97**
- Houses of Faith Applying for **City Council Discretionary Funding**
- Understanding **Islam and the Muslim Experience** in NYC
- **Office of the Attorney General**, with Assistant Attorneys General Linda Heinberg and Sharon Sash

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: MEMBERSHIP MEETING TOPICS 07/21-06/23



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- Overview on **License Agreements**
- **DYCD Commissioner** Howard, Programs and Opportunities
- **DEP Amnesty** Program
- Overview on the **Action Plan** from the Mayor's Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing and Community Development
- The **Pandemic's Real Impact** on Clergy and Congregations
- Pastor Gil Monroe, Executive Director of Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships, **The Importance and Role of Faith Organizations and Properties in NYC**
- Resources on **Hybrid Worship**

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: MEMBERSHIP MEETING CASE STUDIES 07/21-06/23



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- ***Hybrid worship***
 - Broadway UCC
- ***Sale and redevelopment***
 - Avenue Church NYC
- ***Affordable housing development***
 - St. James Church, Fordham
- ***Financing for development***
 - Cornerstone Fund
- ***Considering affordable housing and options on a large multi-property site***
 - Riverside Church

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: MEMBERSHIP MEETING CASE STUDIES 07/21-06/23



Bricks & Mortals

- ***Architectural proposals for the five congregations working with Pratt Architecture course:***
 - St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church
 - The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the City of New York
 - St. Martin's and St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Hudson Yards Synagogue
 - Park Slope United Methodist Church
- ***Full redevelopment***
 - The Community Church of New York

WHAT WE DO: ADVOCACY



Bricks & Mortals

- **Advocate** for needs of FBOs in NYC on real property, mission, and community service, and educating the public and local officials
- **Raise public awareness** of the resources FBOs provide, regardless of faith, including social services, housing, social justice advocacy, cultural programming, arts space, after-school programs, and community meeting space

ADVOCACY: POLICY



Bricks & Mortals

- B&M Membership developed [Policy Platform for NYC's Next Mayor](#) in 2021
 - [Bricks And Mortals Garners Strong Support From NYC Mayoral Candidates](#)
- Chair of the **Mayor's Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing and Community**, resulting in:
 - An Action Plan with +40 proposals
 - Two Citywide Summits 12/22 and 03/24

BRICKS & MORTALS

MEMBERSHIP



HOW B&M CAN HELP YOUR CONGREGATION: MEMBERSHIP



Bricks & Mortals

- Faith Based Members
 - Individual congregations of all faiths with real estate connection: small, medium and large
 - Can own property, rent or be interested in acquiring property
 - Denominations and judicatories
- General Members
 - Nonprofit and advocacy groups
 - Attorneys, architects, urban planners, denominational financing, developers, brokers (+ more!)
 - Must work in NYC and have an interest in faith-based property

WHO ARE B&M MEMBERS?



Bricks & Mortals

- **Faith led!** Designed for Faith-based members to maintain control
- Everyone signs an Annual Ethics Statement
- Annual approval
- Members vote for Board Members

WHO ARE B&M MEMBERS?

Congregations, judicatories, industry, lenders, and other stakeholders



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- [Taylor Aikin, Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects](#)
- [American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan NY](#)
- [The Avenue Church](#)
- [Board of Church Extension of Disciples of Christ, Inc. dba Disciples Church Extension Fund](#)
- [Born Brown / Nursha Project](#)
- [Braham Berg, BBB3RG LLC](#)
- [Bronx Clergy Task Force](#)
- [Meta Brunzema,](#)
- [Collective for Community, Culture and Environment](#)
- [Capell Barnett Matalon & Schoenfeld](#)
- [The Center at West Park](#)
- [Church of the Ascension](#)
- [Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew](#)
- [City Seminary](#)
- [Clal](#)
- [The Delaine Companies](#)
- [Denham Wolf](#)
- [Ecclesiastical Realty Advisory Service](#)
- [Enterprise Community Partners](#)
- [Episcopal Diocese of Long Island](#)
- [Episcopal Diocese of New York](#)
- [400 Foundation](#)
- [First Presbyterian Church in the City of NY](#)
- [First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills NY](#)
- [Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York](#)
- [FX Collaborative](#)
- [Gateway Housing](#)
- [Goldstein Hall, Attorneys at Law](#)
- [Grace Congregational Church of Harlem](#)
- [GWW Planning & Development, LLC](#)
- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [Hudson Yards Synagogue](#)
- [Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing](#)
- [Judson Memorial Church](#)
- [Local Initiatives Support Corporation NYC](#)
- [Matter Real Estate](#)
- [Robert Foltz-Morrison, former Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of NYC](#)
- [Muslim Community Network NY](#)
- [NYC Housing Partnership](#)
- [New York Board of Rabbis](#)
- [New York State Council of Churches](#)
- [New York Society for Ethical Culture](#)
- [Park Avenue United Methodist Church](#)
- [Partners for Sacred Places](#)
- [Presbytery of NYC](#)
- [Purposeful Growth](#)
- [RiseBoro Community Partnership](#)
- [The Riverside Church in NYC](#)
- [Savills](#)
- [Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper, former Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church](#)
- [Bill Shillady, former CEO of United Methodist City Society](#)
- [Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of NYC](#)
- [St James Church, Fordham](#)
- [Tenant Wise](#)
- [Tomasz P Mlynarski,](#)
- [Architect, PC dba Narska Architects](#)
- [UCC Church Building & Loan Fund](#)
- [UCC Cornerstone Fund](#)
- [United Church of Christ, NY Conference](#)
- [The United Methodist City Society](#)
- [United Methodist Church of the Village](#)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**directly elected by Members*



