

Religious buildings play a fundamental role in their communities: they define our local history, are an important source of our artistic patrimony and provide vital space for many local social services, in addition to their religious impacts. Yet these historic buildings are increasingly vulnerable to deterioration and loss. The continuing shift of people and wealth to the suburbs, the shortage of clergy, and decades of deferred maintenance of buildings are all factors that may adversely affect historic urban houses of worship.

For those religious properties that remain open, pressures continue to be placed on strained budgets to address the maintenance and upkeep of the older, historic buildings. For those properties that must be closed, viable opportunities exist to reuse the historic church buildings in a manner that will promote economic development, provide housing and strengthen community ties. Check out what others have done to save and revitalize historic churches!

1. Projects in Massachusetts

There are lots of great home-grown examples for inspiration and reference.

Berlin – Old Methodist Episcopal Church

A nonprofit creates a community center called 19 Carter: www.19carter.org

Boston – Charles Street Meeting House

Church adapted for office use: <http://www.mh-offices.com/location.php>

Boston - IBA Villa Victoria Center for the Arts

Church converted into community center, Latino cultural center & rental facility:
https://www.ibaboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/IBA_RentalGuidelines.pdf

Brookline - St Aidan’s Church

Church rehabilitated for housing: <http://www.wickedlocal.com/article/20100609/NEWS/306099758>

Cambridge - Old Cambridge Baptist Church

Building still functions as a church but is also home to Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre
<http://www.ballettheatre.org/our-facility-2/>
<http://www.oldcambridgebaptist.org/about-us/our-tenants/item/jose-matteo>

Gloucester – Rocky Neck Art Colony 1887 Carpenter-Gothic Church

Church converted to The Cultural Center at Rocky Neck, a cultural center and event rental space
<http://rockyneckartcolony.org/cultural-center/>
<http://rockyneckartcolony.org/renting-the-cultural-center/>

Great Barrington - Saint James Place

A non-profit was formed in 2010 to purchase the closed church, which is now performance/rehearsal and office space. Also used for lectures and special event rentals

<https://theberkshireedge.com/st-james-place/>

<https://saintjamesplace.net/>

Marion – Marion Art Center

A cultural center for visual and performing arts- <http://www.marionartcenter.org/>

Palmer – Union Evangelical Church

Located in the village of Three Rivers in Palmer, the building was sold to a newly created nonprofit group and is the Palmer Historical & Cultural Center, a multipurpose performance center and function hall. - <http://palmerhcc.org>

Pittsfield – Notre Dame

The former Catholic Church was turned into Shire City Sanctuary and used as a makerspace until January 2019, with screen printing shop, commercial kitchen, and space for artist studios, workshops, events, and concerts. The building was sold to AlKhalil Cultural Center in January 2019.

<https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/former-notre-dame-church-in-pittsfield-sold-to-al-khalil-cultural-center,562460>

Sandisfield – former Baptist Church and later synagogue

The Sandisfield Arts Center is a busy community arts center with a theatre/performance hall in the former sanctuary and a gallery/events space in a lower level. - <https://sandisfieldartscenter.org/>

Sandwich – former Catholic Church

Converted into Belfry Inne & Bistro, a restaurant with bed & breakfast - <http://www.belfryinn.com/>

Wales – St. Monica’s Catholic Church

Now a fabric store and workshop space - <http://www.meetinghousefabric.com>

Ware – Methodist – Episcopal Church

Now Workshop 13 a cultural and arts learning center, offering classes in arts, crafts and yoga-

<http://workshop13.org/>

Ware – Ware Center Meetinghouse

The Proprietors of the Ware Center Meeting House is a non-profit historic preservation corporation that works to maintain and restore the building. In partnership with The Ware Historical Society the building houses a museum. Summer concert series, educational tours, and programs are also offered.

<http://warehistoricalsociety.wikifoundry.com/page/Ware+Center+Meeting+House>

Williamstown – former United Methodist Church

Church converted to use as educational facility, Williamstown Community Preschool-

<http://www.williamstowncommunity.org>

Worcester – Chestnut Street Congregational Church

Church slated for demolition became New England Dream Center, part of Liberty Churches that ran social outreach programs. Property sold to a Ghanaian congregation in 2016 -

<https://www.telegram.com/article/20160202/NEWS/160209863>

2. Projects in Other States

Looking beyond Massachusetts can be just as informative!

