Toward a Shared Reverence: A Search for Contemporary Sacred Space and Spiritual Placemaking in the Culturally Layered Suburban Environment

by

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Author’s Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis explores how contemporary architecture can reimagine spiritual placemaking within suburban environments while maintaining continued reverence, collective identity, and phenomenology. With a central focus on the growing Cornell community in Markham, Ontario, the research examines the growing displacement of sacred identity in modern suburban expansion, where religious spaces are typically relegated to temporary or placeless environments. With a blend of theoretical research, precedents, and theological studies, the thesis is centered on the design of a new church for the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Parish. The research draws heavily on placemaking and phenomenological studies that stem from Christian Norberg-Schulz, Juhani Pallasmaa, Gaston Bachelard, Mircea Eliade, Christopher Day, Luis Fernández-Galiano, Dolores Hayden, and Sanjay and Shampa Mazumdar. These are the main theoretical foundations of the proposal, which explores how sacred space is truly made. The legacy of Frederic Ozanam is central, whose strong integration of faith, charity, and scholarship informs the basis of theology and architectural direction. The spiritual progression and spatial understanding of Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso are heavily drawn from Ozanam's doctoral studies on Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. The design process is developed from this parti into its site analysis, conceptual diagrams, massing, sequences, and materiality. With key precedents such as Tamás Nagy's Holy Trinity Church and St. Gabriel's Passionist Church in Toronto, the project reveals how modern sacred architecture can create moments of transience without the dependence on historical reconstruction. Sacredness is then nurtured through processing, thresholds, controlled light, phenomenology, and atmosphere.

The final proposal is a church with a collection of worship spaces, community programs, hoy gardens, and reflective spaces. The project shows how sacred architecture can achieve spiritual orientation and communal meaning. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the sacred architectural experience is not solely reliant on stylistic elements but on the ability to gather, heal, and ingrain memory at its core.

Keywords
Sacred Architecture, Roman Catholicism, Sacred Axis, Collective Memory, Spiritual Placemaking, Suburbia, Place Attachment, Narthex, Courtyard, Church Nave, Transcendence, Markham, Cornell

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Chapter Seven Closing Thoughts

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Chapter One

The Modern Sacred in the Suburban Realm

1.1 Introduction & Statement of the Problem

Sacred architecture in a historical sense has served as one of the most enduring expressions of collective spatial beliefs, ritual, and memory. Churches, temples, and places of worship were once monuments deeply rooted in urban and civic landscapes that functioned not only as sites of religious experience but also as creators of identity and collectiveness.[1] In modern suburban settings, this relationship between the sacred and its surroundings has been strained. Major factors such as rapid urban growth, cultural plurality, and pragmatic development models have shaped how sacred space is conceived. It often reduces sacredness to a functional area rather than a gateway for an experiential and symbolic exploration.

This thesis arises from a critical inquiry into the condition of religious communities and their architecture. While these communities continue to succeed, the architectural expression of the sacred is often delayed and is constrained by simple building typologies or multi-purpose spaces that weaken the qualitative traits of worship.[2] The dependence on high school cafeterias or temporary halls for liturgical events stresses a wider architectural problem. This issue is that the sacred experience is compromised, and collective memory cannot thrive. Without a permanent and symbolic place to practice worship, there are a lot more risks that become transient and detached from the material and spatial realm that once supported sacredness.[3]

1.1.1 Purpose of Study

The central goal of this study is to examine how modern Roman Catholic architecture can be reinterpreted for a growing parish. This is achieved through the process of spiritual placemaking, which must involve key priorities on experiential depth, embodied tradition, and collective importance, and rejecting the repetition of historical monuments. Instead of recreating established church typologies or previous traditions, this thesis seeks to deconstruct fundamental sacred ideas and reassemble them through qualitative architectural strategies. Therefore, I aim to achieve the same sense of blessedness,

[1] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*; Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[2] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.
[3] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.

transcendence, and communal belonging that are traits all connected to the essence of sacred space.[4]

This approach does not attempt to replace or neglect sacred ecclesiastical tradition but instead re-imagine it as an architectural response to present-day realities, such as cultural and social concerns. In doing so, this thesis aims to preserve the heart of the sacred and position architecture as a dynamic practice rather than a stagnant art form.[5]

1.1.2 Thesis Rationale and Theoretical Foundation

The rationale for this research is founded in architectural theory, phenomenology, theology, and discourses that seek to understand sacred space as the basis between everyday life and the sacred. Sacred space can be seen as a rupture within the actions of profane life and a spatial condition that frames orientation, significance, and an existential basis.[6] In addition, architecture and its role in creating existential meaning can occur through place attachment, atmosphere, and spatial sequences.[7]

From a phenomenological lens, architecture can also take on greater significance through multisensory participation. This is where light, materiality, and spatial orders shape how humans perceive and gain memory.[8] With that said, sacred architecture is not defined by its historical references but by its capacity to initiate reverence through human experiences.

This thesis is further informed by contemporary architectural precedents that challenge the referential approach to traditional sacred forms. More specifically, St. Gabriel's Church in North York, Ontario, designed by Larkin Architect Limited, the team offered critical insight. The project adheres to an intentional process of architectural deconstruction by reimaging traditional elements of Gothic church architecture, such as procession, enclosure, orientation, and light. Rather than reproducing established typologies, the design team reassembles them into an entirely new interpretation. The design evokes sacred space without a dependency on historical reference. Through spatial

[4] Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture*.
[5] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.
[6] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.
[7] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[8] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.

restraint and phenomenological clarity, St. Gabriel's Church reinforces the idea that sacredness arises from an experience and not geometry or form alone.[9]

With a strong engagement with these theoretical and architectural perspectives, this thesis views sacred architecture as a lived, real experience that unfolds through movement, atmosphere, and material expression. By framing the thesis through a conceptual lens, this addresses the loss of spatial reverence in modern worship settings and reignites architecture's role in fostering modern-day spiritual placemaking.

1.1.3 Problem Statement

The central problem that lies in this thesis is the ongoing disconnect between modern religious life and the architectural programs that encapsulate it. As faith communities continue to adapt and rise, sacred architecture usually remains an underdeveloped and constrained typology with priorities on utilitarian needs. These conditions restrict the architecture's ability to sustain reverence, foster collective memory, and create continuity with an urban environment.[10]

With that stated, the site chosen for this thesis is the City of Markham, located in Ontario, Canada, with a particular focus on the Cornell Community. The selection of the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam parish was intentional, through their temporary mode of celebrating mass in the cafeteria of St. Brother Andre Catholic Secondary School. This presents an issue with a lack of a prominent place of worship in the heart of Cornell and reveals the broader challenge of how sacred architecture can meaningfully exist in modern suburban contexts shaped by cultural diversity, growing daily patterns, and development pressures. As Eliade notes, without a spatial manifestation, the sacred risks becoming abstract and disconnected from lived experience.[11] Therefore, this issue is not due to any religious decline but to architectural inefficiency, where the sacred is reduced and needs to be cultivated.

This thesis does not suggest a rigid solution for institutional or ecclesial obstacles. I instead want to frame the issue as an opportunity to reconsider sacred architecture's process of

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[9] Larkin Design Team, "Thesis Discussion at Larkin Architect Limited," January 22, 2026, Discussion.

[10] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*; Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.

[11] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

placemaking while integrating ritual, tradition, and community into a cohesive architectural story.[12]

1.1.4 Research Aim and Question

The focal point of this research is to explore how modern sacred architecture can create spiritual placemaking within suburban environments while maintaining long-lasting sacredness and communal meaning. This thesis is grounded on a Roman Catholic Church design proposal situated in a suburban context and as a testing ground for the wider architectural questions.

How can modern sacred architecture reinterpret spiritual placemaking within suburban environments shaped by diverse cultural identities, while preserving lasting reverence for the sacred and fostering a collective spatial meaning that unites faith and community?

1.1.5 Objectives and Scope of Work

To tackle the central thesis question above, the research pursues several intertwined objectives. First, it analyzes how sacred architecture negotiates the connections between everyday life and the sacred, which positions the spiritual environment as a key anchor in modern life.[13] Secondly, it examines how qualities such as urban form, demographic conditions, and culture influence the overall experience of worship and ritual.[14] Then, the translation of phenomenological and theological concepts into real architectural strategies of light, materiality, and process. All these allow for creative ideas of the sacred to be personified physically and spatially.[15]

The scope of this thesis is intentionally left as a limited study, as it does not seek to present universal models for church design or resolve common institutional challenges. I use specific architectural approaches and inquiries that investigate the broader conditions relevant to contemporary sacred design.

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[12] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[13] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.
[14] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.
[15] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*; Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.

1.1.6 Relevance to the Profession of Architecture

This thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse on modern sacred architecture by challenging religious buildings to maintain spiritual and community identity within their given site. As urban growth continues to define North American neighborhoods, this research offers a template for how sacred architecture can transcend temporary spaces and return to the roles of spatial and symbolic monuments.

The study also holds a lot of relevance for the future of Roman Catholic architecture. Most notably, in growing municipalities where demographics and urban patterns change, ecclesiastical infrastructure can be overtaken. By situating sacred space as a mediator between ritual and tradition, this thesis transforms and highlights the long-lasting importance of reverence in fostering belonging and collectiveness.

1.2 The City of Markham and Cornell Community

1.2.1 The History of the City of Markham

Cities are usually understood through their infrastructure, monuments, and neighbourhoods. However, one of the most overlooked aspects of urban identity is the spatial embedding of spiritual life. Historically speaking, sacred architecture has operated as a mediator within cities, offering orientation, symbolic continuity, and a structure for communities that maintain shared values and dialogue. In the modern fabric, especially in suburban settings, this role has become more uncertain. [16]

In the Greater Toronto Area lies the City of Markham, which showcases these urban uncertainties. Historically, it was established as a township in 1793 and named after William Markham, who was the Archbishop of York [17] European settlement was enriched by the arrival of William Moll Berczy, whose legacy reflects the colonial impact that blends with the territorial and religious authorities [18] During the nineteenth century, villages such as Markham Village and Unionville grew as united civic and religious anchors, as churches were among the earliest structures that created a framework for communal interaction.[19]

[16] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[17] City of Markham, "Markham History | William Moll Berczy."
[18] Torti Gallas and Partners and Morrissey, "The Village of Unionville."
[19] City of Markham, "Markham History | William Moll Berczy."



(Figure 1.1): *Markham's GTR station from the late 1870s and into the early 1900s, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.*



(Figure 1.2): Markham's Heritage Unionville sign, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.



(Figure 1.3): William Markham, The Archbishop of York during the 1770s, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Moving into the twenty-first century, Markham has grown from a rural settlement into one of Canada's fastest-growing suburban municipalities due to instant population growth, neighbourhood planning, and steady immigration. [20] Based on municipal and census data. Markham's population sits at 328,940 and has been largely impacted by factors such as cultural diversity, with 59 percent of residents being born outside of Canada and about 78 percent who are visible minorities.[21] The social, cultural, and religious conditions have all been altered due to this massive demographic shift.

[20] City of Markham, "About the City of Markham - Facts & Stats."
[21] Statistics Canada, *Markham 2016 Census Population*; Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census - Markham (Census Subdivision)."



(Figure 1.4): Mainstreet Unionville Markham photograph, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

As Markham continues to grow in the modern world, its North American urban fabric can be described by low to mid-density development, a primary automobile environment, and diverse zoned lands. However, the sacred and symbolic traits remain underdeveloped as the planning initiatives, walkability, and community components have been emphasized more in recent times. Scholars argue that when cities rely too heavily on efficiency and growth without fostering spaces of transcendence, they risk losing in-depth and memory. [22]

[22] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*; Langley, "Strong Towns Langley | Cornell."



(Figure 1.5): Aerial view of the developed homes in Markham, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

1.2.2 The History of the Cornell Community

Located on the eastern side of Markham, the Cornell community stands out as a critical case study in the modern landscape of the city. Cornell was planned during the 1990s and was designed to go against traditional suburban sprawl, which focused on walkability, human-oriented streets, and interconnected public spaces. [23] The neighbourhood's grid-based system and pedestrian-friendly intersections allow for opportunities to build schools and parks that foster more inclusive residential identities.

[23] Langley, "Strong Towns Langley | Cornell."



(Figure 1.6): Grand Cornell Park in the Cornell Community, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.



(Figure 1.7): The residential condition of the Cornell community, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

While Cornell has its advantages, it's also lacking permanent sacred architecture. The residential, educational, and recreational facilities were all in place to tackle the immediate issues of the neighbourhood; however, the spiritual infrastructure has remained stagnant. This reflects an imbalance across the urban landscape, creating tension between material growth and spiritual connection. Theorists of placemaking and connection have all observed the key roles of sacred environments on the profane. They are critical in ensuring that community identities are improved to retain the duality between sacred and secular traditions. [24] If these spaces are permanently missing, the suburban neighbourhoods become subject to a lack of meaning and symbolism.

The primary purpose of sacred architecture is to serve as a spiritual and civic focal point in an evolving urban landscape. For example, churches, temples, and mosques have conventionally added to the improvement of cities grounded in thresholds, movement, and embracing everyday life. In contrast to most contemporary urban areas, sacred architecture has been relegated and often neglected purely for secular experiences. Markham's continuous growth and diversity position itself and Cornell as a crucial site for reimagining the role of sacred placemaking in the modern urban realm. As can be seen in the photographs, St. Patrick's family fun fair carries these older traditions.

[24] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."



(Figure 1.8): The family fun fair in September 2025 at the sister parish, St. Patrick's Church.



(Figure 1.9): Close-up on family fun fair in September 2025 at St. Patrick's Church.

1.2.3 The Rise of the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish

The Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish was established and formally introduced in January 2017. With the Cornell community's growth at an all-time high and the overflow of participants from the sister parish, St. Patrick's Church, they could no longer accommodate seating for weekend celebrations. [25] The acquisition of land for a future church site at 237 Walkerville Road has already created a strong need for a permanent place of worship. In the site's current state, there is a parish outreach garden that provides naturally grown fruits and vegetables for fundraising and other donations in the community. However, since its inception, the parish continues to function in a temporary place and instead uses the site for visits and communal growth.



(Figure 1.10): Photograph of the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam sign at the 237 Walkerville Road church site.

[25] Davis, "Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish Interview," November 25, 2025; Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Catholic Church, "Let's Build Our Church."



(Figure 1.11): A satellite image of the thesis church site at 237 Walkerville Road.



(Figure 1.12): Northwestern photograph of the 237 Walkerville Road church site.



(Figure 1. 13): Southeast photograph of the community outreach garden at the church site.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, its traditional worship has taken shape inside the cafeteria of the Brother Andre Catholic Secondary School. This temporary space has allowed the parish to function normally; meanwhile, it lacks the architectural qualities embedded in sacred space and placemaking.[26] Architectural scholars urge us to see that sacred environments must count on spatial hierarchy, ritual, materiality, and phenomenological traits to achieve a true multipurpose and sacred experience.[27] With thresholds, orientation, and sacred ordering that are absent from worship, this takes away from placemaking and the importance of the relationship between the revered and profane.



(Figure 1.14): St. Brother Andre Catholic School – the exterior view of the temporary place of worship for the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

[26] Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison Volume 1 & 2*.
[27] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.



(Figure 1.15): St. Brother Andre Catholic School – high school cafeteria and temporary worship space for the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish (taken before the vigil mass on January 24th, 2026).

Even with these limitations, the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish experienced a lot of success and growth. Based on 2025 data from Father Ricardo Davis, the pastor of the parish, more than 1,300 families were registered, and weekend attendance maintained between 900 and 1,100 visitors across four masses.[28] The current parish is diverse and multicultural within Cornell's fabric, with a large South Asian, Chinese, and Filipino presence. Religious and sacred life remains strong with baptisms, confirmations, Rite of Catholic Initiation (RCIA), weddings, and funerals exceeding the current needs of the temporary cafeteria.[29] Below is the methodological process that expresses the approaches to addressing the central thesis question.

1.3 Methodology – Mixed Research Approach

This thesis used a mixed-method research approach that combines qualitative architectural analysis, case study research, archival data, spatial mapping, and site visits. This

[28] Davis, "Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish Interview."
[29] Davis, "Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish Interview."

framework addresses the architectural and urban challenges of modern Catholic rituals in Markham's suburban setting. Each method offers a unique lens to the research question while ensuring that the church design for Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish is rooted in theory, community reality, and spatial conditions.

1.3.1 Precedent Analysis and Case Studies

Case studies and precedents form a key piece of this research that allows for a more comprehensive study on how a design proposal can come about. Two contemporary catholic churches in the Greater Toronto Area and another two international precedents will be examined for insight into how sacred architecture behaves in modern, urban, and cultural conditions. The case studies will be examined through photography, interviews, architectural drawings, and site visits.

Moreover, each precedent covers a wide range of criteria such as spatial hierarchy, procession, sacred and secular relationships, material expression, and its approach to urbanism. Both sets of case studies will be looked at carefully through their interior and exterior materials, contribution to spiritual atmospheres, and the liminal spaces that enable a seamless architectural experience. While each example will be treated the same, the local examples will pay closer attention to how their community space and parish operate from the priest's perspective. This will help me navigate which programs I implement outside the worship space and the relationship between the spiritual and the secular.

This analysis is reinforced by conceptual and theoretical frameworks such as sacred architecture, phenomenology, and modern ritual practice. Hence, by placing architectural precedents alongside theory, the case studies can be used to better understand the sacred experience.

1.3.2 Archival Data and Community Exploration

Archival research and community documentation are critical for further insight into historical and contemporary conditions that shape the parish. Primary resources are collected through interviews and discussions with Father Ricardo Davis, parishioners, and members of the wider Cornell community who have more familiarity with its surroundings. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood, interviews with members from the sister parish, St. Patrick's Church, will be conducted. Engaging with other places of worship and their members creates a personal and detailed approach to a church design solution.

1.3.3 Mapping, GIS, and Urban Spatial Analysis

Urban Spatial Analysis and GIS studies are used to observe the physical and social frameworks behind the Cornell community. Mapping data collected from ArcGIS and municipal sources comprises pedestrian routes, vehicular circulation, streets, community buildings, and demographic information. These detailed maps reveal how the neighbourhood operates in everyday life and how each of the different age groups moves through space.

This method provides an accurate representation and understanding of visibility, accessibility, and spatial relationships between the proposed church and the surrounding environment. With data on pedestrian movement and street connectivity, it will better inform design decisions on entrances, paths, and the public presence of the church. This analysis also identifies opportunities for the church to function as a key community anchor for all demographics.

With the combination of architectural design and GIS data, this approach ensures that the church is not isolated but emerges as an active member in Cornell's daily activity. The mapping process directly responds to site planning, orientation, and the connection between sacred space and everyday secular life.

1.4 Overall Chapter Outline

This thesis is organized into seven chapters that collectively explore the connection between the sacred, placemaking, and the suburban identity.

Chapter one investigates the central thesis question and sets the broader context of my proposal. It navigates the challenges that sacred architecture faces in our modern world, especially in the Cornell community and the city of Markham.

Chapter two presents the literature review and the key theoretical framework of the study. It explores the strong writings on sacred architecture, phenomenology, placemaking, and its existential orientation. The chapter establishes the foundation of authors who were used to evoke the sacred experience within the chosen site.

Chapter three outlines the life, intellectual development, and overall legacy of Frédéric Ozanam, the patron saint of the Cornell parish. There is a close emphasis on Ozanam's academic work on Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, which is the foundation of his charity

and social responsibility. This is an interpretation of Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso, which informs the conceptual and spatial development of the thesis design.

Chapter four examines the history of Roman Catholic tradition and architecture in North America and, more specifically, the Greater Toronto Area. The chapter analyzes the procession, ritual hierarchy, and post-Vatican II liturgical transformations while uncovering how modern churches balance community and reverence.

Chapter five looks into the sacred architectural experience through phenomenological analysis and precedent studies. The chapter analyzes the roles of atmosphere, sensory depth, spiritual transcendence, material, and light. It ends with a detailed study of Tamás Nagy's Holy Trinity Church and Larkin Architect Limited's St Gabriel's Passionist Church, which were key precedents that informed the thesis design.

Chapter six presents the architectural design for the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish in the heart of Cornell. It starts with the community analysis, conceptual parti drawings, and other architectural diagramming. It progresses to site strategy, spatial organization, plan development, elevations, sections, and materiality. The proposal showcases how sacred architecture can be reimagine spiritual placemaking within the suburban condition through procession, phenomenology, and its surrounding congregation.

Lastly, Chapter Seven ends the thesis with a reflection on the implications of sacred architecture within suburban life. It creates the theoretical research and design proposal while ensuring the long-lasting role of sacred architecture. The framework for collective memory, existentialism, and spiritual belonging is reaffirmed in the design and its final solution.

Chapter Two

The Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 **Mircea Eliade -** Sacredness, Profane Space, and the Desire for Symbolic Anchors

Mircea Eliade's *the Sacred and the Profane* (1959) captures the foundation for understanding religious architecture as an intentional monument in ordinary human activity. Eliade argues that sacred space emerges through *hierophany*, which is understood as the manifestation of the sacred in everyday life. So, this transforms the homogeneous space into a meaningful and oriented universe.[30]

This theoretical structure is evident in environments lacking the core ideals of symbolism, spatial order, and the ritual nature, which Eliade sees as fundamental to the sacred. With the absence of liminal spaces, axial clarity, verticality, and material designation, he argues that space loses its transcendence and spiritual core. Eliade's framework becomes a diagnostic tool used for revealing the missing components of the parish and responding to the design solutions necessary for a permanent place of worship.

Eliade's work informs design intentions by encouraging key transitions from profane everyday life to sacred experiences. Procession, spatial arrangements, and path toward the true sacredness become an architectural method to define meaning through stability and transcendence. While Eliade's universal philosophy is acknowledged, his focus on symbolic rupture continues as a critical piece for understanding why sacred space cannot be flexible or interchangeable.[31]

2.1.2 **Christopher Day -** Atmospheric Healing & Human Experiences vs Sacred Space

Christopher Day's S*pirit & Place* (2002) shifts the focus of sacred architecture from a symbolic structure to reality and lived experiences. He argues that architecture has a responsibility to heal the connections between people and place. This means that the atmosphere, material presence, light, and acoustics are all experiences that must be reclaimed. Day's work is applicable in shifting modern contexts where efficiency can often overpower the emotional and spiritual interests of its community.[32]

Day's emphasis on inclusivity and belonging relates to growing and diverse environments, which inform opportunities and divisions in sacred architecture. Day believes that revered

[30] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.
[31] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.
[32] Day, *Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment*.

spaces must respond to liturgical function and the emotional side of parishioners, such as sanctuary, love, and identity. In addition, Day's understanding of buildings that can feel, such as how light enters, the age of materials, and acoustic effects on communal worship, all contribute to the phenomenological experience of a site. [33]

Day validates the qualitative architectural studies as ongoing research, which is vital for the sacred framework. He does not rely on quantitative data but instead relies on drawing, observation, and speculative mapping to understand the collective aspects of an architectural experience. Day treats atmosphere as a central component of architectural meaning, claiming that sacred space must be constructed with an intention of how it will be used over time.[34]

2.1.3 **Luis Fernández-Galiano** - Memory, Energy, and the Architectural Continuity

Luis Fernández-Galiano's Fire and Memory (2005) adds a layer of temporality to the architectural discourse by framing buildings as capsules of memory and energy that define cultural continuity. He argues that architecture is not static but collects meaning through material endurance, environmental interaction, and the repetition of tradition. This view is significant in sacred architecture, which must be designed for generations and secure a community identity.[35]

Fernández-Galiano's views on architecture support the narrative that the contemporary Catholic church should embody tradition and respond to new urban experiences. His work reimagines material choice and environmental orientation as carriers of memory.

Fernández-Galiano's contribution to drawing research, precedent studies, and material analysis further explores how energy and spatial behaviors sustain an enduring architectural identity. The argument that church design is not just a formal expression is strengthened by Fernández-Galiano's principles of a long-lasting commitment to rethinking the connections between place and time.[36] However, the following literature explores these ideas further through phenomenology, place, and Catholic theology.

2.1.4 **Gaston Bachelard & Christian Norberg-Schulz** - Phenomenology, Intimacy, & Experience of Sacred Interiors

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[33] Day, *Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment*.
[34] Day, *Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment*.
[35] Fernández-Galiano, "Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy."
[36] Fernández-Galiano, "Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy."

In the Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachlard, he conceives interior sacred space as a lived and creative experience that strays away from just purely functional interpretations. He highlights the intimacy of enclosure, which creates a direct connection to the thesis's goal of uncovering how sacred interiors can produce moments of silence and contemplation.[37]

Bachelard's work creates pathways for secondary and liminal sacred spaces such as thresholds, transitional areas, and moments of spatial expression. These allow for more personal moments of reflection and prayer alongside a collective worship. Instead of treating interiors as residual spaces, this modern Roman catholic church becomes a journey. Bachelard's ideas on phenomenology support the notion that small-scale and enclosed spaces can carry deep emotional and spiritual weight without relying on moments of iconography.[38]

However, Bachelard's emphasis on individual experiences offers limited guidance on areas of communal and ritual components of Catholic worship. This limitation is considered carefully by integrating them selectively. His insights on improving interiors and their spiritual hierarchies allow for pathways to maintain the clarity of liturgical practices.

Christian Norberg-Schultz's Genus Loci continues the phenomenological experience by addressing how architecture creates meaning through place, orientation, and personal identity. His work aligns with the modern church ideologies, which can establish a sacred presence within continuously shifting environments. Norberg-Schulz adds a layer to site planning, massing, and spatial understanding while ensuring that sacredness is both a key identifiable place and can be integrated into everyday life.[39]

Norberg-Schulz leverages identification, which is significant to sacred space. It is not seen as an isolated moment but transforms the spatial community that grounds its congregation socially and spiritually. He suggests that the character adds to the architectural decisions of materiality, scale, and procession, allowing churches to express sacred meaning without imitating historical references.[40]

Bachelard and Norberg – Schulz together form the phenomenological basis that directly contributes to an intimate, personal spirituality, communal worship, and belonging.

[37] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.*
[38] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.*
[39] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture.*
[40] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture.*

Bachelard's claim on interior intimacy informs reflection on sacred moments, while Norberg–Schulz's ideas on place and orientation help reimagine outward connection to site.

2.1.5 **Shampa Mazumdar & Sanjoy Mazumdar -** Place Attachment, Community, and Empirical Experience

Beyond theories and symbolism, the question still lingers: what does sacred architecture actually do for the people who dwell in it over time? Mazumdar and Mazumdar's Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places adds an empirical lens to the discourse, and an answer can only be provided by the human experience. Their research explains that sacred places foster attachment through repetition of ritual and shared emotions. In doing so, their study proves that there is some truth to the theorists of phenomenology. They argue that place has meaning once a mutual relationship has formed.[41]

Mazumdar and Mazumdar express that attachment to sacred space is gradual and is often hidden through everyday celebrations. For example, baptisms, weekly masses, and funerals accumulate over time and help connect individuals to a place that becomes personal and filled with belonging. From this lens, sacred architecture strays away from immediate visual impacts and is framed more by its duration. It is not only about the worship but also about how an individual's life develops. This framework views architecture as a generational companion essential to communal life.[42]

Their findings resonate closely with worship, which becomes limited as its rituals lack continuity and the necessary retention of memory. Mazumdar and Mazumdar argue that temporary conditions are not as successful as permanent ones, as they suffer from a lack of establishment and grounding in a place.

2.1.6 **Thomas Barrie & Juhani Pallasmaa** - Sacred Mediation & Embodiment

Thomas Barrie's The Sacred In-Between (2010) positions the importance of liminal spaces in sacred architecture. Barrie's argument lies in sacred space as not defined by a single moment but rather a sequence of transitions that prepare visitors for spiritual encounter. An architectural rhythm is created when thresholds, changes in light, and directional movement are introduced to add to the natural spiritual journey from ordinary life to

[41] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."
[42] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."

sacredness. Barrie stresses that the value of architecture lies not in visual empowerment but in its ability to slow the body and to show how attention can be reordered. [43]

Barrie's work informs that procession is a key element for movement and arrival, which are carefully treated to allow sacredness to spread gradually. From this perspective, architecture takes on the role of caregiver, receiving its worshippers and accompanying them until they finally dwell in space.[44]

This discussion is deepened by Juhani Pallasmaa's The Eyes of the Skin (2012) by shifting the attention from spatial orders to embodied perception. Pallasmaa argues that architecture has meaning when it's built on multisensory experiences rather than ornament. The senses of touch, sound, shadow, weight, and temperature define how space is felt and remembered. These sensory traits in sacred architecture become significant as they instill feelings of attentiveness and presence.[45]

Pallasmaa's work highlights the importance of designing for the human body rather than for what the physical brings. Materials are not just selected for aesthetic purposes but for what feelings they evoke. Pallasmaa's focus on slowness and sensory depth relates to phenomenological drawing, material-based analysis, and experimental site studies. His work reinforces an approach that prioritizes the quiet presence over formal expressions of the sacred.[46]

2.1.7 **Harold Turner** - The Knowledge of Encounter

Harold Turner's From Temple to Meeting House provides insight into the theological and historical backdrop. Turner's work frames the evolution of Christian worship space and expresses how shifts in liturgy have reshaped architectural form. He demonstrates that arrangements can respond to changing environments, and worship, authority, and participation are maintained across sacred architectural history. This historical compassion enables sacred architecture to be understood as an expression of materiality and theological practices.[47]

Turner highlights that Christian sacred space must maintain a tension between community and the transcendence between orientation, the divine, and the communal gathering of

[43] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.
[44] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.
[45] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.
[46] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.
[47] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.

faith. This stability addresses elements like the altar as a focal point for sacraments and collectivism, and forms relationships rather than returning to a distant object.[48]

Turner begs the question of why spatial balance matters in these spaces. His literature provides a framework for understanding how architecture can reinforce both sacredness and inclusivity. He offers guidance on how modern architectural design might contribute from a sensory and atmospheric lens. This proves that a Catholic church should consider the liturgical meaning more often.[49]

Thus, Turner's spatial sequencing, material understanding, light, and enclosure are seen as tools for testing how theological principles are experienced phenomenologically.[50] The intersection of liturgical theory and architectural practice can move beyond typological tradition and be synthesized more critically.

2.1.8 **Hayden Dolores** – Place Memory & Sacred Space

Dolores Hayden's The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History (1995) situates the built environment as a vessel of collective memory and argues that landscapes are creators of social meaning. She stresses that design, preservation, and new interpretation can turn memory into something that is made more visible.

Hayden's central argument on what can be preserved can directly shape the universal understanding of history and belonging. Her knowledge draws parallels to sacred architecture, as memory and ritual are ingrained into material form. A worship space acts as a capsule of layered memories, such as liturgy, community, and sacraments, which are collected over time through habits of ritual.[51] Hayden's framework applies to this as she extends sacred space into theology and atmosphere. These include questions of collective remembrance and continuous Christian tradition.[52]

Her work builds on the concept of place memory as she positions it alongside cyclical, embodied rituals and how memory is unlocked through actions such as sensory engagement and repetitiveness. This is meant to be framed in a way that doesn't allow

[48] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.
[49] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.
[50] Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship*.
[51] Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.
[52] Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.

modern sacred space to become a static display of materiality or the feelings that arise from an experience.[53]

By reflecting on Hayden's insights, sacredness must be understood as a piece of public history. There must be a responsibility to both carry doctrine forward and contribute to people's views and experiences of spaces.

2.2 Reflection & Synthesis on Thesis

Collectively, the selected literature adds to the discourse on sacred architecture as a spatial, experiential, and cultural framework. These extend beyond formal religious symbolism, as each author contributes to sacred architecture through tools that reimagine ritual, community, and place.

Mircea Eliade's concept of *hierophany* grounds the theoretical framework in theory and creates an understanding of sacred architecture as a rupture within everyday life. His separation between the sacred and profane illustrates why temporary worship settings tend to fail, as they don't maintain the strong spiritual depth and community permanence required in these spaces. This thesis adds to Eliade's claims that by creating new sacred architecture as a mediator that reframes orientation, ritual procession, and transcendence within suburban fabrics.

Christopher Day, Junhani Pallasmaa, and Thomas Barrie add to this discussion by focusing on lived and sensorial events as true experiences of sacred architecture. Their perspectives on phenomenology suggest that the sacredness is founded both in symbolic indicators and in its atmosphere, materiality, light, and human movement. These ideas inform the thesis's design intentions through its prioritization of spatial sequences, sensory engagement, and its experiential depth, which are all tools for fostering long-lasting reverence.

Moreover, Gaston Bachelard and Christian Norberg-Schulz further shed light on the importance of place and interior experience. Intimacy and contemplation are a few of Bachelard's key concepts that address the significance of interior spatial orders and human reflection. Meanwhile, Norberg-Schulz stresses the ability of architecture to ground identity within a specific landscape. In Cornell's context, place identity is usually seen as

[53] Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.

a separate element, as these theories can allow for the design of a church that maintains both a community aspect and a permanent sense of belonging.

Alongside the other phenomenological lenses, Dolores Hayden, Luis Fernández-Galiano, and Mazumdar add a layer of memory and time. Their combined work views architecture as a vessel of cultural continuity in which meaning is collected through repetition, collectivism, and long-term attachment. Together, their literature is relevant for the critique of the temporary worship environment, which is key to this thesis. There is a struggle to recapture the permanence of spaces, which is a requirement when creating collective memory and identity.

On a final note, Harold Turner's analysis places architecture within the wider context of the Christian experience. His focus on spatial relationships and communal gatherings allows for divine orientation to leverage the importance of liturgical clarity and to ensure church architecture adapts to its surroundings. Turner's insight grounds the thesis in architectural exploration with a key focus on Catholic worship while shifting focus away solely from phenomenological views.

Therefore, these theoretical works support the central thesis argument that modern church design must transcend functional spaces and help environments grow into long-lasting reverence, community identity, and spiritual placemaking. Markham's design for a new Roman Catholic Church is an experiment where the author's principles are tested in terms of its spatiality, materiality, and architectural strategies, which together thrive in its community.

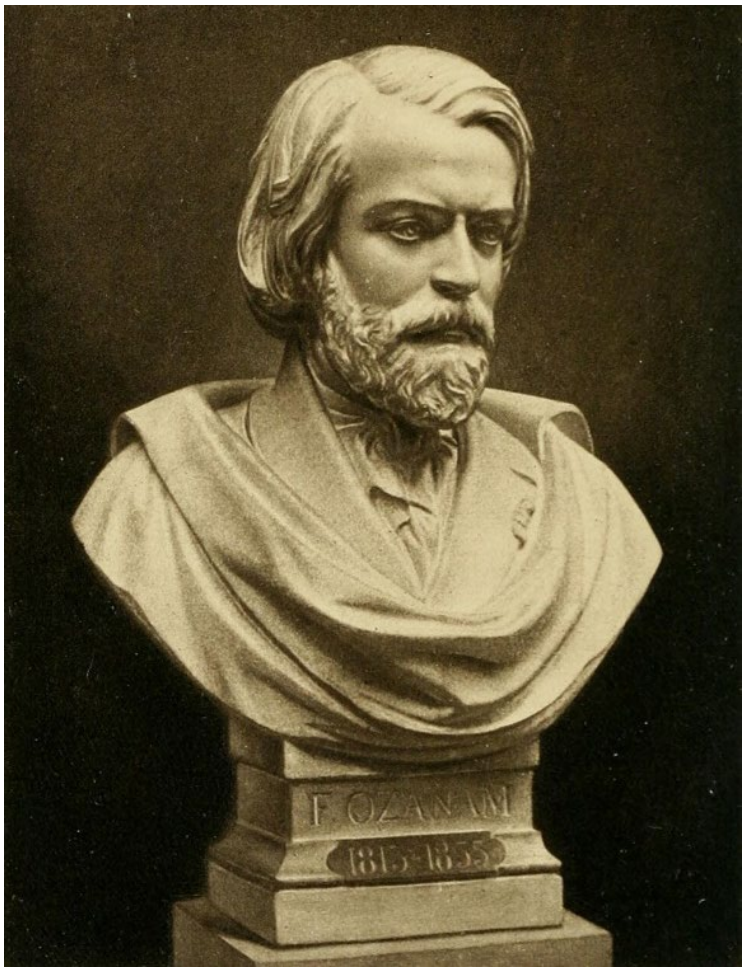
Chapter Three

The Story of Frédéric Ozanam - Cornell's Patron Saint

3.1 Rise of Frédéric Ozanam

3.1.1 Frédéric Ozanam: Early Life, Intellectual Formation, and Social Vision

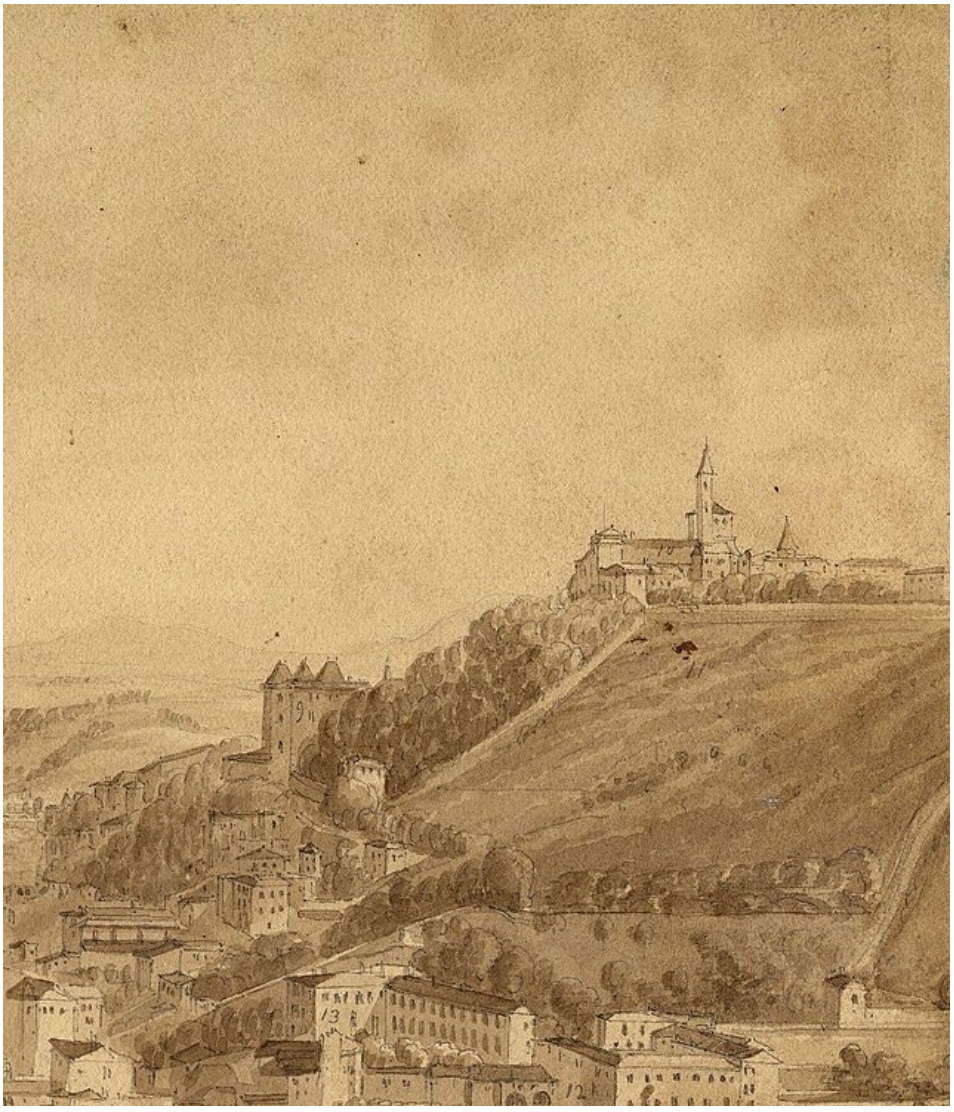
Frédéric Antoine Ozanam was born on April 23rd, 1813, in Milan, Italy. He grew up under the Napoleonic rule with a deeply catholic and intellectual family. His father, Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, was a physician and a former army surgeon, and his mother, Marie Nantas Ozanam, was known for her strong values, such as piety and moral teachings. Frédéric's household was built upon scientific rationalism, religious prowess, a strong sense of accountability, and ethics. This created an environment for a young man in which faith and reason were seen as key forces in his upbringing and belief system. All of these traits would become critical to Ozanam's future spiritual life and Catholic faith.[54]



(Figure 3.1): A marble statue of Frédéric Ozanam, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[54] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."