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- **Taylor Aikin**, Associate Partner, MBB Architecture
- **Dr. Debbie Almontaser**, President, Muslim Community Network
- **Meta Brunzema**, Architect and Urban Designer, Collective for Community, Culture & Environment
- **Joshua Burcham**, Managing Director & Creative Director, Radish Lab
- **Ellen Liu Chan**, Asset Manager, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
- **Nathaniel Christian III**, Trustee, Presbytery of New York City
- **Nell Derick Debevoise**, Partner, Purposeful Growth
- **Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley**, Regional Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan New York
- **Rev. Dr. Patrick Duggan**, Executive Director, UCC Church Building & Loan Fund
- **Jason Labate**, Partner, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law
- **Matthew Murphy**, Executive Director, NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy
- **Rev. Angela Redman**, Executive Director, United Methodist City Society
- **Bishop Angelo M. Rosario**, CEO, Bronx Clergy Task Force
- **Rev. Dr. William Shillady**, former Executive Director, United Methodist City Society
- **Egbert Stolk**, Director of Diocesan Property Services, Episcopal Diocese of New York
- **Alex Weis**, Principal, Matter Real Estate

Former Board Directors

- **Roger Leaf**, Trustee, Presbytery of New York City
- **Rabbi Joseph Potasnik**, Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis
- **Ira Schuman**, Vice Chairman, Director, Co-Branch Manager, New York, Savills
- **Rev. Mieke Vandersall**, Owner and Principal Consultant, Vandersall Collective
- Peter Cook, Executive Director, NYS Council of Churches
- **Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper**, former Senior Minister, Judson Memorial Church
- **Marc Greenberg**, Executive Director, Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness
- **Gianfranco Grande**, Executive Vice President, Partners for Sacred Places
- **Rev. Dr. Damaris Whitaker**, former Senior Minister, Fort Washington Collegiate Church
- **Canon Rev. Dr. Audley Donaldson**, Priest, St. Stephen and St. Martin's Episcopal Church
- **Pastor Gilford Monrose**, Faith Advisor, NYC Office of the Mayor
- **Rev Joseph H. Holland**, Director, 400 Foundation
- **Neil Steinkamp**, Managing Director, Stout

MEMBER BENEFITS



Bricks & Mortals

- 30 minute one-on-one **assessment** with B&M staff to discuss your congregation, programs and property
- Access to a **Member-only portal** on the B&M website
- Join **Bimonthly Membership Meetings**, including resources for houses of faith and case studies how congregations have used their property
- **Up-to-the-minute information** to stay in compliance with new local laws and ordinances affecting the community
- Receive information on opportunities for **grant funding**
- **Connect to a network** of NYC's faith and real estate community
- A forum to **highlight successes and share lessons** learned

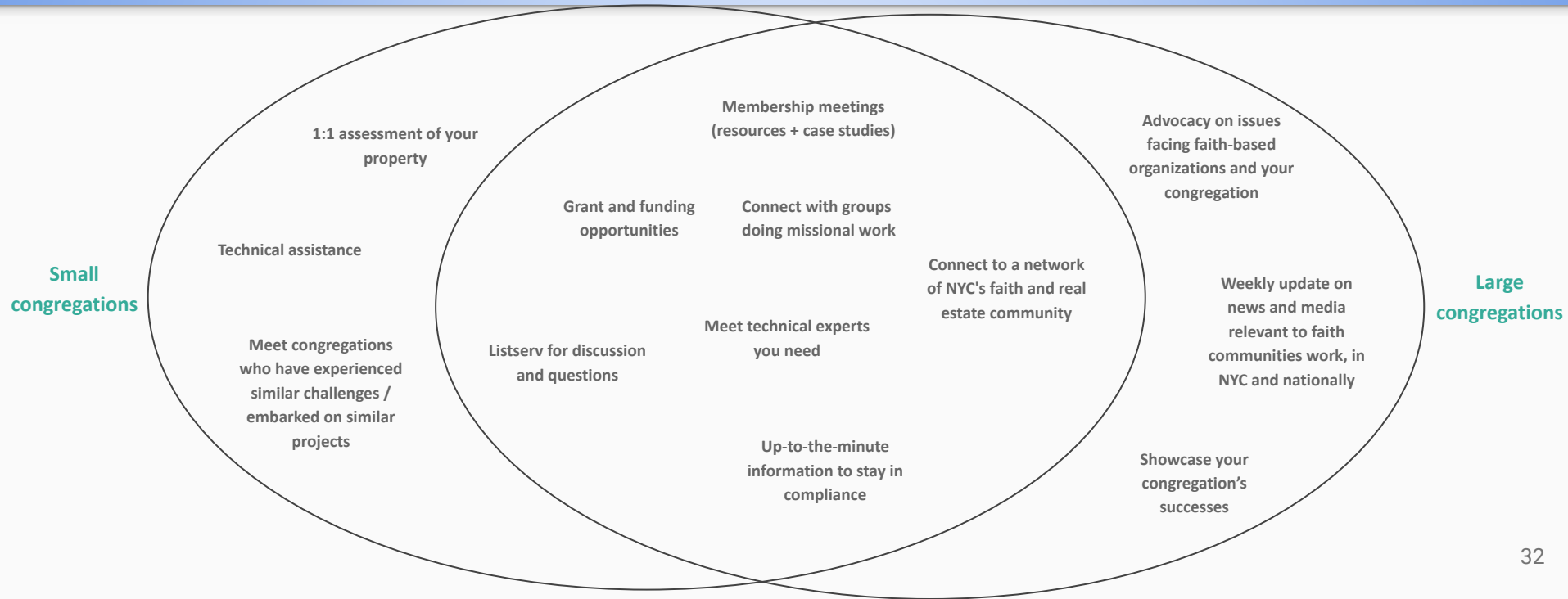
MEMBER BENEFITS



Bricks & Mortals

- **Events** throughout the year relevant to faith-based organizations and the real estate community, and exclusive webinars only for members
- Participate in **advocacy** for the faith community and faith-owned real estate
- Join a citywide, interfaith community of houses of faith **confronting the same issues**
- Receive a **weekly update** on news and media relevant to faith communities work, in NYC and nationally
- **Benefit from resources** that are developed in response to the faith community and members' specific needs, as they arise
- Access to **businesses providing discount** to members
- **Listserv** for discussion, questions, and to share your organization's updates and events with a wide network

Benefits for different types of congregations



JOIN US!