Florida – Old St Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Jacksonville

Converted to historical society headquarters and available for event rentals

<http://www.jaxhistory.org/historic-properties/>

Georgia - Sacred Heart Cultural Center, Augusta

A former Roman Catholic Church converted to cultural center and hosts concerts, plays and is also has rentable event space - <http://www.sacredheartaugusta.org/index.html>

Indiana – Methodist Episcopal Church - Indianapolis

Church converted to condominiums now called Meridian Arch -

<http://www.highrises.com/indianapolis/meridian-arch-condos/>

Maine – Chestnut Street Church, Portland

Converted to an upscale restaurant called Grace - <https://www.trineeventsgrace.com/>

Maine – St. Dominic’s, Portland

A Catholic church converted to the Maine Irish Heritage Center-home for educational programs, community events, museum, archives and library; also available for rental as an event space

<http://www.maineirish.com/>

Maine - South Berwick

A former church converted to a library-

<http://www.southberwicklibrary.org/about-us/history-of-the-south-berwick-public-library/>

Michigan – St. Albertus Church, Detroit

The Polish American Historic Site Association was formed to preserve the church, which continues to have masses but also hosts other events –

<http://www.stalbertusdetroit.org/about-us.html>

Minnesota – St Rose, Kenyon

A non profit was formed to preserve this prairie church which is still used for services and other events-
http://www.friendsofstrose.org/public/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=3

New York – former Catholic Church, Buffalo

A former church was converted to King Center Charter School – <http://www.kccs.org/history.html>

New York – Buffalo

A 74-year-old church was renovated for Canisius College cultural & performing arts center as Montante Cultural Center- <http://www.canisius.edu/about-canisius/campus/montante/>

New York - Fourth Universalist Society of New York

Created a separate non-profit to do fundraising
<http://www.sacredplaces.org/uploads/files/861768938657833845-profile4thuniversalist.pdf>

New York – Portageville Chapel, Portageville

A former chapel serves as a retreat center for professional organists and provides a private rehearsal facility - <http://www.portagevillechapel.org/>

North Carolina - Presbyterian Church, Charlotte

Church converted into contemporary art center, artist studios , workshops and gallery space called McColl Center for Art + Innovation. Also features business innovation institute which offers a personal and professional development program for senior level executives that focuses on creativity and innovation and special event rental space - <http://mccollcenter.org>

Pennsylvania – St. John’s the Baptist, Lawrenceville, Pittsburgh

Church converted into a brewery/restaurant – <http://www.churchbrew.com>

Vermont – Immanuel Episcopal Church, Bellows Falls

Church converted to Stone Church Arts Center, an active parish that also has performing arts non-profit using church for concerts ; the nonprofit promotes music, art and spirituality at a retreat and conference center in a Vermont village – <http://www.stonechurcharts.org/>

3. Other Resources

Here are some more resources and online articles that may prove helpful to your efforts.

2019 Article from New Hampshire’s Laconia Daily Sun about guidelines for the reuse of Catholic Churches - https://www.laconiadailysun.com/news/local/heritage-chair-pontifical-guidelines-say-bishop-should-save-church/article_6a67e9b0-817c-11e9-abbc-ebfb95a1c608.html

2009 Article about New Jersey churches being adapted for new use:

<http://www.njchurchscape.com/index-Jan09.html>

Discussion of how to form nonprofits has good discussion of issues for churches

<http://www.njnonprofits.org/ThinkingOfForming.pdf>

2010 Article that discusses new uses for closed Catholic churches

<http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/closed-churches-get-new-uses>

Thesis on church adaptive reuse: “Houses of God...or not? Approaches to the Adaptive Reuse of Churches in Germany and the United States” by Rebecca Lueg, 2011

http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/12120/Rebecca%20Lueg_Final%20Project_Adaptive%20Reuse%20of%20Churches_DRUM.pdf;jsessionid=6C27AF70A2E9432A26D2B8A61E3B839D?sequence=1

Partners for Sacred Places – Non profit that aids in preserving historic houses of worship through technical assistance, grants, etc. - <https://sacredplaces.org/>

National Trust for Historic Preservation – National non-profit advocacy and education organization with numerous articles and information on historic churches, reuse models, etc. -

<https://savingplaces.org/>