Community in Post-Disest World


Approved by Master’s Examination Committee:

______________________________
Liliane Wong
Professor, Head, Department of Interior Architecture, Thesis Chair

______________________________
Jeffrey Katz
Senior Critic, Department of Interior Architecture, Thesis Advisor

______________________________
Rafael Luna
Critic, Department of Interior Architecture, Thesis Advisor

______________________________
Wolfgang Rudorf
Critic, Department of Interior Architecture, Thesis Advisor
Additional Acknowledgement and Appreciation towards:

Nick Heywood  
Adjunct Faculty, Department of Interior Architecture, Advisor, Writing and Thesis Book

Ben Cornelius  
Critic, Department of Interior Architecture, Consultant, Structural Engineering

Stephen Turner  
Critic, Department of Interior Architecture, Consultant, Energy, Systems, and Sustainability

Eric Anderson  
Assistant Professor, Department of History of Art + Visual Culture, Advisor, History
Dedicated to my Mom, Dad, Sister, and Trevor.

To my Mom.
For teaching me to find joy in all that I do since life is so short.

To my Dad.
For showing me that nothing is ever finished and that everything has potential to improve.

To my Sister.
For providing laughs, a listening ear, and an understanding heart.

To Trevor.
For constantly inspiring me and being beside me to push me ten steps beyond my comfort zone.

Thank you to all friends and fellow students. This process would not have been possible without the constant exchange of ideas and support.
We are in need of a new sense of community, that doesn’t rely upon religion. There exists a demand to adapt the church typology to meet the needs of current society rather than allowing these important buildings to be demolished or preserved indefinitely in an unneeded state.

With the decline of Christian religious practice in America, thousands of churches become underutilized or vacant every year, leaving these icons with strong religious associations empty. This abandonment simultaneously impacts the communities these churches once held together. Today’s generations’ sense of community has transitioned from physical to virtual connections, leading to less meaningful in-person relationships and a loss of strong self-identity.

New communities can exist without religion, but they have to be created and should be housed in the same buildings that previously housed religious communities. A shift towards an ethical churchless society is possible, but needs to be planned consciously. Using the Sunday Assembly, an all-inclusive community-building worldwide organization, as the primary inhabitant of the deconsecrated Holy Trinity Church in the South End of Boston, we can bring the needs of the community back into this iconic structure. In order to remove the possibility of failure due to reliance on donations, a secondary program of a boutique hotel will be added to the building. This also continuously brings new people into the space, and helps to remove religious associations from the building. Using the addition of layers of Sunday Assembly meeting space and boutique hotel to subtract the religious iconography, the church can become a building without religious associations.
history: decline of religion
In the 1990s, religious practice in the United States began to drop. Within the last ten years, it is reported that the number of Americans who claim to have no religious affiliation is the highest it has ever been since the data started to be collected in the 1930s. In the 1930s, less than 5% of the population identified themselves as non-religious. This statistic remained about the same for 60 years until it jumped to 8% and again jumped to over 21% in 2010. This percentage was inclusive of all religions in the United States, however there were even more drastic decreases in religious practice within certain religions. Christianity saw one of the largest decreases in practice compared other religions. Between 1990 and 2013, the proportion of Christians in the country as a whole shrank from 86% to 71%. In the Northeast, the Christian decline was the most pronounced and decreased from 84% to 64%. Even more specifically, the Catholic branch of Christianity in the Northeast experienced the most decrease of all. The proportion of self-identified Catholics in the Northeast decreased from 43% to 31% from 1990 to 2013. Comparatively, in the rest of the country, the Catholic proportion only decreased from 26% to 22%. The overall shift away from all religion in the 1990s stemmed from several factors. Some see the parallels in the increase of liberal political beliefs and the decrease of religious believers. There have also been statistics showing that Americans are less religious because of the internet. Other reasons include the millennial generations lack of interest or time and their want for complete freedom.