BECOME A B&M MEMBER



Bricks & Mortals

- bit.ly/bmapplication
- Contribution levels:
 - Churches with annual budgets up to \$100,000: **\$25**
 - Churches with annual budgets up to \$250,000: **\$100**
 - Churches with annual budgets up to \$1,000,000: **\$500**
 - Churches with annual budgets over \$1,000,000: **\$1,000**
- Scholarships and waivers are available
- For more information: <https://www.bricksandmortals.org/membership-join-us>

OPTIONS FOR YOUR SPACE



SHARING YOUR SPACE



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Short-term rentals

- Space lease + rental program
- Diversify revenue
- Mission aligned or commercial



Long-term lease

- 501(c)(3)
- Mission-aligned
- Arts, community-based, or other
- Steady income
- 24% of congregations are doing this (2020 Faith Communities Today national survey)

SPACE SHARING EXAMPLE



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Example: Judson Memorial Church

- 2,700 weekly visitors, 50 events / week
- 5 congregations are based at Judson
 - 18% of congregations are sharing with other faith groups (2020 FCT survey)
- Rent to approximately 181 groups: Arts (38%), Justice (36%), Worship (26%)



PARTIAL REDEVELOPMENT + EXAMPLE



Bricks & Mortals



"I think it's an obligation to care for God's people. This is basic nuts-and-bolts Christianity." - Bishop Provenzano

Renovating or developing a portion of your property

Example: St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (Queens)

Emergency housing for LGBTQ youth; partnered with the Ali Forney Center to create a 16-bed shelter

SPACE ADAPTATION EXAMPLES



Bricks & Mortals

Exterior Uses

- Apiary
- Community Garden
- Greenhouse
- Playground

Interior Uses

- Adult Day Care
- Arts and rehearsal space
- Café
- Community Spaces
- Co-working Spaces
- Commercial Kitchen
- Dancehalls
- Data Archives
- Day Care
- Exhibition Hall
- Event Spaces
- Fitness Gym
- Health Clinic
- Homeless Shelter
- Housing: Affordable, Supportive, Student, Senior, Mixed Income
- Meeting rooms
- Office Space
- Recording Studio
- Restaurant
- Retreat space
- Shared Worship space
- Storage

MAXIMIZING YOUR REAL PROPERTY: REAL ESTATE SALE AND SEARCH



Bricks & Mortals

- Sell your building + find another location to worship
- Sell your building + merge with another congregation

Example: Congregation Habonim

Sold their building + moved into the base of new residential building



MAXIMIZING YOUR REAL PROPERTY: FULL REDEVELOPMENT



Bricks & Mortals

Complete renovation or development of your property

Example: St. James Episcopal Church, Fordham



MAXIMIZING YOUR REAL PROPERTY: FULL REDEVELOPMENT



Bricks & Mortals

Example: St. James Episcopal Church, Fordham (Bronx, NY)

- Honors the historic church
- Programming: 102-units, 9 stories
- Includes: 900 sf rooftop terrace, 5,200 sf landscaped courtyard, resident lounge/ multi-purpose room, computer center, laundry room, bike storage, fitness room, office and social service space
- 5,300 Community Service Facility offers:
 - weekly food pantry and hot meal service,
 - regularly scheduled financial wellness seminars,
 - a non-profit community development credit union program, and an after-school program that will provide tutoring and snacks to school-aged children in the neighborhood.



**BUILDING AND SITE IMPROVEMENTS
TO EXISTING COURCH FILLED UNDER
THE FOLLOWING LOCALS:**
#1 BC 21.26.95
#2 PC 21.02.02
#3 PC 21.01.73

St James Terrace

2000 Jerome Ave., Bronx, NY 10468

Concept - Housing Patterns
707 Broadway, Suite 606
Bronx, NY 10461

Dattner Architects
1386 Broadway, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10019
Tel: 212.247.2300
www.dattner.com

Division Engineer
Sullivan
22 Ave B
New York, NY 10003

Mechanical/Structural/Marketing Engineer
Design Engineering
25 Broadway
New York, NY 10006

Contractor/General
Gruet 19th Avenue
88 West Street, Suite 1706
New York, NY 10006

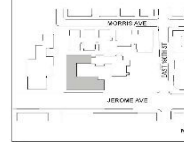
Support of Electrical/Civil Engineer
Langan
320 West 31st Street 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001

Food Service Design
Hortography Associates
429 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Landscape Design
E&E Landscape Design
88 West 32nd Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001

100% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
90% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
80% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
70% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
60% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
50% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
40% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
30% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
20% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00
10% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS	00/00

DATE: 100% CD SUBMISSION



4th Flr
3,000 Dattner Architects P.C.