With the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, the Ozanam family moved back to France, where they settled permanently in Lyon in 1816. France's second city, Lyon, was a major center known for its commerce, trading, industries, and Roman Catholic life. Lyon, during the early 19th century, was deeply rooted in Catholicism, while also being socially divided. This era was marked by the silk workers, whose poor living conditions contributed to the protests and revolution in the industry. This had a profound effect on how Ozanam would grow up and perceive the world around him.[55]



(Figure 3.2): An illustration of Lyon, France, during the early nineteenth century, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[55] Slattery, *Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.*

In his early life, Ozanam can be described as a quiet, sensitive, and deep-thinking young child. His early education was filled with a strong passion for literacy and a critical awareness of social suffering, especially among the less fortunate. Frédéric's view drastically changed in the post-revolutionary era in France. Anticlerical sentiment and social inequality were key components prominent during this time. Thus, Ozanam's early years of growth began to change in a society that struggled with its views on religion, moral authority, and responsibilities.[56]

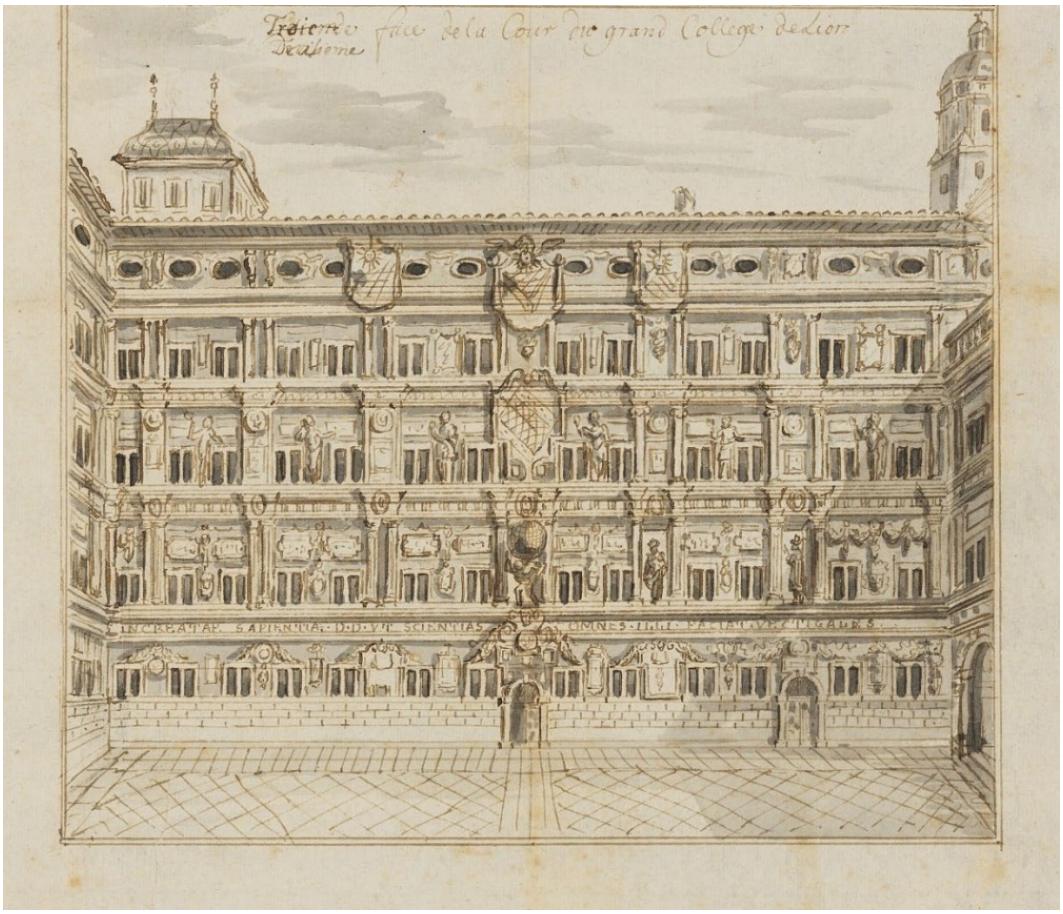
3.2 The Early Academic Life of Frédéric Ozanam

3.2.1 University Life in Lyon and Paris: Intellectual Formation and Catholic Engagement

Frédéric Ozanam's academic journey began in Lyon, where his family settled after living in Italy for some time. He was educated at the Collège Royal de Lyon, which was one of the most prestigious secondary institutions in France during this era. The school's curriculum was grounded in classical humanist education, which had a key focus on Latin and Greek literature, philosophy, and history. This was the time when Ozanam developed his deep passion for literature and formed his disciplined habits of reading and writing. This affected and would later define his academic career.[57]

During his important years at the Collège de Lyon, Ozanam already engaged in texts that were beyond what students were doing at his age. He was being compared to early Christian writers, medieval historians, and other classical figures. During this time, he was exposed to the intellectual issues of the French Enlightenment and its revolution, where there was a lot of skepticism toward Catholicism and its institutions. While there were so many tensions and uncertainties during this time, he learned to accept belief and to understand faith as something that can't be compressed by history or other philosophy.[58]

[56] Slattery, *Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.*
[57] Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*.
[58] Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*; Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.



(Figure 3.3): An original artwork of the Grand Collège de Lyon, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Lyon was a foundational piece that allowed Ozanam to encounter mentors who taught him to view Catholicism as an intellectual art and not just something that is related to devotion. This prepared him for a future where he would use his intellectual power in Paris and flourish.

3.2.2 Move to Paris and Lawyer Studies (1831 to 1834)

In 1831, when Ozanam turned eighteen, he moved to Paris to pursue a higher education at the Sorbonne. With a lot of knowledge and support from his father, he enrolled in the Faculty of Law at the University of Paris (Faculté de Droit de Paris). In the early nineteenth century, studying law was both professional training and a path to public life, political influence, and respect amongst the community.[59]

[59] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.



(Figure 3.4): A lithographic drawing of Paris in the 1830s, where Ozanam spent most of his time studying, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Ozanam would then complete his coursework and earn his law degree in 1834. After this moment, it became clear that his passion lay elsewhere beyond studying law. He found out that law had its limits in addressing the moral, historical, and social questions of the world around him. His legal education contributed to his analytical skills and would inform him more on social structures, institutions, and societal responsibility. However, these concerns would transform his approach, where charity and texts on social interaction were at the forefront of his beliefs.[60]

3.2.3 Intellectual Life Beyond Law: Sorbonne and Paris Lectures

On top of his formal legal studies, Ozanam would attend a variety of lectures in Paris at the Sorbonne on topics such as literature, philosophy, and history. Although these were not part of his law degree, they were all central to his intellectual identity. Ozanam took full

[60] Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*.

advantage of Paris, which was one of Europe's most vibrant centers of learning and debate.[61]

He was deeply interested in the resurgence of medieval studies, Christian life, and older historical philosophy. Ozanam rejected the notion that the Middle Ages were simply known for their pure superstition and social stagnation. He went against the grain and began to view a new vision for medieval Christianity that represented a blend of faith, philosophy, art, and social order. These new ideas shaped his scholarly journey and his understanding of Dante.[62]



(Figure 3.5): The depiction of the library of the Sorbonne University in Paris. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[61] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.
[62] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.

Ozanam would be accompanied by modern catholic thinkers who were linked to the renewal of catholic intellectual life in France. He admired the courage and knowledge that Henri - Dominique Lacordaire brought forth. He maintained an idea of independent thinking, to resist major shifts in ideology, and to remain committed to human conditions and dialogue.[63]



(Figure 3.6): A photograph of Henri Lacordaire in the 19th century, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[63] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.

3.2.4 Student Debates, Catholic Views, and the Rise of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Ozanam's university life was also shaped by his frequent involvement in student debates, especially in the Conference of History. This was a forum in which young intellectuals debated on philosophical, political, and religious questions. These gatherings were known for their critiques of Christianity and accusations against the church that had become irrelevant and left behind in the modern age.[64]

It was during these student debates that Ozanam would famously confront the idea that Catholicism belonged only to the past. He responded to these views as he argued that the truth of Christianity must be expressed through critical arguments and accompanied by lived experiences. Ozanam's inspiration from the 17th-century philosophy of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833 led to the founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which was initially composed of a group of university students. When it was first conceived, Emmanuel Bailly was the first president of the society alongside Frédéric Ozanam.[65]

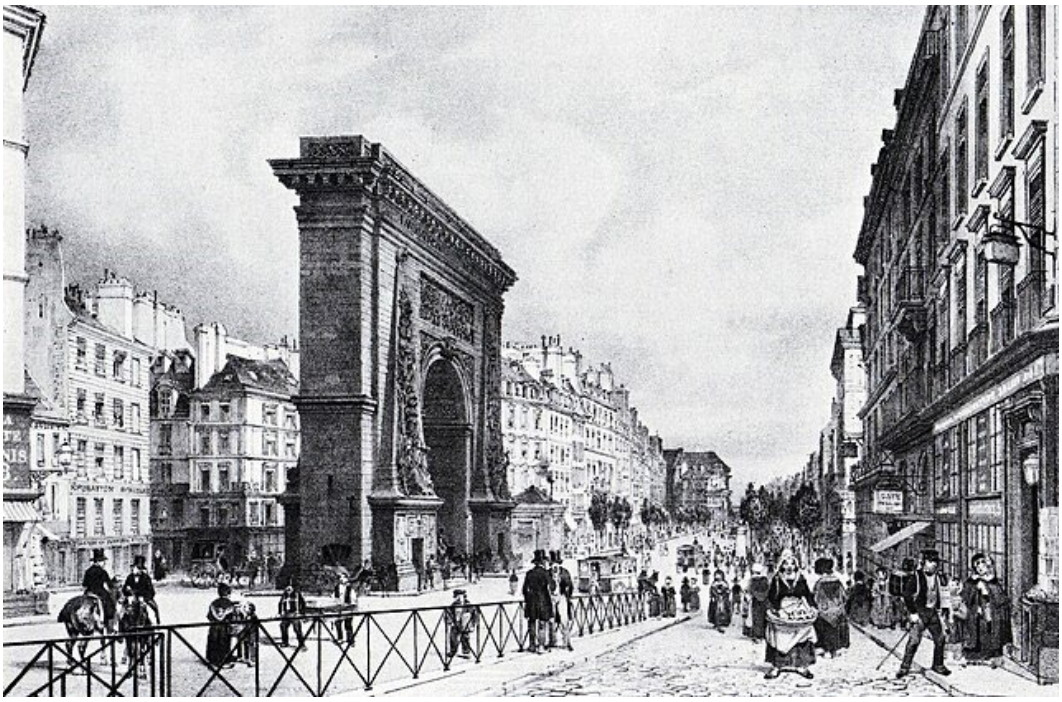
[64] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.
[65] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.



(Figure 3.7): Portrait of St. Vincent de Paul, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

The Society's framework was closely connected to Ozanam's academic surroundings. It was created as a lay initiative that was rooted in the intellectual life of Paris but shifted toward the realities of the less fortunate and the poor. Members visited impoverished families in Paris and would offer assistance based on personal encounters rather than simple charitable actions. For Ozanam, this was in place to respond to the challenges that the university had. Faith had to prove itself with reliable actions.[66]

[66] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.



(Figure 3.8): The poor streets of Porte St. Denis in 1840, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Ozanam did not see his work as separate from his personal studies; he viewed intellectual formation and charity as equally fulfilling. Knowledge without charitable action can be seen as risky arrogance, and charity without reflection lacks sentiment. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul became a beacon of hope and an embodiment of what Ozanam believed throughout his academic career.[67]

3.2.5 Transition Toward a Scholarly Vocation

By the mid-1830s, Ozanam had begun to follow his true calling by not only practicing law but also in scholarship and teaching. After completing his law degree, he would eventually pursue advanced studies in literature and history and earn a doctorate in the study of Dante's Inferno. His early involvement in medieval texts helped him during his years of informal study at the Sorbonne, which would later impact his journey as a professor. He became well-versed in early Christian civilization, catholic philosophy, and its application to other works during the Renaissance.[68]

Historical attentiveness, moral responsibility, and openness to dialogue were all important intellectual habits that he formed during his university years and would remain at the

[67] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."
[68] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."

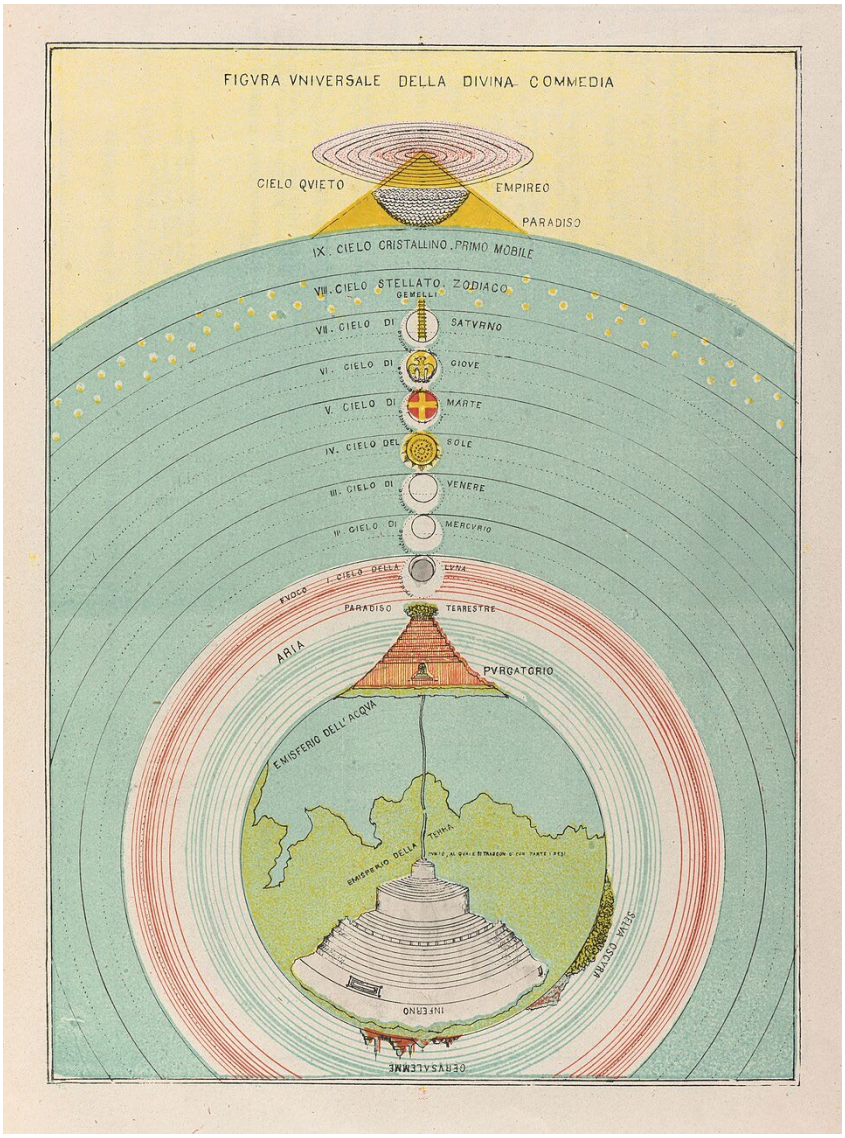
forefront of his adult life. Paris not only educated Ozanam but also allowed him to confront the central questions of modernity. This covered the role of religion in secular life, intellectuals' actions toward society, and the possibility of blending faith with critical thinking. His response to these challenges defines the ongoing chapters of his life and the long-lasting significance of Catholic thought.[69]

3.3 Frédéric Ozanam's Doctoral Thesis on Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy

3.3.1 Overview of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy

Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* is the foundational work of medieval Christian literature, presenting a poetic and theological version of the journey toward God. It was written in vernacular Italian and follows Dante's journey through three chapters, which are Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso.[70] These translate to Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven as unique spiritual realms controlled by divine justice and grace.

[69] Dirvin, *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters*.
[70] Durling, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*.



(Figure 3.9): Overview of the Divine Comedy painting, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

The story follows Dante's adventure from sin to salvation, which is first led by Virgil, a Roman poet of human reason, and then by Beatrice, who is symbolic of divine love and mercy. Each realm is ordered intentionally to reflect the soul's connection to God by expressing the moral cosmos through punishments, purification, and gifts.[71] Besides the Divine Comedy's poetic importance, it also had a profound influence on modern Western thought, theological philosophies, and artistic expression, which ultimately shaped the perceptions of how we experience sacred space.

[71] Durling, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*.

3.3.2 Dante within the Intellectual Realm and Mind of the Thirteenth Century

The key foundation of Ozanam's argument is that Dante cannot be seen as a separate piece from the intellectual changes of the thirteenth century. For instance, the integration of Aristotelian philosophy into already existing Christian theology. Ozanam places Dante on the same intellectual level that created Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. This emphasizes that Dante was open to learning scholastic methods, even when expressed through poetry as opposed to an in-depth academic analysis. The Divine Comedy by Dante functions as a poetic treatise that mirrors scholastic efforts to rearrange knowledge in a cohesive hierarchy system.[72]



(Figure 3.10): Portrait of Dante Alighieri, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[72] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.

By focusing on Dante's view of academic thought, Ozanam is on the same page as he refuses to believe modern notions that separate literary intellect from older tradition. Dante's original views and Ozanam's new perspective do not reject medieval philosophy but accept it in a poetic form.

3.3.3 Inferno as a Moral Idea and Philosophical Framework

Ozanam's analysis of the inferno is separated by its reliance on moral transparency over the emotional side that impacts thinking. While accepting how clear Dante's words are, Ozanam rejects any ideas that see Hell as a space of pure cruelty or lack of imagination. Instead, he argues that Inferno is run by a constant ethical view that every punishment relates to a specific moral setback. Hell is not seen as a chaotic or evil space, but it is ordered almost perfectly.[73]



(Figure 3.11): Gustave Doré's drawing of Dante's Inferno, Plate LXV: Canto XXXI: titans and giants, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[73] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.

Ozanam focuses on the process through Hell, which can be compared to the degradation of reason and thinking. The upper circles punish the sins that relate to weakness, passion, and lack of self-control, while the lower circles involve fraud, betrayal, and acts that require critical thinking but refuse it against truth and integrity. This moral journey finishes where Satan is a frozen figure who has a complete separation from the divine God. This is seen differently, not as a typical fiery character but just a stagnant entity. Ozanam sees Dante's vision as a philosophical image where true evil is not truly gone, while love and reason are still at hand.[74]



(Figure 3.12): Dante and Virgil in Hell – third circle of hell, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[74] Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy.*

This reading is closely connected to Dante's moral beliefs on Aristotelian and Thomistic ethics, which strengthens Ozanam's idea that the Inferno is seen through philosophical viewpoints rather than the accessibility to the existing narratives. Modern scholars have focused on the ethical analysis of Dante's Hell, which views it as a moral backdrop rather than a theatrical performance.[75]

3.3.4 Divine Comedy: Justice, Mercy, and Unity

While Inferno sees a strong vision of justice, Ozanam was always pushing that it cannot be seen as a separation from Purgatorio and Paradiso. Hell is symbolic of justice without any grace, but it is not the destination of Dante's creativity. Ozanam focuses on Dante's cosmos, which is directly related to unity with justice and mercy operating as a complementary factor of divine order.[76]

By placing Inferno in the larger narrative that makes up the structure of the Divine Comedy, Ozanam refuses to accept Dante as an excessive or morally ruthless person. Instead of this viewpoint, he presents Dante as a theologian-poet whose main concern is centered on the restoration of morality and the soul that gradually moves toward God. This reading sees later education and academic resources as a way to understand Dante's reading as a spiritual journey rather than being stagnant in our punishments.[77]

3.3.5 Dante's Academic Perspective and Vincentian Thought

Ozanam's association with Dante and his studies does not separate him from his Vincentian obligations to charity, justice, and social responsibility. With key values focusing on moral clarity, human integrity, and liberty, which reflect the same principles that guided his work with the poor. Ozanam really prioritizes intellectual inquiry and social action, as these did not overshadow his innate values but were just reinforced and made more aware.[78]

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[75] Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*; Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*.
[76] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.
[77] Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*.
[78] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam"; Carranza, "The Vincentian Charism in the Laity: Frederick Ozanam."



(Figure 3.13): St Vincent de Paul, amongst a divine love and care, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

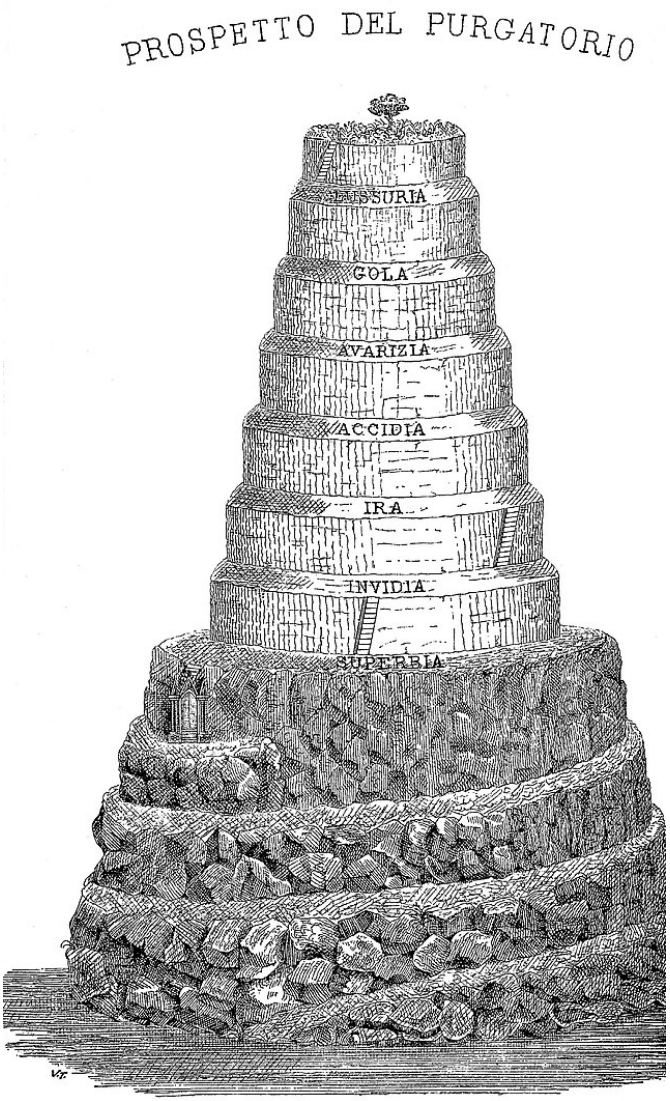
Ozanam demonstrated that medieval Catholic philosophy can create both artistic brilliance and ethical importance. He thought that challenging modern ideals of Christianity was now gone and socially irrelevant. His reading of Inferno draws similarities to his charitable work. The aim here is to make moral truth visible, clear, and actionable within a solid representation of human experiences. This blend between thought and practice remains as one of the most significant components of Ozanam's legacy.[79]

3.3.6 Purgatorio: Moral Healing, Time, and the New Love Reorder

With the shift from Inferno to Purgatorio, Ozanam sees this as a major shift in how Dante saw morality. The focus on disordered love in Hell provides the opportunity for moral

[79] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."

healing throughout time, effort, and divine grace. Inferno is very different, as free will permanently shifts away from the good. Purgatorio views the soul with the ability to receive redemption and is open to transformation. Ozanam understands the realm of Purgatorio from a unique lens, where it's fully poetic and an expression of medieval Catholic moral beliefs. This would mean sin is seen from a twofold perspective, with liability and scars that require purification.[80]



(Figure 3.14): The diagram of Purgatorio in the Divine Comedy, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[80] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.

What is very central to Ozanam's analysis of Purgatorio is the ability to restore the proper hierarchy of love. The mountain's structure can be parallel with the same moral belief as Hell, but also inverted. Sins can be purged not only through retributive pain but through the effort to reimagine how people see desire. Pride turns to humbleness, envy is removed, and sloth turns into meaningful goals and purposes that become greatness. Ozanam focuses on this process that confirms human freedom rather than rejecting it. The individuals who experience penance willingly experience renewal, but show moral growth must require a combination of divine grace and human effort. This is a core theme and principle that aligns closely with Thomistic theology.[81]

Ozanam also draws on the presence of time and hope that takes place in Purgatorio, which is missing in Inferno. Temporal progress, liturgical pacing, and communal prayer all call to moral transformation, which is always possible and cannot be undermined. From Ozanam's perspective, Purgatorio can be referred to as the human realm of the Divine Comedy, as struggle, patience, and moral development continue as important concepts. This notion supports the wider view that Catholic philosophy offers so much, including rational interpretation of integrity and the genuine understanding of moral growth that is embedded in hope and unity.

3.3.7 Paradiso: Intellectual Fulfillment and Purpose

Paradiso is the ultimate fulfillment of one's spiritual journey, and for Ozanam, he sees this as a blend between Dante's analysis of faith and reason, where intellect reaches its highest point. Modern views tend to oppose theology, and how rational it is, Ozanam argues that Dante has a framework based on the beatitude as an intense learning rather than abandoning it. In Heaven, the soul never loses its purpose but actually gains more over time. Truth is not understood indirectly but taught through direct involvement with the divine.[82]

[81] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*; Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*.
[82] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.



(Figure 3.15): Paradiso painting, Canto III: Dante and Beatrice.

Ozanam understands Paradiso as a realm that embodies the complete harmony between philosophy and theology proposed by medieval academic work. With major influence from Thomistic knowledge, Ozanam stresses that the blessed experience always varies in terms of its glory. Its all about the capacity to receive truth, not the inequality of how the divine loves the world. There are differences in intellect and moral formation that affect how much glory one can experience. The hierarchy of heaven confirms that Dante's version of knowledge, virtue, and love is inseparable from true human fulfillment.[83]

Additionally, Ozanam also highlights Dante's understanding of light, order, and the motion of the universe as an illustration of the true metaphysical journey. The imagery behind Paradiso consists of concentric spheres, rhythm-based movement, and luminous landscapes, which reflect a universe controlled by clearness as opposed to disorder.

[83] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.

Ozanam's cosmic order presents a rebuttal against modern views that faith undermines rational thinking. Unlike Dante's heaven, which depicts reason perfected by grace, achieving the very reason that Ozanam believes the modern world has unfortunately credited mainly to secular views.[84]

Paradiso is the ultimate world where moral and intellect are perfected, and it begins in Inferno. Hell reveals the consequences of poor decisions based on reason and love, while Purgatorio is the start of redemption and transformation. Paradiso is true fulfillment, where the journey continues to grow and attach more truth to the soul.

3.3.8 Scholarly Legacy and Ozanam's Completed Doctoral Work on Dante

Frédéric Ozanam's continuous engagement with Dante formed the foundation for his life beyond his studies and intellect. His doctoral thesis on Dante was defended in 1840 at the University of Paris and marked his formal entry into his academic journey, making him a key figure within the nineteenth century of medieval literature. This research was later touched up and published as Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century, which positioned Dante as the focal point of theological and philosophical analysis.[85]

[84] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*; Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*.
[85] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*; Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."



(Figure 3.16): Portrait of Frédéric Ozanam by Antoine Maurin, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Ozanam's doctoral work was so ahead of its time in terms of its scope and methodology. During the medieval period, this thought was dismissed as irrational and stagnant. He argued that Dante's Divine Comedy was an embodiment of a consistent set of academic philosophy, Christian theology, and poetry. Augustine and Aquinas' thoughts can be aligned with Dante's work, which allowed Ozanam to challenge the separation of faith from reason and portray the era of the Middle Ages as one filled with intellectual thinkers.[86]

3.4 Marriage, Family Life, and Lay Holiness with Charity in Practice

3.4.1 Marriage as a Calling and Moral Grounding

In 1841, it marked a significant milestone in Frédéric Ozanam's life when he married Amélie Soulacroix. This was a part of his Christian vocation where he viewed marriage as

[86] Ozanam, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska*.

more than a secondary commitment. Ozanam saw it as a genuine path to holiness and moral responsibility. His wife was the daughter of a university rector, where Ozanam had the opportunity to share his mutual intellectual and religious commitments. While sharing many traits in common, their relationship was founded on respect, affection, and a shared purpose.[87]

Ozanam saw marriage as a way to strengthen his ideas on charity and the less fortunate. His domestic life was surrounded by values such as patience, humility, and responsibility, which all contribute to his social engagement. These virtues were learned and adopted by his family, which shaped a belief in social inequality and human integrity. Throughout history, scholars have noted that Ozanam's vision for charity was not separated from domestic upbringing. He approached the poor as if he related to them and was informed by the daily experience of caring for households.[88]

The birth of Ozanam's daughter Marie continued this vocation as he grew more reflective on inheritance, education, and the moral examples he set. Fatherhood was a period of his life where accountability for the future generation is reinforced, and social injustice becomes more than just a political idea.

3.4.2 Lay Holiness and the Path Away from Clerical Idealization

Ozanam's life can be seen as a model of nineteenth-century Catholic tradition rooted in the lay experience. He did not pursue sanctity through the clerical view or religious vows, but he had a strong understanding of holiness that emerges through ordinary commitments. For example, marriage, professional labor, civic activity, and the continuous engagement with suffering are ways he saw his calling. This perspective directly correlates with the values embedded in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which he insisted should remain a lay organization of everyday social life.[89]

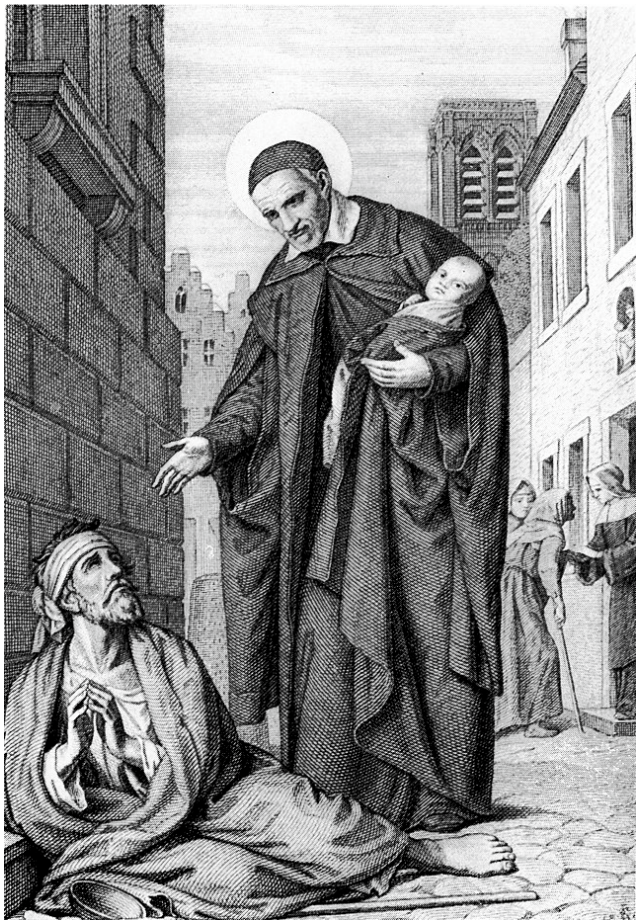
The notion that moral authority belonged only to the clergy or religious organizations is what Ozanam refused to support. He believed that lay people must take responsibility for observing faith within the social and economic structures of the modern world. This faith shaped his persistence that charitable work can be carried out in a personal way instead of

[87] Slattery, *Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.*; Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*.
[88] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."
[89] Carranza, "The Vincentian Charism in the Laity: Frederick Ozanam."

being delegated or part of an institution. Ozanam views charity as a relationship between presence, modesty, and mutual vulnerability amongst communities.[90]

3.4.3 Personal Charitable Work and Giving to the Poor

Ozanam's work consisted of sincere and personally engaged efforts with the poor. As the founding member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, he ensured that he always participated in regular home visits to impoverished families in Paris, offering material support and continuous prayers. His care was intended to be humble with food, firwood, clothing, and other financial payments, which meant he delivered with the spirit of companionship and the love of Christ.[91]



(Figure 3.17): A depiction of the St. Vincent de Paul mission and charity, Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

[90] Rybolt, "The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederick Ozanam."
[91] Slattery, *Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.*

Even with a limited number of financial resources, Ozanam frequently supported those in need and often gave beyond his means. His letters reveal that there is a concern that charity should never be a form of humiliation for anyone involved, and strengthen any social structures.[92]

3.4.4 The Death and Beatification of Ozanam

Frédéric Ozanam's later years were plagued by physical fragility and intense charitable labor, which led to his premature death. With so much of his time spent travelling, teaching, and his commitment to the poor, Ozanam could not take this pressure and eventually passed away in Marseille on September 8th, 1853, at forty. He just returned from Italy in search of recovery, but could not receive further support. His death was mourned by the Catholic community worldwide and within his academic circles as well. His vision of social engagement and faith continued to rise with the Society of Vincent de Paul, and within one hundred years, the church recognized his holy works. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1997, which gave Ozanam the title "blessed," affirming the greatness of Ozanam's legacy as a model for justice, dignity, and human life.[93]

[92] Carranza, "The Vincentian Charism in the Laity: Frederick Ozanam."
[93] Slattery, *Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.*

Chapter Four

Roman Catholic Tradition: Western History, Impact, and Approaches

4.1 Brief history of Roman Catholicism in North America

4.1.1 Historical overview of Roman Catholicism in North America

Roman Catholicism is among the earliest Christian traditions to maintain a presence in North America. It arrived through the generations of European settlers and colonization, which began in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The Spanish and French missions brought Catholic theology alongside sacramental and ecclesiastical practice to indigenous lands before the protestant denominations developed as separate institutions.[94] Unlike other Protestant movements, which would emerge as decentralized models, Roman Catholicism came as a detailed institutional system rooted in authority, generational rituals, and sacramental knowledge.[95]

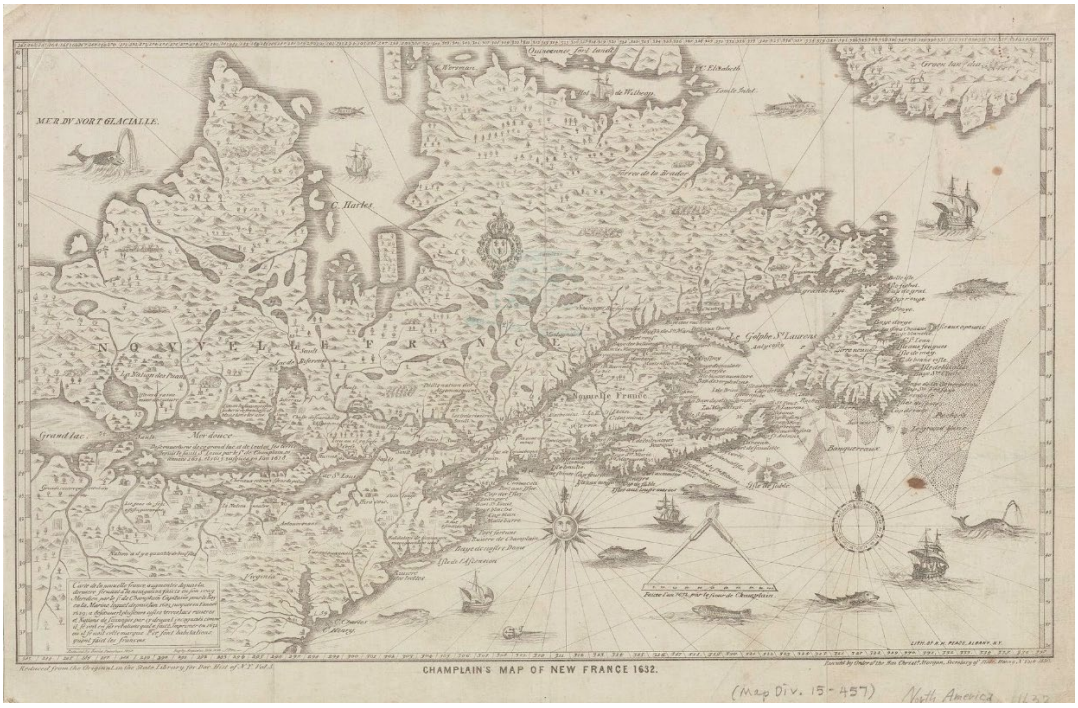


(Figure 4.1): The Jesuits interacting with tribes in North America (17th century), Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

The earliest stages of Catholic expansion in North America mainly stemmed from missionaries or other religious orders. The Jesuits, Franciscans, Récollets, and Ursulines are all groups that played a central role in evangelization while also founding schools,

[94] Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics*.
[95] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*.

hospitals, and systems of a social society.[96] These missions would often operate as initial settlements where religious life was integrated into daily routines and spatial organization.



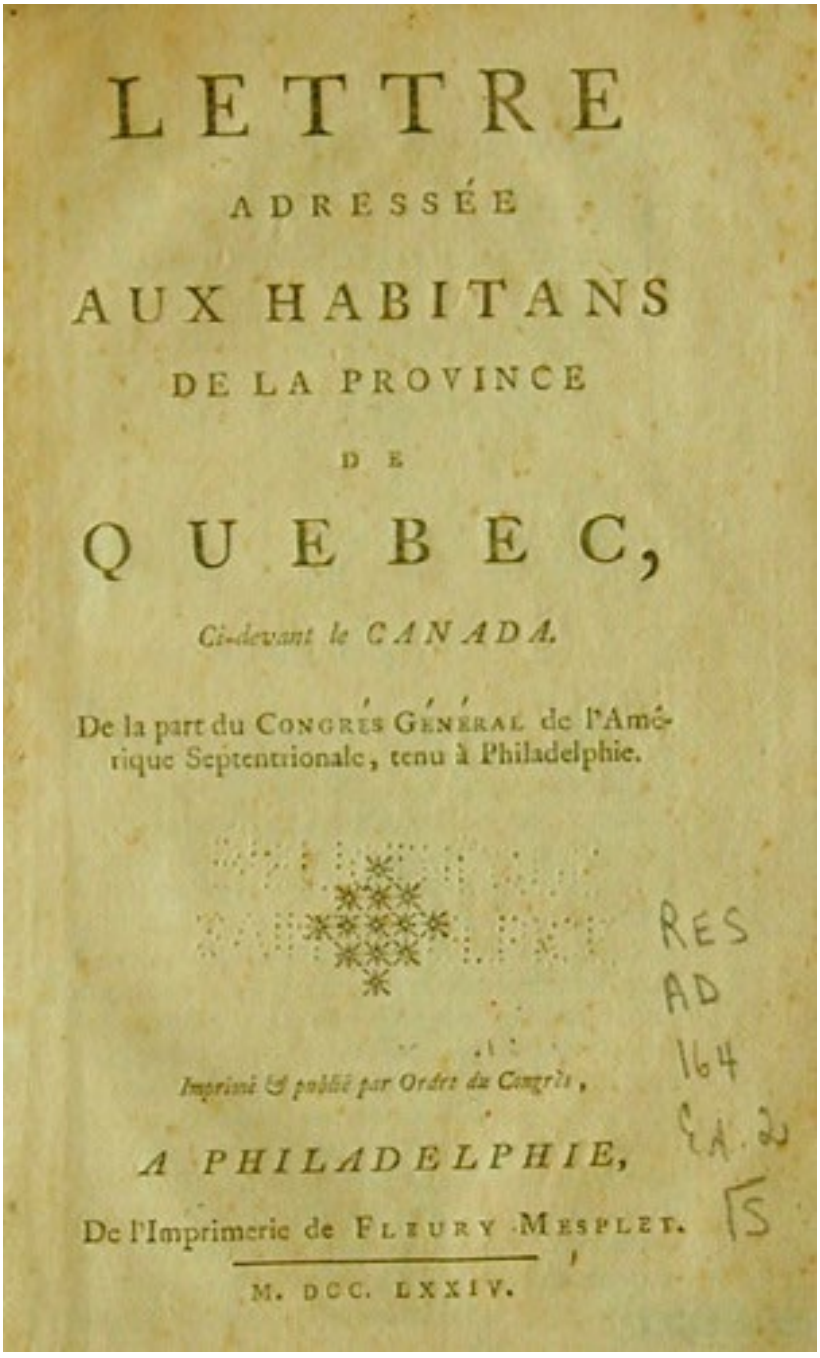
(Figure 4.2): Champlain's map of New France that shows the northern part of the United States, then to Lake Erie (1632), Public Domain, Via Wikimedia Commons.

Modern-day Canada would eventually become what it is as Roman Catholicism developed primarily from French colonial rule. The founding of New France related to Catholic missionary goals, especially among the indigenous nations such as the Huron-Wendat. Sainte – Marie was a major settlement among the Hurons that showcased early ambitions to convert European religious life into unknown lands. With that in effect, this produced sacred spaces that relied more on ritual traditions and communal discipline rather than on historic architecture.[97]

In 1763, with the British conquest of New France, Catholicism entered an era of political uncertainty, but it remained a large and powerful institution. The Quebec Act of 1774 was proposed to allow freedom of Catholic worship, which would maintain clerical authority. This allowed Catholic institutions to last and later grow within mostly protestant

[96] Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*.
[97] Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*.

communities.[98] This act ultimately enabled an avenue for the foundation of Catholicism to grow beyond Quebec and eventually into Ontario.


LETTRE

ADRESSÉE

AUX HABITANS

DE LA PROVINCE

DE

QUEBEC,

Ci-devant le CANADA.

De la part du CONGRÈS GÉNÉRAL de l'Amérique Septentrionale, tenu à Philadelphie.