The dramatic decrease in Christianity, and most specifically Catholicism, was due to the sexual abuse scandal that exploded in Boston in 2002. In Massachusetts, the percentage of Catholics decreased by one-third from 54% of the population to 36%. While the crisis swept across the country, it most impacted New England, which was historically the most Catholic part of the country.

Christianity continues to lose adherents with no foreseeable change, regardless of the best efforts to attract membership by religious leaders.

What is happening with these remaining structures?

Some churches hold on to the buildings but often have to use the maintenance budget to pay taxes and fees to the city. Other church owners rent out their space for functions as a way to financially support the building. Many churches keep the building but hold services less frequently—sometimes only once a year—to resist being shut down. However, there remain churches that are not as fortunate. Churches are frequently sold and bought to be adapted into restaurants, housing, skating rinks, bookstores, childcare centers, community centers, etc. Some of these buyers and developers respect the grandeur and monumentality of the church and carefully intervene on the structure, leaving most of the church intact, sometimes even preserving iconography. This approach allows the church to still be read as a church—from both exterior and interior perspectives. Other owners divide the church to better serve the new function and leave little to no regard of the history of the building. From the outside, the building could still serve as a religious institution, but the interiority speaks to the building’s current use.

Ecclesiastical worship-spaces are often the best-built and longest-standing buildings of a community. However, these buildings are also the most challenging to adapt to new uses because of its heavily iconographic symbols embedded into the architecture.

There exists an obvious need to find new uses for the religious building typology due to the decline of religious practice but there also exists the question of how. Through the adaptive reuse process of subtraction, removing these icons can create opportunities to adapt this building typology to a larger variety of new uses needed by current and future generations.
When religion was a common practice among most people, strong communities existed within those churches, synagogues, temples, etc. People formed bonds over shared beliefs, morals, values, and ethics. Vast religious networks existed because of these bonds extending through the faithful between towns, states, and countries. Since the decline of religion, these strong communities do not exist in the same size, regularity, or level of interconnection. The more recent generations’ sense of community has transitioned from physical connections to virtual connections. The millennial generation’s largest communities exist online through social media. They find little want or need to physically gather, which has resulted in less meaningful relationships and a loss of strong self-identity. There exists a need to provide the opportunity, common reason, shared time, and a place for the younger generations to physically gather to bring back the lost sense of local community.

Without religion.

Younger generations have expressed no interest or desire for religious practice. Many don’t have time in their busy schedules for religion; others want to exercise their freedom to not have to attend any longer since living away from their parents. A large majority view religious organizations as being too conservative and almost as many don’t believe in a higher power.
Early 1800s

German immigrants faced the challenge of adapting to a new social environment while still holding on to their cultural heritage and tradition.

1800-1932

Estimated Religious Participation

1935-2014

Actual Religious Participation

1836-1846
Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J. tried to bring in secular clergy from Germany. None stayed permanently.

1842
First German HolyTrinity Church built.

1853
German population grew and they needed a larger church. New land was purchased and construction began. Designed by Patrick C. Keely.

1856
Bishop Fenwick returned all buildings except church and rectory to Archdiocese. Jesuits departed twelve years later and many parishioners gave up.

1948
Holy Trinitiy Church closed. Parishioners formed a preservation group and idea shut down by Office of Pastoral Planning.

2008
Holy Trinity Church closed. Parishioners formed a preservation group.

2014
Listed for sale by Colliers International for $4 million.

Timeline information from Robert J. Sauer's written History of Holy Trinity Church.

Line Graph abstraction from Aggregate Religiosity Index.
history: neo-gothic architecture
The Holy Trinity Church stands on Shawmut Avenue in Boston, Massachusetts. It was built in 1876 in a neo-gothic architectural style. Its expensive and durable Roxbury puddingstone and Maine granite illustrates the significance and power of the Catholic Church in the South End neighborhood fabric. The church was one of the last built during the gothic revival period and today remains a strong symbol of neo-gothic architecture in Boston.