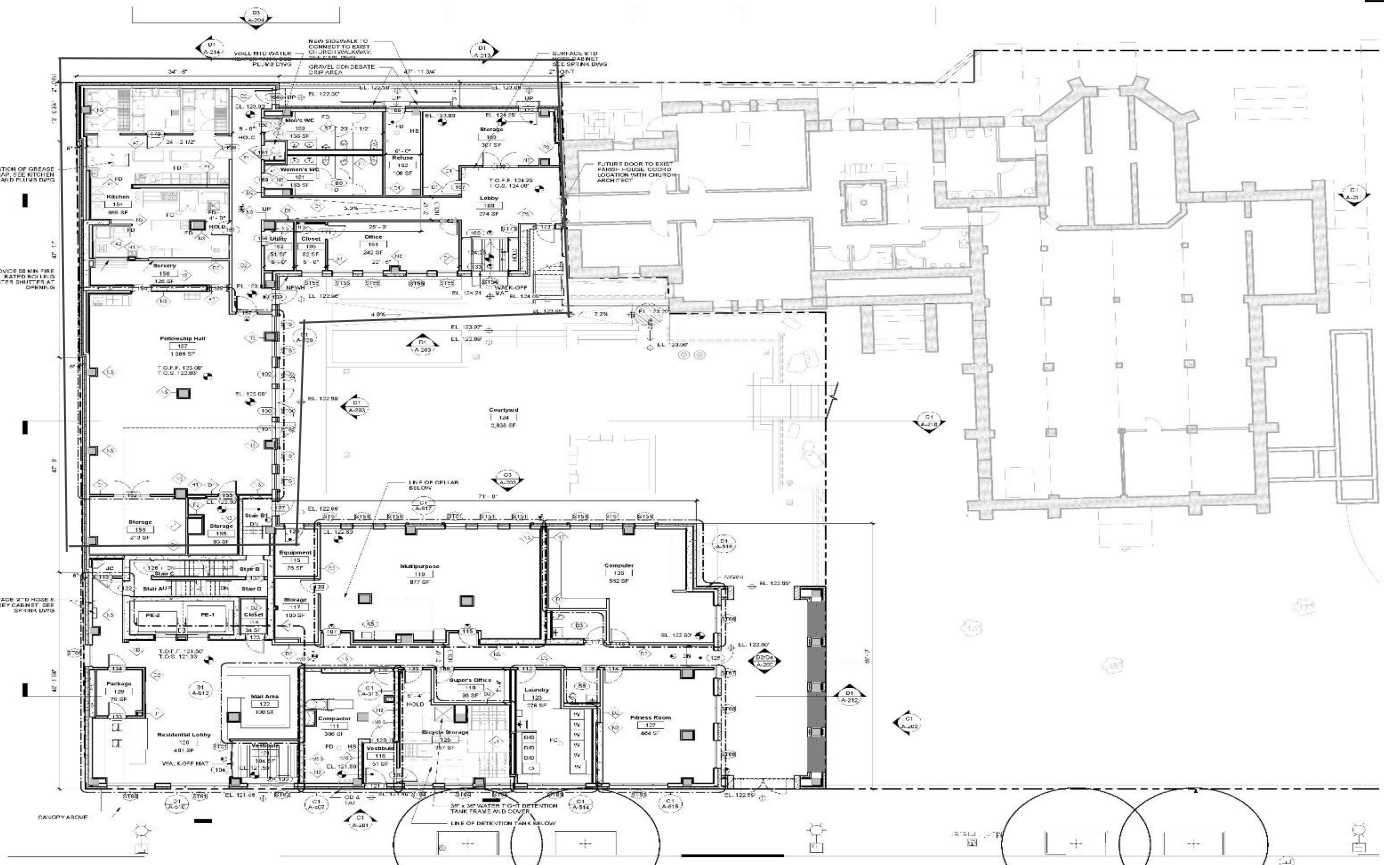
1st Floor Plan with St James Church

Date: 03/12/21
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"
Drawn by: KD, SD, BM
Checked by: NCT
Project No: 1550.0A
Sheet No: 101



1 of 137
DOB Application No: New Building #21018747

A-102.00



1st Floor Plan
1/8" = 1'-0"

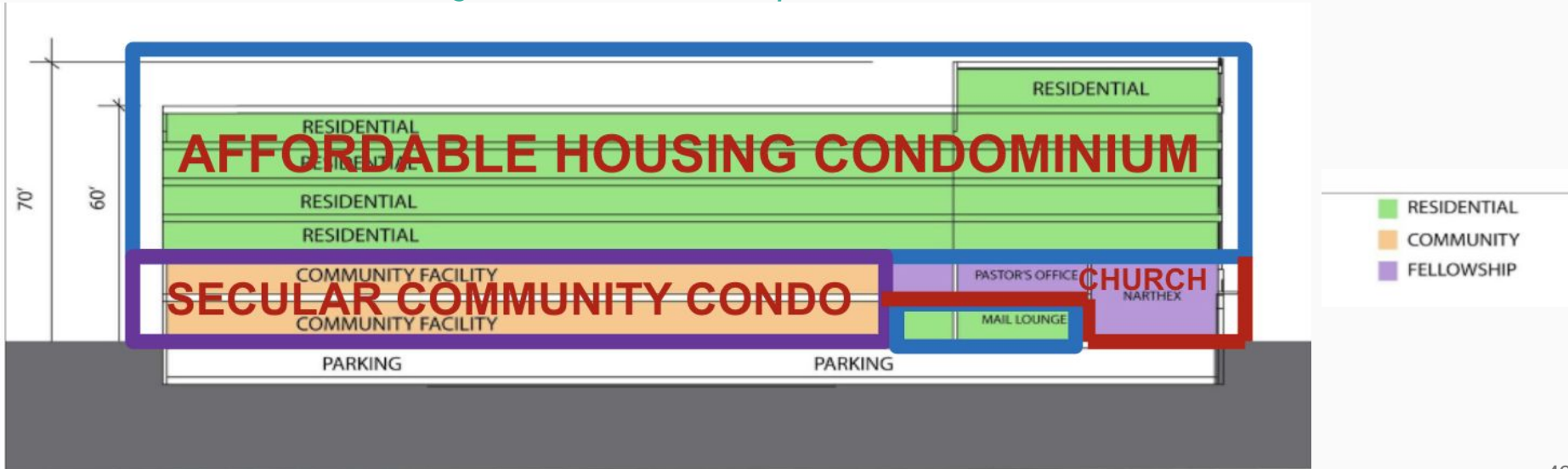
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MAXIMIZING YOUR REAL PROPERTY: FULL REDEVELOPMENT