RES AD 164 CA.2 5

Imprimé & publié par Ordre du Congrès,

A PHILADELPHIE,

De l'Imprimerie de FLEURY MESPLET.

M. DCC. LXXIV.

(Figure 4.3): The cover page of a letter created by the First Continental Congress in October 1774, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

[98] Walsh, *The Quebec Act (1774) and the Hanoverian Church–State Relationship*, no. 602.

4.1.2 The Transition from Europe to the Western Hemisphere

The transfer of Roman Catholicism from Europe to North America consisted of many factors, such as the adjustment to new cultural, social, and spatial qualities of the land. Catholic doctrine and its theology remained consistent with its materiality and spiritual understanding of faith. This then evolved in response to the environmental conditions, multicultural experiences, and the limited resources.[99]

European Catholic Architecture has been expressed in colossal forms over many generations. These would typically involve detailed axial planning and high ornate ritual geometry. However, early catholic spaces in North America were usually temporary or not too detailed in their construction. Sacredness was often completed through acts of procession, gestures, and collective discussion rather than architectural approaches.[100] This resulted in ritual practices that often came first before architectural forms.

With the rise of Catholic populations alongside settlements and immigration, larger sacred structures spread over time. Parishes were established, dioceses flourished, and churches gradually grew and gained a larger architectural presence. Hence, Catholicism in North America continued to diverge and become distinct from other European structures that operated in societies primarily characterized by pluralism and dominated by Protestant groups. This required more negotiation within the public and social realm.[101]

[99] McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*.
[100] Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development - Translated by Francis A. Brunner*.
[101] Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics*.



(Figure 4.4): The Catholic Church in America and its progress during the 1890s, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

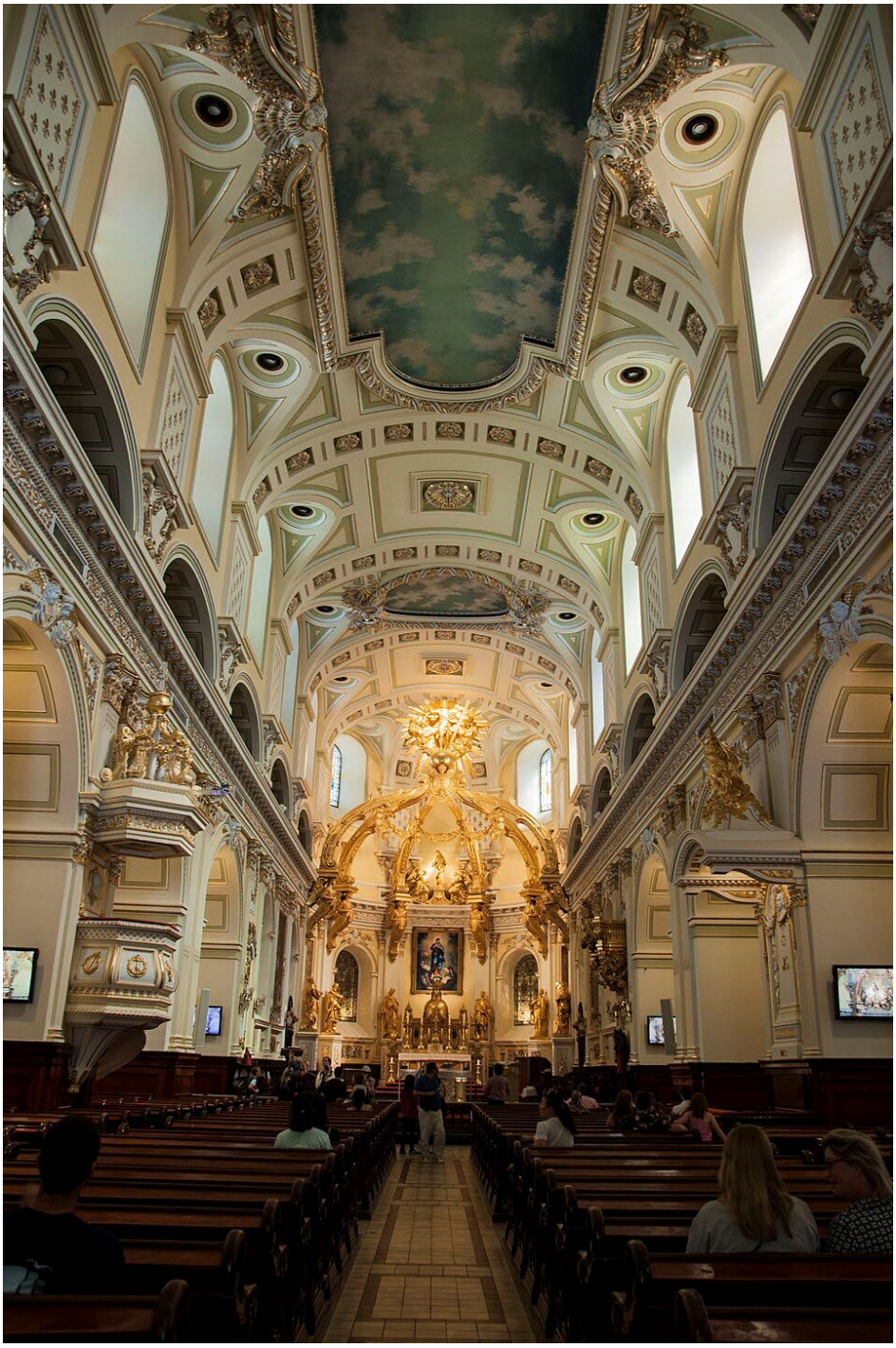
Key shifts also reimagined Catholicism's social perspectives. Churches were not state-based institutions but were centered on the concept that Catholicism is a support system for immigrants and marginalized populations. The catholic identity gained a new social and pastoral focus in North America and would go on to contribute to the spatial arrangements of parishes and their community organizations.[102]

4.1.3 Evolution of Roman Catholicism in Canada

The nineteenth century was a key point in Canadian history. This was marked by the significant growth in Roman Catholicism, largely driven by immigration rates. Irish Catholics fled their country from famine in the 1840s, which followed other waves from Southern and Eastern Europe. Religious groups were then reshaped, and the cultural landscape shifted in response to the conditions of Canadian cities.[103] In Ontario specifically, the Catholic population grew predominantly from Protestant groups, such as

[102] Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age*.
[103] McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*

their political and social values. Issues regarding exclusion and marginalization began to arise during this time.



(Figure 4.5): Interior view of the church nave of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Montreal, Québec, Canada. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

A parallel system of education, healthcare, and social assistance was a response from the Catholic community. Different school boards, hospitals, and charitable groups were conceived as institutions devoted to faith, but also as a way to maintain communal resilience. These institutions offered new ways to experience space, such as neighbourhoods modeled around the sites of sacred buildings, and the contribution to evolving infrastructure.



(Figure 4.6): Exterior view of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Montreal, Québec, Canada. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

With each passing generation, parishes became the central point of catholic living and routine. Alongside the liturgical program, its social, cultural, and shared centers were also vital for creating key communal anchors during the nineteenth century. Churches in each

town were among the earliest structures that functioned as sacred, meaningful, and fulfilling settlements that contributed to true Catholic integrity.[104]

The transition into the early twentieth century brought new life to Catholicism. Ontario became a primary setting of faith and was seen as a strong institution able to adapt to urban issues and demographic shifts.

4.2 Roman Catholicism in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

4.2.1 Catholicism, Migration, and Urban Change

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) symbolizes one of the important sites for Roman Catholicism in Canada. Large-scale immigration from the post-Second World War period transformed Toronto into a major metropolitan center. Catholic parishes grew rapidly during the era of suburban growth, which gave rise to new residential developments and responses to shifting demographic trends.[105]

Modern Catholicism in the GTA reflects the broader scale and character of its catholic tradition. Immigration from Italy, Portugal, the Philippines, Latin America, South Asia, Africa, and East Asia has altered the experience of parish life by introducing multilingual liturgies and diverse approaches to devotional practices.[106] This range of backgrounds and beliefs is evident in cities like Markham, where its Catholic parishes host highly multicultural congregations in suburban settings.

[104] McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*
[105] Archdiocese of Toronto, *History of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.
[106] McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*



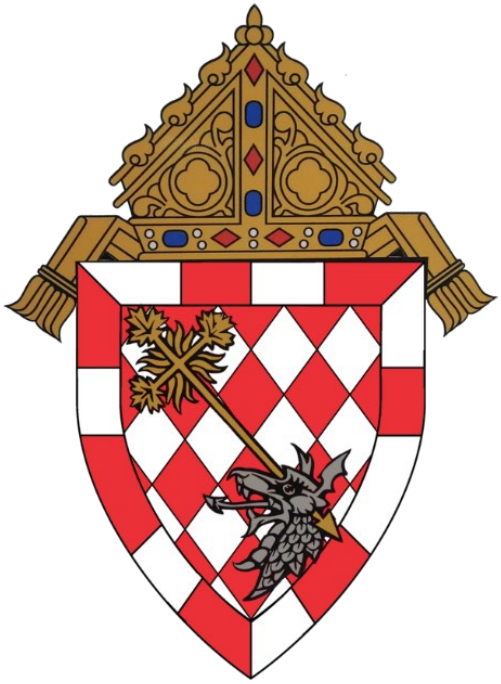
(Figure 4.7): St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (1920 and 1930). Open Government License - Ontario via Wikimedia Commons.

In an architectural sense, postwar Catholic churches in the GTA have placed function, accessibility, and communal organization over the traditions that define older Catholic monuments and sacredness. Parish complexes regularly integrate worship space with other critical programs such as classrooms, church halls, and service-based rooms. This highlights the church's ever-growing pastoral and social objectives.[107]

[107] Archdiocese of Toronto, *History of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.

4.2.2 The Archdiocese of Toronto – the Institution and Influence

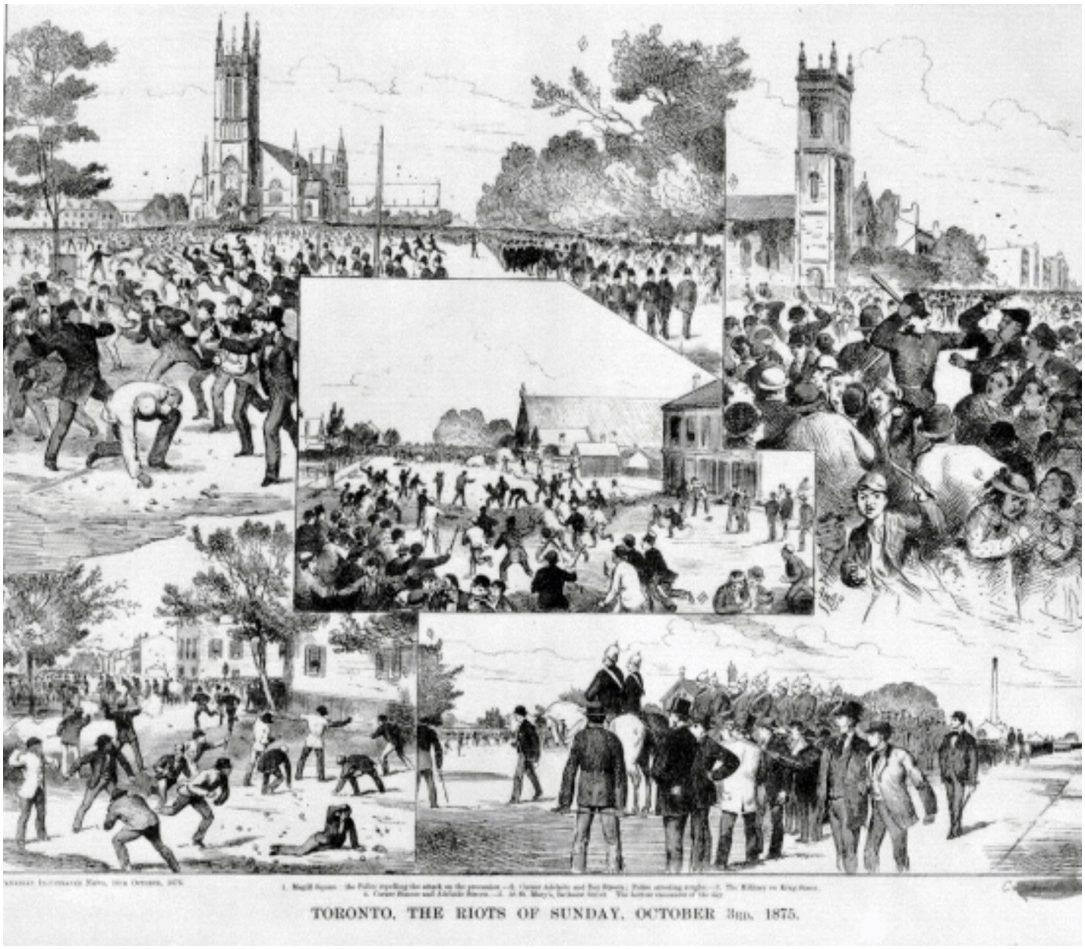
1841 was an important year for Catholicism as the diocese was established but then emerged as an archdiocese in 1898. The Archdiocese of Toronto is one of the largest Catholic authorities in North America, and its institutional growth aligns closely with Toronto's urbanism and expansion. With the increase in Catholic populations, the archdiocese developed as an organized network of parishes, communities, elementary schools, hospitals, and non-profit organizations.[108]



(Figure 4.8): Archdiocese of Toronto Coat of Arms, Creative Commons Licensing via Wikimedia Commons.

Catholic public presence began to emerge with tensions throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the relationship between Protestants and Catholics. These disagreements led to major events such as the Jubilee Riots of 1875, as challenges of claiming Catholic identities in public life developed. Even though these conflicts were impacting Catholic life, its institutions refused to diminish and instead became vital parts of the city's continuous growth in civic infrastructure.

[108] Archdiocese of Toronto, *History of the Archdiocese of Toronto*.



(Figure 4.9): Original illustration of "The Toronto Riots of 1875", Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

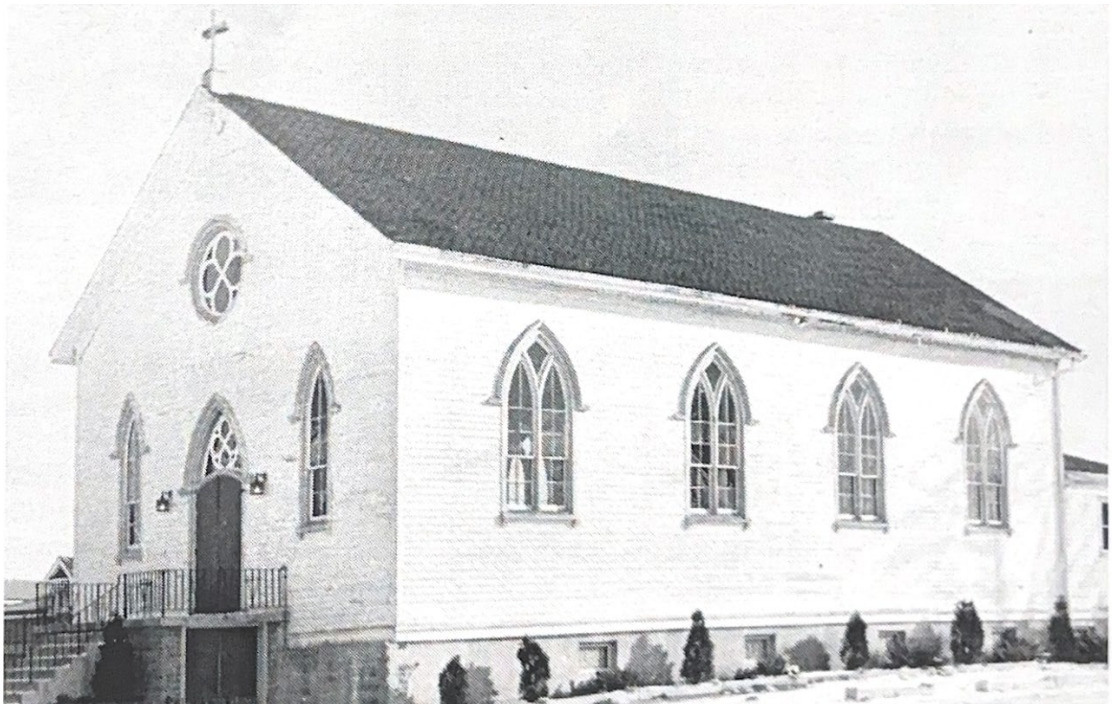
After the era of the Second Vatican Council, the Toronto archdiocese began focusing more on local parish life and community engagement. The church adopted more regionalized spatial approaches within a neighbourhood instead of participating solely in symbolic agency, which reflected the wider theological shifts of the time.[109]

4.2.3 Rise of Catholicism in Markham

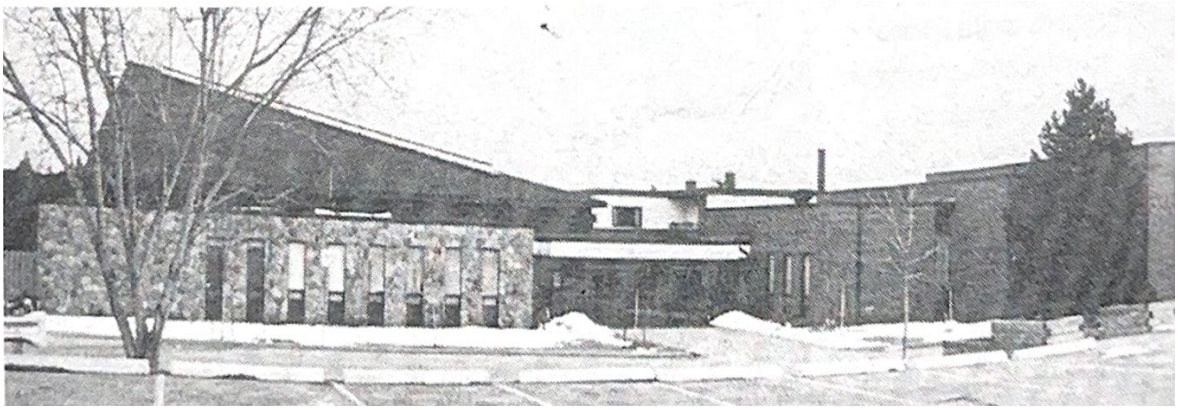
The city of Markham experienced significant Catholic growth, with major factors including settlement, immigration, and suburban development. The earliest form of a Catholic presence in Markham came from the establishment of the St. Patrick's mission in the mid-nineteenth century. It later became St. Patrick's Church, the city's first Catholic parish, with worship beginning in 1855. Visiting priests began to celebrate mass with their local settlers

[109] Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age*.

on Rouge Street, and in 1862, a small wooden church was constructed to serve the growing rural community.[110]



(Figure 4.10): The first St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church was established in 1862 on Rouge Street in Markham. Photograph included in the 75 Years of Prayer & Service pamphlet (2007) by Rosemary Miller.

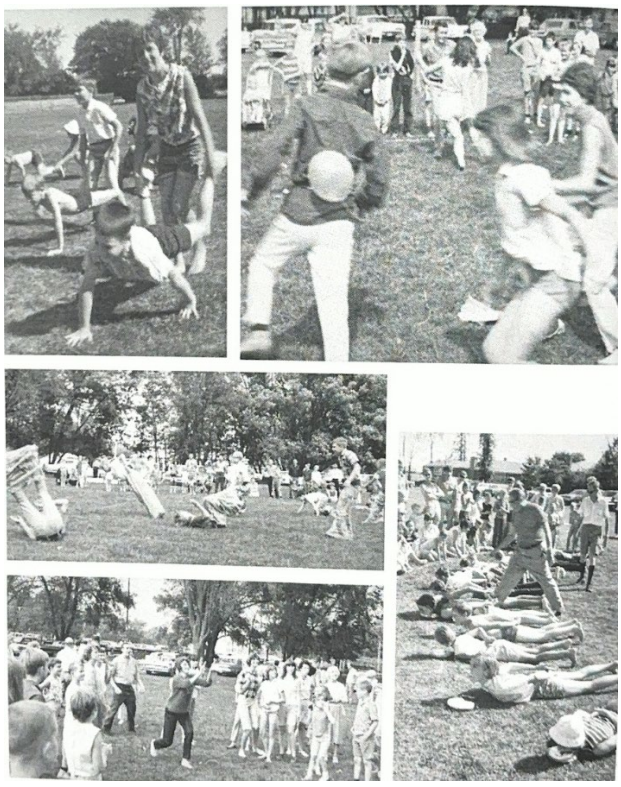


(Figure 4.11): The newly constructed St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in 1970 on Highway 7 in Markham. Photograph included in the 75 Years of Prayer & Service pamphlet (2007) by Rosemary Miller.

[110] Archdiocese of Toronto Archives, "St. Patrick's Mission, Markham."

Markham transitioned from an agrarian town into a large suburban municipality in the twentieth century. As Catholicism grew in its local communities, so did its population and immigration. The construction of a new St. Patrick's church began on Highway 7 in the 1960s, reflecting changes in their neighbourhoods and the growth of its congregation.[111] As time passed, ongoing waves of immigration from Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Philippines would reshape modern Catholic parish life into multicultural experiences. This would go on to be consistent with the wider patterns of other municipalities across the Greater Toronto Area.[112]

Roman Catholicism remains a strong presence in Markham, with other parishes thriving, such as St. Justin Martyr Church. While visiting these new churches, I noticed that they offer more than just worship but are also social and communal anchors. Based on the foundations of its early missionaries, catholic churches in Markham continue to adapt to its modern urban conditions while maintaining long-lasting ritual and engagement.



(Figure 4.12): The parish picnic of St. Patrick's Parish in the 1970s. Photograph included in the 75 Years of Prayer & Service pamphlet (2007) by Rosemary Miller.

[111] St. Patrick's Parish - Markham, *Parish History*.
[112] McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*

4.2.4 Frédéric Ozanam's Catholic Social Mission in the GTA

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and the legacy of Frédéric Ozanam have been a strong anchor for Catholic social life in the GTA for generations now. Based on the value of personal encounter, dignity, and charity, the society reflects the surrounding landscapes that foster the continued growth of its municipalities. Ozanam is understood in Toronto as a way to express social service and to extend faith

While the Society of Saint was founded in Paris in 1833, its influence began to spread eventually to the Atlantic. In Canada, the first conference took place in 1846, and by 1850, lay members founded the first Ontario Conference at St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto. This made it one of the earliest organized groups and expressions of Catholic voice in the province.[113]



(Figure 4. 13): Interior of St. Vincent de Paul Church while hosting a priest's first mass in 1946, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[113] Canadian Encyclopedia, *Society of Saint Vincent de Paul."*.



(Figure 4.14): Atlas of the City of Toronto, 1910. St. Michael's Basilica is highlighted in blue. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Toronto Catholic social teaching ensured that it was grounded in principles of human dignity, solidarity, and ensuring charitable actions to the poor. This would create a framework and lay the foundation for the parish's future initiatives and social charity drives, which would overtake the traditional secular welfare approach.[114] The Vincentian

[114] Wright, *The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching: A Guide for Decision Making from Daily Clinical Encounters to National Policymaking*.

tradition would carry forward into modern generations of Toronto's fabric, with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul having a dedicated building for non-profit initiatives in the city's garden district.

4.3 Procession and Liturgy: Vatican Council Periods and Contemporary Tradition

4.3.1 Pre – Vatican II Procession & Practice

Before the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic practice was described as a powerful sense of ritual, hierarchy, and transcendence during worship. The main form of the Mass was referred to as the Tridentine Rite, which was founded after the Council of Trent from 1545 to 1563. This was eventually formed into the Missale Romanum of 1570. This type of practice was in place for about four hundred years and ensured that worship was stable and had clerical authority.[115]

[115] Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development - Translated by Francis A. Brunner*; Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*.



(Figure 4.15): Pasquale Cati's Council of Trent painting (1588), Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

The mass was only offered in Latin and focused on the universality of the church while reinforcing the separation between clergy and the congregation. The priest-maintained *ad orientem,* which saw him facing east rather than towards the church pews. This was a symbol of a communal gathering that would be fully devoted and always connected to God.[116] A sacred distance and atmosphere of awe were felt due to actions of silence, ritual habits, and spiritual gestures. This further contributes to the ideas of Rudolf Otto, who described this period as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.[117]

[116] Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development - Translated by Francis A. Brunner*; Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.
[117] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey*.

Pre – Vatican II church architecture embodied theology rooted in hierarchy and spatial stratification. This was comprised of higher altars, altar rails, rood screens, and longitudinal axial plans that appeared in Christian symbolism to express the true connection to Christ. The sanctuary presented a clear and elevated zone for ordained clergy, highlighting the theological differences between sacred and profane space.[118]

Both the inside and outside of the churches during this time were impacted by liturgical events. For example, feast-day processions such as Corpus Christi and Marian devotion celebrations extended rituals into everyday civic life, where streets and plazas would transform into lively gatherings.[119] These rituals affirmed the Catholic presence, especially in areas where Catholic populations were marginalized.



(Figure 4.16): An outdoor mass during a burial (Pre Vatican II and World War I, 1914 to 1918). Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

4.3.2 The Liturgical Transformation: The Second Vatican Council

Between 1962 and 1965, the Second Vatican II Council marked a shift in Catholic liturgical practice as it created opportunities for transparent participation and communal worship.

[118] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*; Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.
[119] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.

The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, also known as *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* now saw liturgy as a modern way to celebrate Christ-like action. They insisted that this change was aimed to be fully conscious and required the full involvement of each visitor.[120] This major theological movement shifted from a complete focus on laity and clerical action to communal engagement of all visitors. These key changes included vernacular languages, redirection of the altar towards the pews, the roles of lay minsters and a more simplified version of rituals and texts.



(Figure 4.17): Franklin McMahon's illustration of the procession of Cardinals entering St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (1962). Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

This transformation was felt almost immediately and had a massive impact on the future of sacred architecture. Churches were newly constructed in ways that would prioritize visual proximity, improved acoustics, and spatial belonging. The elongated or axial plans of the past were altered into more round and centralized forms of worship. The altar was considered a key frontispiece around the assembly and contributed to contemporary models rooted in communion.[121] Entrance procession, the offering of gifts, and communion were

[120] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium."
[121] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*; Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.

all modern liturgical components. They were understood as total engagement from the assembly while shifting away from symbolic actions performed solely by clergy members.[122] This liturgical movement became an expression of community and shared rituals amongst the congregation.



(Figure 4.18): Pope Paul VI & Enrico Dante partaking in the Second Vatican Council (1963 – 1965). Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

Hence, Vatican II recreated sacred space as a concept that is relational and dynamic. At its core, this was produced through more action and communal involvement. S*acrosanctum Concilium* views architecture as a means to serve the liturgy and align spatial form with theological and spiritual meaning.[123]

[122] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*.
[123] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium"; Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship.*

4.3.3 The Contemporary Catholic Approach: Post – Vatican II

After 1965, Catholic liturgy continued to struggle with the tension between older tradition and change. While the current Roman Rite has remained the same since the 1960s, contemporary catholic worship maintains cultural diversity, especially in areas that are known to be urban and immigrant-dense, such as the Greater Toronto Area.[124]

The church was known to encourage liturgical adaptation, which led to the combination of diverse musical forms, languages, and unique ways of expressing faith. As this took place, the overall framework behind the Roman Rite remained a focal point and was followed by communities all over.[125] Modern procession is presented in a more localized manner on parish grounds or during specific liturgical seasons. However, they continue to function as an internal expression of their surrounding communities.

Contemporary Catholic philosophy seems to view sacred space as a concept produced through ritual activity, collective dialogue, and personal experience. This is closely rooted in the wider phenomenological and anthropological views of ritual space, in which movement, gathering, and continuous practices are enacted.[126]

Modern Catholic philosophies tend to focus on the dynamics of hospitality, accessibility, and inclusion, allowing architecture to become a more flexible framework for supporting liturgical life.[127]

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[124] McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*.
[125] Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*.
[126] Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*; White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*.
[127] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*; McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887–1922.*

Chapter Five

The Sacred Architectural Experience & Precedent Analysis

5.1 The Sacred Architectural Experience

This chapter argues that the answer lies in how the sacred architectural experience is cultivated. The embodied, phenomenological condition that is reshaped through light, material orientation, and procession. Spiritual placemaking is not accomplished solely through symbolic form but is grounded when architecture frames perception, memory, and ritual engagement over periods of time.

In growing, culturally diverse suburban environments, the church's identity is often overlooked and lacks the means to sustain long-lasting reverence. These environments support worship, but haven't been able to structure the sacred experience. As a result, reverence becomes irregular rather than maintained spatially. This chapter situates the sacred architectural experience as a key connection between suburban placemaking and lasting spiritual identities.

5.2 Spiritual Placemaking: Theoretical Framework

Spiritual placemaking extends into urban placemaking theory into the realm of transcendence and communal faith. While placemaking emphasizes engagement and participation to help form identity, spiritual placemaking ingrains ritual, memory, and theological symbolism into a stable architectural monument. [128] However, spiritual placemaking involves embedding ritual continuity and collective memory into a stable architectural form. Where secular placemaking usually focuses on engagement, sacred placemaking often places endurance and existential orientation above all else.

5.2.1 Place, Memory & Identity

Edward Relph argues that authentic place arises from lived realities, continuity, and deep meaning rather than from superficial experiences.[129] In contrast, placelessness emerges in environments that lack rootedness and symbolic stability. Many suburban developments risk becoming placeless through the same typologies and the rise of standardized commercial buildings.

Similarly, Yi-Fu Tuan expresses the idea of place that is infused with value through constant human action and encounters.[130] Sacred architecture contributes heavily to this

[128] Ellery and Ellery, *Strengthening Community Sense of Place through Placemaking*; Low and Altman, "Place Attachment."
[129] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.
[130] Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

process through liturgical repetition, seasonal rituals, and generational habits. Architectural form then becomes completely inseparable from communal memory.[131]

Sanjay Mazumdar and Shampa Mazumdar demonstrate this attachment to religious spaces through their belief in repeated ritual practice within stable and meaningful environments.[132] When worship occurs in temporary settings, its long-term attachments are weakened because its spatial continuity is interrupted.

5.2.2 Genius Loci & Existential Direction

Sacred architecture can also be defined as the concretization of genius loci and the spirit of place. Architecture must serve as the mediator between context and transcendence, neither ignoring suburban surroundings nor introducing an orientation beyond everyday life.[133]

In liturgical spaces, orientation is not just a geographical condition but should be understood more from a theological standpoint. Aspects such as axial clarity, focal hierarchy, and proportional harmony help navigate the body and perception of ritual tradition. This orientation nurtures collectivism and spatial meaning across all cultures.[134] Spiritual placemaking, thus, is not achieved through past references but develops from when architecture provides more existential clarity.

5.3 Phenomenology & Atmosphere

5.3.1 Sensory Depth & Atmosphere

For architecture to be revered, it must engage all the senses to achieve existential clarity.[135] Sacred environments create silence, tactility, and luminous differences, and these atmospheres slow the perception and strengthen awareness. Architecture that prioritizes vision alone creates both distance and a detached state. Instead, meaningful spaces arise from the multisensory integration of touch, sound, temperature, and materiality. In particular, sacred environments rely on sensory depth to help recalibrate bodily awareness and improve the state of being within a larger order.

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[131] Low and Altman, "Place Attachment."
[132] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."
[133] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[134] Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture*.
[135] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.

Furthermore, atmosphere is the basis for the emotional density of space that forms the material simplicity and unification of our senses.[136] Atmosphere is immediate and is founded on the careful use of material, light, and acoustic performance. In sacred architecture, this density is reached not through an excess but through its limitations. For instance, silence is based more on perception, and surfaces reveal their texture through the constant changes in light. Sound is altered subtly as the human body reveals enclosure and expansion at the same time. These conditions contribute to Zumthor's concept of presence, which cannot be relegated or confined to built form alone.

From this perspective, sensory modulation becomes a tool to achieve a better theological understanding. Atmospheric strategies such as discreet light around the church nave, immense light around the altar, the acoustics that affect the cladding, or the tactility of stone. Together, these contribute to the perception and layers that make up the spatial hierarchy. Instead of overwhelming each visitor with a ritual performance, they invite gradual spiritual ascent.[137]

The balance between monumentality and intimacy is just as important. Gaston Bachelard stresses that large spaces waver between safety and vastness. Sacred architecture must then take on the responsibility of negotiating transcendence and enclosure at the same time. The vertical volume of the space can create feelings of awe, just like smaller chapels or shifts in ceiling height can offer emotional shelter. This tension allows worshippers to witness humility before the comfort of community belonging.[138]

In practical terms, this approach signals a need for suburban sacred environments to have layered thresholds. These should include the gradual dimming of light and allow space to compress before opening into the nave to enable an easy transition into the sacred nave. Textured and warm felt materials should express permanence and craft, and their acoustics should further support liturgical traditions.

5.3.2 The Mystical & Reverence

In the Idea of the Holy by Rudolf Otto, he describes authentic religious experience as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This is the paradoxical condition of the individual,

[136] Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects*.
[137] Ellery and Ellery, *Strengthening Community Sense of Place through Placemaking*; Low and Altman, "Place Attachment."
[138] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas*.

where they are both being overwhelmed and drawn inward.[139] The sacred is not just comforting but also immense and intimate, destabilizing traditional perceptions and grounding the believer in meaning.

Architecture becomes a tangible concept in which this paradox can be mediated spatially. If the mystical is both inviting and inspiring, then sacred architecture must function as calibrated conflict. For example, scale humbles and does not separate, an enclosure that shelters but cannot confine its visitors, and light that reveals but also maintains its mystery.

Verticality is one of the most immediate expressions of the tremendum. Height extends perception and shifts the individual's eye upward and decenters the human body as a measure of space. Historical sacred architecture has used vertical proportionality to signal transcendence to reimagine existentialism. Yet verticality does not produce reverence alone because, without proportional coherence, height becomes ineffective. Christian Norberg-Schulz suggests that orientation and proportion are what allow architecture to create existential meaning.[140]

Light deepens this relationship as controlled illuminance strengthens a focused gaze by withholding uniform visibility. In contrast to commercial environments that are categorized by brightness and continuous glare, sacred space relies on hierarchy instead.

The mystical should not be imposed but constructed for proportion, hierarchy, and authentic use of materiality. So, in this way, sacred architecture maintains reverence not through ornament but through experimental unity.

5.4 Tamás Nagy – Holy Trinity Church International Architecture Precedent

The Holy Trinity Church in Gödöllő by Tamás Nagy was completed in 2007 and emerged during Hungary's post-communist religious resurgence. With many restrictions on ecclesiastical construction, new church buildings began to grow and maintain symbolic weight as key markers of spiritual renewal and cultural restoration. Scholars of post-socialist Central Europe highlight that the religious architecture in this period acted not

[139] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey*.
[140] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.

only in a liturgical sense but as a way to reassert the collective identity and memory of the Hungarian community.[141]

Architectural documentation describes the church as an intentionally restrained form that relies on geometric clarity, brick massing, and controlled apertures that form its own unique identity instead of replicating historic buildings.[142] The older methods of adopting ornament were now discarded as Nagy empluts stragteis on abstraction and tectonic legibility to comprehend sacred identity. This approach directly applies to the research question, and if sacred architecture is to function meaningfully in modern suburban settings, it must communicate transcendence without solely depending on nostalgia.[143]



(Figure 5.1): An image of Nagy Tamás, who designed the Holy Trinity Church. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

[141] Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change.*; Máté-Tóth and Dániel Nagy, *Hidden Dynamics of Religion and Human Rights in Central and Eastern Europe*.
[142] Metszet, *Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy*.
[143] ArchDaily, *Roman Catholic Church / Tamás Nagy*.



(Figure 5.2): An exterior view of the Holy Trinity Church and its entrance. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

5.4.1 Orientation & Liturgical Clarity

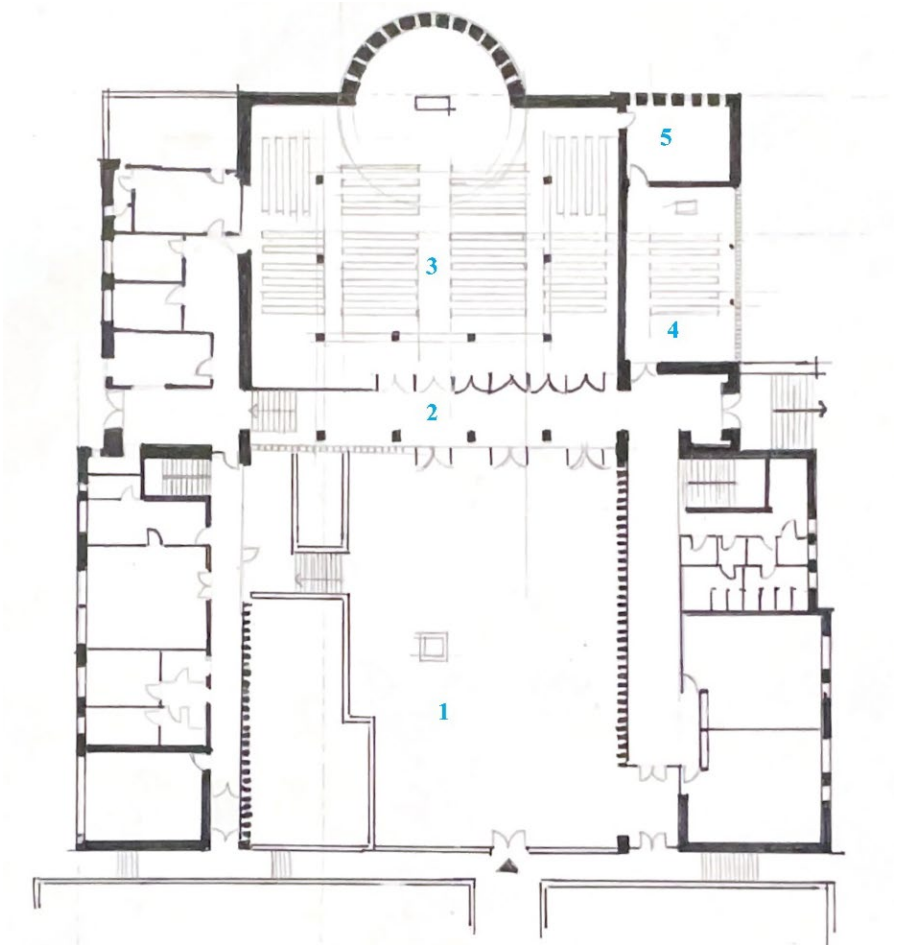
The church is organized in a profound longitudinal axis that makes up the altar. This configuration is documented in published plans and critical reviews of the building but will be sketched for this thesis.[144] This axial organization brings forth an immediate spatial legibility and creates a shared orientation for its visitors. As Christian Norberg Schulz argues, orientation allows human beings to live and be immersed in a meaningful existential structure. In Holy Trinity Church, this axis does more than navigate its congregation and circulation; it aligns bodies toward a sacramental hub and reinforces the collectivism of its Catholic liturgy.[145]

The progression from the entrance, nave, and eventually to the sanctuary unravels in a sequence that strengthens perceptual focus on the spaces. The altar then transforms spatially, which culminates in the proportion, alignment, and light of each celebration. This evolution draws parallels to the liturgical movement that involves gathering for the Eucharistic celebration, which further supports what Louis Bouyer identifies as the spatial embodiment of collective worship.[146]

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[144] Metszet, *Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy*.
[145] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.
[146] Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture*.

For this thesis design proposal, this precedent describes orientation as a way to achieve universal architectural language. In a diverse suburban community, clear axial alignment and a hierarchy of proportions that transcend different styles, while all sustaining theological presence. The use of geometry instead of ornamentation becomes the main driver of shared meaning and importance.



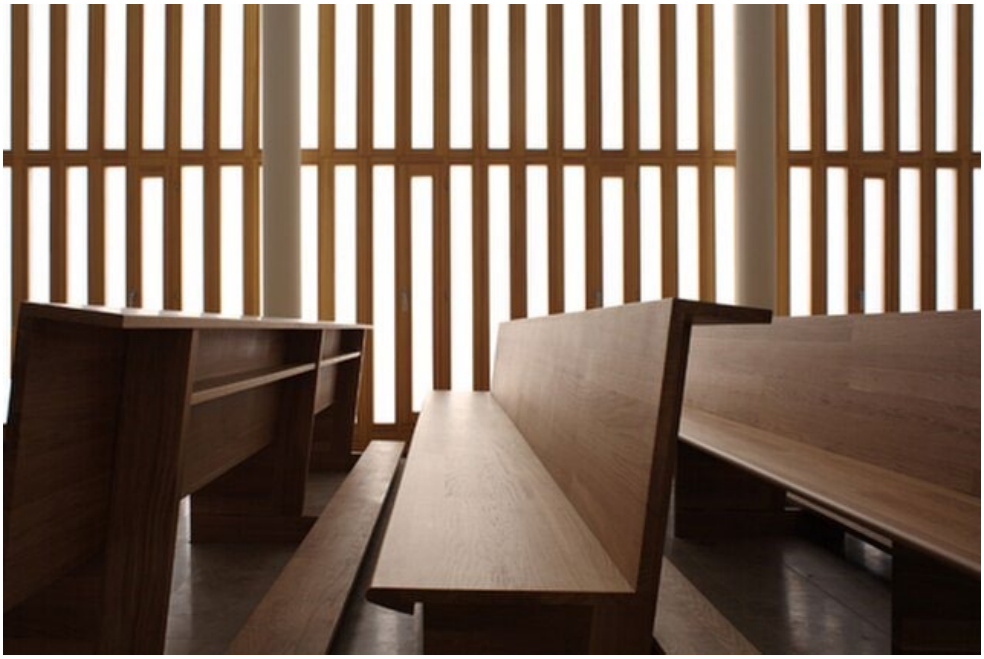
(Figure 5.3): A hand-sketched floor plan of the Holy Trinity Church. **1:** Plaza, **2:** Narthex, **3:** Nave, **4:** Chapel, **5:** Priest's Preparation Room/Sacristy.