The gothic revival began in Europe in the early 19th century amidst a new attitude about historical style in architecture: revivalism. Revivalism claimed that there was only a single historical model appropriate for modern architecture. The movement was declared capable of providing models grounded in national traditions, institutions, and values. The most abundant of these revival styles was the gothic rebirth.

The style of the movement was characterized by the ability to read the function of the building from its facades. Its aesthetics were formed from the necessities of the program and structure rather than style, and every smallest detail had a meaning or served a purpose. It was a style of complete architectural honesty. It was a style where the interior could be read from the exterior, which allowed for a clear reading of the different functions of the building before entering. It was honest; it was tied to nature, was seen as being capable of never-ending extension and growth, symbolized power, and represented the most ideal state.
The Neo-gothic revival of medieval forms first found architectural expression in the mid-eighteenth century in the private realm. It was employed as a style in houses of the wealthy and politically influential English antiquarians. The movement quickly spread into the public realm and began to appear in Britain in the early decades of British 19th century church design. It experienced a period of rapid growth when the urban population in Britain grew exponentially, which created the demand for hundreds of new churches. In 1818, Parliament approved one million pounds to build 600 new churches- all of which were to be designed and built in the neo-gothic style. The new construction of these neo-gothic churches in working class neighborhoods began to establish a strong national consciousness and identity. Within a few years, the style spread to Germany and France, who both labeled the architecture as their own. Despite the presence of the style in England and France, German architects were the first to promote Gothic as a powerful expression of national genius and character. Architects and urban planners in Germany used neo-gothic architecture to foster a sense of national identity in territories still divided amidst countless princes, dukes, and local lords. Throughout the entire movement, there was national competition in England, France, and Germany to claim Gothic as peculiarly their own. In each of these countries, an architectural camp began to form- all of which were dedicated to the restoration of stylistic unity. The people living at the same time were preoccupied with the problem of personal and national identity and many of the arguments conducted by the members of these three rival camps were overshadowed by that fear.

However, the emergence of the gothic revival as English national architecture can be attributed to two main events in the mid 1830s. The first of which was an 1835 decision by the parliament to require a Gothic style for the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster after it experienced a devastating fire. The second of which was Augustus Pugin's fiery campaign for Gothic revival not only as a means of reforming taste but also one of restoring social fabric and the moral fiber of industrialized England.

The English neo-gothic movement was the primary source for the early Gothic Revival in America. The Gothic style was the first picturesque style to challenge the classical taste of early nineteenth-century America and by the 1840s, it had become a full-fledged revival that posed a serious threat to the established classical doctrine. The style first was realized in the US as primarily public buildings with the earliest and major thrust in Catholic churches. The introduction of the Gothic style was associated with a period of extreme expansion in the church. This growth was stimulated by the new religious freedom granted by the Constitution and the growth of the country. The growth was also stimulated and continued largely because of the Cambridge Camden Society, later called the Ecclesiological Society. This Society was an English and predominately Anglican group that had resolved to do what it could to influence the design of churches outside the British Isles. As soon as a few churches were built in the United States, which conformed to their suggestions, they had made a profound impression in the realm of American church architecture- mostly because of the high quality of those first buildings. What had started as a modest party of Gothic enthusiasts and scholars with diffuse ideas suddenly became a large, insistent, and vocal body of believers who were convinced that the presence of “good” art from a “better” age would, and could, improve contemporary life. In Boston, neo-gothic architecture appeared parallel to the time and way it appeared in American architecture as a whole.

The Holy Trinity church was built in 1877 by P.C. Kelly in an English neo-gothic style. It is English neo-gothic because of its square apse, its greater emphasis on the horizontal rather than vertical, and its high level of decoration and detailing. It is one of the finest examples of neo-gothic architecture in Boston. Today, some churches and collegiate buildings remain to be built in the neo-gothic style but besides those few structures, this movement eventually decreased in popularity with the development of new materials and requirements of new building shapes and styles.