Bricks & Mortals

**Common configuration for redevelopment*



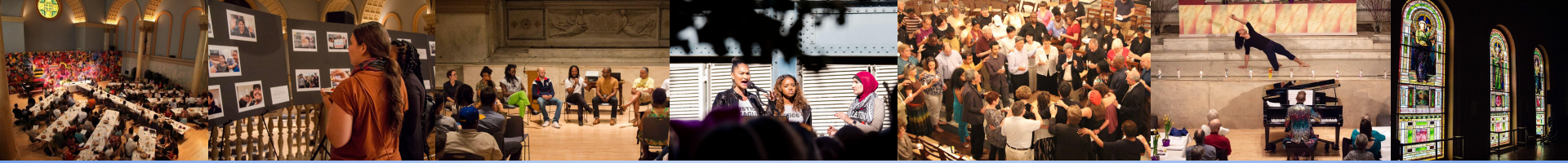
AFFORDABLE HOUSING: PARTNERSHIP FOR FAITH-BASED AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Bricks and Mortals is a founding member of the Partnership.

The Partnership helps faith-based organizations with property develop affordable housing - through access to **technical assistance** and **pre-development funds**

Contact Rtyler@nyscoc.org if you're interested in starting a conversation.





CONTACT US

www.bricksandmortals.org

info@bricksandmortals.org

follow us @ bricksmortalsny



Bricks and Mortals: The Future of the Faith-Owned Real Estate

Houses of faith are rapidly losing their real estate as a result of membership declining, dwindling budgets and aging buildings, often with six- or seven- figures of deferred maintenance. And this trend is expected to increase - we are living through the largest transfer of property in generations.

As houses of worship in the United States empty out, communities stand to lose the critical resources that faith institutions provide. Many religious communities are the social safety net providing food, emergency housing, immigration services and many other forms of supportive assistance. This is grave for residents who benefit from basic social services, but also those who enjoy the architectural, cultural, and spiritual assets of faith communities more indirectly. The average urban sacred site generates \$1.7 million in economic impact annually, with 87% of the beneficiaries of the community programs and events housed in sacred places are not members of the religious congregation¹. More broadly, we also know that active faith communities enrich neighborhoods building social capital, which has tangible effects on neighbors' physical, mental, and financial wellbeing².

This is an existential crisis for faith communities across the US, one which will have significant implications on their future, and thus the future wellbeing of their members and neighbors. How we address this challenge will shape not only our faith institutions, but also our communities, for decades to come.

This is why the community and work of Bricks and Mortals are worthy of support.

Over the last four years, Bricks and Mortals has become a vibrant grassroots, interfaith membership organization with the mission: to help houses of worship thrive by providing creative and sustaining solutions to managing their real estate, so that they can fully engage their communities and realize their missions.

Houses of faith: "Snowballing" closures

Houses of faith are rapidly losing real estate, with closures predicted to "snowball."³

More Protestant churches closed in 2019 than opened⁴. This was the first time the number of churches in the United States had not increased since the firm began researching the subject. This downward trend began before the pandemic, and has only accelerated. Another study estimated that 3,850 to 7,700 houses of worship per year (75 to 150 congregations per week) closed between 2010 and 2020 in the United States⁵.

¹ Economic Halo Effect of Sacred Places, Partners for Sacred Places and University of Pennsylvania, 2016.

² Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert D. Putnam, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

³ "100,000 Reuses for the Church to Find," David Roach, Christianity Today, September 25, 2023.

⁴ "Protestant Church Closures Outpace Openings in U.S.," Aaron Earls, Lifeway Research, May 25, 2021.

⁵ "Study: More churches closing than opening, Yonat Shimron," Religion News, May 26, 2021.

Post-pandemic, these closures are expected to double or even triple⁶. Another study put closures at 25% of the roughly 400,000 FBOs by 2025⁷. This same research said that in the next 50 years, up to half of US churches will repurpose their buildings.

In his new book, “Gone for Good? Negotiating the Coming Wave of Church Property Transition,” Mark Elsdon, a Presbyterian pastor, makes the case that this moment in history poses a unique opportunity for the church to make a difference. As congregations disperse the enormous real estate holdings of the church, Elsdon sees a chance for community renewal. Billions of dollars in church-owned property and 100,000 properties are expected to be sold or repurposed by 2030⁸. This decline presents a series of urgent issues for houses of worship, as well as our towns and cities.

Bricks and Mortals wishes to assist in turning around the downward spiral.

Lacking planning and support, these faith properties will be sold for non-missional purposes, causing local communities to lose access to crucial social services, common spaces, and the benefits of the social capital that houses of worship generate. We’re already seeing numerous cases of high-end housing and retail replacing faith groups in their buildings, unseating critical community functions; further contributing to gentrification and pressures on low-income and marginalized communities. If a property must be sold, the urgencies that faith properties often face in absence of planning and support often result in “fire sales” leaving holes in community support and unrealized income to the faith community.

What’s happening, and what’s changed?

Attendance down: The percentage of Americans holding membership in a house of worship dropped below 50% for the first time in history, with the median church size halving. Attendance and participation is closely tied to congregational budget size⁹. Most congregations are small, with 46% maintaining budgets less than \$100,000 and 75% with \$250,000 or less¹⁰.

Declining religiosity: There is an increasingly non-religious population growing in numbers. Often referred to as the “nones”, fewer than half (47%) of Americans say they belong to a church, synagogue or mosque. This is down from more than 70% in 2000¹¹.

COVID-19 Pandemic: Houses of faith closings have accelerated since the pandemic. Protestant pastors reported that typical church attendance is only 85% of pre-pandemic levels, and research found that attendance was down to 67% weekly, versus 75% before the pandemic¹².