5.4.2 Material Permanence

Holy Trinity Church employs techniques such as load-bearing brick masonry and clear structural elements that make up the entire architecture. The building's strong emphasis on material integrity showcases the expressive quality of the brick envelope.[147] The masonry forms anchors between the church and its suburban surroundings. This enables tactile depth

[147] Metszet, *Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy*; ArchDaily, *Roman Catholic Church / Tamás Nagy*.

and the importance of light across the building surfaces throughout each day. These observations help affirm the long-term attachment and identity formation argued in placemaking scholarship.[148]

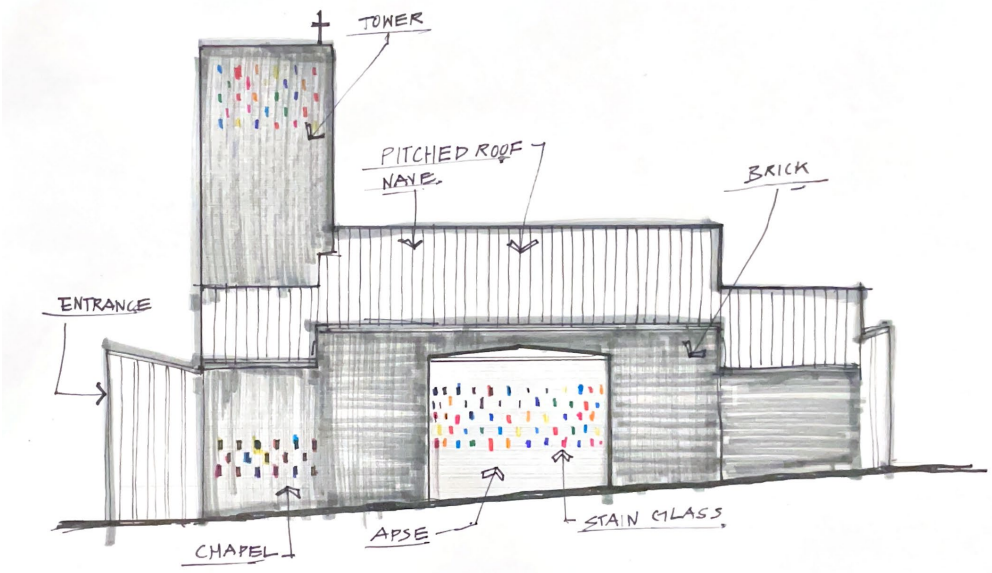


(Figure 5.4): A close-up on the pews in the chapel showing the apertures and wood textures. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

Moreover, Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes that architecture must unlock the haptic sense to allow for an existential experience. In the case of Holy Trinity Church, the use of authentic materials forms the basis of a physical spiritual journey. Worshippers immediately encounter weight, texture, and endurance instead of depending on typical surface finishes for sacred placemaking. This is seen in the following images below.

This type of performance carries on into the Holy Trinity Church's sociocultural realm. Sanjay Mazumdar and Shampa Mazumdar contribute to this precedent that long-term attachment to sacred spaces is improved through stability, material repetition, and the constant practice of rituals in the same environments.[149] In suburban contexts that are shaped by rapid development and typical pieces of architecture, durable masonry construction is the catalyst for continuity. The sacred is featured here as an enduring presence instead of a temporary circumstance.

[148] Low and Altman, "Place Attachment."
[149] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."



(Figure 5.5): A hand-sketched north elevation of the holy trinity church & its main components.

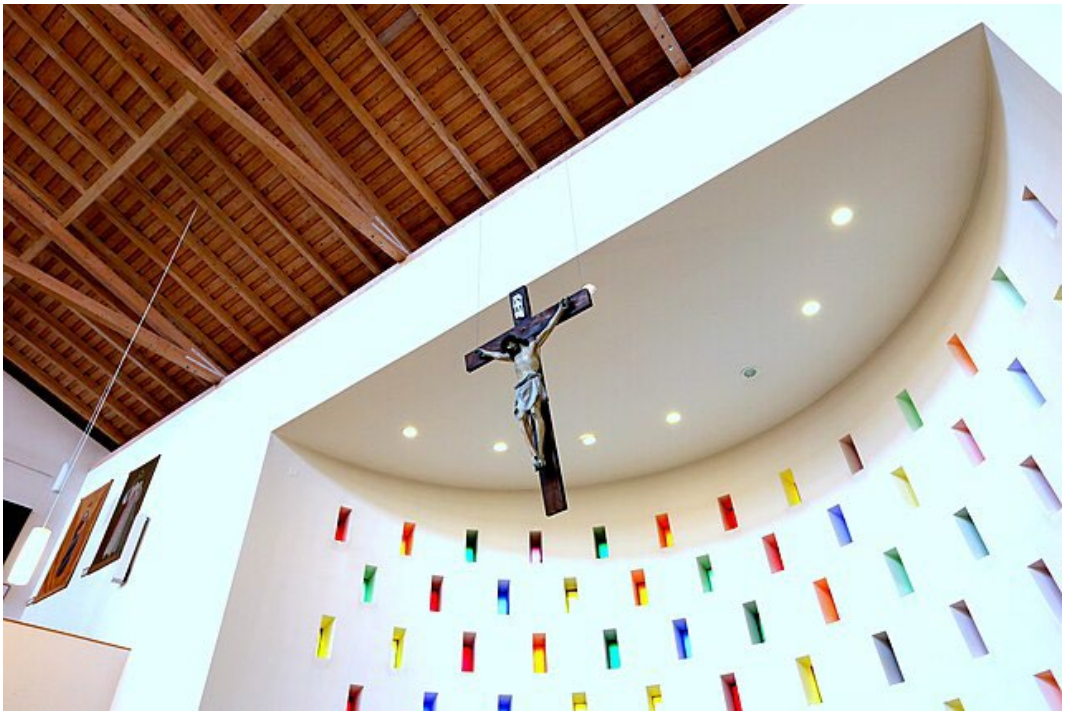


(Figure 5.6): A view of the altar and front pews inside the church nave. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

This can be connected to the thesis proposal design with the careful consideration of materials that should express durability and craft. Since the research question seeks to preserve enduring reverence within a suburban community, permanence becomes not only a symbolic trait but an experiential component.

5.4.3 Light as a Hierarchy

The photography and analytical documentation of the church reveal a constrained lighting strategy in which apertures are carefully used to strengthen illumination toward the nave.[150] The nave, compared to its other spaces remains subdued, which unlocks the altar's ability to emerge as a glowing focal point.



(Figure 5.7): A close-up on the altar roof and the apse-stained glass windows. Creative Commons License via Wikimedia Commons.

This order aligns with Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous, which states that the sacred evokes both attraction and humble distance. The concentrated light draws attention while the shadow maintains the mystery of the sacred. The spatial differences between the dim

[150] Metszet, *Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy*.

nave and the illuminated chapel demonstrate the theological hierarchy without making it feel like a performance.[151]

With that mentioned, Peter Zumthor's ideals relate to the Holy Trinity Church's atmosphere, which comes from the careful use of light, material, and proportion. Nagy tackles the atmospheric conditions through the narthex's control and modulation of light before its congregation celebrates in the nave. This situates the church as a monument that separates itself from the typical commercial typologies that carry the same brightness.[152]

5.4.4 Relevance to Central Thesis Topic

The Holy Trinity Church demonstrates that contemporary sacred architecture can reimagine how tradition is expressed without directly copying past rituals. Through axial orientation, authentic use of materials, and a light-based hierarchy, it maintains reverence within a suburban context that is constantly changing from its modern development.

Based on the architectural analysis of the building, it emphasizes the strong geometrical and tectonic clarity as the main driver for continued reverence.[153] These qualities are directly connected to the thesis question, which seeks to understand sacred architecture through a lens that cultivates spiritual placemaking in suburbia but also maintains the essence of sacredness.[154]

5.5 St Gabriel's Passionist Church Local Architecture Precedent

St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church was designed and completed in 2006 by Larkin Architect Limited, with the main design under the retired architect Roberto Chiotti. It occupies a quiet suburban parcel in North York, Ontario, while surrounded by residential streets and smaller commercial buildings.[155] Unlike many of the historic cathedrals in the downtown core of Toronto, Ontario, this church confronts the spatial implications of suburbia, such as wide roads, parking lots, and an isolated identity.

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[151] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey*.
[152] Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects*.
[153] Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change.*
[154] Metszet, *Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy*.
[155] Larkin Architect Limited, *International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment (iiSBE) - St. Gabriel's Parish, Toronto, Ontario.*; Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, *St. Gabriel's Passionist Church Case Study*.

This design intentionally creates a sacred presence through its clarity, material weight, and spatial transitions. It neglects previous techniques of monumentality by addressing the central thesis question of how sacred architecture can reassert sacredness within environments shaped by pragmatism and the cultural majority.

Chiotti's design seems to stray further away from historical replication and instead reimagines Catholic liturgical principles through contemporary construction and environmental awareness. In doing so, this expresses what Thomas Barrie describes as the architecture's balancing role between everyday life and wholeness.[156] The building transforms into a continuous threshold that can be perceived as the in-between.



(Figure 5.8): The exterior garden in the fall, looking into the south glazed façade of the nave, 2025 Photograph by Larkin Architect Limited.

[156] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.

5.5.1 Light as Liturgical Sequence

Light is the primary driver in the St. Gabriel's concept. The church nave is illuminated through hidden clerestories and indirect daylight techniques that focus vertical ascent without overwhelming the congregation. The altar is placed to one side, which receives the heightened illumination that strengthens the central component of worship.[157]



(Figure 5.9): A close-up on the perimeter skylights that emit afternoon light, 2025, Photograph by Roberto Chiotti from Larkin Architect Limited.

This intricate distribution of light can be seen above, which sees the back concrete wall soaked from the colourful afternoon light. This supports Rudolf Otto's understanding of

[157] Larkin Architect Limited, *International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment (iiSBE) - St. Gabriel's Parish, Toronto, Ontario.*; Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, *St. Gabriel's Passionist Church Case Study*.

the revered as both an intimate and immense feeling.[158] Light helps draw attention to its users but also ensures that mystery is sustained.



(Figure 5.10): A close-up on the reflected light onto the church nave wall, 2025, Photograph by Roberto Chiotti from Larkin Architect Limited.

This contrasts with the typical suburban typologies that are described by their uniform glare and brightness. Chiotti aims to turn this narrative by differentiating sacred interiors through modulation. The narthex remains more discreet and subdued by establishing perceptual compression before being admitted into the nave. This sequencing is at the core of Mircea Eliade's argument that sacred space is found through ruptures, which can be seen as the break from the profane and reverence.[159]

[158] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey*.
[159] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

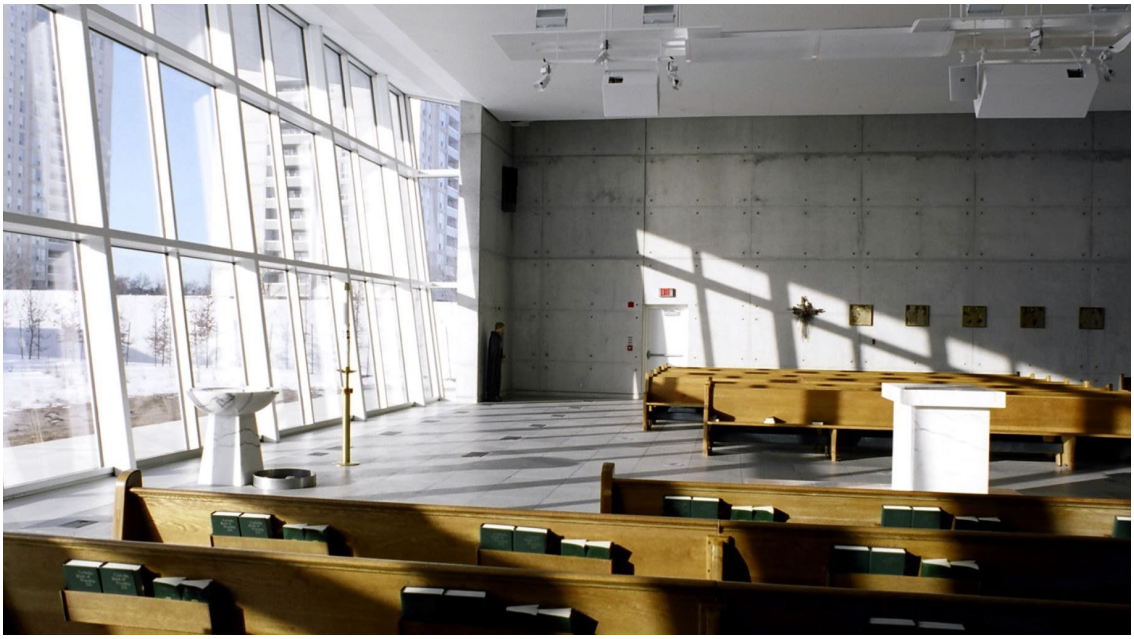


(Figure 5.11): A view of the narthex & church doors before entry into the nave (left), church entry doors into narthex (right), 2006, Photograph by Steven Evans

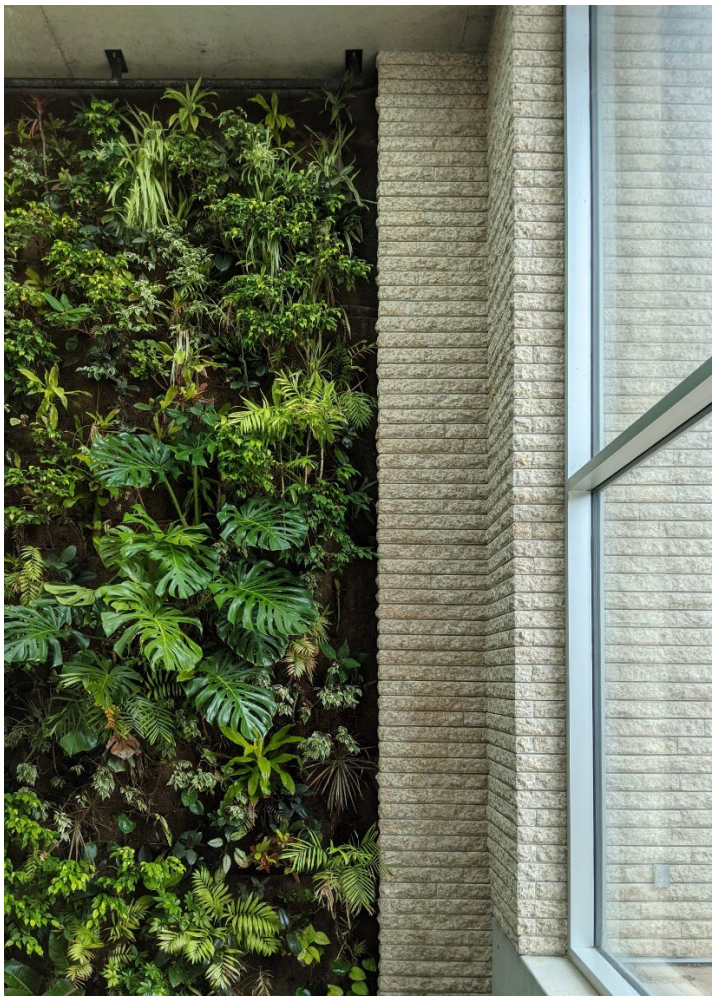
5.5.2 Material as Theology & Infinity

St. Gabriel's is both an act of tectonic and symbolic expression. Its materiality is expressed as brick masonry, concrete, and large glazing systems to create a modern construction language. The building communicates the weight and strength that are usually left behind in suburban ecclesiastical buildings that place cost efficiency over material integrity.[160]

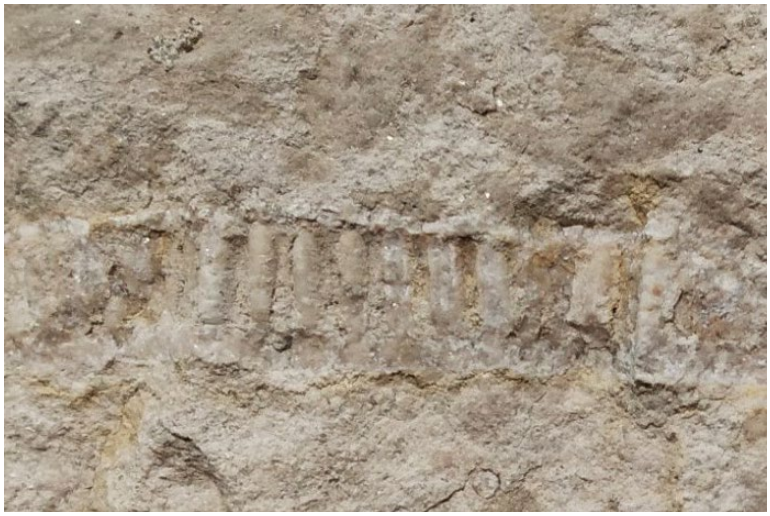
[160] Larkin Architect Limited, *International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment (iiSBE) - St. Gabriel's Parish, Toronto, Ontario.*; Dettloff, "How a 'Green' Church in Toronto Teaches Theology through Design."



(Figure 5.12): A view of the church nave in January, which shows the strong use of passive heating in the winter, 2006, Photograph by Steven Evans.



(Figure 5.13): The interior living wall in the narthex, 2025, Photograph by Teresa Tran from Larkin Architect Limited.



(Figure 5.14): A close-up on the Tyndall Stone (limestone) used in the church's garden, 2025, Photograph by Teresa Tran from Larkin Architect Limited.

Christopher Day argues that authentic materials create more meaningful and emotional sacredness by engaging with the human senses and revealing environmental responsibility.[161] Chiotti integrates geothermal systems, thermal mass, and passive ventilation not as hidden elements but as key attributes for its architectural character. Sustainability thus becomes a theological representation of stewardship ingrained in construction.



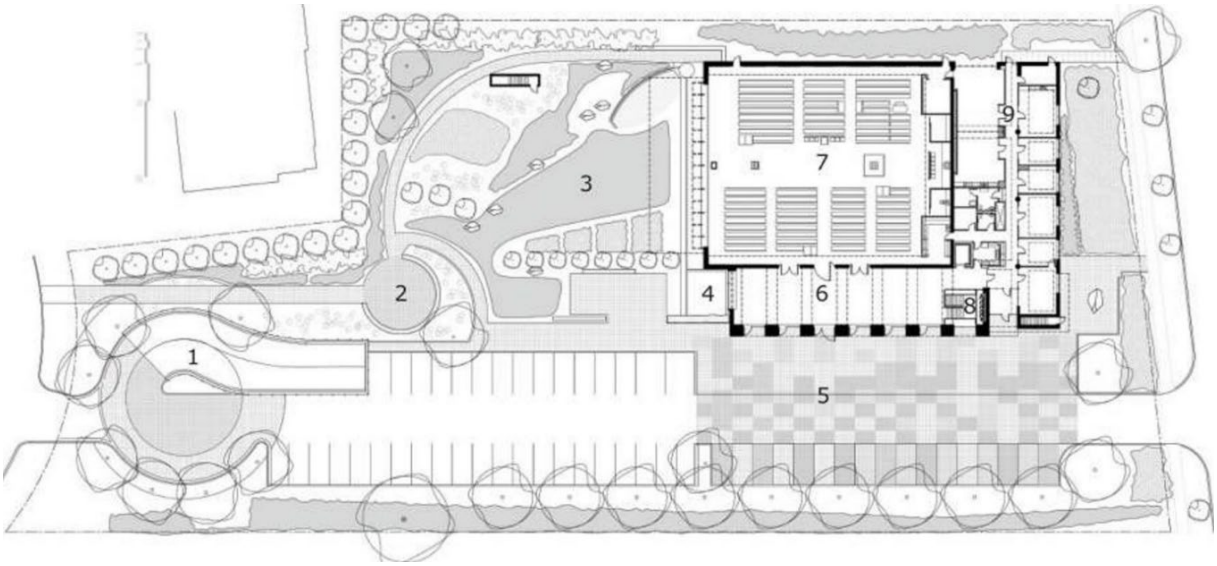
(Figure 5.15): A view of the south-facing wall in the summer, 2025, Photograph by Larkin Architect Limited.

Luis Fernández-Galiano also contributes to the theory of architecture being inseparable from energy and memory, a key trait in St. Gabriel's concept. Fernández-Galiano argues that buildings endure culture when their material systems express a continuous form.[162] St. Gabriel's brick envelope connects the church to its surrounding neighbourhood, enabling light to register across the detailed façades throughout the day.

[161] Day, *Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment*.
[162] Fernández-Galiano, "Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy."

5.5.3 Building Orientation and Processional Clearness

The Church remains unique in terms of its axis as it organizes its congregation around the altar. This orientation is not circular but very different than its previous ancestors. Harold Turner notes that worship spaces must personify doctrinal structure spatially. Each of St. Gabriel's thresholds unfolds sequentially, such as the exterior landscape, the transitional narthex, and finally the nave seen below.[163]



(Figure 5.16): St. Gabriel's Church floor plan, 2006, drawing by Larkin Architect Limited. **1:** Ramp, **2:** Meditation Circle, **3:** Garden, **4:** Water Feature, **5:** Plaza, **6:** Narthex, **7:** Nave, **8:** Living Wall, **9:** Administration.

[163] Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, *St. Gabriel's Passionist Church Case Study*.



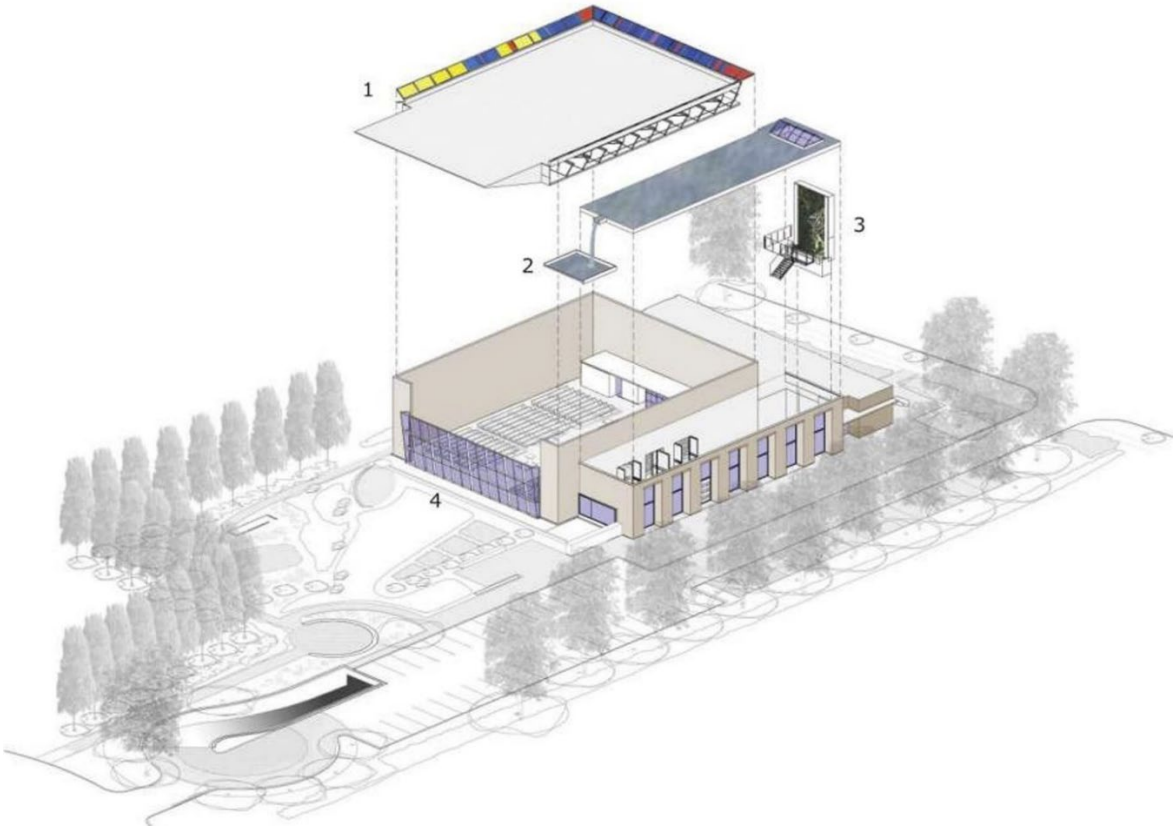
(Figure 5.17): A view of the nave along the sacred path to the exterior glazing & garden, 2006, Photograph by Martin Knowles.

This building recreates an orientation that aligns the congregation around the altar towards a new way of expressing sacredness and worship. This reflects Norberg-Schulz's idea that meaningful architecture provides direction and grounding within a wider phenomenological framework.[164]

5.5.4 Form & Geometry

The formal language of St. Gabriel's is constrained yet also invents new methods of sacred typologies. This lack of ornament and decoration allows the geometry to be understood as legible and a collection of clear volumes, seen below in Figure 5.18.

[164] Norberg-Shulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*.



(Figure 5.18): Axonometric of St. Gabriel's Church with its key design features, 2006, drawing by Larkin Architect Limited. **1:** Perimeter skylights to allow light to enter & bathe the nave walls, **2:** Water feature to support the surrounding plants, **3:** Living/Garden Wall, **4:** South glazed wall that faces the garden.

Rather than highly detailed elements, Chiotti creates an abstraction of the essential principles of enclosure, axiality, and order. He expresses geometry and form as a symbolic vessel through proportion instead of iconography. This relates to Barrie's idea that sacred architecture balances transcendence through spatial order.[165]

5.5.5 Liturgy & Community Continuity

St. Gabriel's maintains its layered liminal areas from the exterior garden to the narthex and eventually the nave.[166] There seems to be a clear procession that prepares the body for celebration. The shift from open daylight exterior to the controlled interior marks the moment worship begins. Eliade's concepts are evident through St. Gabriel's spatial

[165] Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture*.
[166] St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish, *Green Church: Engineering*.

compression, and the release allows ritual to be more tentative in the narthex rupture seen below.[167]



(Figure 5.19): Window seat that looks out to the garden from the narthex. An extension of the community, 2025, Photograph by Teresa Tran from Larkin Architect Limited.

[167] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.



(Figure 5.20): The exterior garden path that leads to the main glazed façade, 2025, Photograph by Sarah Christie from Larkin Architect Limited.



(Figure 5. 21): Close up on the waterfall feature where the window seat is, 2025, Photograph by Roberto Chiotti from Larkin Architect Limited.

Beyond liturgical practice, integrated seating in the narthex and parish spaces extends the sacred experience into everyday community life. By supporting the continuous social integration, the church transforms into a stable anchor within the surrounding context of North York.[168] The liturgy and program together foster continuity and collective spiritual identity.[169]

5.5.6 Relevance to Central Thesis Topic

St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church conveys that sacred architecture in suburban environments can create reverence through modern controlled light, procession, and material integrity instead of copying historical monuments.[170] As a precedent, it reinforces the thesis's argument that spiritual placemaking comes from an experiential analysis and spiritual clarity that together foster a long-lasting shared identity.

[168] Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.
[169] St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish, *Green Church: Engineering*; Dettloff, "How a 'Green' Church in Toronto Teaches Theology through Design."
[170] Dettloff, "How a 'Green' Church in Toronto Teaches Theology through Design."

Chapter Six

Thesis Design Proposal: Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

6.1 Design Proposal: The Sacred Experience in the Suburban World

This thesis is founded on the central architectural question, which is how modern sacred architecture can reinterpret spiritual placemaking within suburban environments shaped by diverse cultural identities, while preserving lasting reverence for the sacred and fostering a collective spatial meaning that unites faith and community.

The design proposal for the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish is an instant response to this question. In the heart of the Cornell community in Markham, Ontario, the project tackles the growing separation between active participants in religious life and the missing piece of sacred space in modern suburban settings. While the parish is currently thriving in its current state, its lack of permanent worship spaces creates a deeper architectural issue.

Therefore, this proposal transcends traditional institutional programs and aims to reinvent sacred architecture as a long-lasting spiritual medium between ritual, community, and the suburban place. Instead of replicating historical programs in past churches, this proposal aims to reinterpret the key principles of sacred architecture, which are thresholds, orientation, procession, atmosphere, and collectiveness. Through modern architectural language, this thesis is grounded in phenomenological and theological analysis.

The literature reinforces the design explored throughout the thesis and allows for a strong conceptual foundation for the project's sequencing of transition and spatiality. This design chapter showcases how theoretical concepts move into built reality and how sacred architecture can meaningfully exist in modern suburban environments. This is achieved not through history but through the human experiences that create important spiritual placemaking.

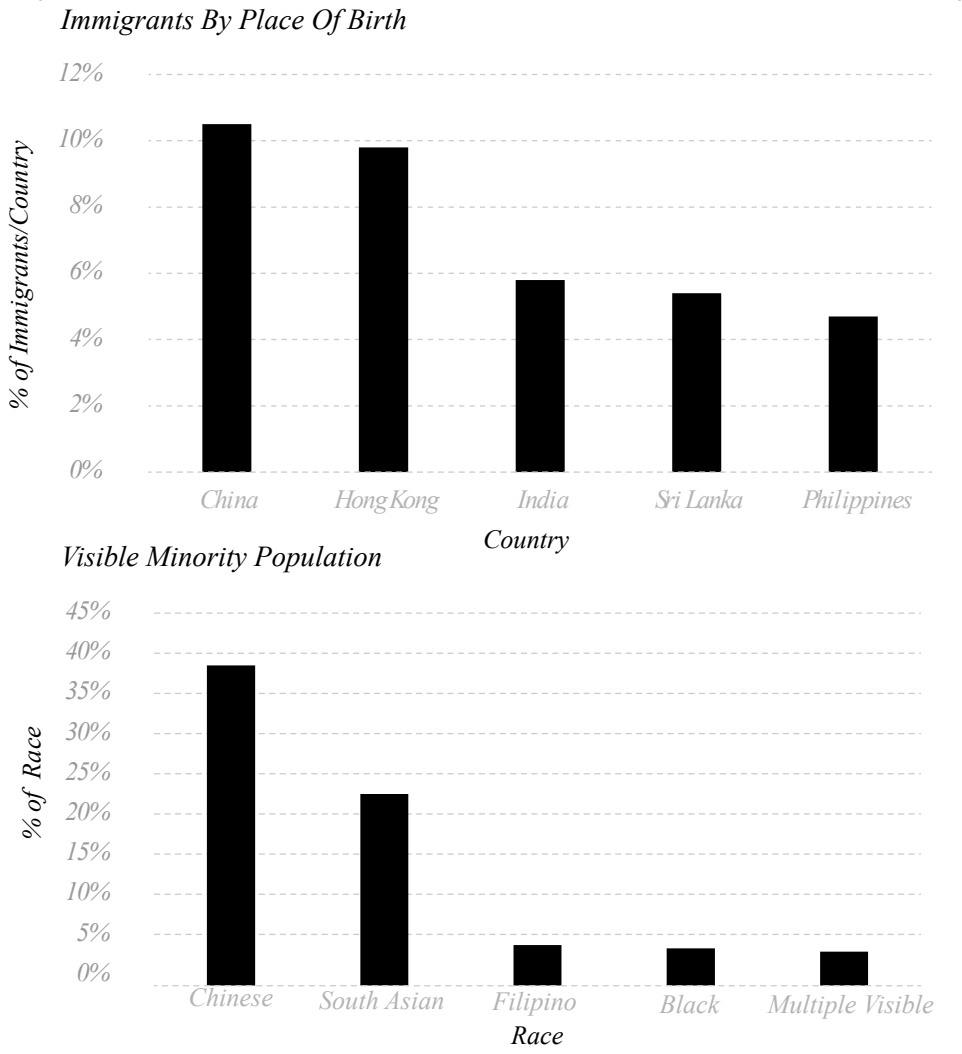
6.2 From Community Analysis to Architectural Intention

The project began with an in-depth investigation into the demographic and urban experiences of Cornell. This detailed phase was key to allowing the architecture to be founded in the lived realities of the community. The church needed to respond to both Catholic liturgical traditions and the social, cultural, and spatial qualities embedded in modern suburban life.

Through demographic analysis, it was revealed that Cornell and the wider Markham community are multicultural, with a large South Asian, Chinese, and Filipino population. All of these contribute to the diverse religious community.[171]

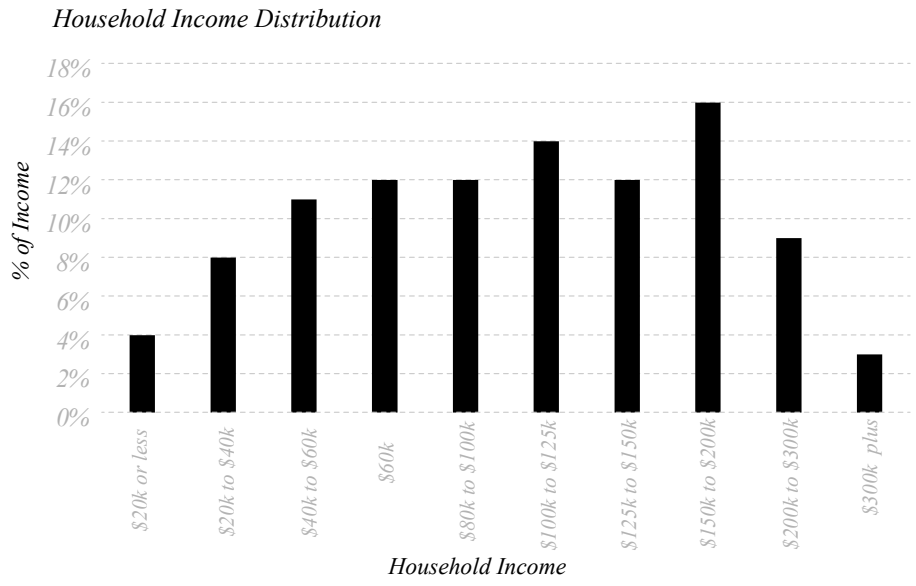
[171] City of Markham, "About the City of Markham - Facts & Stats."

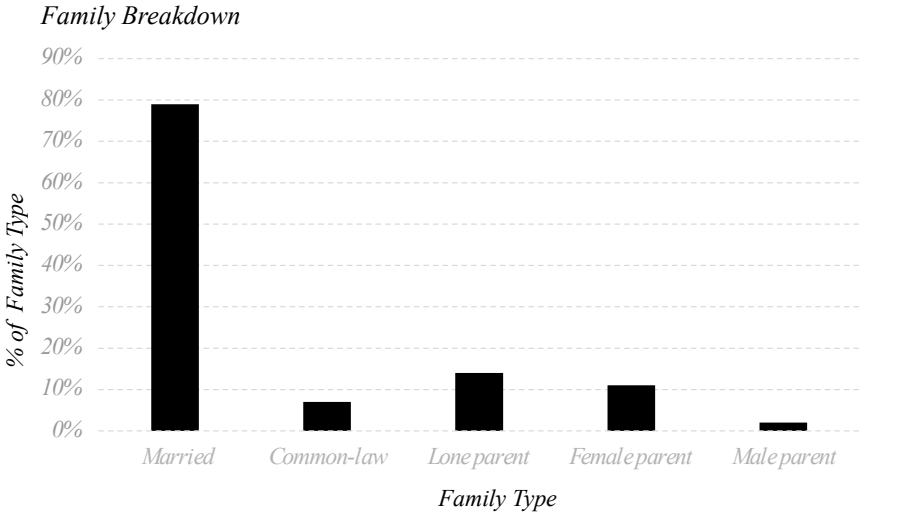
The data also suggested a strong sense for families with a lot of data supporting children, young adults, and multigenerational households.[172] These findings showed that the church operates as a daily anchor for collective and community life that can support education and collectivism. This is closely connected to Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar's work, whose research aligns with sacred place attachments and their focus on religious spaces that maintain meaning through constant ritual and continuity. Sacred attachment here is not grounded in visuals alone, but in personal memory.[173] In response to this, the design integrates communal programs including a daycare, learning commons, and community kitchen. This contributes to the sacred life beyond liturgical practices with emphasis on the routines of everyday parish life. These spaces create opportunities where long-term social attachment ensures the church becomes ingrained in the lives of its congregation.

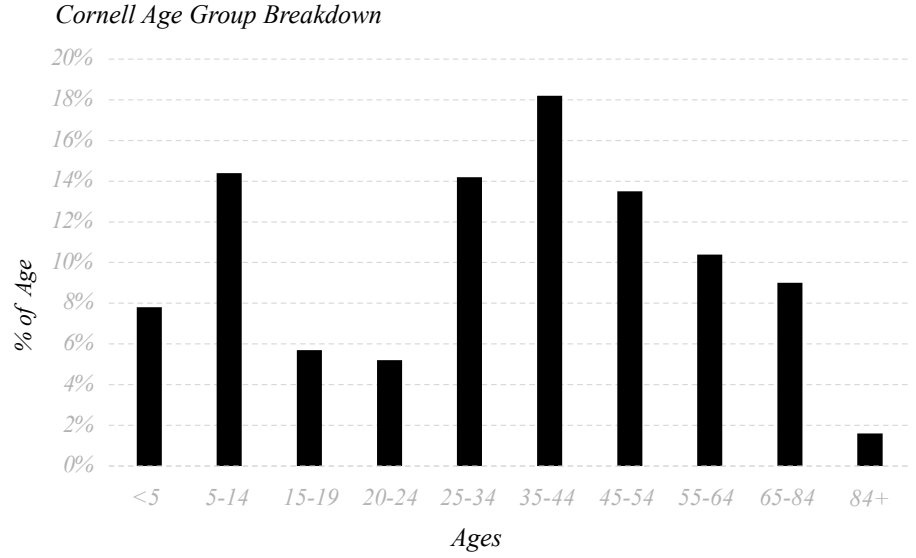


(Figure 6.1): Cornell Community data based on immigrants and the visible minority population.

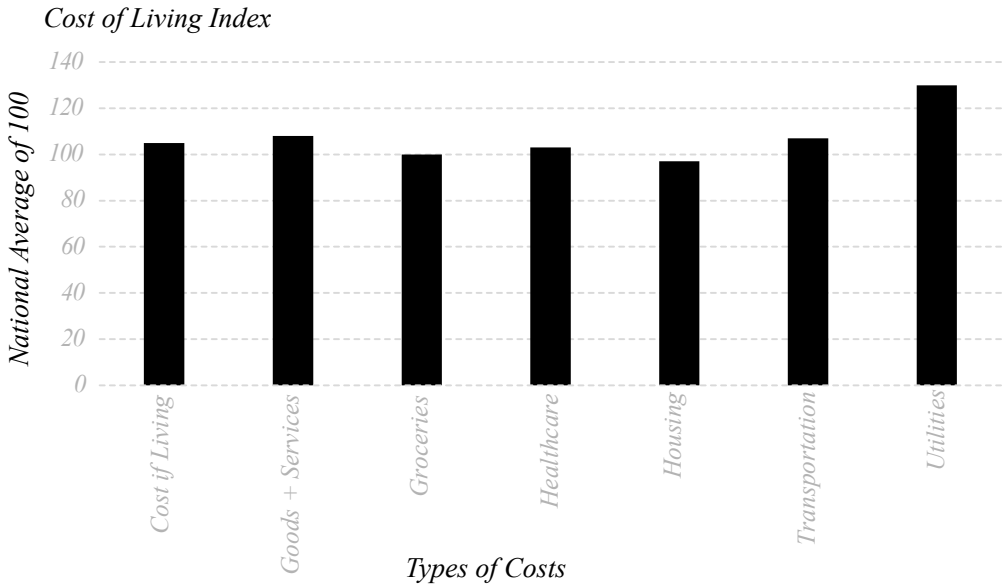
[172] City of Markham, "About the City of Markham - Facts & Stats."
[173] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred.