140 shawmut ave: site analysis
South End: In the last 200 years, the South End has gone through major demographic shifts—a place where white, middle class families resided quickly turned into the tenement district during the financial crisis. The same neighborhood then transitioned into a predominately African American neighborhood that became a jazz mecca and later an area where gays were drawn to live because of the possibility of living in the same-sex lodging houses. By the 1990’s, the neighborhood was a major haven for artists and designers. By the early 2000’s, the area was becoming gentrified with the end of rent control and although remaining ethnically and economically diverse today, it is primarily comprised of higher-end residencies with some mixed-used commercial areas. This neighborhood is home to the Boston Ballet, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston Medical Center, galleries, restaurants, and many community organizations.

The Holy Trinity Church is located on the edge of two very different neighborhoods in Boston: The South End and South Boston. Both neighborhoods were built upon former tidal marsh areas to house the expansion of the “downtown” Boston area in the late 1800s.

South End: This neighborhood has always been a predominately Irish-Catholic community until the early 2000s when the diversity increased because of the second and third generations of Irish-Catholics moving elsewhere. Currently, this area is going through a lot of redevelopment and becoming a popular residential neighborhood with young professionals and families because of it’s strong sense of community and quick access to downtown. It is currently home to the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center and Institute for Contemporary Art but is also emerging as Boston’s newest neighborhood.

South Boston: In the last 200 years, the South End has gone through major demographic shifts—a place where white, middle class families resided quickly turned into the tenement district during the financial crisis. The same neighborhood then transitioned into a predominately African American neighborhood that became a jazz mecca and later an area where gays were drawn to live because of the possibility of living in the same-sex lodging houses. By the 1990’s, the neighborhood was a major haven for artists and designers. By the early 2000’s, the area was becoming gentrified with the end of rent control and although remaining ethnically and economically diverse today, it is primarily comprised of higher-end residencies with some mixed-used commercial areas. This neighborhood is home to the Boston Ballet, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston Medical Center, galleries, restaurants, and many community organizations.

The neighborhood, community, and surrounding demographic was important in the selection of site to address the social phenomena of the decline of religion. The South End has a well-founded community that can support and populate a new institution while the new institution can simultaneously support the founding of the new community of South Boston. The site is an easily accessible area from both neighborhoods, and the rest of Boston, and is in a promising area of development and growth.

3 Aerial Photo from Bing Maps
The lower population density at the site combined with the high population density surrounding the site allows for growth within the site. The vacant site is waiting and ready to be populated by the surrounding area.

- 2010 Population Density by Census Block

The site is located in the middle of five different median household income zones. With these varying economic levels, there is an opportunity to influence all members of society. These five income zones will also be beneficial in financially supporting the new programs.

- 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Median Household Income by census tract

- $87,464- $143,819
- $66,250- $87,464
- $52,433- $66,250
- $37,274- $52,433
- $24,717- $37,274
- $10,250- $24,717
- Non-residential area

City of Boston Median Household Income $52,433

The map is produced by the Office of Digital Cartography & GIS, BRA. November 2011.

With the surrounding population being comprised of a large percentage by the younger generation, the neighborhoods’ populations naturally support redefining community. By starting to integrate this new sense of community into the younger generation, a new type of community will be formed that will continue to grow and develop with them.

- Boston Census 2010 Demographics
In contrast to the rest of Boston being predominately populated by females, this building’s site offers a balanced gender population. 

- Boston Census 2010 Demographics

Land Use
- Single Family Residential
- Two Family Residential
- Three Family Residential
- Residential (4-6 units)
- Apartment
- Condominium
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Government
- Garage, Tanks, Other

Church:
136 Shawmut Ave, Boston, MA
Zoned: Commercial
Classification Code: 369: Cultural and Entertainment Properties:

Addition:
140 Shawmut Ave, Boston, MA
Zoned: Residential
Classification Code: 121: Non-Transient Group Quarters: Rooming and Boarding

136 Shawmut Ave -
303.1 Assembly Group A.
Assembly Group A occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social or religious functions, recreation, food or drink consumption or awaiting transportation.

303.4 Assembly Group A-3
Assembly uses intended for worship, recreation or amusement and other assembly uses not classified elsewhere in Group A including, but not limited to: ... places of worship...