⁶ “Study: More churches closing than opening, Yonat Shimron,” Religion News, May 26, 2021.

⁷ “Of Prophets and Profits,” Rick Reinhard, Rice Business Magazine, Fall 2023.

⁸ Gone for Good? Negotiating the Coming Wave of Church Property Transition, Mark Elsdon (Editor), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2024.

⁹ “FACTs on Finance: Trends in Congregational Economics from the Faith Communities Today 2020,” Dr. Sean Payne, King and Barnett, Faith Communities Today, 2020.

¹⁰ “Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview,” Faith Communities Today, 2020.

¹¹ “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Jeffrey M. Jones, Gallup, March 29, 2021.

¹² “Protestant Church Closures Outpace Openings in U.S.,” Aaron Earls, Lifeway Research, May 25, 2021.

With the advent of virtual and hybrid worship, houses of worship no longer need to be neighborhood based and services no longer need to be attended in person.

Bricks and Mortals: needed now more than ever

Most congregations have decades of deferred maintenance and the cost of maintaining a religious structure has increased dramatically. Property insurance has doubled and tripled in the last five years. All costs for their aging properties are only escalating. Church property costs \$7 to \$10 per square foot annually to operate — \$70,000 to \$100,000 for a 10,000-square-foot property¹³. Building operations alone would necessitate annual giving of nearly \$17,000 per attendee, based on the average congregation size.

Meanwhile, congregation populations are declining and aging. Eighty-five percent of revenue is from participant contributions; this downturn is also seen in the 20% decline in median income or gifts between 2010 and 2020. This perfect storm has produced a profound mismatch between sparse congregations and cavernous properties.

Faith-based organizations require support in many forms to continue to serve their communities. In particular, they need knowledge, experts, and other resources designed to help them navigate these questions. They need guides who can assess their current status, including risks and opportunities, and explore and explain their options. And then they need connections to reputable specialists, an organization advocating for enabling policy, and a peer group in which to share and resolve their needs. They need professionals to help them navigate the maze of community building regulations, including violations, tax issues, new codes and new laws (such as Local Law 97).

Only with these complementary forms of support will faith-based organizations be able to ably navigate their futures and continue to support their communities and/or intentionally plan their legacies.

This is exactly why Bricks and Mortals is so critical in our work with congregations and is worthy of support, among funders who are invested in holistic community wellbeing.

When Grace Congregational Church of Harlem was in dire straits with a complex development project... Bricks & Mortals not only took my call but then assembled the help needed on the legal and political front. As a Pastor for 15 years I had no one else to turn to for help. So thankfully the knowledge and expertise in handling the survival of places of worship is at Brick and Mortals - I am forever grateful! - **Rev. Dr. Nigel Pearce, Senior Pastor, Grace Congregational Church of Harlem, UCC**

In a city where so many vital community services are economically provided by the faith based community and where this community has so much more potential in areas like affordable housing, we need to find creative ways to unlock resources in that community. Real estate is often the answer. Helping the faith based community to get those decisions right is what B&M is all about. - **Ira Schuman, Vice Chairman, Director, Co-Branch Manager, New York, Savills**

¹³ "Of Prophets and Profits," Rick Reinhard, Rice Business Magazine, Fall 2023.

The Muslim Community Network (MCN) has been engaged with Bricks and Mortals from the very beginning, trying to get Muslim houses of worship to join the meetings, as there are over 200 mosques in New York City. Many of these mosques have trouble sustaining themselves due to a lack of funding and an inability to understand how to utilize their space.

Bricks and Mortals has been instrumental in providing critical and often esoteric information which is difficult for the diverse Muslim community to understand in how to sustain our houses of worship.

Their expertise in New York City tax laws surrounding houses of worship and guidance as to how to make these houses of worship community-friendly - in order to help sustain their work - is absolutely essential.

Bricks and Mortals is providing a service that no one else is doing.

They truly understand that houses of worship are important gathering spaces for the community and Bricks and Mortals is helping save many of these institutions with their team of experts. - ***Muslim Community Network***

Bricks and Mortals' work is absolutely critical for meeting this moment of existential crisis for faith-based organizations and communities.

Bricks and Mortals was founded to educate and empower congregations in NYC to maximize and monetize their real property to support their missions, benefit the community, and continue their good work.

The organization's core purpose is to ensure that faith-based organizations have the knowledge, connections, access to resources and experts, and advocacy they need in order to: manage their real properties in service of their missions and communities; understand and address new realities that affect faith communities and their real estate; build resilience; and take charge of their own destinies and legacies. This work is organized into four program areas: Knowledge; Connections/Network; Access to resources; and Advocacy.

These seismic shifts in real estate can be transformed into a boon for houses of faith, but not without proactive, collaborative, faith community-driven, interfaith, unbiased efforts like those of the Bricks and Mortals community and organization.

Join Bricks and Mortals

MEMBER BENEFITS



Below is a selection of the benefits you will gain as a B&M Member.