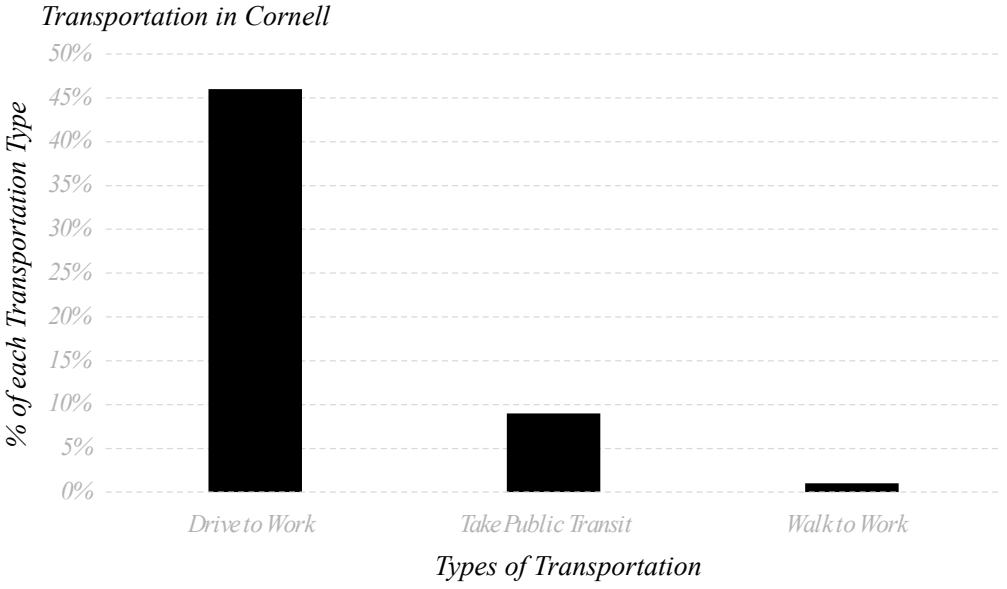






(Figure 6.2): Cornell Community data based on income, family type, and age groups.





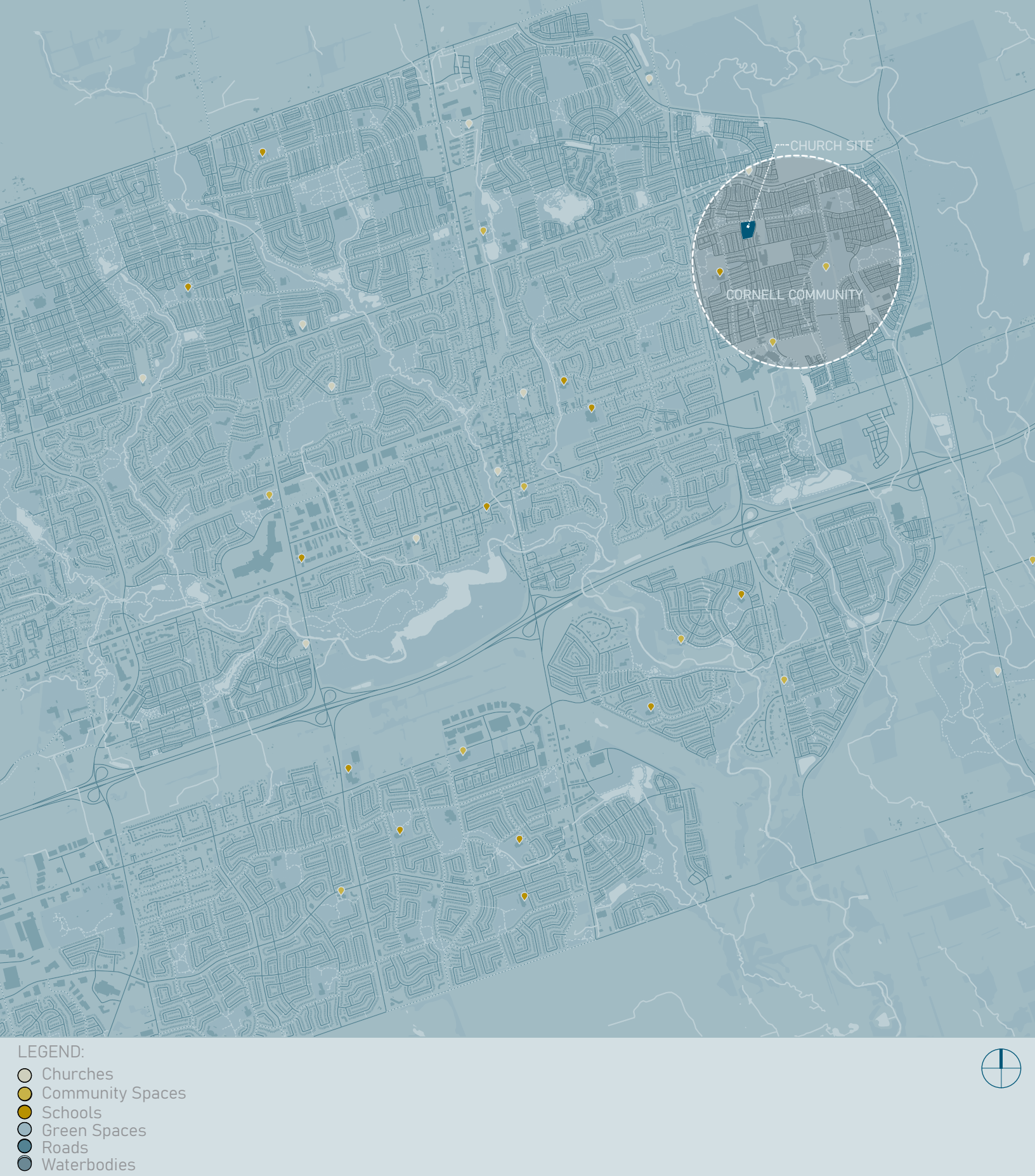
(Figure 6.3): Cornell Community data based on types of costs and types of transportation.

This thesis also examines the urban character of Cornell while studying the planned structure seen in its patterns. These include organized residential blocks, walkable streets, and layered liminal spaces in public and private spaces. There are also shared landscapes such as porches, front gardens, and communal green spaces. These conditions create a key source for the architectural language in the proposal.

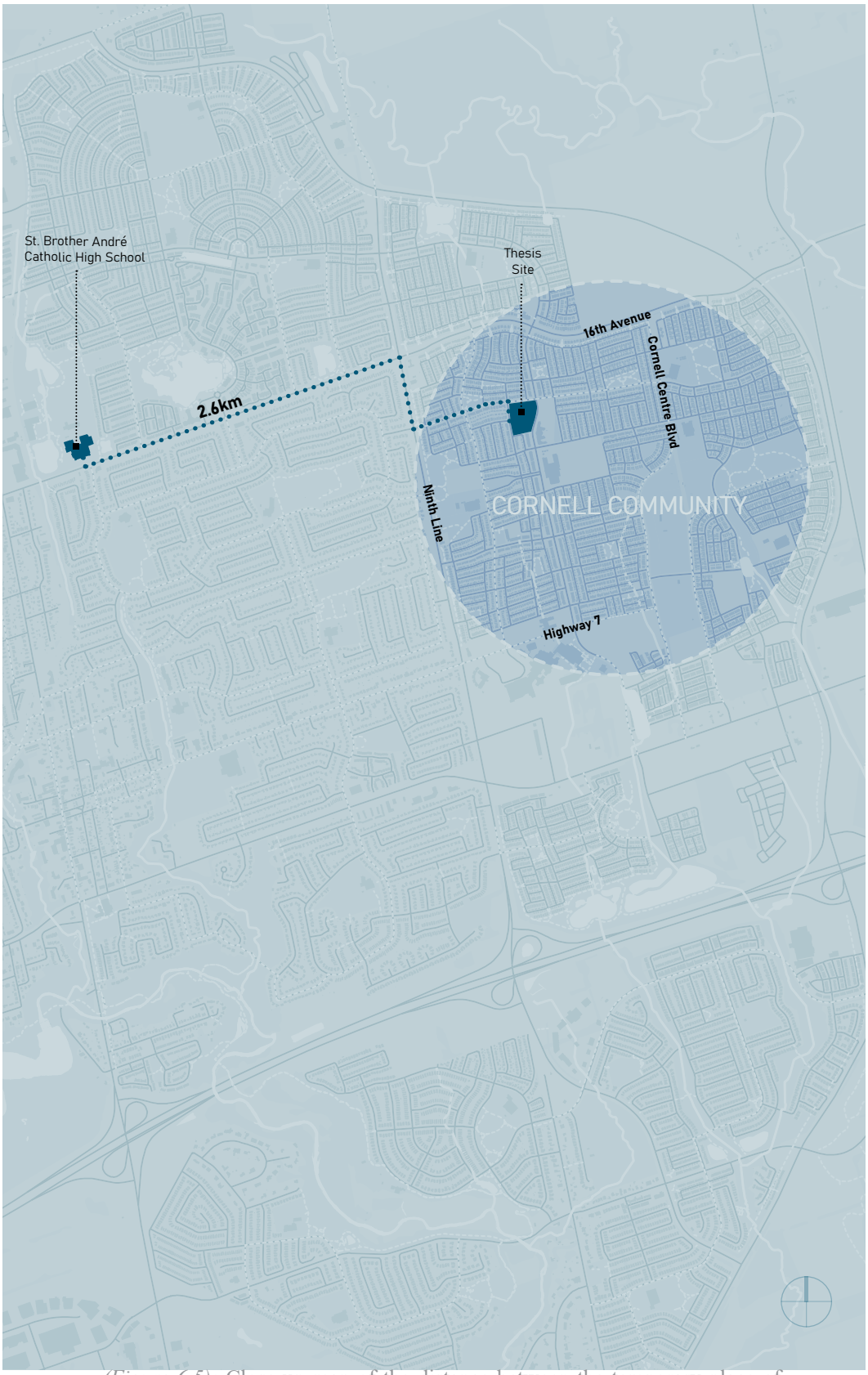
I see Cornell's approach by reinterpreting streets, gardens, and thresholds into sacred architectural tools. This design choice reflects Christian Norberg–Schulz's idea of the genius loci, where architecture can emerge and strengthen the spirit of places. I wanted the church to grow from its rhythms and spatial patterns, where it now becomes a recognizable piece of architecture and transcends its surroundings.[174]

It's also fair to mention that the transformation of ordinary suburban language into the sacred also expresses the sacred in between. Sacredness, according to Barrie, usually arises from the layered transitions that make an individual encounter their own spirituality. Thus, the church adopts and then transforms Cornell's familiarity toward transcendent experiences. [175]

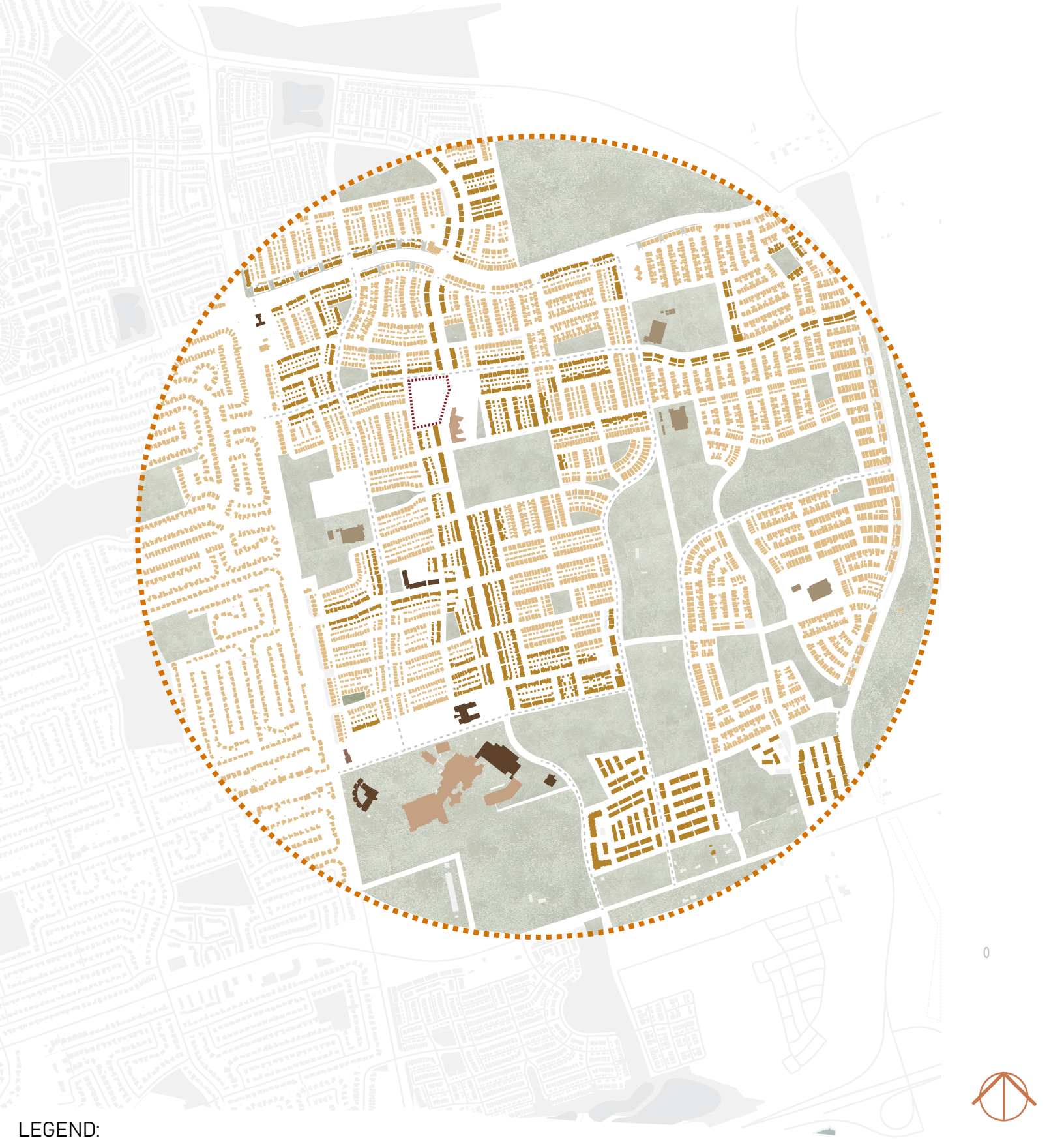
[174] Norberg-Shulz, Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture.
[175] Barrie, The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture.



(Figure 6.4): Context map of the City of Markham

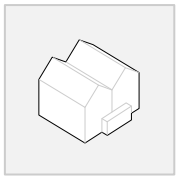


(Figure 6.5): Close-up map of the distance between the temporary place of worship and the proposed site.

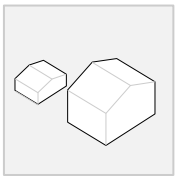


(Figure 6.6): Close-up map and analysis on the Cornell Community.

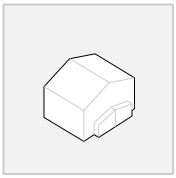
Cornell Building Typologies



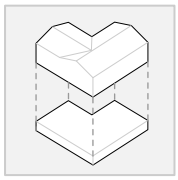
Semi-Detached



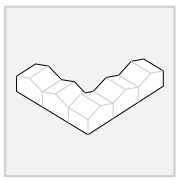
Detached House & Garage



Detached House & Double Garage

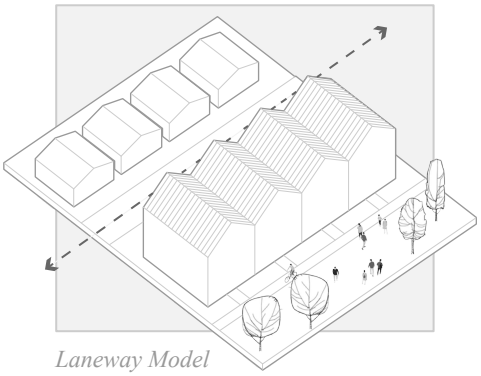


Storefront Lobby & Residential Above

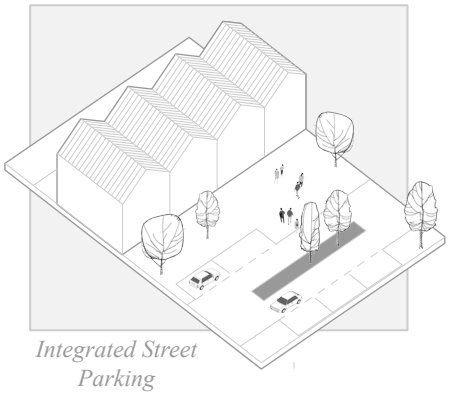


Rowhouse & Connected Apartment Units

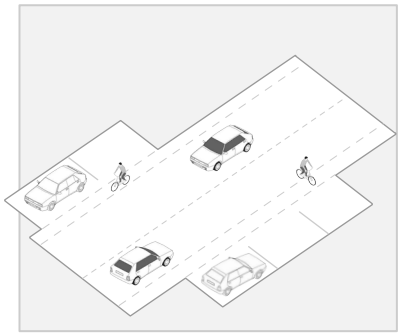
Cornell Neighbourhood Approach



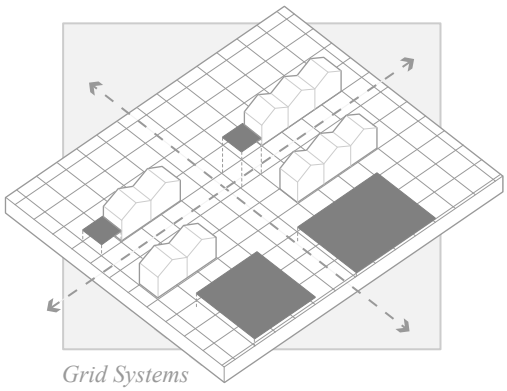
Laneway Model



Integrated Street Parking

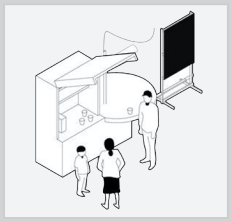


Complete Streets



Grid Systems

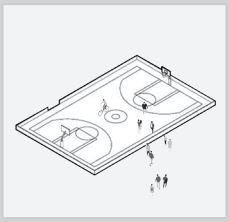
(Figure 6.7): Cornell's building typology & neighborhood analysis diagram



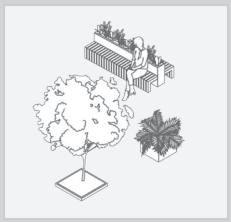
Outdoor Kiosks



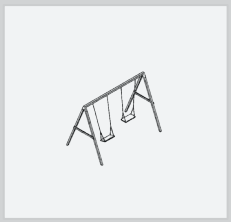
Picnic Areas



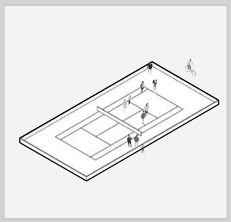
Basektball Courts



Parkettes

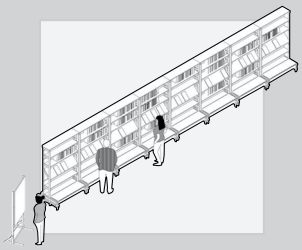


Parks

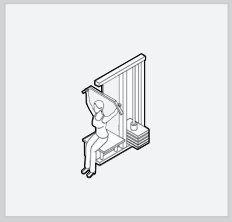


Tennis Courts

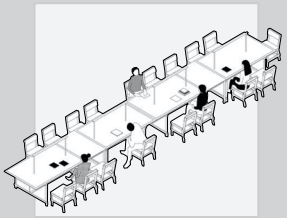
Outdoor Areas



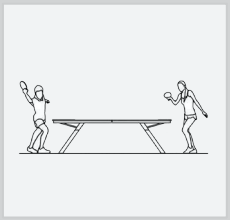
Libraries



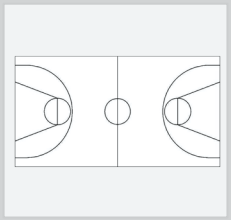
Fitness Rooms



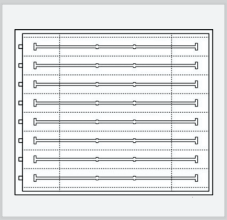
Study Spaces



Game Rooms



Gymnasium



Swimming Pool

Indoor Spaces

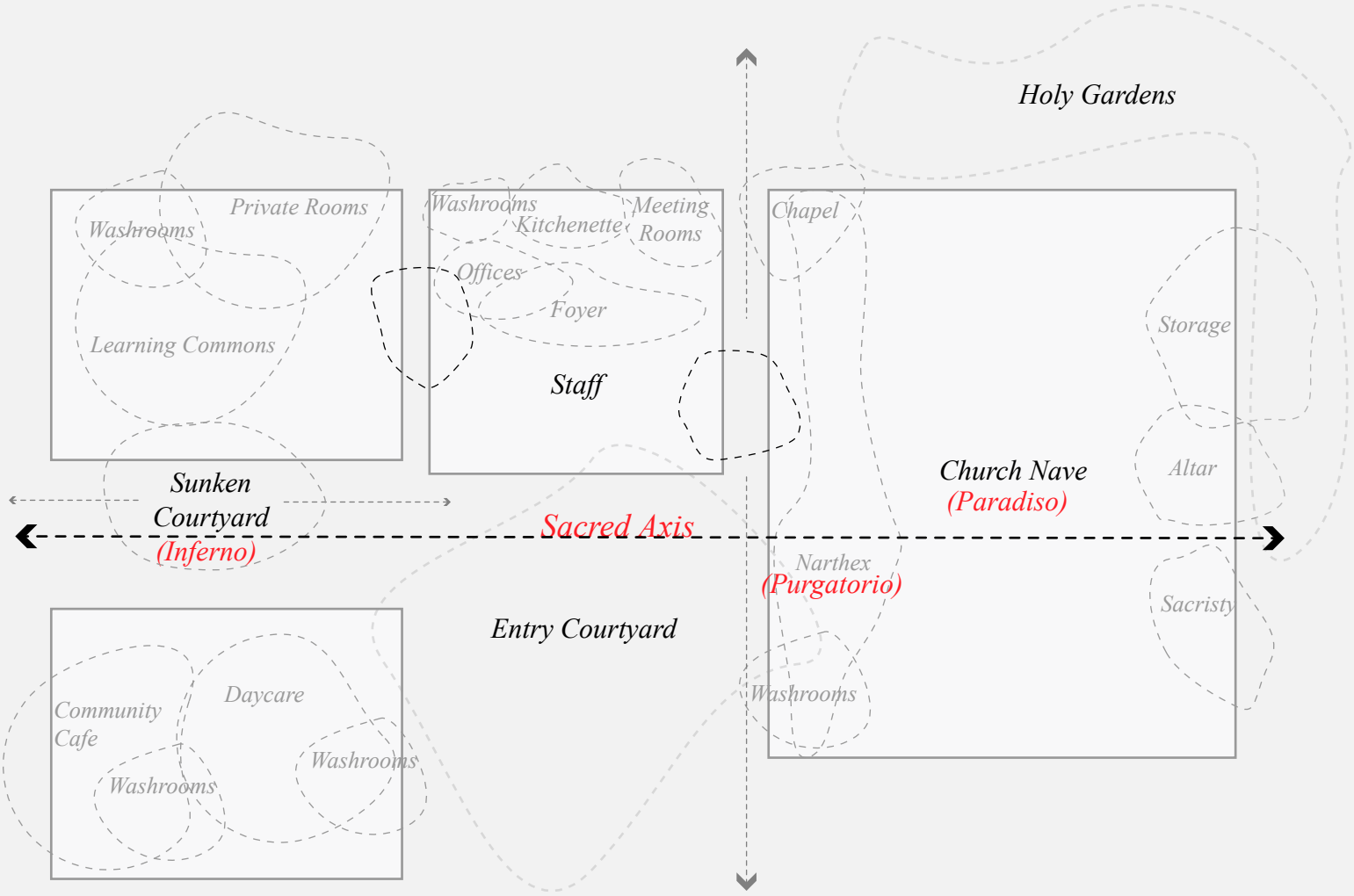
(Figure 6.8): Cornell's community festivities and traits analysis.

6.3 Spatial Sequence, Sacred Organization, and Architectural Diagramming

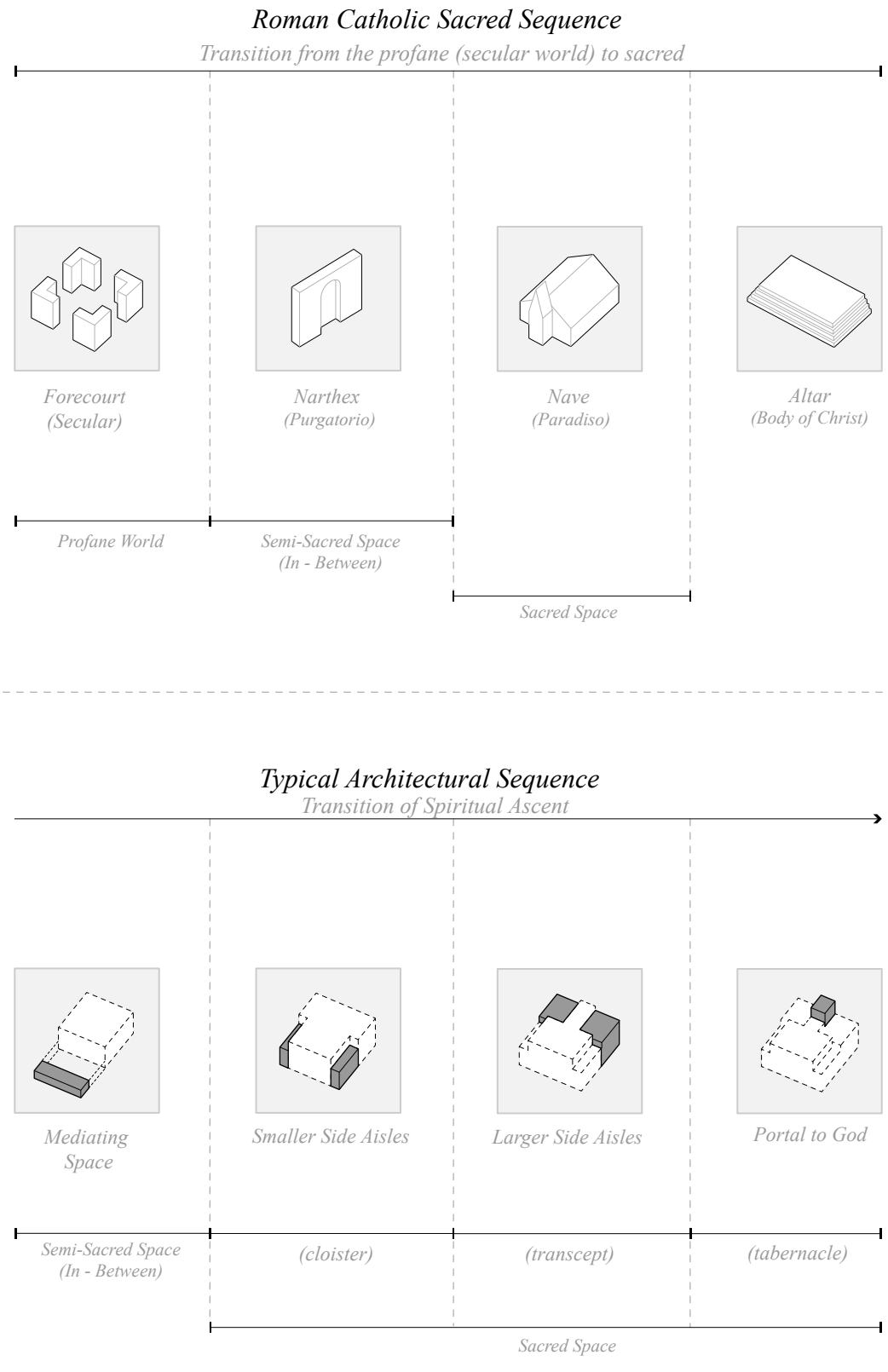
After understanding the site, the development of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam now zooms into the plan parti with a deep inquiry into how sacred space can be visualized and experienced through spiritual transformation. The framework of the proposal draws on the life and intellectual legacy of Frederic Ozanam, whose faith, scholarship, and charitable actions are at its core. Ozanam's understanding of Catholic life was always rooted in movement, which is an ongoing journey of intellectual thought, reflection, and how we take on our responsibilities.[176] This concept of spiritual progression is based on the architectural connection between Ozanam's engagement with Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, particularly in the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. These three points represent the project's parti as a spatial concept that organizes the emotional and experiential direction of the parish. These studies below depict Inferno as a condition where earthly separation and difference in elevation take place. The secular and daily activities of suburban life that define Cornell today can be described as Inferno. The repetition of housing, commercial strips, and infrastructure creates a broad landscape for spiritual direction with pragmatic approaches. This condition draws parallels to Mircea Eliade's understanding of the profane world as spatially separate, which is an idea that lacks sacred hierarchy.[177] To respond to this, the project locates the suburban condition as the architectural inferno realm. This can be described as a place of suffering, but also spiritual diffusion and ambiguity.

The first role of architecture here creates a point of rupture. Through conceptual massing diagrams and sequences, the church is situated as a mediator within its fragmented world. The bell tower is seen as a beacon and acts as an axis mundi. Its vertical gesture of orientation and symbolism interrupts the horizontal movement of Cornell. Eliades claim that sacred architecture confirms a fixed center is relevant here as the meaning bleeds outward. It also relates to Christian Norberg Schulz's argument that architecture must add an existential foundation to its congregation by allowing them to focus on the physical and spiritual aspects of the world.[178]

[176] Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska.
[177] Eliade, The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion.
[178] Norberg-Shulz, Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture.



(Figure 6.9): Church parti plan & organization diagram



(Figure 6.10): Initial church programs and sacred sequences.

Moreover, the second stage of the parti is formed by Purgatorio, which becomes a powerful model for how procession is laid out in the church. Ozanam saw Dante's mountain of purification as a gradual journey filled with moral healing through movement and reordered love. This concept directly informs the programmatic development, such as the narthex being this in-between space to Paradise.[179] Early diagrams suggest that the church is a sequence that has layers and liminal spaces. The surrounding holy gardens, courtyards, and corridors express this. Every transition symbolizes the quiet transformation between atmosphere, scale, and human perception.

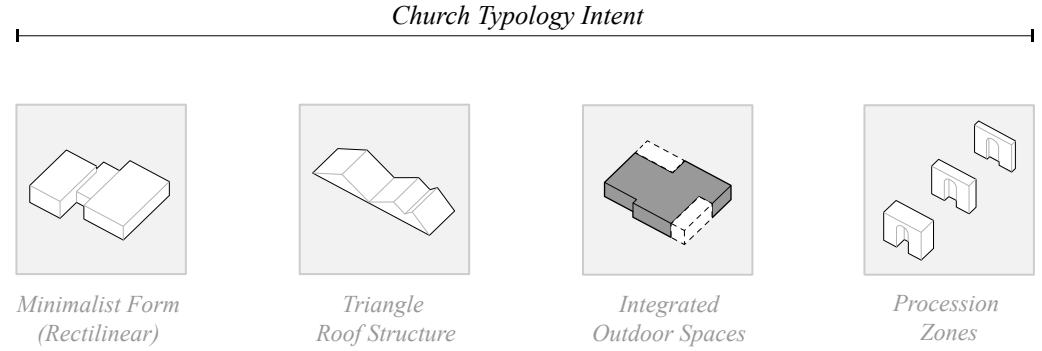
The conceptual drawings ensure that architecture is a ritual movement instead of a static form. Thomas Barrie's view on sacred architecture as unfolding doors of thresholds becomes very important. Barrie claims that sacred places are experienced through a slow preparation, as liminal spaces create more openness before spiritual interaction happens.[180] This theory becomes an essential component of the design and development of its programs. The procession or pilgrimage through the churches reflects the spiritual ascent, which is the movement away from secular distraction and toward inner peace.

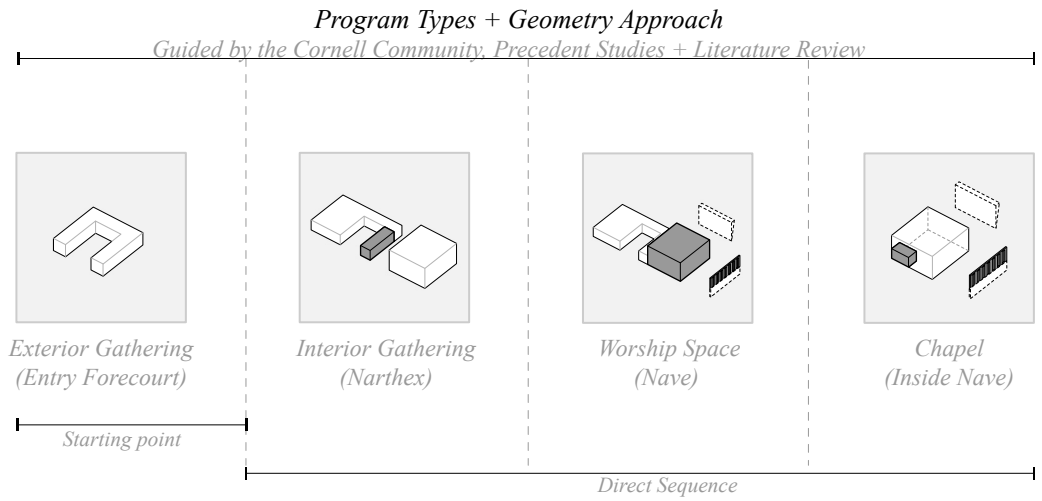
The final phase of my theoretical framework is Paradiso, where Dante describes divinity through light, balance, and perfected knowledge. Ozanam acknowledges Paradiso as the combination of faith and reason in which intellectual and spiritual fulfillment become symbolic.[181] In this architectural proposal, the collection is translated into the nave and sanctuary, where the program focuses on centrality, illumination, and communal events. Therefore, this reveals the liturgical center and the embodiment of spatiality and transcendence.

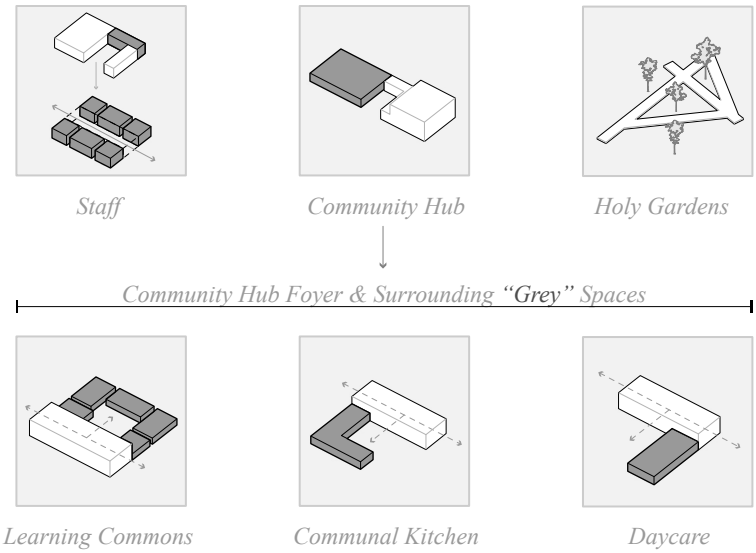
The design uses a theological story to generate form as the parti goes from a fragmented landscape to orientation and form progression to solutions. In this way, Frederic Ozanam's doctoral legacy becomes ingrained in the architectural form and church itself. His goal within the Roman Catholic faith is both contemplative and action-based, which helps guide the symbolic framework behind its spatial intent.

[179] Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska
[180] Barrie, The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture
[181] Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska.

Program + Form Approach

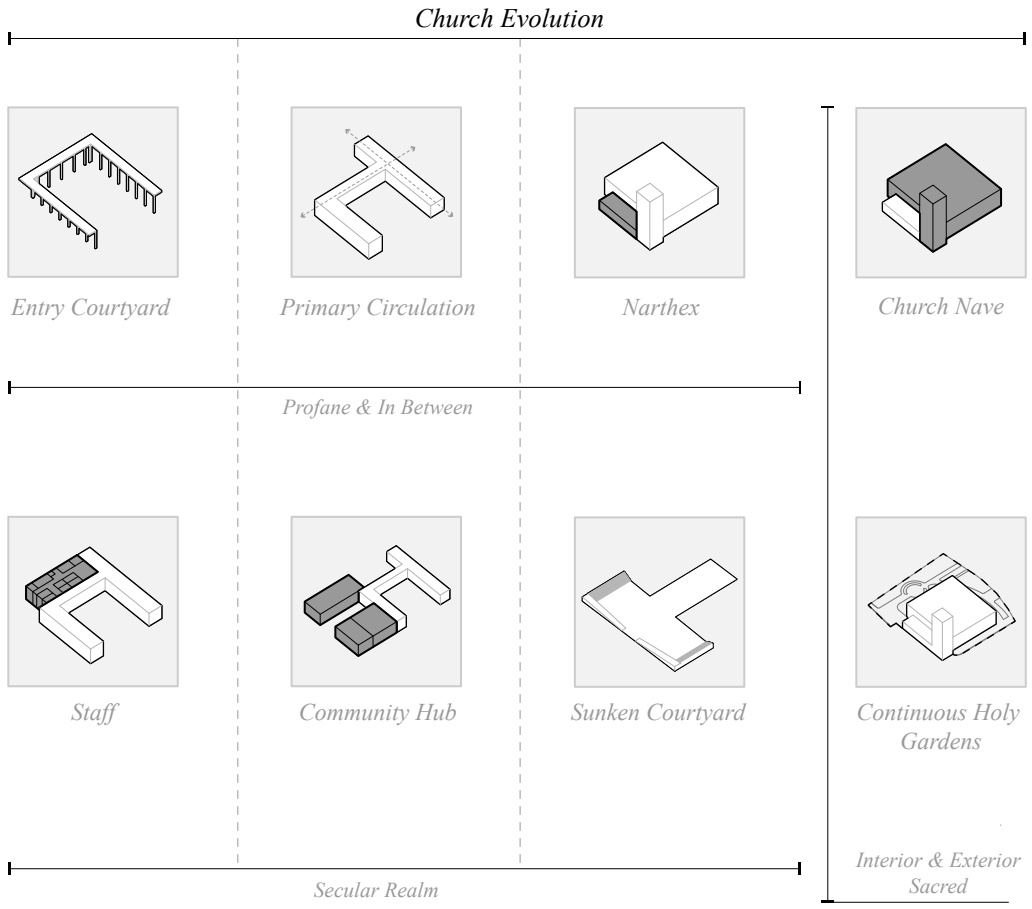






(Figure 6.11): Church program types & geometry approach.

Final Program + Mass Approach



(Figure 6.12): Final mass & church sacred approach.

6.4 Site Strategy & Architectural Layering

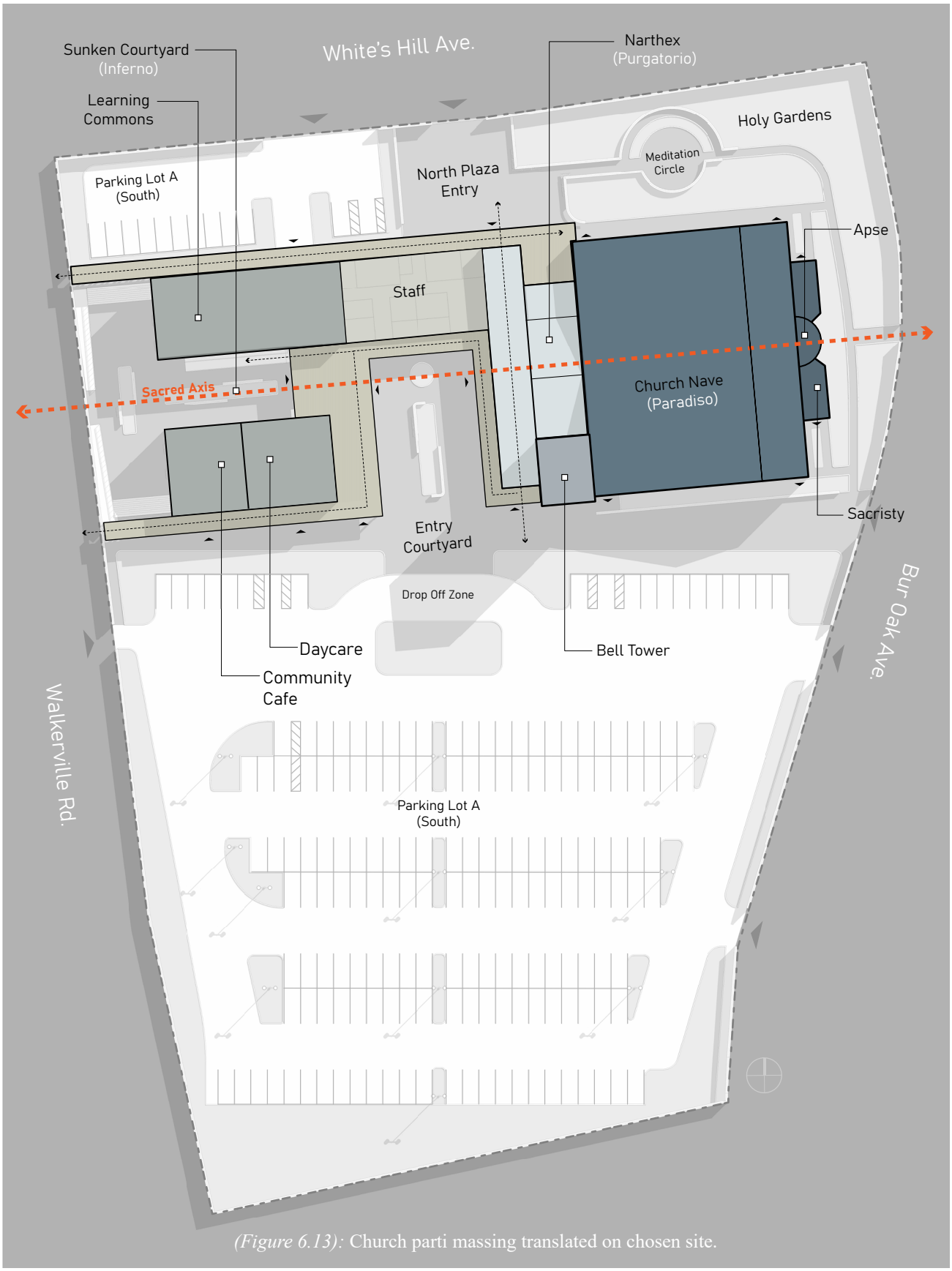
With the development of the architectural parti in place, the design begins to unfold while engaging with the physical experiences of Cornell. The series of massing drawings below consists of a plan and axonometruic of the parti on the site. I wanted to delve deep into the site analysis, placement studies, and the relationships between its surroundings. Through the spatial fragmentation, repetitive residential growth, and architectural consistency, how can the proposed church provide a fulfilling sacred experience within its environment?