140 Shawmut Ave -
310.1 Residential Group R.
Residential Group R includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for sleeping purposes when not classified as an Institutional Group I or when not regulated by the International Residential Code.

310.4 Residential Group R-2
Residential occupancies containing sleeping units or more than two dwelling units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature, including: ... Boarding houses (nontransient) with more than 16 occupants...

http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/getattachment/92d3800f71db-4fb5-9a12-2fd67007eab5/.
140 shawmut ave: site documentation
Longitudinal Section
Scale 1\' = 1/32"
program
The Sunday Assembly is an organization that celebrates life. Their motto is: live better, help often, wonder more. There are 35 assemblies throughout the world and they are still growing. Assemblies gather on a regular, weekly, or bi-monthly basis (depending on the Assembly) to play/sing music together, listen to readings, hold lectures and workshops, cook and eat communal meals, and provide community service. Besides their weekly or bi-monthly large-group meetings, they also meet a few times a week in smaller interest groups such as yoga, reading groups, self-help groups, art groups, etc. The Boston Sunday Assembly has existed for a year and still has no set location— they gather in various locations on Harvard’s campus.

The Sunday Assembly program is to exist within the Holy Trinity Church to serve as an answer for simultaneous questions dealing with the re-use of the religious building typology and the social phenomena of a need for physical community.

Churches failed not only because people stopped coming but also because people stopped donating money to parishes. expecting churches to exist only on donations is untenable in today’s times. A for-profit secondary program would eliminate the possibility of failure and provide a steady income for the Sunday Assembly.

Another reason to fill the church with the hotel is that there is more square footage than needed for the Sunday Assembly alone. The addition would also capitalize on the “church-like” characteristics of the space by allowing the interior of the hotel rooms to be read as old religious architecture. This type of boutique hotel could turn the building into an overnight destination.

By bringing people in from all over the state and country to stay at the hotel, the Sunday Assembly could influence those who stay to start or join Sunday Assemblies in their own hometowns. This could produce a ripple effect where their key principles of community, assembling, wonder, education, and service can be implemented in cities and towns across the country.
Small Interest Groups.

- Yoga and Mindfulness
- Theatre/ Dance
- Philosophy
- Music/ Vinyl
- Book Club
- LGBT
- Singles
- Creativity
- Poetry Appreciation
- Sewing, Knitting, and Craft
- Photography
- Waking
- “Resolve” Groups

(Daily)

Social Events.

- Lounging
- Socializing
- Drinking
- Potlucks
- Casual music performances
- Workshops

(Weekly)

Community Service.

- Community Service

Assembly.

- Live Band
- Group Singing
- A cappella group
- Host/ MC/ Comedian
- Guest Speaker
- Poetry
- “Doing Their Best”
- Quiet Reflection
- Coffee/ Social Hour

(Bi-Monthly)

Conferences.

- “The Need for Secular Community”
- “Creativity”
- “Digital Community Building”
- “Love Not Labels”
- “Diversity Now! But How?”
- “Improv Class”
- “Leadership”
- “Personal Transformation”
- “User Friendly Brain Tools”
- “Positive Psychology”
- Yoga, Drinks, Workshops, Cabaret, Rave, Talks, Open Space, Community Dinner, Orchestras, Community Service, BBQ

(Annually)

Incomes.

- Boutique Hotel

(Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Annually)
There are multiple layers of church typology that define the Holy Trinity Church and that people react to. These layers include decorative elements such as Crucifix, stained glass depicting biblical stories, organ pipes, bibles, ornate detail, and so on. There are also layers of architectural religious icons that define a church including the bell tower(s), the circulation, the columns, the entry doors, the altar, the west-facing entryway, the east-facing church pews, the singular, large volume, the symmetry in plan and section, and the cruciform plan. These layers of church architecture that are completely integrated into all aspects of the design of the church define the religious typology.
Symmetrical  Balcony  Circulation  Narthex  Arched Windows  Single, Large Volume  Bema  West-Facing Entry
After careful analysis of the icons of the Holy Trinity Church, the process of subtracting the icons begins. These important parts are subtracted from a person's initial readings of the building by constructing layers in front and around them so that the religious symbols are never seen by people attending the Sunday Assembly. By inserting hotel space into every religiously significant part of the church, the large center volume remains for the Sunday Assembly's usage. The Sunday Assembly's volume becomes a floating box inserted into the building that reads without any religious association.
Diagramatic Models: Operations