- 30 minute one-on-one assessment with B&M staff to discuss your congregation, programs and property
 - Access to a Member-only portal on the B&M website
- Join Bimonthly Membership Meetings, including resources for houses of faith and case studies how congregations have used their property
- Up-to-the-minute information to stay in compliance with new local laws and ordinances affecting the community
 - Receive information on opportunities for grant funding
 - Connect to a network of NYC's faith and real estate community
- Events throughout the year relevant to faith-based organizations and the real estate community, and exclusive webinars only for members
 - Participate in advocacy for the faith community and faith-owned real estate
 - Join a citywide, interfaith community of houses of faith confronting the same issues

Sample past events:

*Opening your sacred site now and post-Covid
Tax Exemptions for Houses of Faith*

- Receive a weekly update on news and media relevant to faith communities work, in NYC and nationally
 - Benefit from resources that are developed in response to the faith community and members' specific needs, as they arise
 - Access to businesses providing discount to members
- Listserv for discussion, questions, and to share your organization's updates and events with a wide network
 - A forum to highlight successes and share lessons learned

Faith Based Members



Submit application: bit.ly/bmapplication

Application

- [Membership form \(link\)](#) (annual)
- [Ethics pledge \(link\)](#): Affirming commitment to the Purposes of B&M, and to transparency and fair dealing in in all matters involving real property owned by faith based organizations (annual)
 - [Membership contribution \(link\)](#) (annual)
- [Letter of Nomination](#): Members receive this letter from their religion's governing body, or their organization (via Board resolution)
 - o [Letter of Support](#): These members represent the general interest of faith-based organizations in and around NYC. A qualifying faith-based organization can sponsor these Members, effectively passing on their Membership to this individual. This is only for members ineligible to receive a Letter of Nomination.

Contribution

- Organizations with annual budgets up to \$100,000: \$25
 - Organizations with annual budgets up to \$250,000: \$100
 - Organizations with annual budgets up to \$1,000,000: \$500
 - Organizations with annual budgets +\$1,000,000: \$1,000
- * *Faith-Based Organizations with Letters of Support: \$100*

GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

GET IT HERE



HOW TO DETERMINE PRICING

**for faith based organizations
sharing their space*

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GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**for faith-based organizations*

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JOIN OUR MAILING LIST



**UPCOMING EVENTS AND RESOURCES
FOR FAITH-OWNED PROPERTIES**

WEEKLY NEWS UPDATES



**MONTHLY ROUND-UP OF EVENTS,
GRANTS AND MORE**



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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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There's no single way to undertake a community engagement process – most professionals will use multiple different methods.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Houses of worship have long been pillars of their wider communities; they provide space to worship and pray, but also often provide food for those in need, healthcare for the un- and under-insured, career help for the jobless, childcare, addiction recovery support, and many other services. As congregations embark on new projects to serve the community, it is important to understand what the wider community wants and needs. As you embark on this research, or “community engagement,” you might be surprised at what you find!

Community engagement can take many forms: surveys, workshops, mapping exercises, and more. Each engagement methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses, and here we provide resources to help you undertake community engagement processes with your congregation and the wider community.

Some congregations choose to undertake this process with a consultant, who can provide an outside set of eyes. Of course, not all congregations have the funds to hire a community engagement consultant. One benefit of a consultant is having an outside perspective on their community, and approach community engagement in an unbiased way.

What does community engagement look like?

SURVEYS A survey is a research instrument where participants (members of your congregation and the wider community) individually answer questions, usually through an online portal, but sometimes on paper or through an in-person interviewer. Surveys can be a good tool to gather feedback from many different people in your community, but don't provide many opportunities for deeper discussion.

Check out this resource to learn more about designing surveys: [How to Create a Community Engagement Survey](#)

FOCUS GROUPS Focus groups provide an opportunity for deeper discussion. In a focus group, community members come together to have a moderated discussion about a topic. A focus group for your congregation might include diverse community members from across your neighborhood discussing what programs would benefit them and what programs are currently lacking in your area. Focus groups can provide a lot of insight, especially as the back and forth amongst community members can lead to a deeper understanding of the issues neighborhood residents face.

Here are some tips on creating a focus group: [Urban Institute: Focus Groups](#)

Bricks and Mortals is an interfaith non-profit. Our mission is to empower faith-based organizations to maximize their buildings and property to serve their communities.



Become a member at
bricksandmortals.org



Follow us and find more resources:
[@bricksmortalsny](https://twitter.com/bricksmortalsny)



NEWS AND MEDIA UPDATE

March 11, 2024

bricksandmortals.org



Bricks & Mortals

Advocating for Affordable Housing

Last week, dozens of faith leaders, elected officials, and advocates gathered in Albany to rally in support of the [Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act](#).

The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act, sponsored by [State Senator Andrew Gounardes](#) and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham, aims to facilitate the construction of [affordable housing on properties owned by religious organizations in New York State](#).

The bill has garnered support from various legislators so far, the legislation has 18 co-sponsors in the Assembly and 11 in the State Senate.

Both houses of the state Legislature are planning to introduce their [one-house budget proposals](#) today before adjourning on March 14th.



Photo from: @OpenNYForAll via Twitter

In Martha's Vineyard, over 1,000 community members, including faith institutions, gathered in support of [religious leaders' call for action on housing](#). Faith leaders in Massachusetts are advocating for better funding for affordable housing efforts.

House of Worship Development Projects

Several churches in Nebraska are [finding new purposes within their communities](#) after being faced with declining attendance and rising costs. Former places of worship are being repurposed into apartments, offices, community centers, and arts spaces. The former Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Benedict was transformed into housing while the Southminster Methodist Church is set to become offices and apartments. Proceeds from property sales are often reinvested into renovation projects or become reserves for the remaining churches.



The Southminster United Methodist Church. The new owners are seeking historical landmark status before starting renovations. Photo by Naomi Delkamiller/Flatwater Free Press

The Salt Lake City School District and the LDS Church are [downsizing their real estate holdings](#), leading to concerns about the potential demolition of significant community buildings and landmarks for new development. To address this issue, the Planning Commission has proposed incentives to encourage the adaptive reuse of older and culturally significant structures. The proposal, which unanimously passed the Planning Commission, aims to broaden the permitted uses of eligible buildings, allowing for conversions to multi-family residential units even in zones where residential use is currently restricted.