The site planning approach began with a careful analysis of Cornell's existing urban layers. The neighbourhood can be described by its modern planning principles, as its surrounding streetscape comprises typical housing typologies, expansive roadways, and infrastructure designed to improve efficiency for its users. While being a functional place, many of the concerns from the literature review were implemented in the design to ensure belonging and a unified meaning.

Norberg-Schulz's concept of existential orientation is important here as he argues that architecture must allow humans to create meaning in their environment based on their legible relationships between place and their cultural identity.[182] My analysis brought me to the plan parti and the church massings placed along the major roads of White's Hill Avenue and Bur Oak Avenue. The parking lot has 185 stalls to ensure a family of four in one space. There are two parking lots labeled A and B, with the southern lot acting as one of the paths leading to Paradiso and a major drop-off zone for the elderly and children who attend the daycare. However, the north parking is designated for staff and accessibility during meetings or parish events.

Moreover, this placement of the site's eastern and western entry points also expresses the Vincentian mission of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, whose life combined faith and social interaction in everyday life. Ozanam neglected the idea that the Catholic practice should be isolated from the public realm but instead interwoven within the community and charity. [183]

[182] Norberg-Shulz, Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture.
[183] Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska.



(Figure 6.13): Church parti massing translated on chosen site.

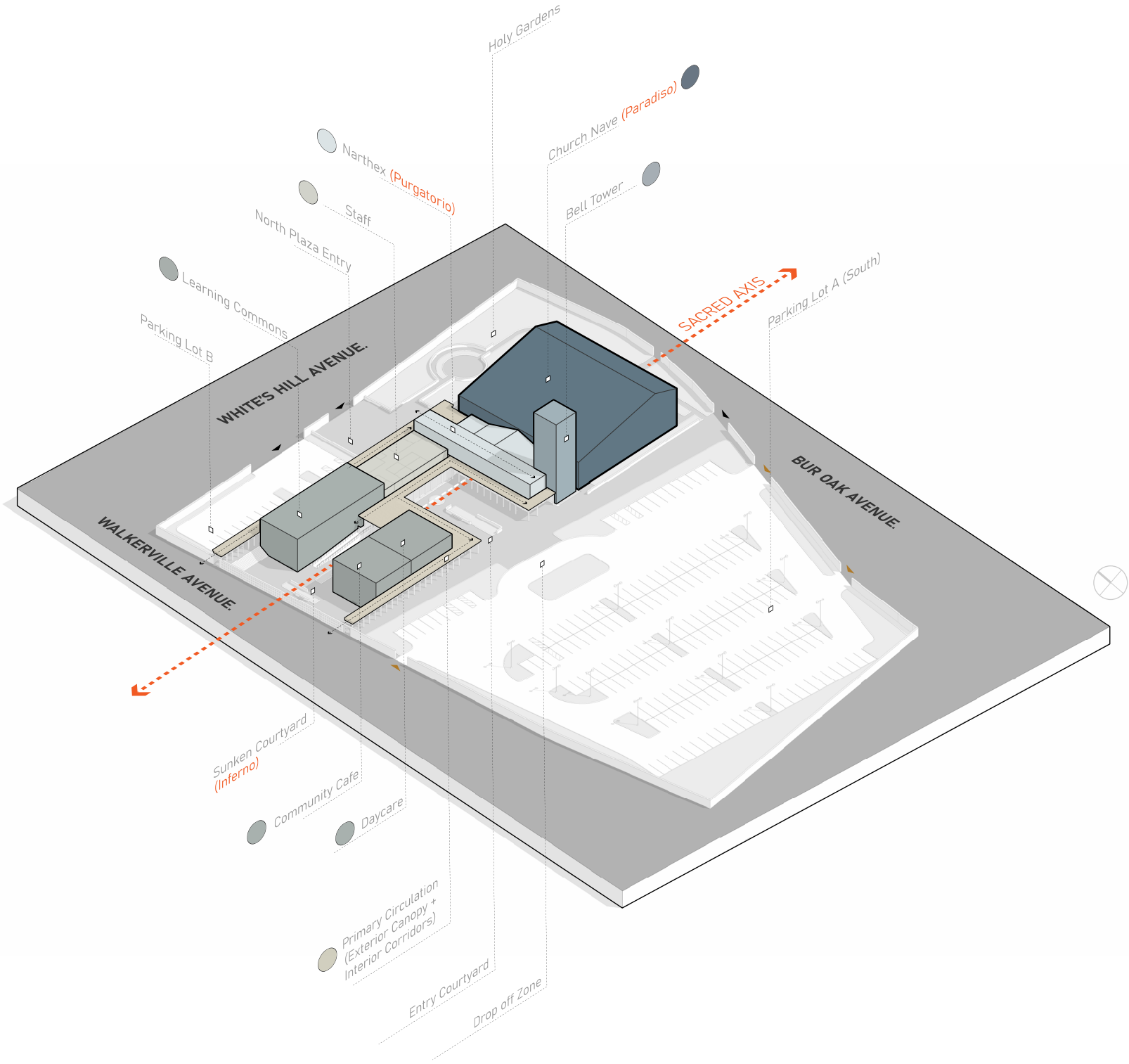
The church is positioned along the street to reflect the outward identity of its congregation and to draw people in slowly. This was to ensure that the relationship with the civic realm is prominent, as the church actively participates in shaping the identity of its neighbourhood and draws its congregation in for a pilgrimage. This strategy recalls the origin of sacred spaces in urban fabrics and their role in operating as a shared point of reference in a unified environment.

One of the significant elements from the early massing is the sacred axis, which bleeds into the final design. The church shape maintains a horizontal profile while the placement of the narthex, nave, bell tower, and its community spaces forms a sacred journey throughout time and space. However, its vertical elements introduce moments of transcendence and a rise in a sacred presence. For instance, the bell tower and nave allow the church to function as a communal junction in which Paradiso in Dante's Divine Comedy is a spiritual framework connected to Ozanam's own thesis work. [184]

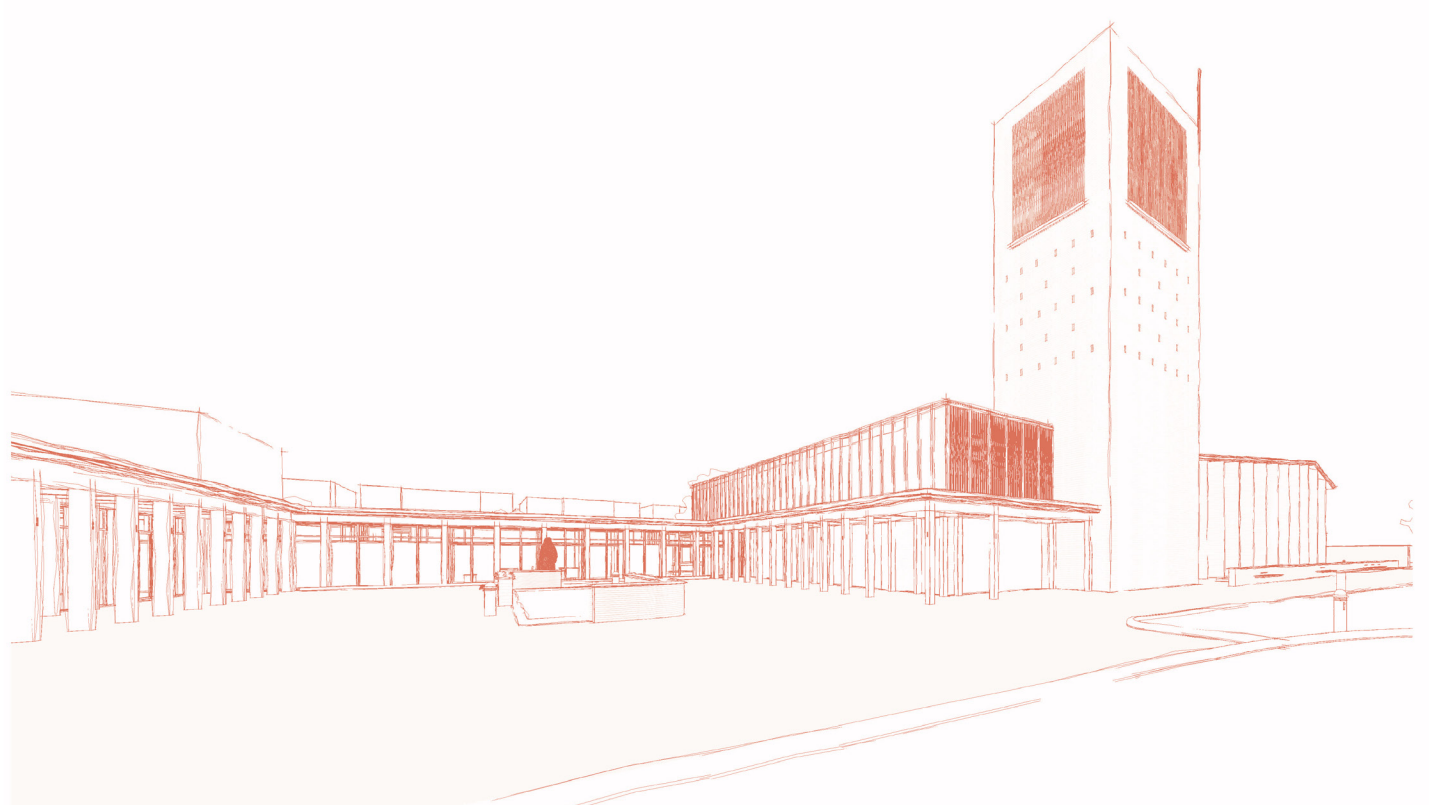
The surrounding landscape is also of great importance and contributes heavily to the site strategy. The design includes a series of planted courtyards, liminal pathways, and intimate gathering spaces that maintain a balance between the public realm and the church interiors. I wanted to demonstrate that sacred placemaking occurs before entry into any physical space. Based on inspiration from St. Gabriel's Passionist Church, the gardens and exterior pathways directly relate to ritual preparation and treat its landscape as an active member in the architectural threshold.[185]

Movement through these exterior spaces slows the experience and promotes more attentiveness. The congregation gradually moves from the secular realm of suburban life to spaces of meditation. Thomas Barrie's view that scared architecture is an unfolding threshold is crucial as the landscape becomes the initial phase of ritual transformation.[186]

[184] Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Lucia D. Pychowska.
[185] Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, St. Gabriel's
[186] Barrie, The Sacred In-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture.



(Figure 6.14): Church parti and axonometric massing on thesis site.

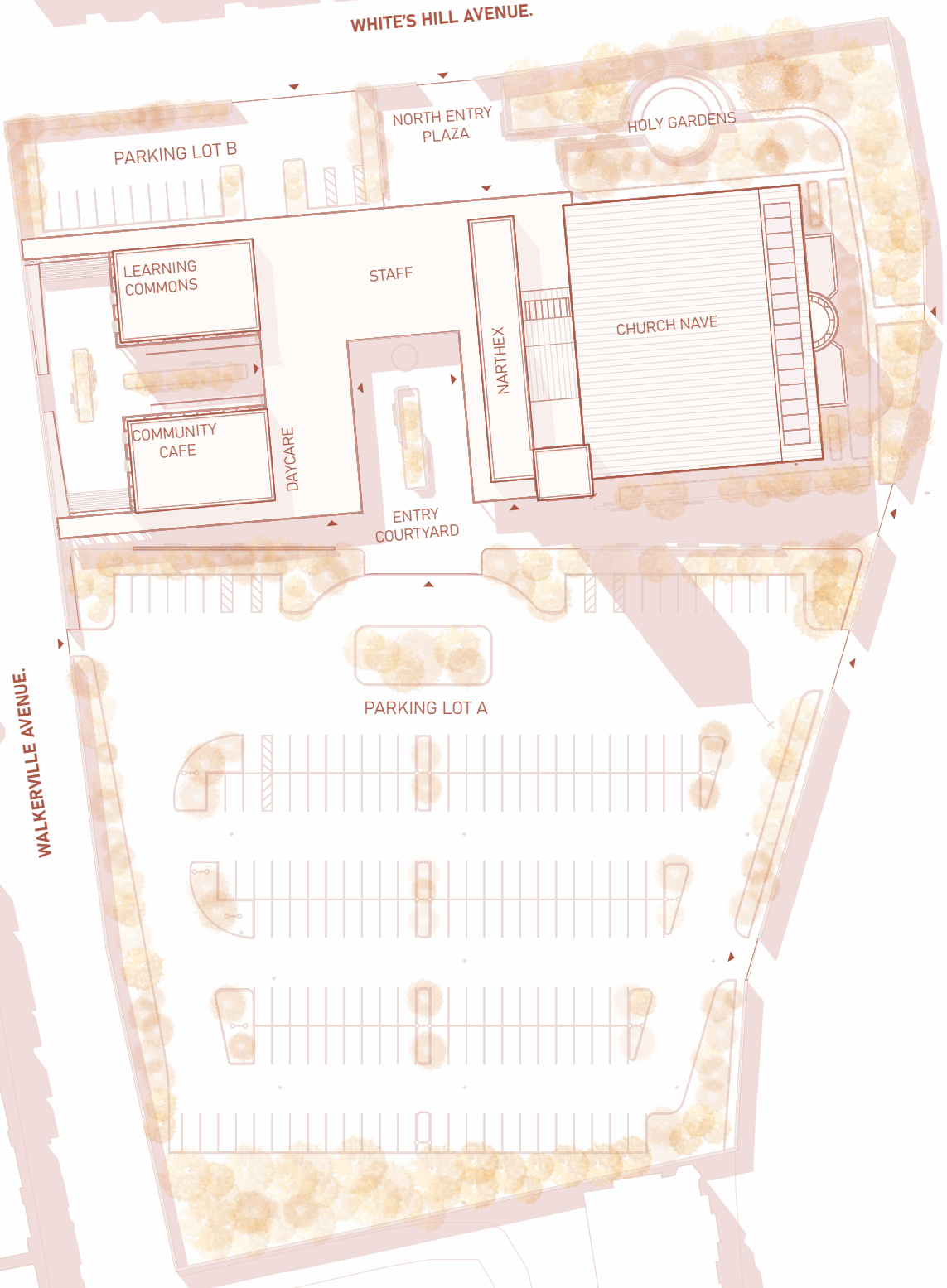


(Figure 6.15): Overall church concept contour drawing.

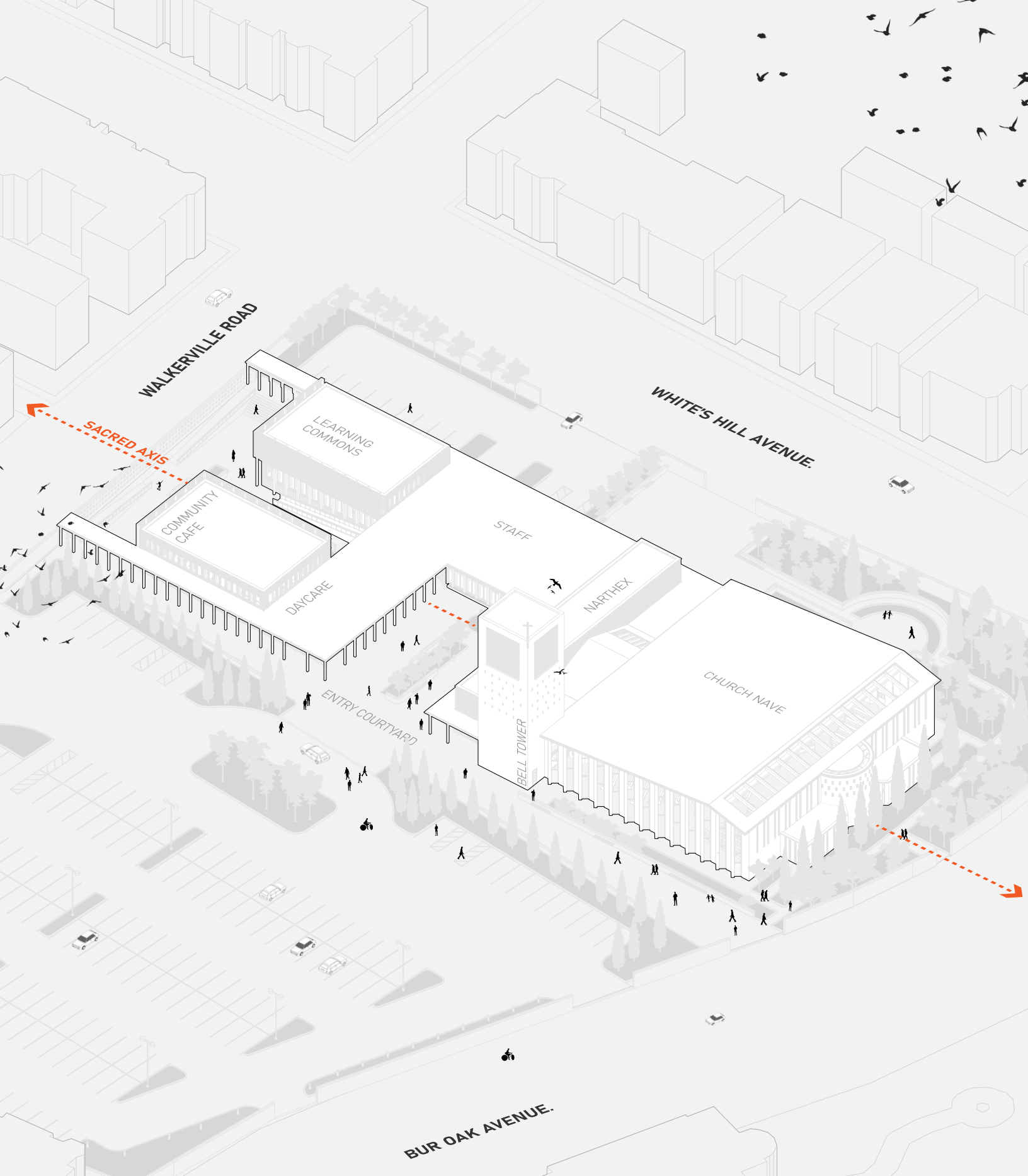
6.5 Plan Development & Building Organization

Now that the massing and parti has evolved into a built form, the final floor plan defines how ritual movement and communal life are all integrated within the architecture. The floor plan showcases a post-Vatican II approach and the liturgical realm with a complete spiritual and social backdrop that supports Vincentian life.

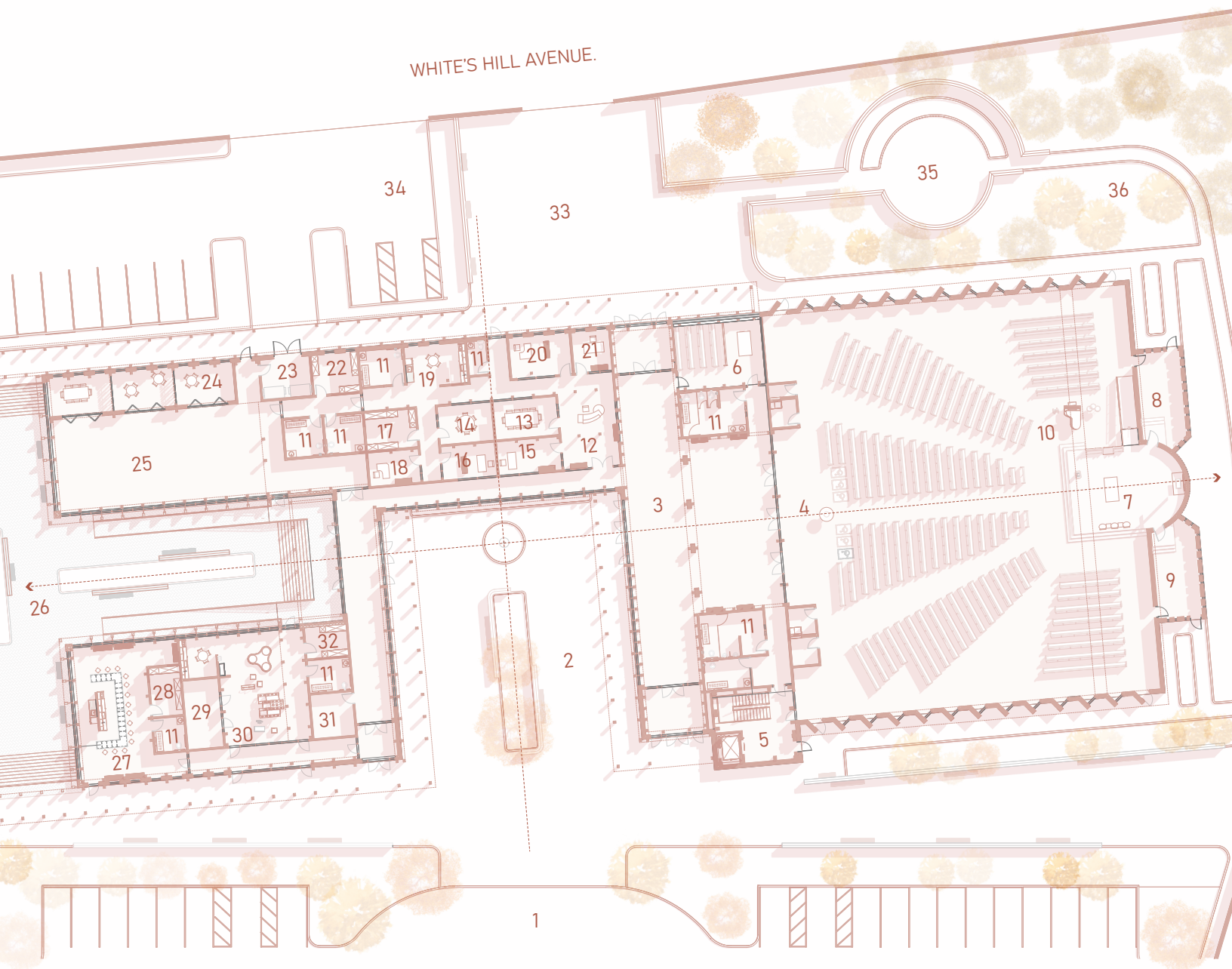
The plan is not only important for what it has inside, but also for the movement through it. The circulation through its main programs – church nave, staff, and community hub, with three primary corridors, culminates in the progression of the sacred axis. The exterior courtyards from the north and south lead to the narthex and then to the nave, where Paradiso is reached. This transforms ordinary circulation into real growth and procession. The main concept of sacredness must separate itself from the profane through meaningful shifts.



(Figure 6.16): The proposed Blessed Frédéric Ozanam site plan.



(Figure 6.17): The proposed Blessed Frédéric Ozanam church site axonometric.



1. DROP OFF ZONE
2. ENTRY COURTYARD
3. NARTHEX
4. CHURCH NAVE
5. BELL TOWER
6. ADORATION CHAPEL
7. SANCTUARY
8. SACRISTY STORAGE
9. SACRISTY
10. CHURCH CHOIR
11. WASHROOMS/ACCESSIBLE WASHROOMS
12. STAFF FOYER
13. LARGE BOARD ROOM
14. SMALL BOARD ROOM
15. STAFF ROOM 1
16. STAFF ROOM 2
17. STAFF STORAGE
18. STAFF ROOM 3
19. KITCHENETTE
20. PRIEST OFFICE
21. ASSOCIATE PRIEST OFFICE
22. LEARNING COMMONS STORAGE
23. GARBAGE ROOM
24. PRIVATE STUDY ROOMS
25. OPEN LEARNING COMMONS FOYER
26. SUNKEN COURTYARD
27. COMMUNITY CAFE
28. CAFE STORAGE
29. QUIET ROOM
30. DAYCARE SPACE
31. ELECTRICAL/MECHANICAL ROOM
32. DAYCARE STORAGE
33. NORTH ENTRY PLAZA
34. NORTH PARKING LOT
35. MEDITATION CIRCLE
36. HOLY GARDENS

(Figure 6.18): The proposed Blessed Frédéric Ozanam building floor plan.



(Figure 6.19): Church entry courtyard contour drawing.

6.5.1 Church Narthex

The narthex is very important with its combination of both the secular and sacred. It begins through the primary doors through the entry courtyard, with a secondary entrance also leading to the narthex from the north part of the site. With that said, the main goal is an open public space that rebuilds the liminal threshold as congregations gather, reflect, and prepare to receive God's presence. Harold Tuner's views on sacred space relate to the narthex here through its emphasis on worship environments that help create a balance between collectivism and movement.[187]

Parishioners can gather socially in a large open space with ample western light, with the intent toward worship. The narthex fulfills the in-between role through its exposed glu-laminated structural elements, almost resembling the bones of the human body before transcendence. Its elongated nature creates effective filtered light and a visual connection to both interior and exterior landscapes, which slows down the human body and mind during movement.

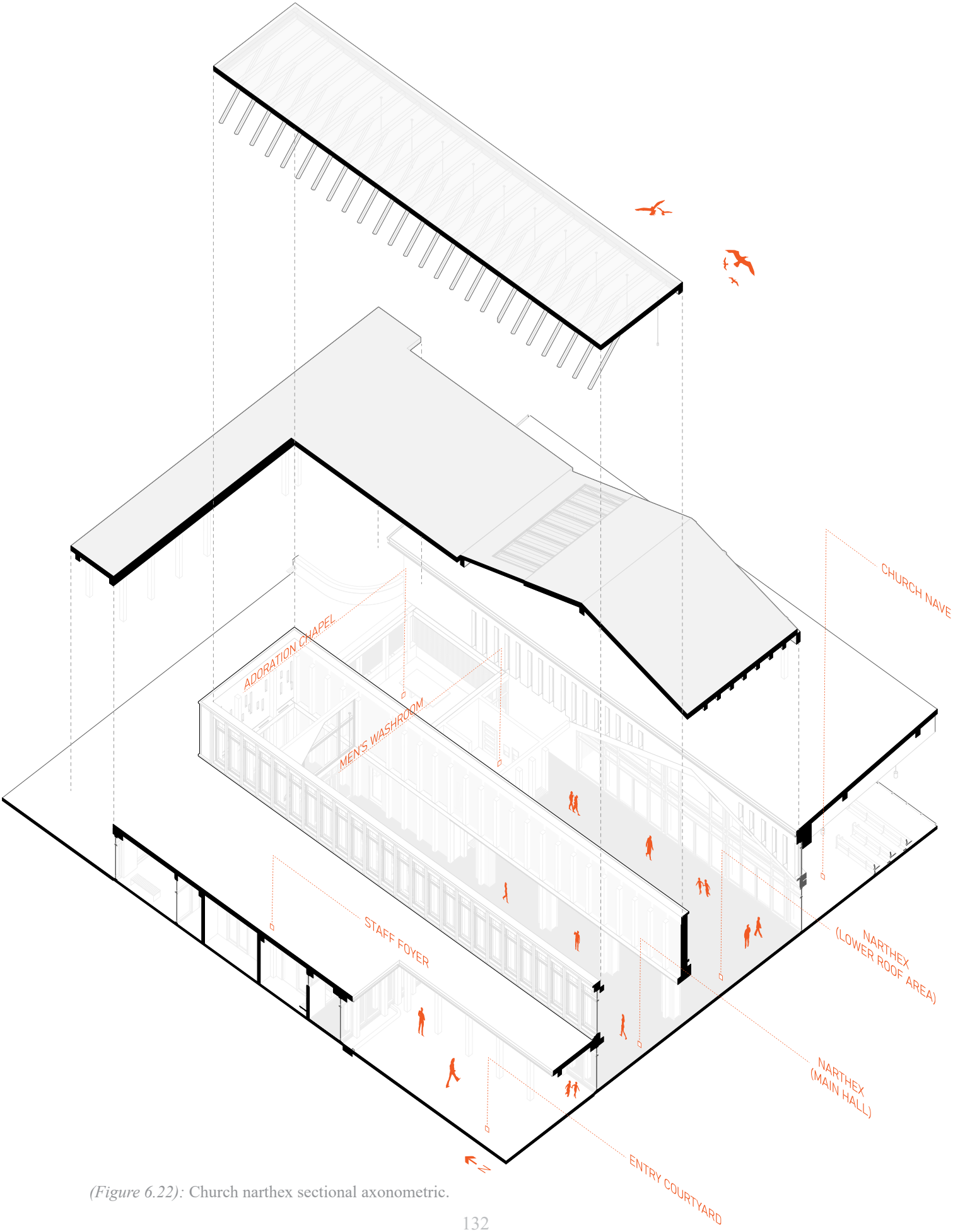
[187] Turner, From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship.



(Figure 6.20): Entry courtyard to narthex illustration.



(Figure 6.21): Church narthex partial floor plan.



(Figure 6.22): Church narthex sectional axonometric.



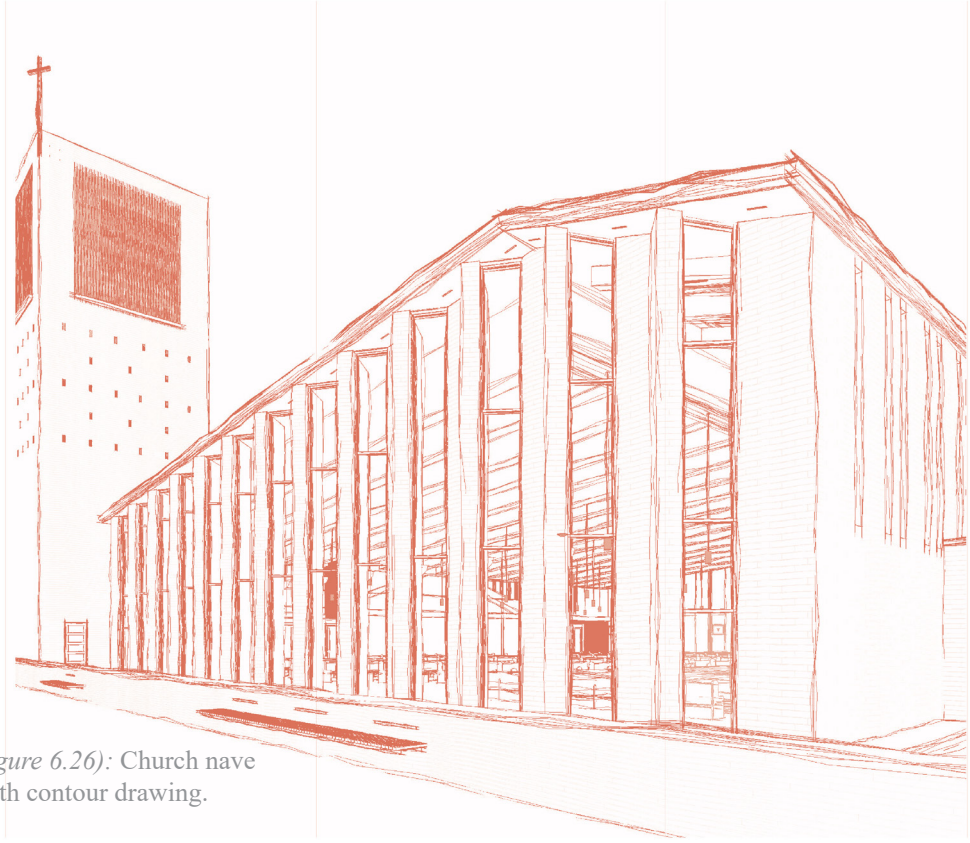
(Figure 6.23): Church narthex illustration - entrance looking north.



(Figure 6.24): Church narthex illustration - entrance looking south.



(Figure 6.25): Church narthex illustration - nave entrance.



(Figure 6.26): Church nave south contour drawing.

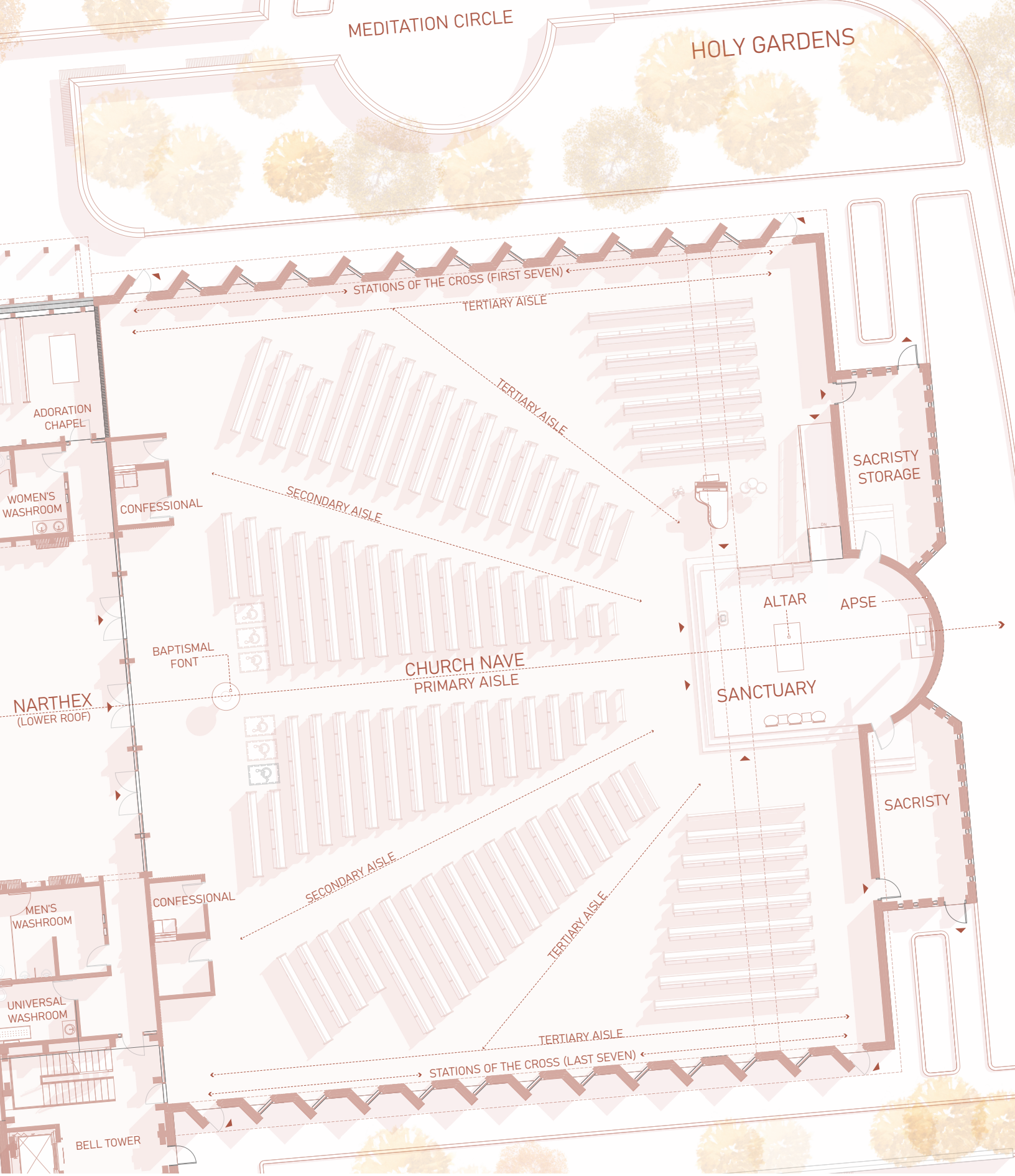
6.5.2 Church Nave

At the eastern corner of the plan is the church nave, which seats 830 people and acts as the core and symbolic link of the entire parti. The nave begins with the baptismal font, with two confessionals on either side that resemble the early stages of a Christian's journey through the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation.

We as humans all sin, but first come into this world blessed with God's presence to kick start our personal pilgrimage. The confessionals are intentionally placed there to express that we sin as we come from the secular world, but then are cleansed as we move toward God.The thresholds leading to the nave align with Christopher Day's argument that sacred architecture should add to the emotional and spiritual weight of each place. With Day's thoughts, the nave is positioned to support inner transformation through its quiet atmosphere, natural light, and spatial behavior before the altar is reached.[188]

The steps towards the sanctuary become the fixed point at which movement and attention are at their highest level. This creates a spiritual understanding that is embraced throughout the building. The sanctuary is organized with essential components - the altar, altar server chairs, credence table, ambo, altar, chairs for the priest, associate priest, and parish deacon, and lastly the tabernacle where the apse holds the body of Christ (Eucharist). The drawings below express my personal research in the design while visiting Ontario parishes and churches.

[188] Day, Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment.



(Figure 6.27): Church nave partial floor plan.

Then, the chosen skylights above illuminate the altar and sanctuary in the early morning and during the afternoon. The apse is considered the most sacred due to the eucharist being held there and is seen through the stained-glass skylight windows that illuminate only that area. I aimed to create a hierarchy of light here to emphasize the presence of God at that point, which is the greatest. This distinguishes the paths and journey towards God and sacred placemaking.

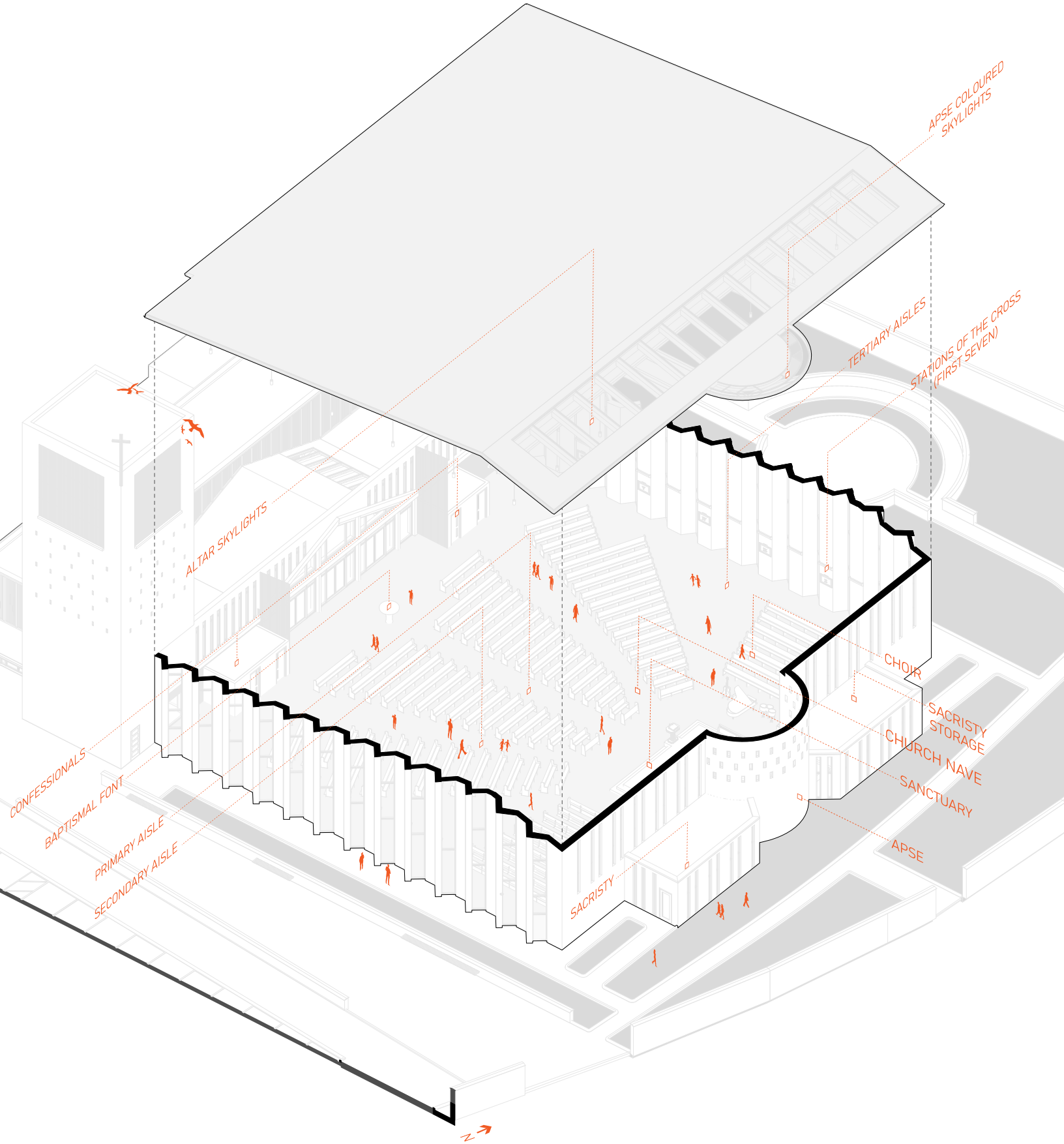
The sloped roof with its exposed glu-laminated timber structure resembles the spiritual ascent toward Paradiso and the tabernacle where the body of Christ (Eucharist) is located. These draw people inward just as the surrounding exterior landscape did, but now in the nave's interior.