In order to adapt the Holy Trinity Church to a new use, there must be subtraction throughout the religious architecture. Through the adaptive reuse processes of subtraction, addition, stripping down, and exposing, the church becomes a building with no association to religion. There exists a need to eliminate or change how we perceive these icons so that use by the current, non-religious population are met architecturally. The diagrammatic models below begin to illustrate possible interventions by means of addition or subtraction that to re-define associations to the building.
design
bibliography

This book provided the foundational knowledge of the history of neo-gothic architecture. Bergdoll explains how, when and why neo-gothic architecture came to exist in Europe. This history helped my writing to transition into a discussion on how the movement came to be prevalent in America.


Bindley’s article discusses the reasoning behind the low numbers of religious practitioners. Throughout the article, she cites reasons and statistics that span across multiple religions, age groups, and political beliefs.


Boston Redevelopment Authority’s website provides a multitude of mapped census information color-coded in the city of Boston. Included in this thesis book are maps depicting population density, male/ female ratio, age groups, and income levels around my site. This information was used in the selection of the site and program.


The five graphs in this article map the decline of religion reported annually by Gallup. The graphs include the decline of identity, attendance, membership, importance, and relevance.


Germann’s writing helped to elaborate on the foundational knowledge that Barry Bergdoll had written about by explaining more specific influential case studies of Neo-Gothic Architecture and theories behind them in Europe.


Allen Downey’s research from the Massachusetts’ Olin College of Engineering on the correlation between the decline of religion and the increase in Internet usage is presented. It is not concluded this is the sole cause but proposes it is a major reason behind the decrease in religious practice.


Mulligan writes on the importance of community and the recent change in peoples’ communities- transitioning from physical to an array of virtual communities that often have specific membership criteria. He discusses the make-up of these modern, virtual communities and the effects it has on individuals.


Pierson’s book brings Bergdoll and Germann’s books’ foundational information of the neo-gothic movement to the United States. His writing helped to relate the history to a more local scene of architecture and started to provide more specific knowledge on neo-gothic architecture in America.

Putnam writes about the decrease in church attendance by the younger generations and the impact this has had on the individuals, the churches, and most importantly, the communities.

Rainer, Thom S. The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation. CITY: B&H Publishing Group, 2011. This book is based on 1,200 interviews with members of the millennial generation and studies who we are as professionals, individuals, family members and our attitudes towards diversity, workplace, money, media, environment, and religion.


Sunday Assembly program based on London’s model. The Sunday Assembly was founded here and remains to be the most successful branch.


Written history of the Holy Trinity Church beginning with the development of the congregation and ending with the deconsecration of the church in 2008. History provided timeline of building’s formation, additions and demolitions.


Silk’s research helps to explain the decline of religion specifically in terms of Christianity, Catholicism, and in the northeast. This writing helps to inform understanding of the reasoning behind the decrease in Catholic Church attendance in Boston.


City of Boston’s written history on South Boston. Knowledge of past and current status’ provided rational for site selection.


Stanton’s writing helps to conclude my writing on the neo-gothic architectural movement in America by discussing the gothic revival specifically in American Church architecture.


This paper stresses the importance of physical place and physical presence for how people construct meanings in their lives.


Vadum’s article provided history on Boston’s South End. Knowledge of past and current status’ provided rational for site selection.


Venturi, Brown, and Izenour published their analysis of Las Vegas as a phenomenon of architecture as a form of communication and created two categorizations of buildings: “the duck” and the “decorated shed”.