Reframing Interfaith Families

Alison Weikel and Rachel Weinstein White propose [replacing the term “interfaith” with “Jewish+”](#) to describe Jewish families that include a member who does not identify as Jewish. They advocate changing the narrative within Jewish communities to promote inclusivity and help the community grow. Both Alison and Rachel faced discrimination and felt excluded in the community for having partners that do not identify as Jewish. To change the narrative they are hoping to spread the use of these terms:

Jewish Adjacent: describes a member of a Jewish family who does not identify as Jewish. Jewish+ Family: a Jewish family with at least one family member who is Jewish Adjacent

Alison and Rachel believe that Jewish Adjacent family members can inspire and enhance the Jewishness of Jewish+ families, if we invite and engage them. Here are some of their ideas:

1. Talk to members of Jewish+ families to learn about their lived experience
2. Change the narrative in our communities
3. Walk the walk when it comes to inclusivity
4. Share your story

“Our Jewish Adjacent family members are adding to the Jewish experience and narrative, not detracting from it. They are not diluting it; they are making it richer.”

Houses of Worship and Community

Two Episcopal dioceses in Central Pennsylvania have launched the [Help, Healing, and Hope medical debt forgiveness initiative](#), aimed at alleviating medical debt for Pennsylvania residents. The program, a collaboration between Hope Church in Manheim and St. Luke’s Church in Lebanon, has raised over \$30,000 through cooperative efforts involving more than 120 congregations and individuals. This funding is expected to forgive an estimated \$3 million to \$3.5 million in medical debt across 38 Pennsylvania counties.



The Rev. Ray Jordan (right) offers communion during a monthly in-person worship. Photo provided by First Community UCC.

Rev. Ray Jordan's journey at First Community Church United Church of Christ in Dallas began with offering pulpit supply and eventually led to him becoming the church's pastor, prompting a shift in the church's ministry approach. The congregation faced financial challenges, prompting them to sell their building and adopt a "[mission-centered church without walls](#)" model. They invested the proceeds from the sale to sustain their operations and better serve their congregation, leading to increased community engagement and a revitalized sense of purpose.

If you enjoy these weekly updates, please consider becoming a Bricks and Mortals member or [making a contribution](#) so we can continue to provide this and resources like it.

[Sign up to join our mailing list](#) and get these every week!

BRICKS AND MORTALS

a nonprofit providing creative and sustaining solutions to help houses of worship thrive.



We empower faith-based organizations in New York City to maximize their buildings and property to serve their communities.

Bricks and Mortals helps congregations survive and thrive in NYC.

- Keep up-to-date on changes in taxes, building requirements and new opportunities
- Meet other faith-based organizations, real estate professionals and more to help you maximize and manage your property
- Educate the public and political leaders on your important work

Join congregations like yours and become Bricks and Mortals members today.

bricksandmortals.org

RECENT EVENTS



Bricks & Mortals

Affordable Housing 101 Guidance for Faith Community

How to develop affordable housing for your community

bit.ly/ah-nyc

Join Venuely Now!

Share your Congregation's space - earn funds every month simply by sharing your congregation's extra space during downtime. Hosting with Venuely is free. Venuely is a mission-driven, non-profit, owned and operated by the non-profit, Bricks and Mortals

Visit venuely.org to get started

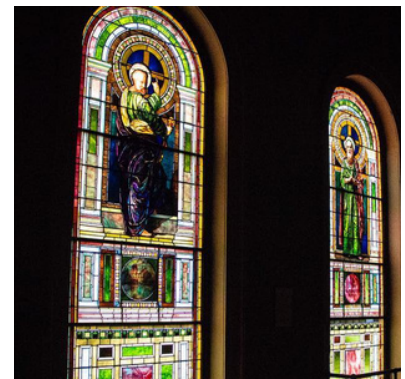
Public Sanctuaries

A Case For Redefining the Black Church as Public Space

bit.ly/public-sanctuaries

Conversations with Congregations: Public Health Impacts of Climate Change

bit.ly/nydis-cc



FAITH-BASED AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUMMIT

SPECIAL GUESTS

- HUD Regional Administrator **Alicka Ampry-Samuel**
- NYC **First Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright**
- **Rev. Adriene Thorne**, Senior Pastor, The Riverside Church in the City of New York
- **Pastor Gilford Monroe**, Executive Director, NYC Office of Faith and Community Partners

PANELS ON

- City of Yes: Zoning Proposals and Views from the Community
- Affordable Housing Policy Changes: What's Next?
- Faith Property Landmarks



13 MARCH 2024



8AM - 12PM



RIVERSIDE CHURCH, NYC

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Bricks & Mortals



TRINITY CHURCH
WALL STREET



GOTHAM

REGISTER NOW:



NEWSWORTHY ARTICLES

Faith-Based Affordable Housing Summit

In December 2022 we held a Faith-Based Affordable Housing Summit with NYC Mayor Eric Adams, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships, and the Mayor's Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing & Community Development, chaired by our Executive Director, Kate Toth.

This Summit discussed the Action Plan developed by the Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing & Community Development, which presents concrete solutions and policy recommendations that would allow faith properties to develop affordable housing on their properties, supporting the City and their communities in meeting this crisis.

New York City faces a homelessness and affordable housing crisis. The faith community is uniquely well positioned to play a substantial role partnering with the City to respond to this crisis.

There are more than 5,600 religious properties in NYC's five boroughs, with lively congregations from and serving their communities. Even with the current obstacles and lack of support identified in the Action Plan, faith-based organizations currently provide 40 percent of the vital human services in NYC.

Joined by dozens of expert panelists and hundreds of attendees, the Summit had panels on many topics including, affordable housing, landmarks, and air rights – all discussing how to mobilize support for utilizing faith-properties and supporting faith communities, so faith communities can continue to support their communities!

If you missed the Summit, be sure to tune in and watch the full event [here](#).



Thank you to all of the panelists, attendees, working group members, Pastor Monroe and the Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships for planning this event, and Trinity Church Wall Street for hosting.

Let's keep up this momentum! Want to get involved with the Working Group's next steps? Email us at info@bricksandmortals.org.