In addition, the slim windows on the north and south sides create views into the holy gardens and allow the stations of the cross to be held during celebrations. The mystery and ambiguity of what the nave windows hold from the outside is part of the separation between the profane and secular, as mentioned by Mircea Eliade.[189]

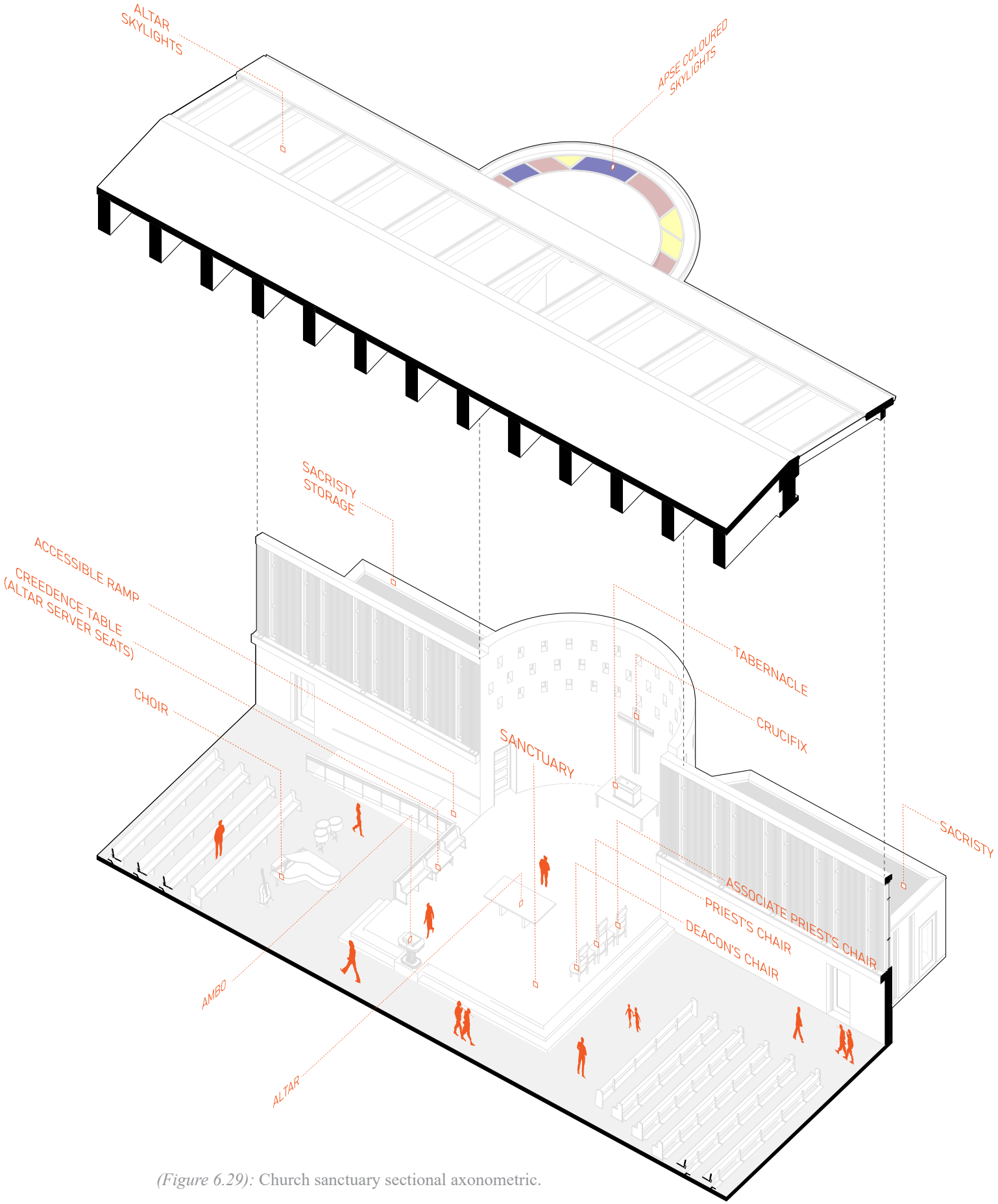
The symmetrical church pew layout through the central aisle and secondary aisles voices the continuous progression towards the altar. The choir is separated to one side to contribute to songs and hymns during celebrations such as the Holy Communion. Adjacent to that space, an accessible ramp and seats are proposed to facilitate mass participation and help lecturers read more effectively at the sanctuary.

The nave is the ultimate realm of paradiso, fully supported by the life and legacy of Frederic Ozanam and the notion that a spiritual journey must take place in everyone's life. The nave is a spiritual anchor that draws and guides Cornell so that every individual can experience a feeling of sacredness.

[189] Eliade, The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion.



(Figure 6.28): Church nave sectional axonometric.



(Figure 6.29): Church sanctuary sectional axonometric.



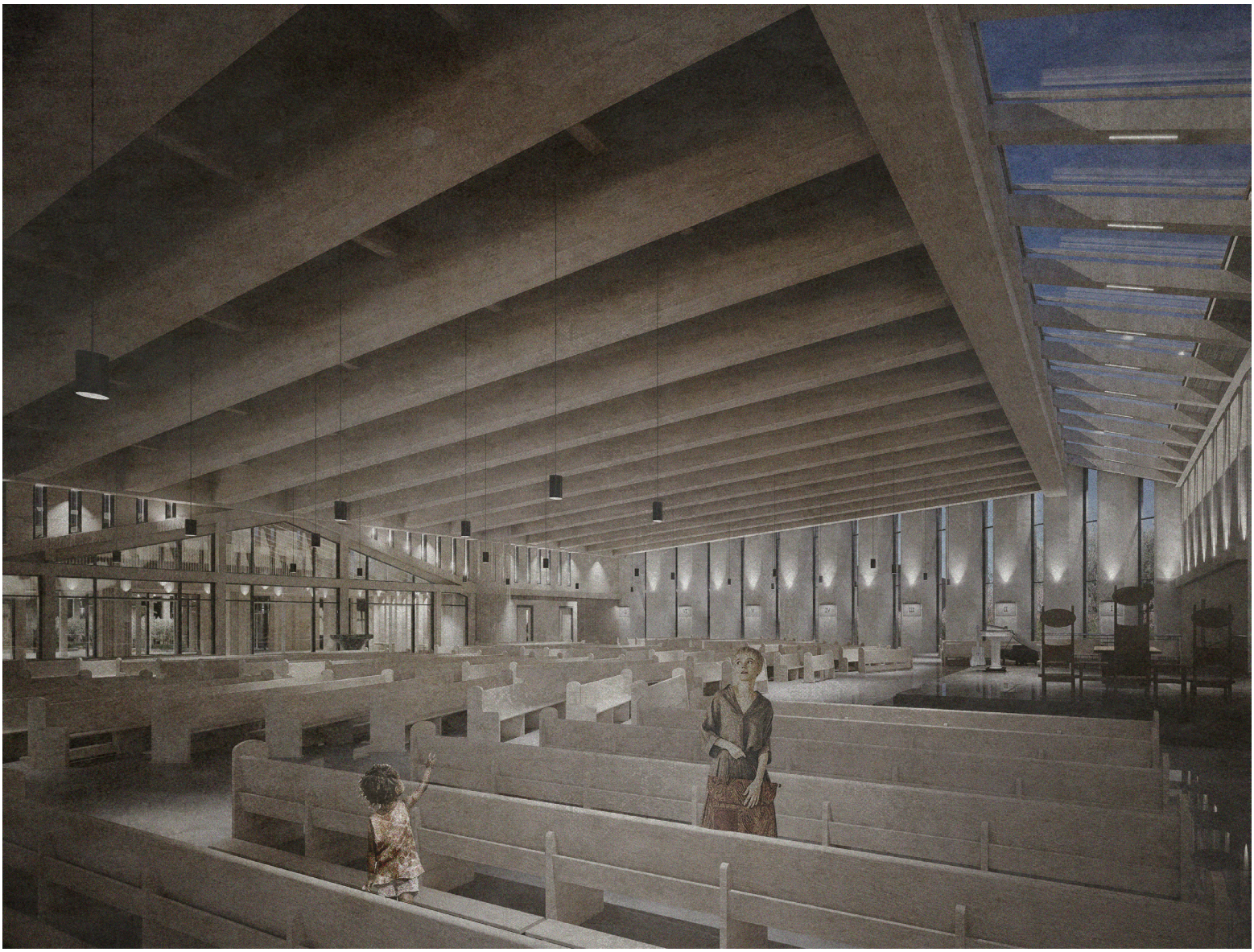
(Figure 6.30): Exterior church nave illustration - partial south facade.



(Figure 6.31): Exterior church nave illustration - full south facade.



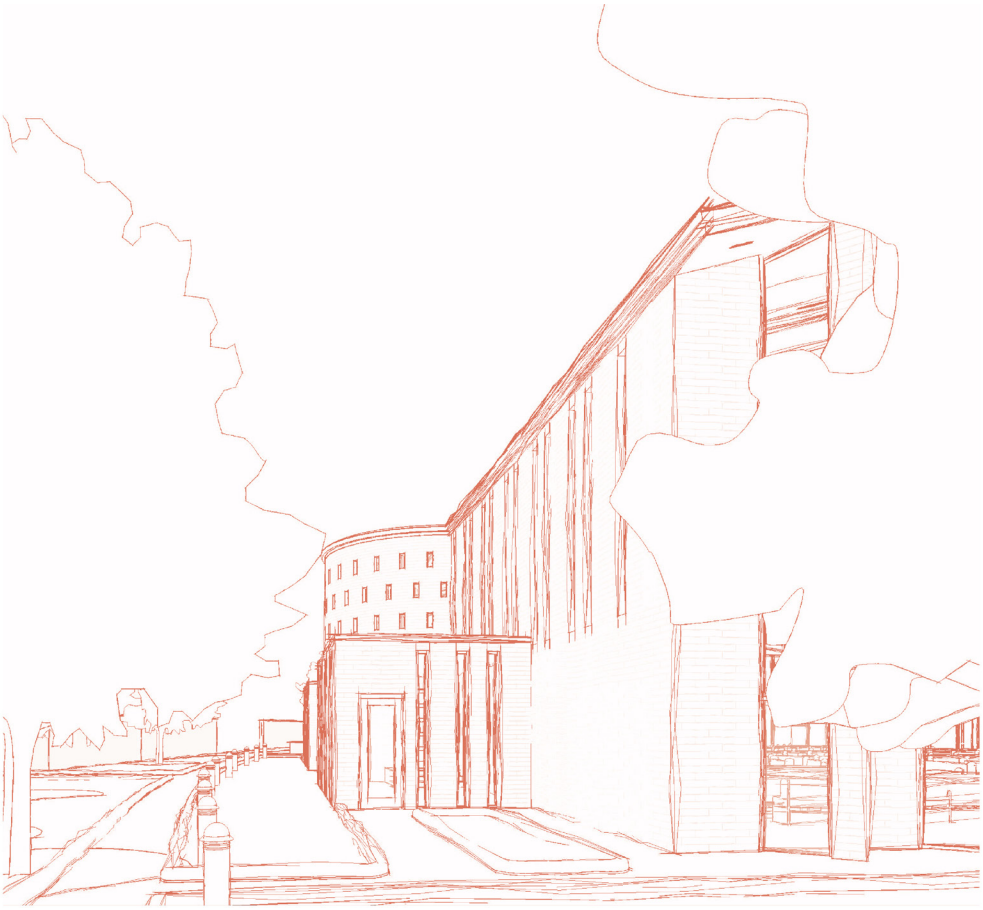
(Figure 6.32): Interior church nave illustration - entry into space.



(Figure 6.33): Interior church nave illustration - south side aisle.



(Figure 6.34): Interior church nave illustration - sanctuary perspective looking at the central aisle.



(Figure 6.35): Holy Gardens contour drawing.

6.5.3 Holy Gardens

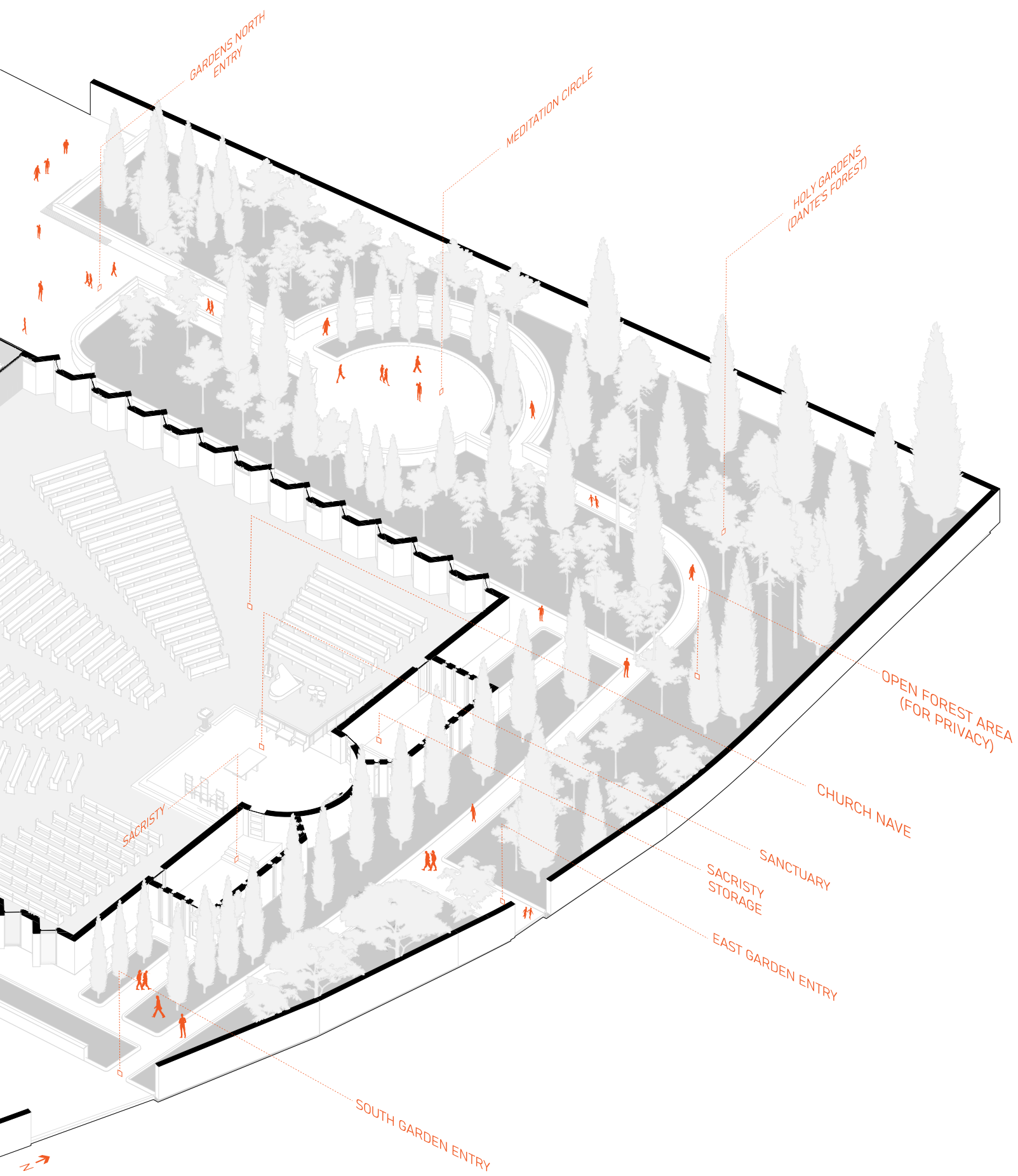
The holy gardens help extend the sacred experience beyond the nave walls and allow the architecture, landscape, and meditation circle to work in unison when creating moments of reflection and a journey through human sin. This was intended to be a separator and an individual space away from the public street, the community hub, and the rest of the other spaces. It's a dual relationship with the Garden of Eden and Dante Alighieri's forest in the Divine Comedy, where sin and loss are prominent in the secular world. This was heavily inspired by the exterior procession and landscape that St. Gabriel's Passionist church is known for.[190]

I used similar pathways, planted courtyards, and adjacent green spaces to help build up a gradual movement through a sacred garden within the secular realm. Thomas Barrie described this as a sacred "in-between" space where transformation, just like the narthex, can occur before worship. There is a ritual sequence that takes the congregation on a journey through sin and our inner spiritual beliefs.

[190] Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, St. Gabriel's Passionist Church Case Study.



(Figure 6.36): Holy gardens partial plan.



(Figure 6.37): Holy gardens partial axonometric.



(Figure 6.38): Holy gardens illustration - meditation circle.

Additionally, the holy gardens were inspired by Gaston Bachelard's views on intimacy and imaginative ways to dwell in exterior spaces. It's central for gardens to offer memory, imagination, and personal reflection with the surrounding nature unfolding throughout time, creating a sense of a sacred refuge.[191]

Furthermore, the consistent changes in weather, filtered northern light, and the presence of Dante's large forest align with Luis Fernández-Galiano's understanding of architecture and landscape as devices for temporal continuity.[192] Thus, the holy gardens are intended for personal contemplation and collective gathering, where sacredness can be expressed even in exterior settings.

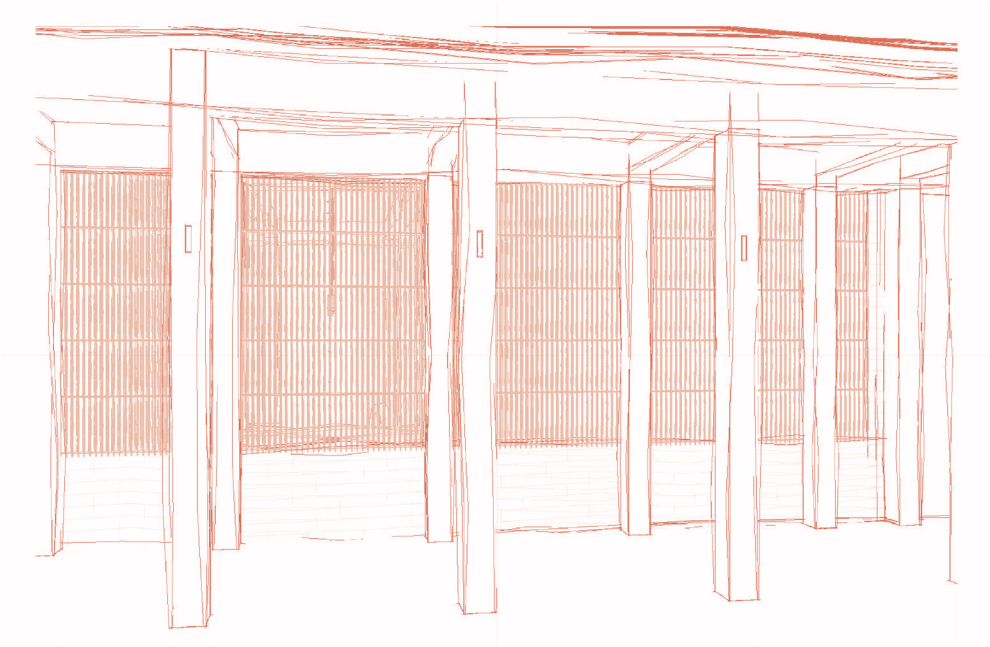
[191] Bachelard, The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas
[192] Fernández-Galiano, "Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy."



(Figure 6.39): Holy gardens illustration - northwest corner.



(Figure 6.40): Holy gardens illustration - westside entry.



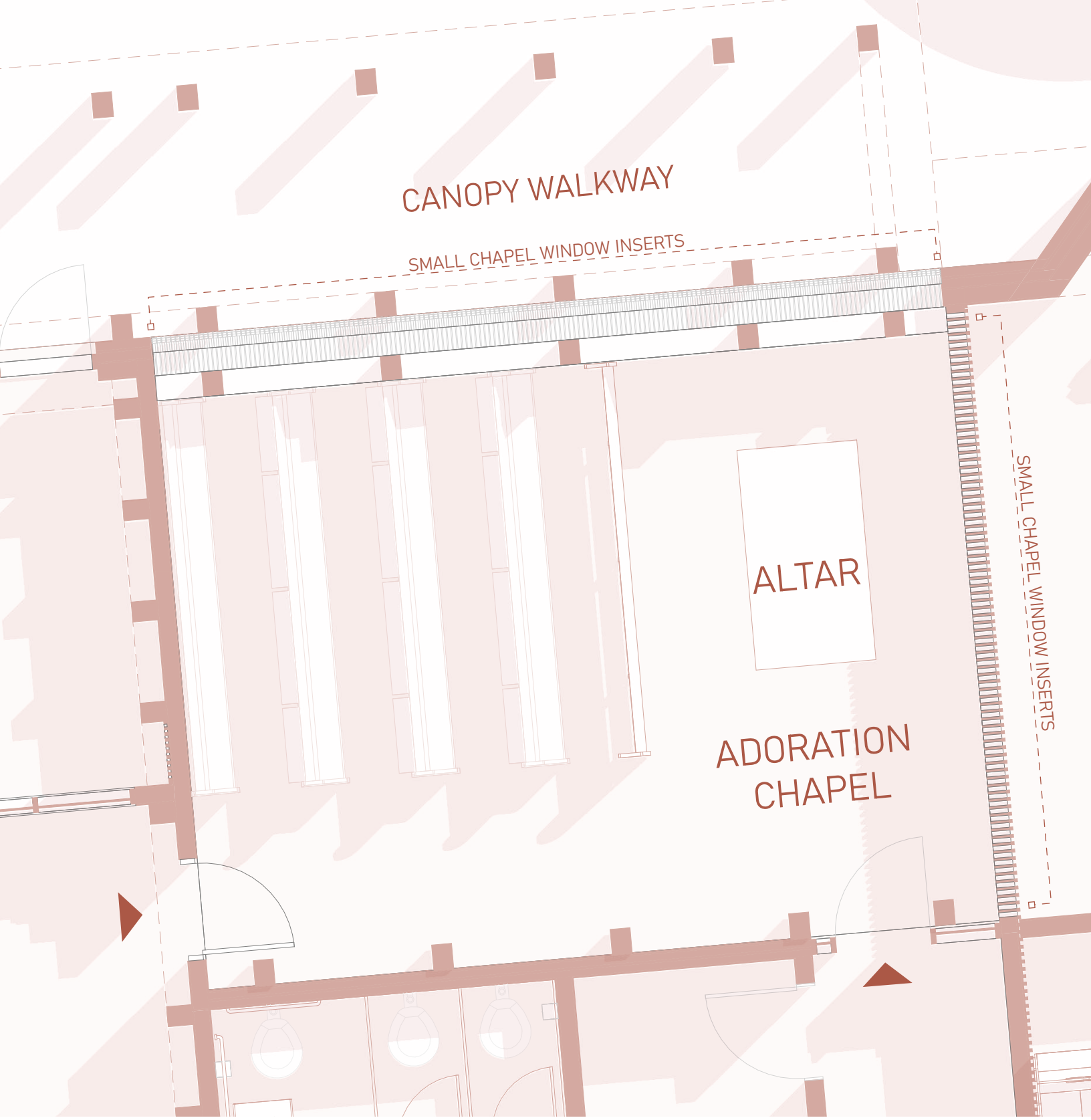
(Figure 6.41): Exterior adoration chapel contour drawing.

6.5.4 Adoration Chapel

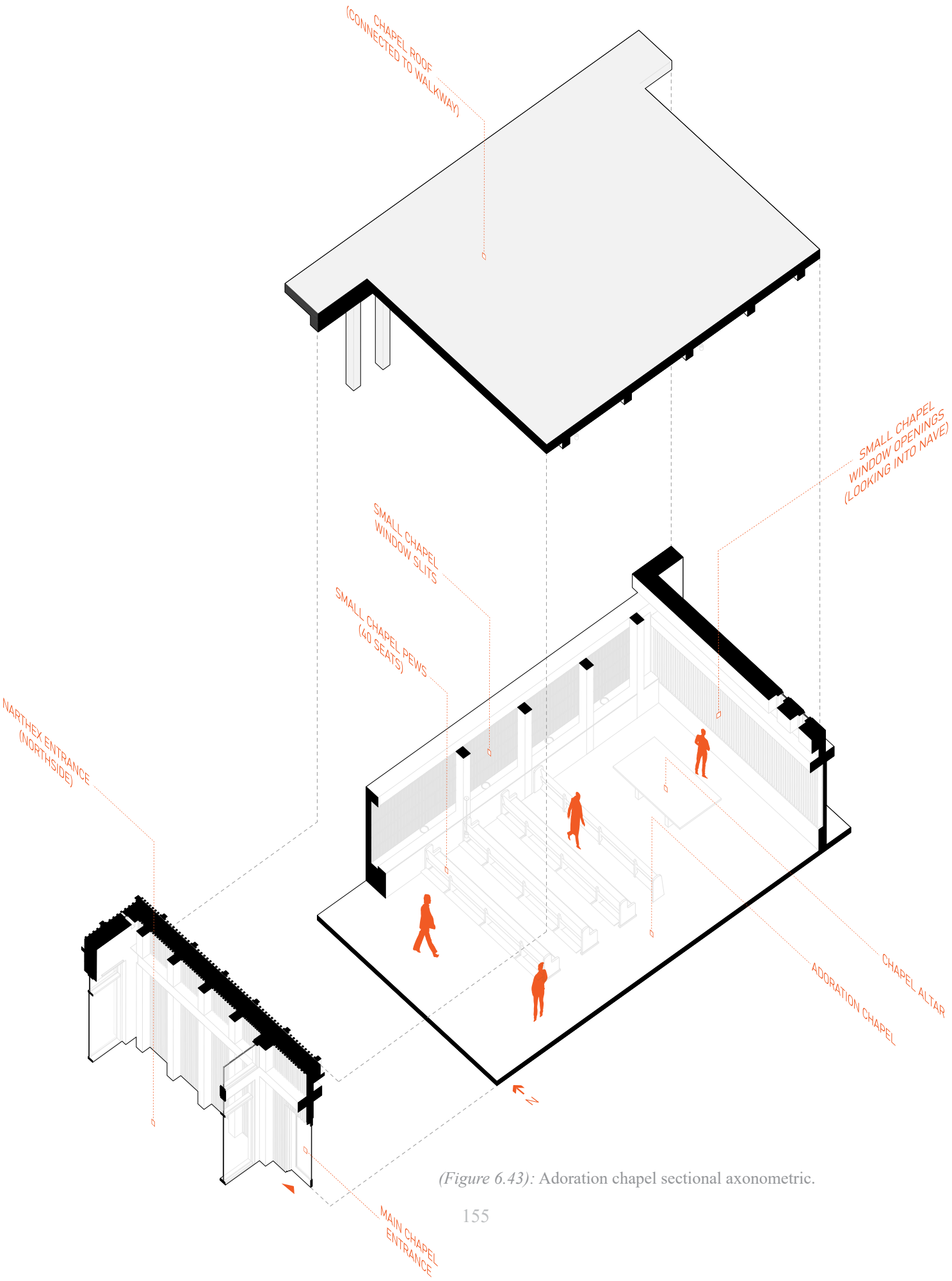
The adoration chapel is the secondary worship space to the nave, where a more quiet and personal relationship with God takes place. The forty-person chapel was designed to focus on intimacy through subdued natural light, warm materials, and quiet acoustics, which draws on Juhani Pallasmaa and Rudolf Otto's views.[193] Their phenomenological lens on sensory and emotional experiences of the sacred and the numinous concept is prevalent in the chapel, especially with its balance between ambiguity and relief.

This is further demonstrated below through the filtered daylight and a controlled amount of shadow, which creates an atmosphere of personal sacredness. The goal of the chapel is to be small and separate for more one-on-one time with prayer and reflection. It aims to strengthen individual faith and improve the architectural intent for layered sacred experiences within the parish.

[193] Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses; Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey.



(Figure 6.42): Adoration chapel partial floor plan.



(Figure 6.43): Adoration chapel sectional axonometric.



(Figure 6.44): Adoration chapel entry illustration.



(Figure 6.45): Adoration chapel aisle illustration.



(Figure 6.46): Staff foyer contour drawing.

6.5.5 Church Staff

Within the fabric of the church plan are dedicated staff spaces that support the daily, administrative, and operational elements of the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish. These offices, meeting rooms, and support areas are fundamental to the church's role as a permanent anchor and institution that reflects the current responsibilities for parish life.

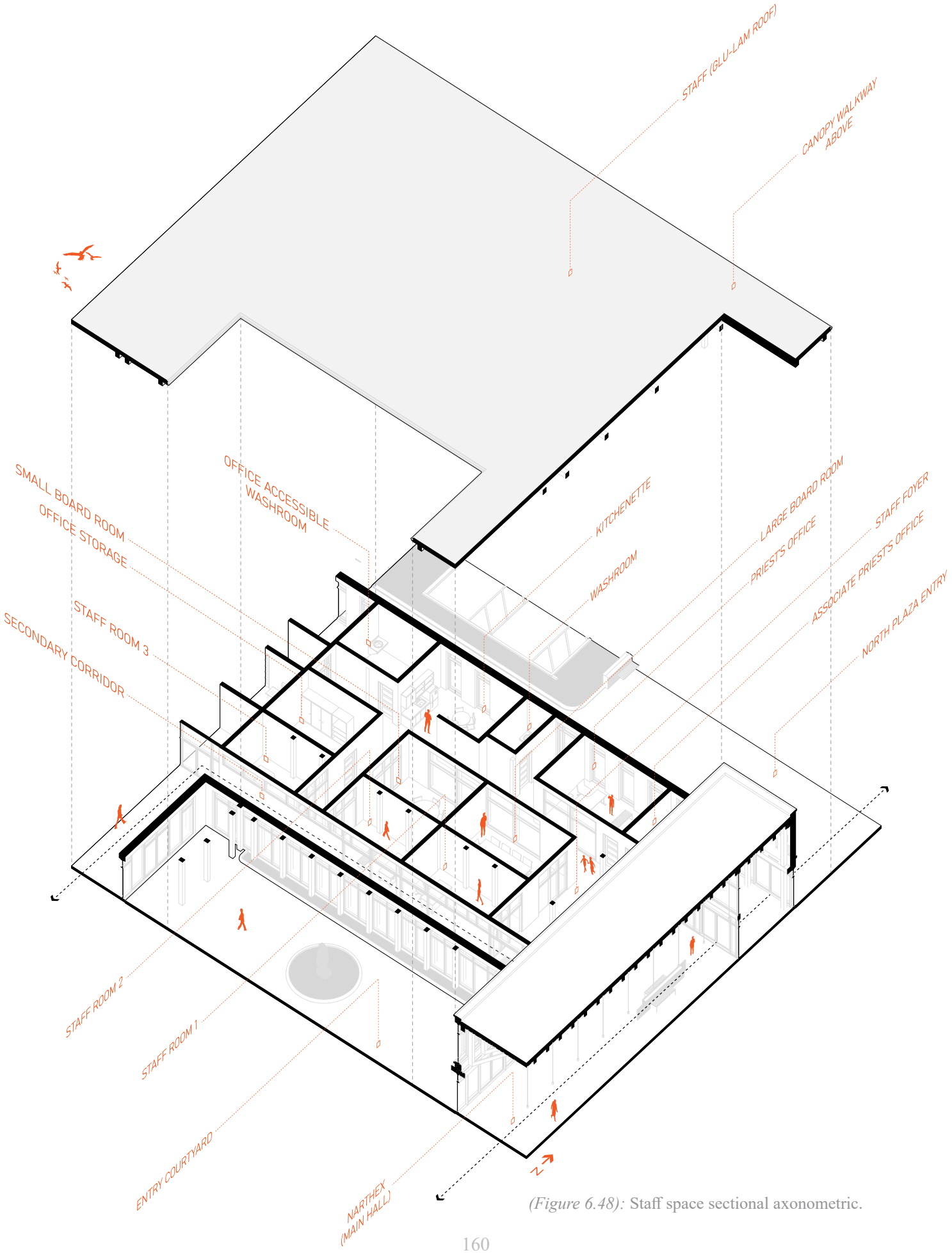
The staff balances the accessibility with privacy and further reinforces Harold Turner's view of sacred architecture as a mediator between communal life and spiritual ascent. I wanted to ensure that pastoral care remains closely connected to the daily human experience. I intend for these spaces to act as counseling, outreach, and everyday acts of service to the public.[194]

This inclusion is necessary for all sacred spaces, but also to contribute to Frédéric Ozanam's Vincentian goals in faith and action. Since Ozanam expresses that Catholic responsibility must be shown through compassion and active care for others, these spaces become architectural additions to his mission.

[194] Turner, From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship.



(Figure 6.47): Staff space partial plan.



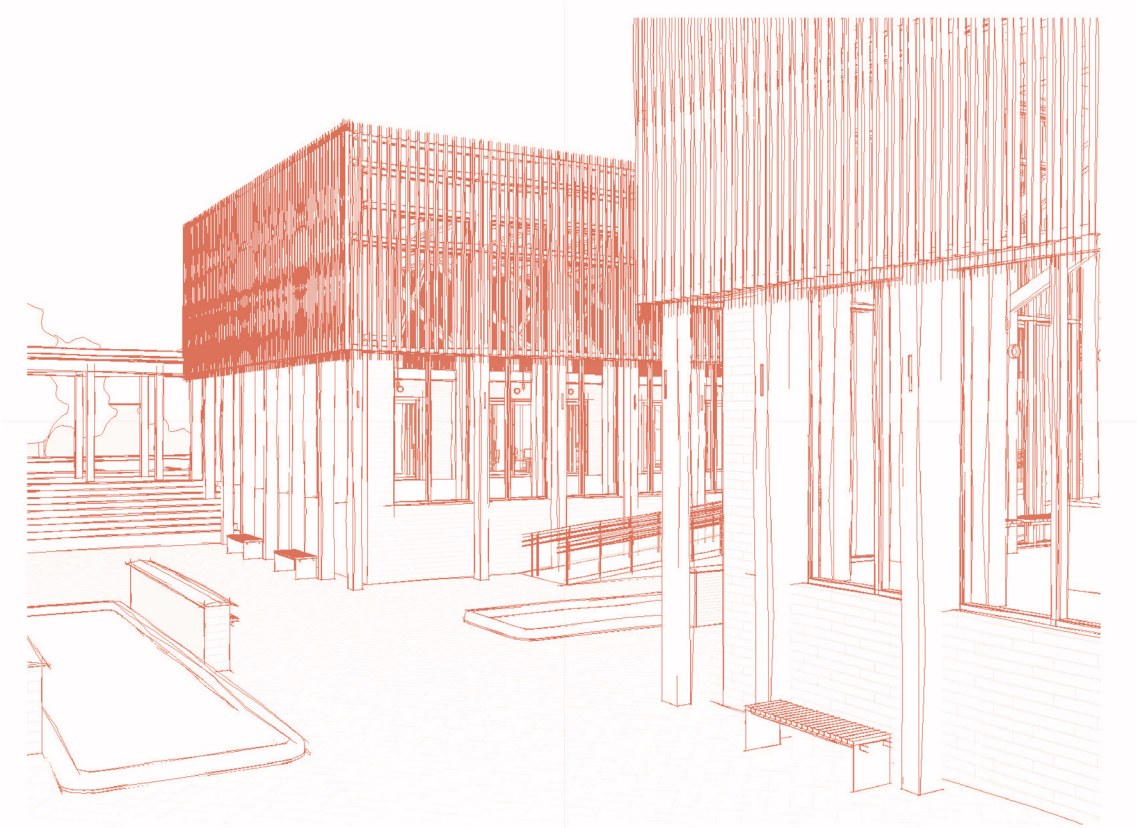
(Figure 6.48): Staff space sectional axonometric.



(Figure 6.49): Staff space foyer illustration - looking south.



(Figure 6.50): Staff space kitchenette illustration.



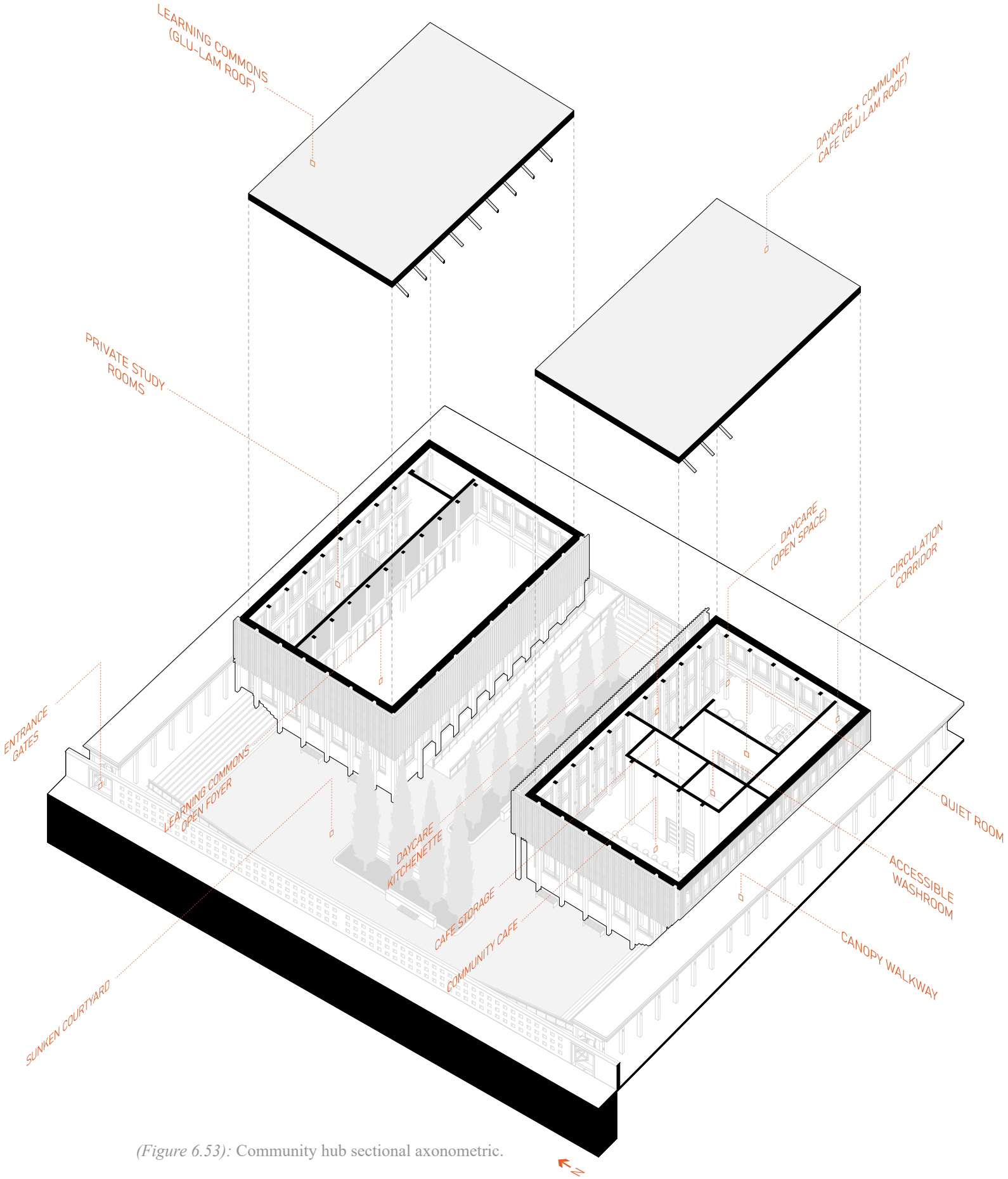
(Figure 6.51): Community hub exterior contour drawing.

6.5.6 **Church Community Hub:** Learning Commons, Daycare, & Community Cafe

The church community hub is the basis for the social and educational core of the parish that goes beyond the nave. I wanted to reinforce the thesis argument that sacred architecture must support both worship and collective gathering. The learning commons, daycare, and community kitchen are carefully integrated into the overall building footprint to ensure that educational acts of gathering and services remain central to Frédéric Ozanam's legacy. The collection of these interior spaces surrounds the sunken courtyard where a playground and other outdoor parish events take place. All over the year, festivities and the parish celebrates local traditions together. The community hub represents the secular realm of a growing parish. The life that Ozanam left behind is reflected in his three key traits to contribute to the overall theme of the building and what its parishioners stand for. The following drawings express the spatial and physical qualities of the site and communal aspects of the spaces.



(Figure 6.52): Community hub partial floor plan.



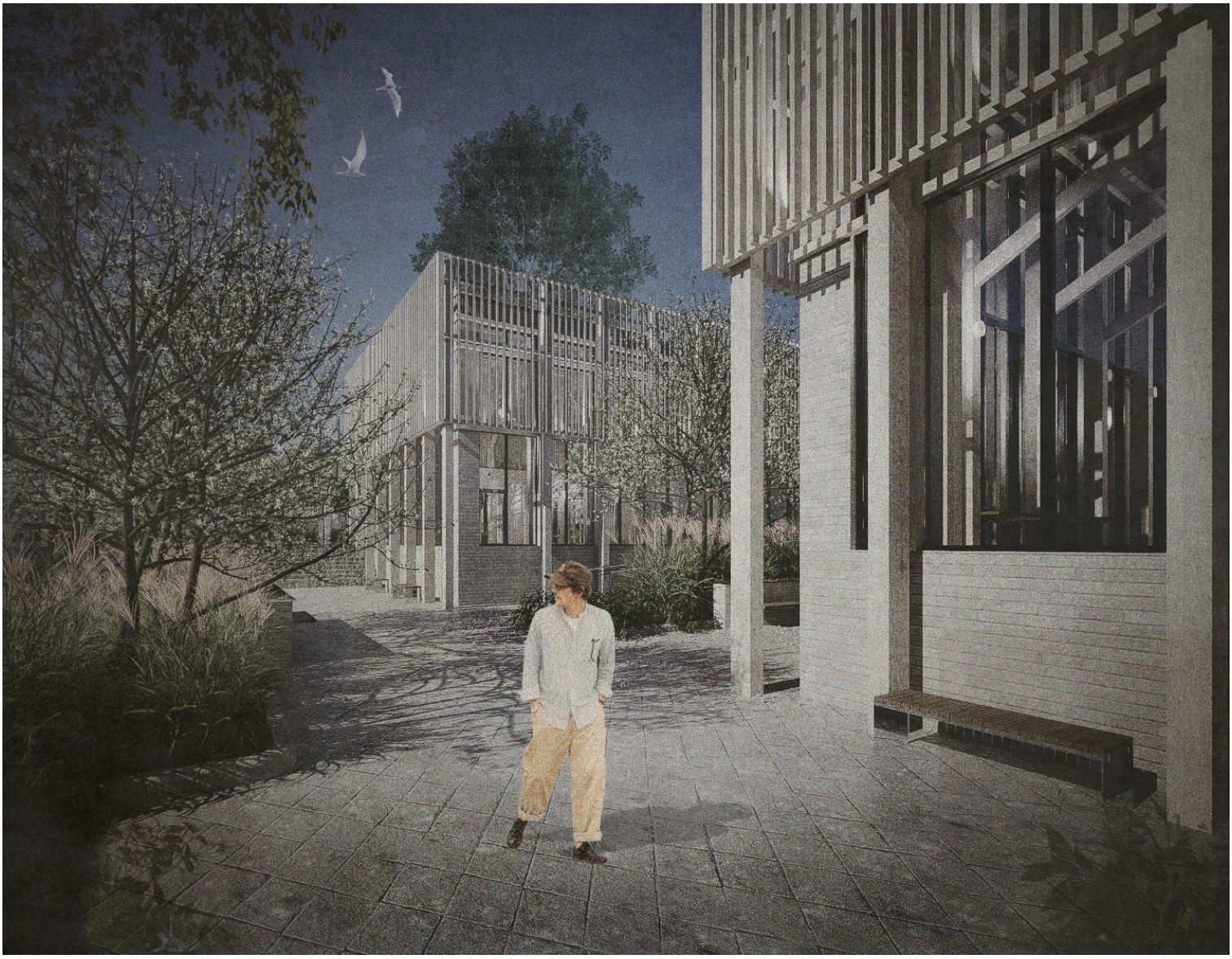
(Figure 6.53): Community hub sectional axonometric.



(Figure 6.54): Community hub - sunken courtyard illustration looking south.



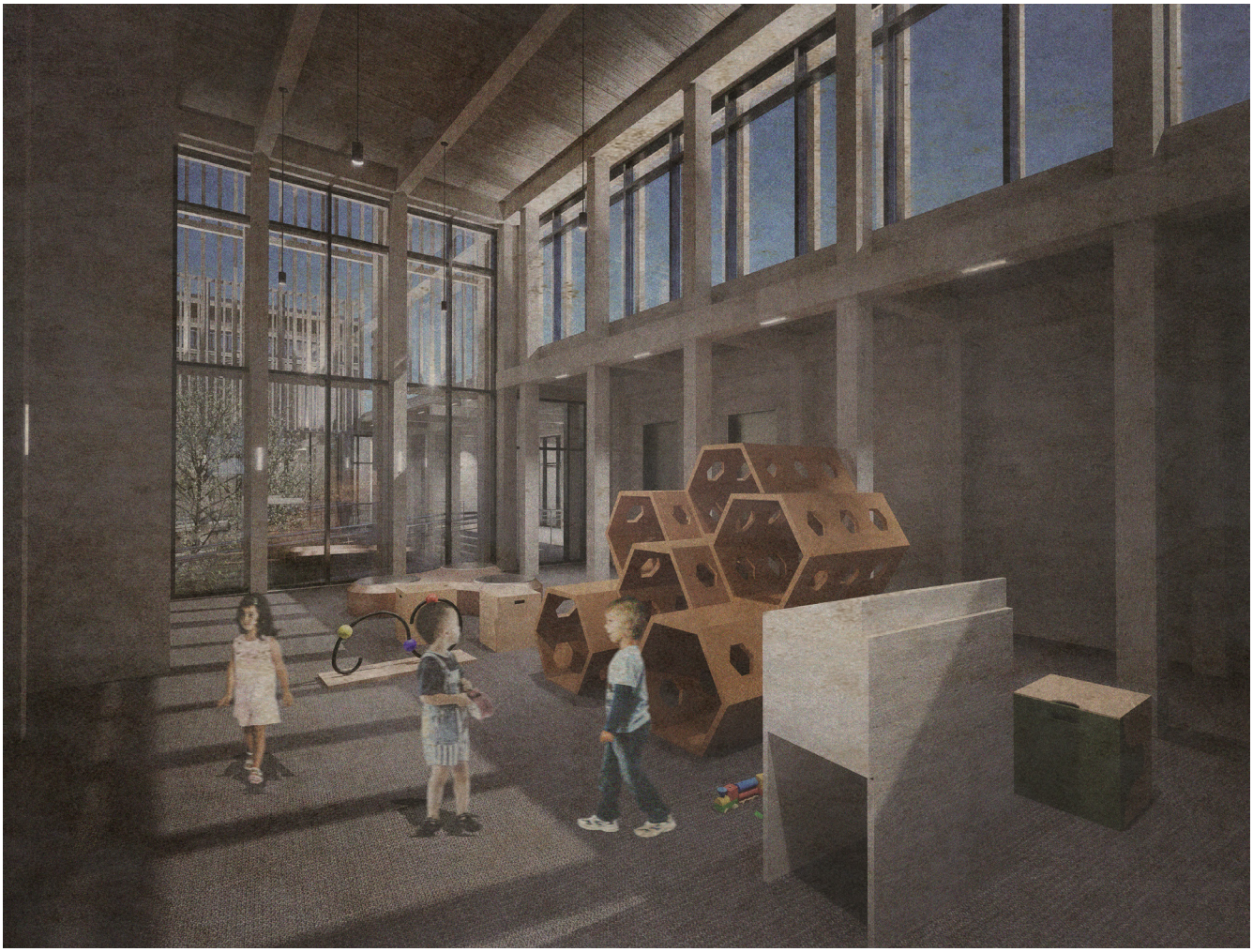
(Figure 6.55): Community hub - sunken courtyard illustration looking north.



(Figure 6.56): Community hub - close up on sunken courtyard illustration.

The daycare extends the mission of the Catholic church into familial life and welcomes children into the parish community in the early stages of development. I modeled this after my personal experience of a daycare and based on my memory of key programs such as the open play space and quiet room. The daycare acts as a gateway for youth and child programs supporting the lay life of Ozanam. This is coupled with an outdoor sunken courtyard, which acts as Inferno to Dante's Divine Comedy.

The slow progression from the west to the eastern part of the site is a journey that both Dante and Ozanam took in their own spiritual lives. This is reflected in the placement of this program and its relation to the other spaces that surround it. However, it goes beyond just the parti, from a pragmatic lens, the sunken courtyard morphs into a playground for the children during the week, while also acting as a parish gathering space on weekends. Both the daycare and the sunken courtyard's inclusion emphasize long-term belonging and ensure the church remains a part of everyday suburban rhythms.



(Figure 6.57): Community hub - close up on daycare illustration.

The community café supports shared meals, outreach events, and charity initiatives. After mass celebrations or parish events, the congregation can attend the café for discussions and gatherings to extend collectiveness beyond liturgy. Perimeter seating can also be seen in the floor plan to support the elderly and provide more accessibility to the older visitors. I wanted the community cafe to embody more than Ozanam's scholarly legacy and promote the Vincentian commitment to hospitality and service to others. This is further strengthened by Christopher Day's understanding that architecture should encourage emotional comfort and human connection.[195] Most notably, in this case, these spaces promote warmth and openness to the community. Together, the community hub is fundamental for the church and its objective to be more than a place to celebrate mass. It transforms into a permanent civic and sacred beacon where faith, education, and communal support are nurtured.



(Figure 6.58): Community hub - close up on cafe looking south illustration.

[195] Day, Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment.



(Figure 6.59): Community hub - close up on cafe looking north illustration.

The learning commons provides a large and open flexible space for parish events and post-celebration gatherings. It's also comprised of smaller and more intimate rooms for quieter discussions. The learning commons are designed to offer areas for missionaries to attend archdiocese events and for young adults during the day to study and engage in local seminars. Hayden Dolores's literature played a role in my design choices as I began to see architecture as a vessel for public memory and collective identity.[196] This space allows for faith formation and community knowledge to be experienced across all generations. It becomes a place where both education and spirituality can flourish, directly aligning with Frédéric Ozanam's commitment to lifelong scholarship.

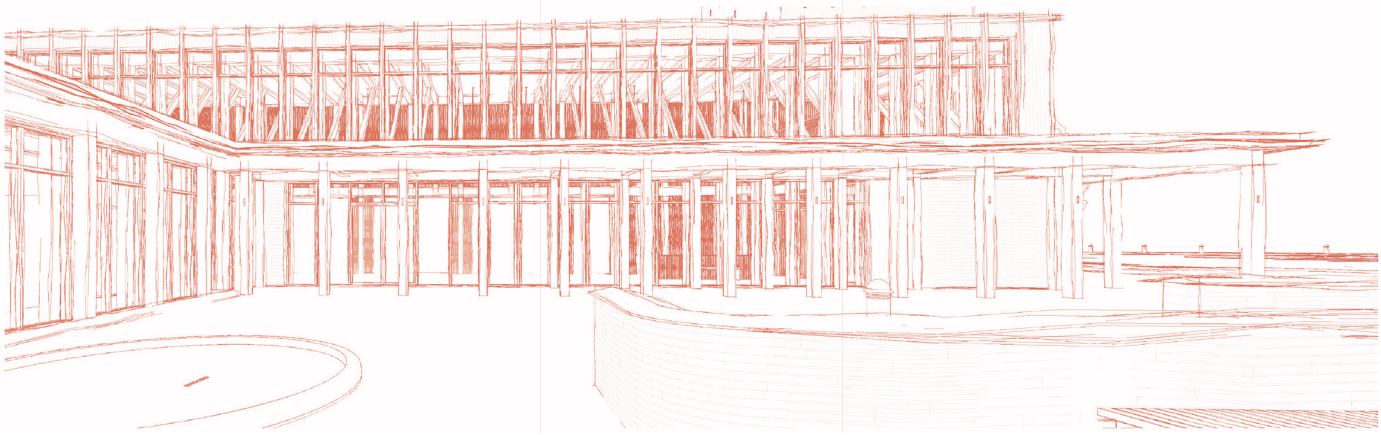


(Figure 6.60): Community hub - close up on learning commons study rooms illustration.

[196] Hayden, The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History.



(Figure 6.61): Community hub - close up on learning commons foyer illustration.

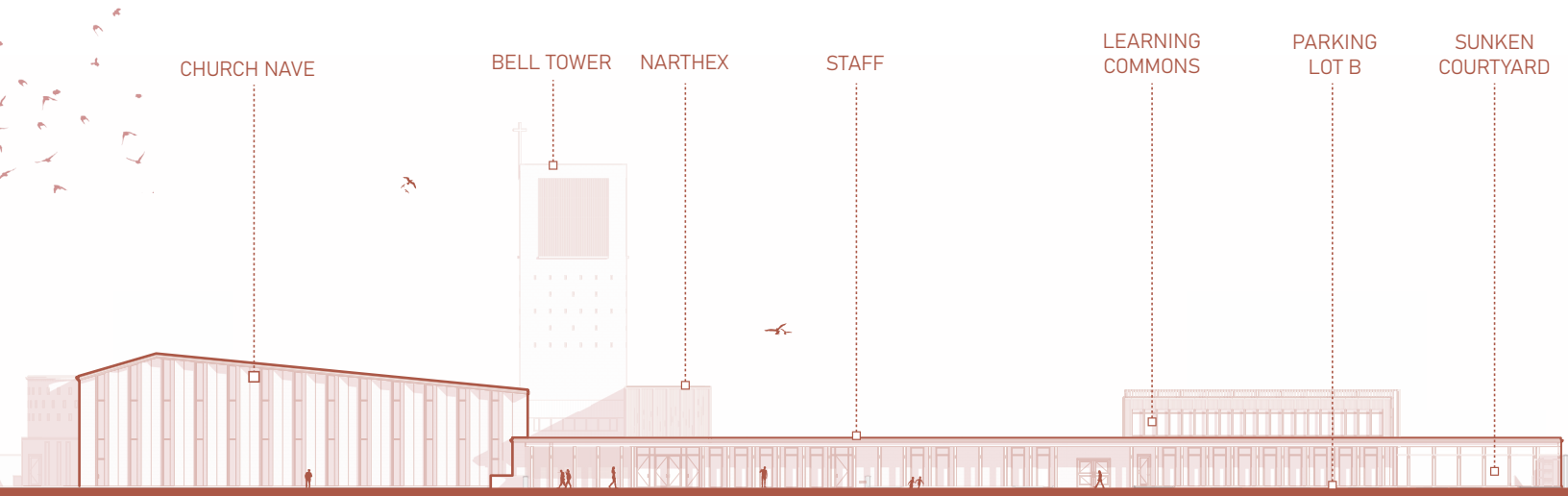


(Figure 6.62): Narthex entry contour drawing.

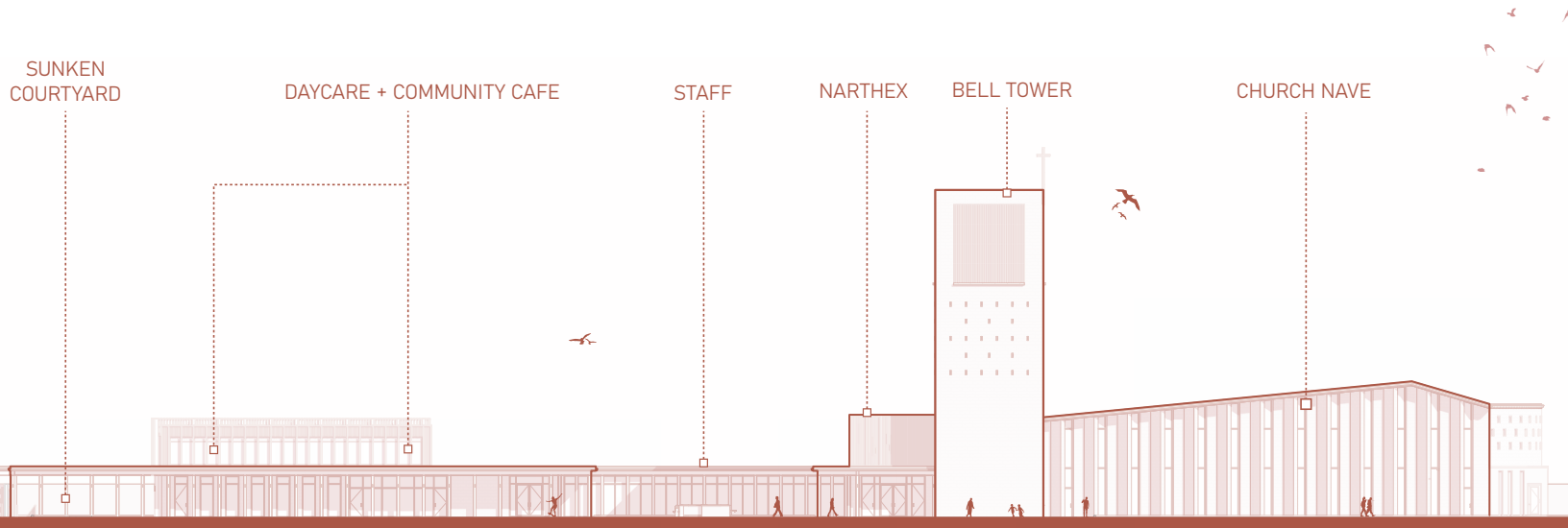
6.6 Exterior Elevation Development and Church Evolution

The church started with a series of simple geometric volumes, with their relationships tested through layering and carving. This process reflects the core argument of the thesis, which asks how sacredness can arrive from abstraction and a new spatial order. From this light, this relates to Tamás Nagy's Holy Trinity Church, where its architectural identity is achieved through constant manipulation of masonry mass and the careful use of tectonic limits. Just like Nagy's church, my proposal neglects any decoration or symbolism as the key driver of sacred meaning. Instead, I rely on the approach that preserves expressive proportion, enclosure, and effective daylight.

The church develops from an elongated horizontal volume that connects the spaces to Cornell's suburban scale. This horizontal approach is essential within a neighborhood characterized by its repetitive forms and growing infrastructure patterns. The church avoids a large, overpowering monument and ensures continuity with the street, and embraces the site's innate civic identity. The architecture here must enable human beings to express themselves meaningfully within their environment. The massing does not seek transcendence through its separation but transforms itself in the ordinary suburban fabric.

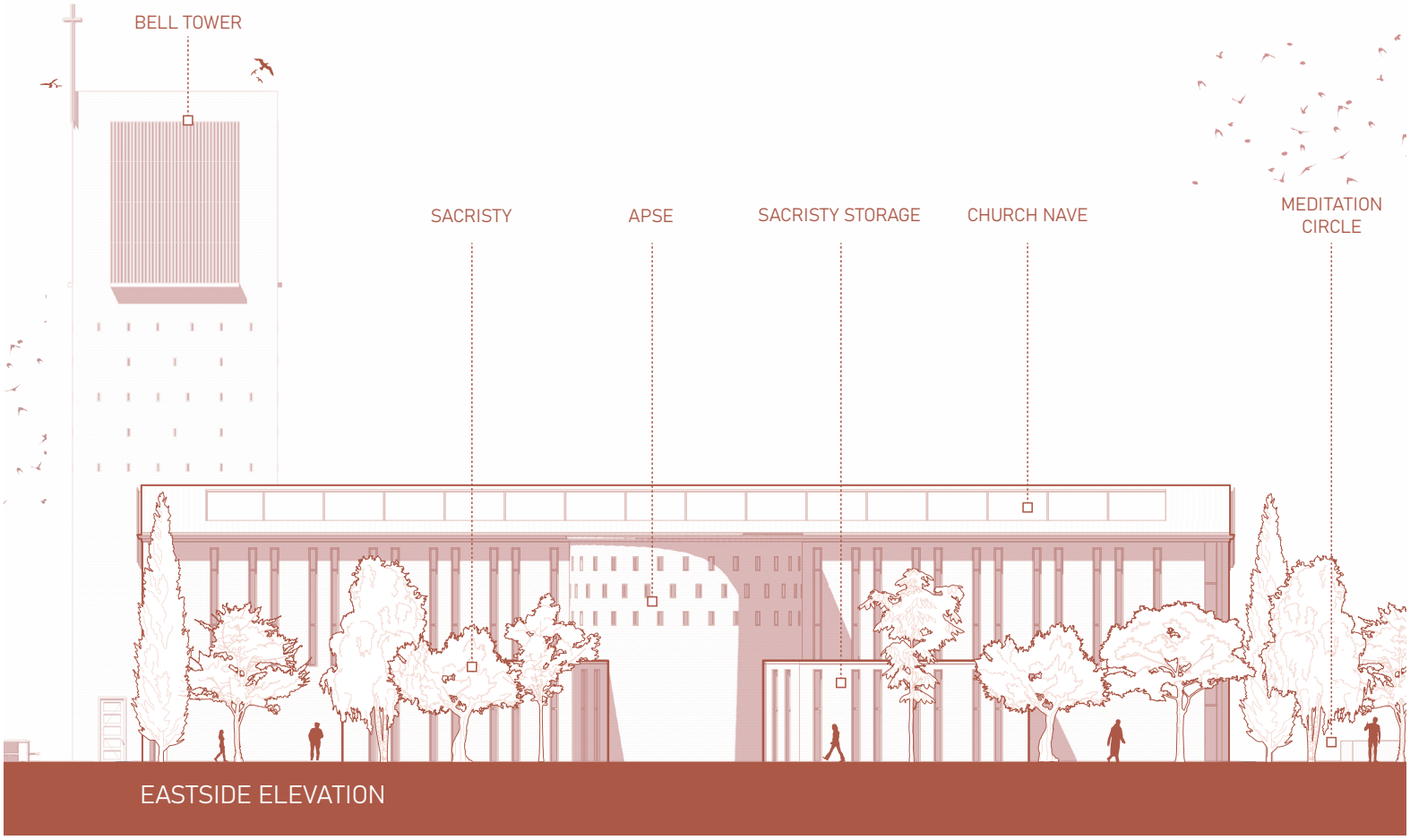


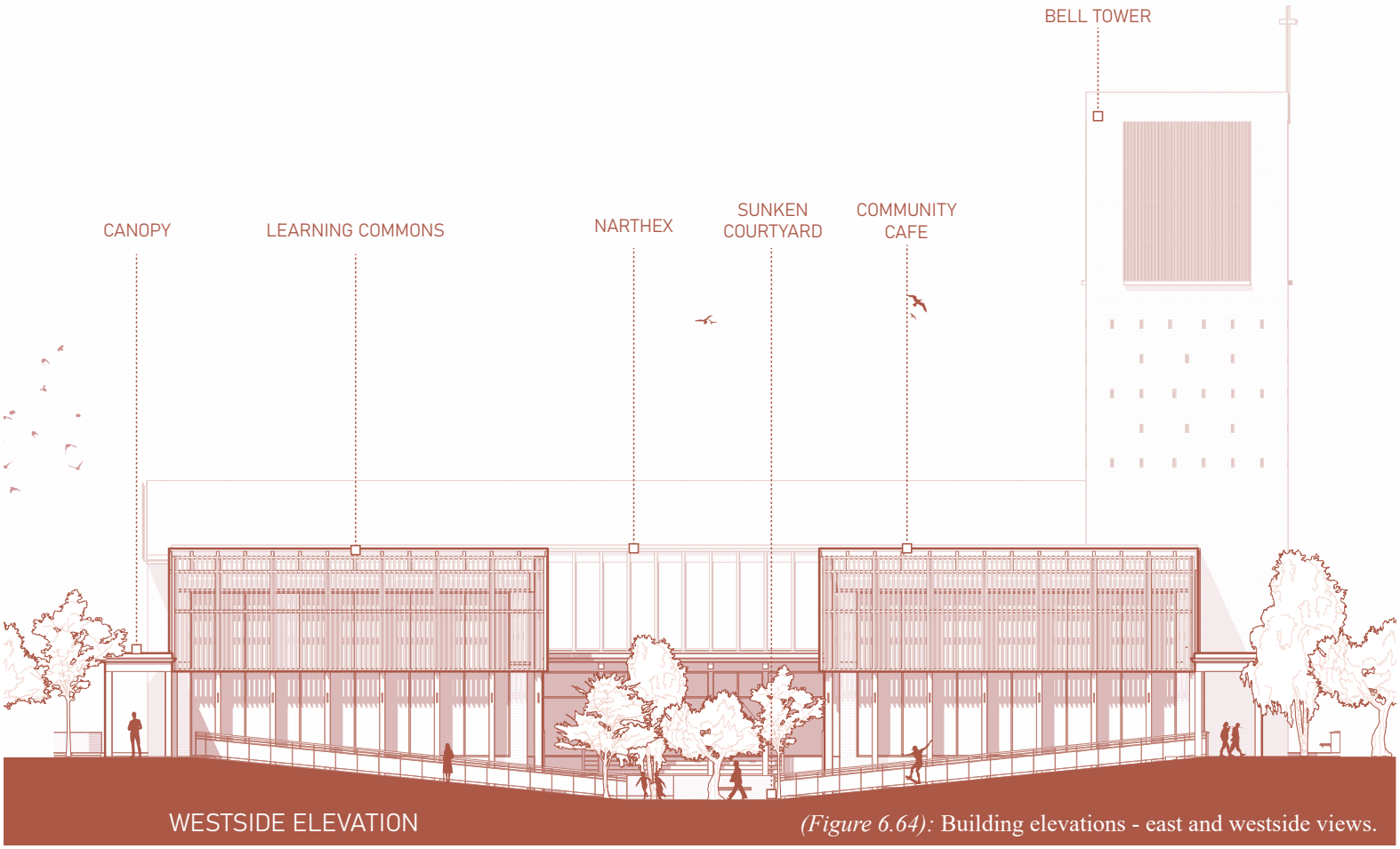
NORTHSIDE ELEVATION



SOUTHSIDE ELEVATION

(Figure 6.63): Building elevations - north and southside views.



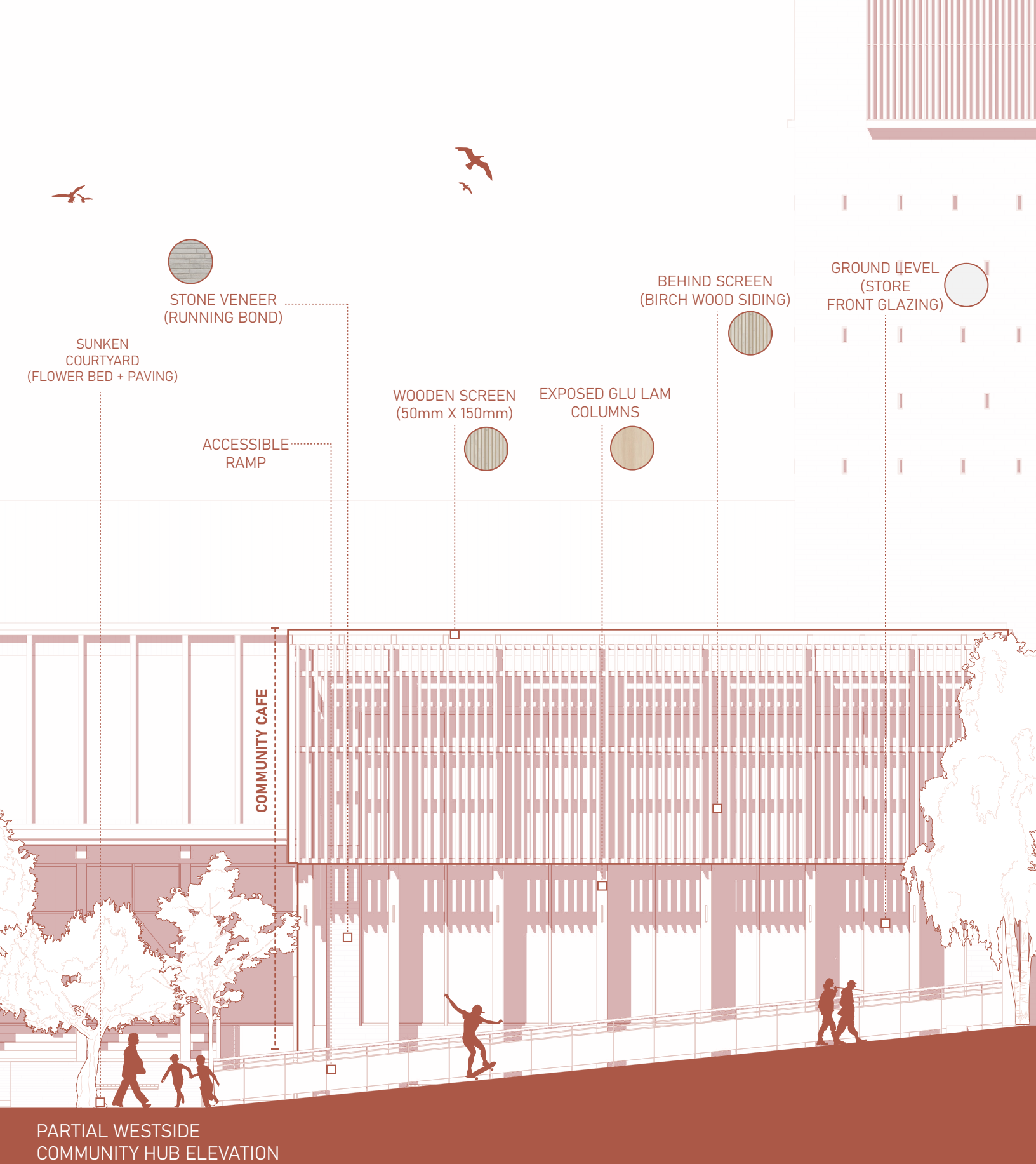


(Figure 6.64): Building elevations - east and westside views.

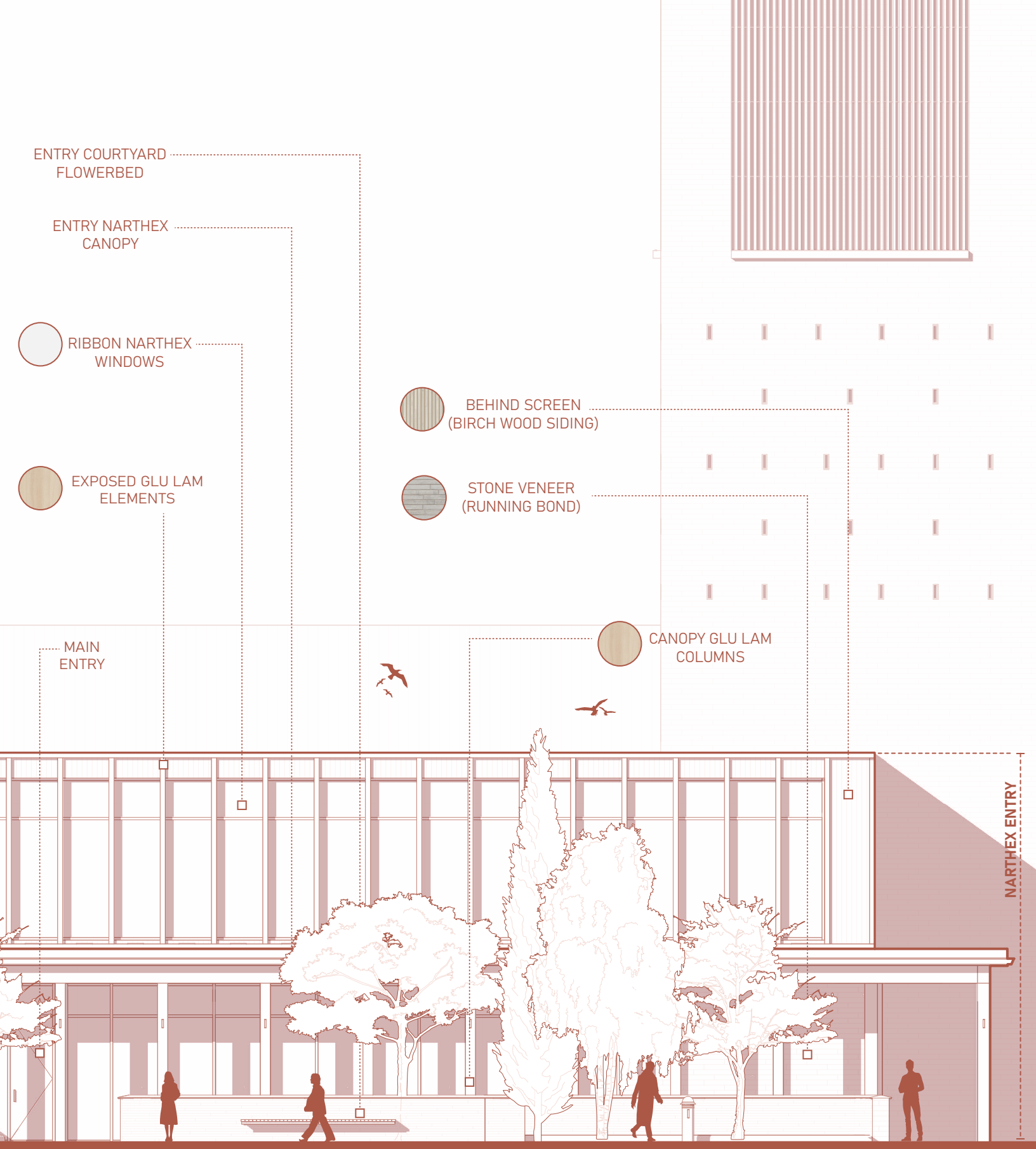
As the design grows, the church nave its other communal spaces are subtracted to generate courtyard spaces and sheltered entrances. The voids cut from each space reshape ritual and create moments of anticipation and reflection. Harold Turner's perspective on sacred space emphasizes that architecture must form a strong bond with communal accessibility and how each spiritual journey begins.[197] My strategy also aligns closely with Bachelard's The Poetics of Space through personal architectural moments such as simple corners, thresholds, and each program enclosure. [198] These become vessels of memory, creativity, and emotional depth. The layered volumes and recesses within the church prepare its visitors for spiritual preparation and to transition inward before finally moving toward the altar.

Similarly, Ozanam understood spiritual growth as a movement of purification and ascent while discovering a personal relation to our own spirituality. This theological framework becomes a vital piece to the massing process itself, as the architecture is not revealed in its entirety right away. This draws parallels to Dante's ascent through Purgatory because it requires movement and active participation. Therefore, the church transforms geometry into a theological expression of architecture, and the massing becomes a device for orientation, memory, and a path through the spiritual experience.

[197] Turner, From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Place of Worship.
[198] Bachelard, The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.

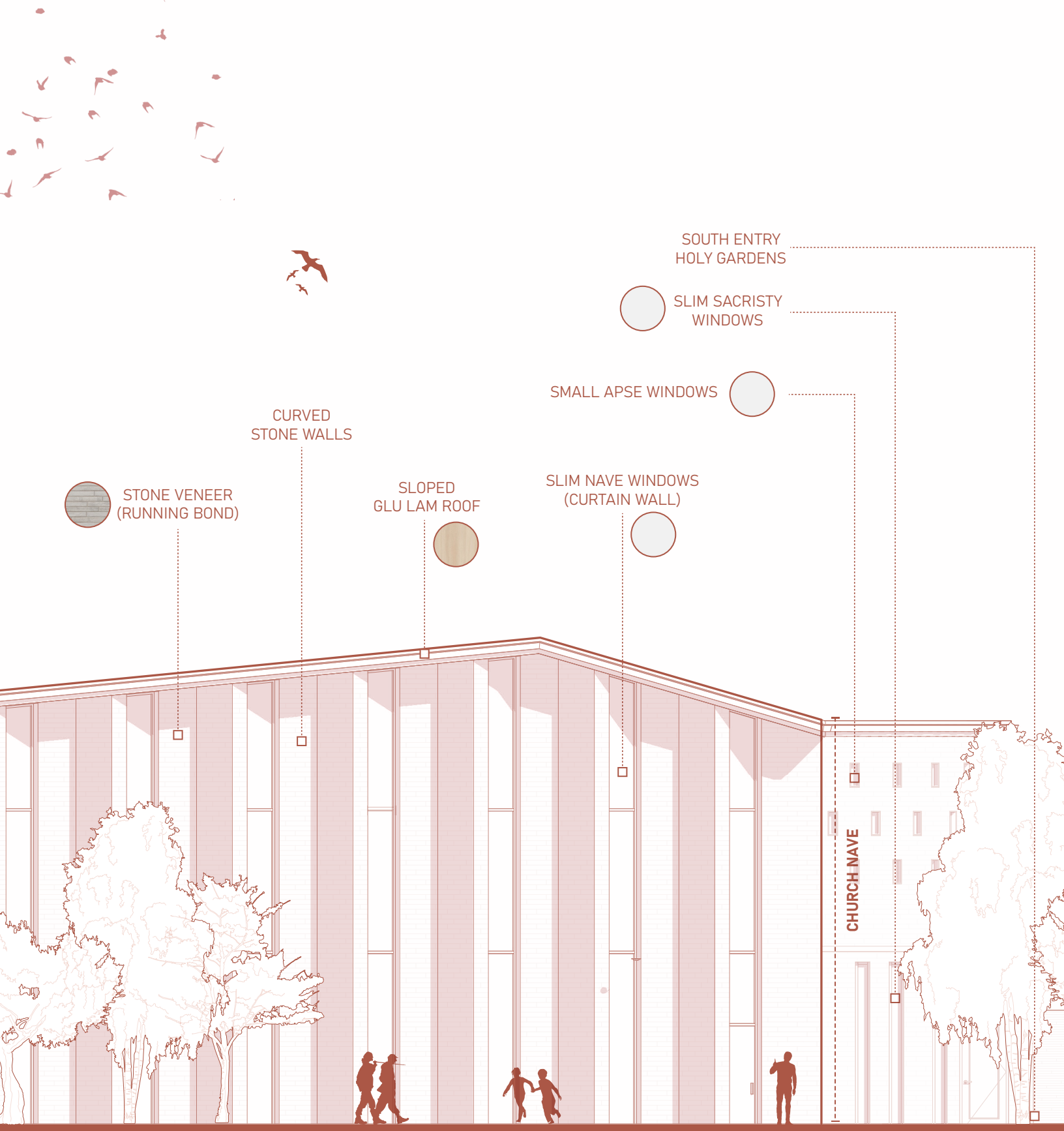


(Figure 6.65): Partial westside building elevation - community cafe elements.



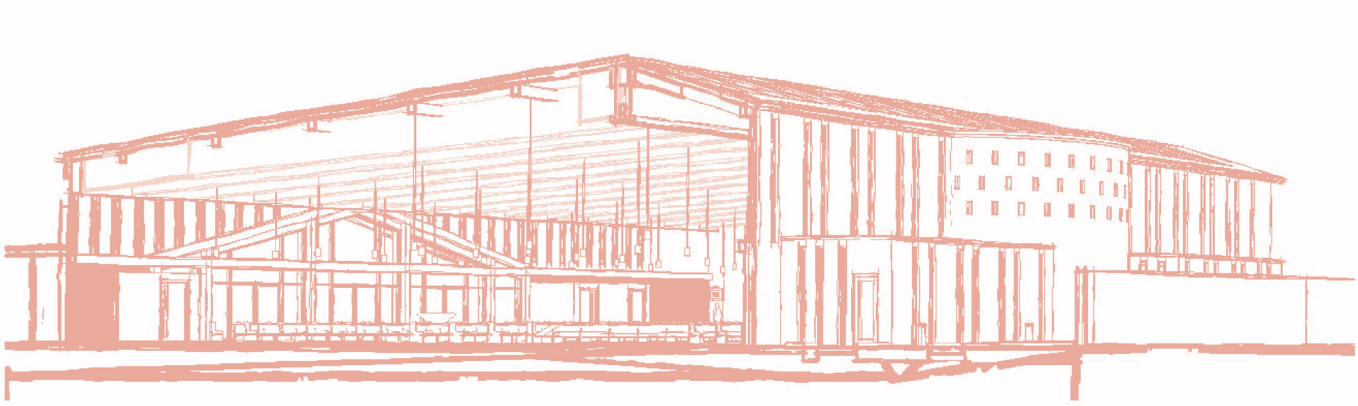
PARTIAL NARTHEX ELEVATION (WEST)

(Figure 6.66): Partial westside building elevation - narthex elements.



PARTIAL SOUTHSIDE (NAVE) ELEVATION

(Figure 6.67): Partial building southside elevation - church nave elements.



(Figure 6.68): Nave perspective section contour drawing.

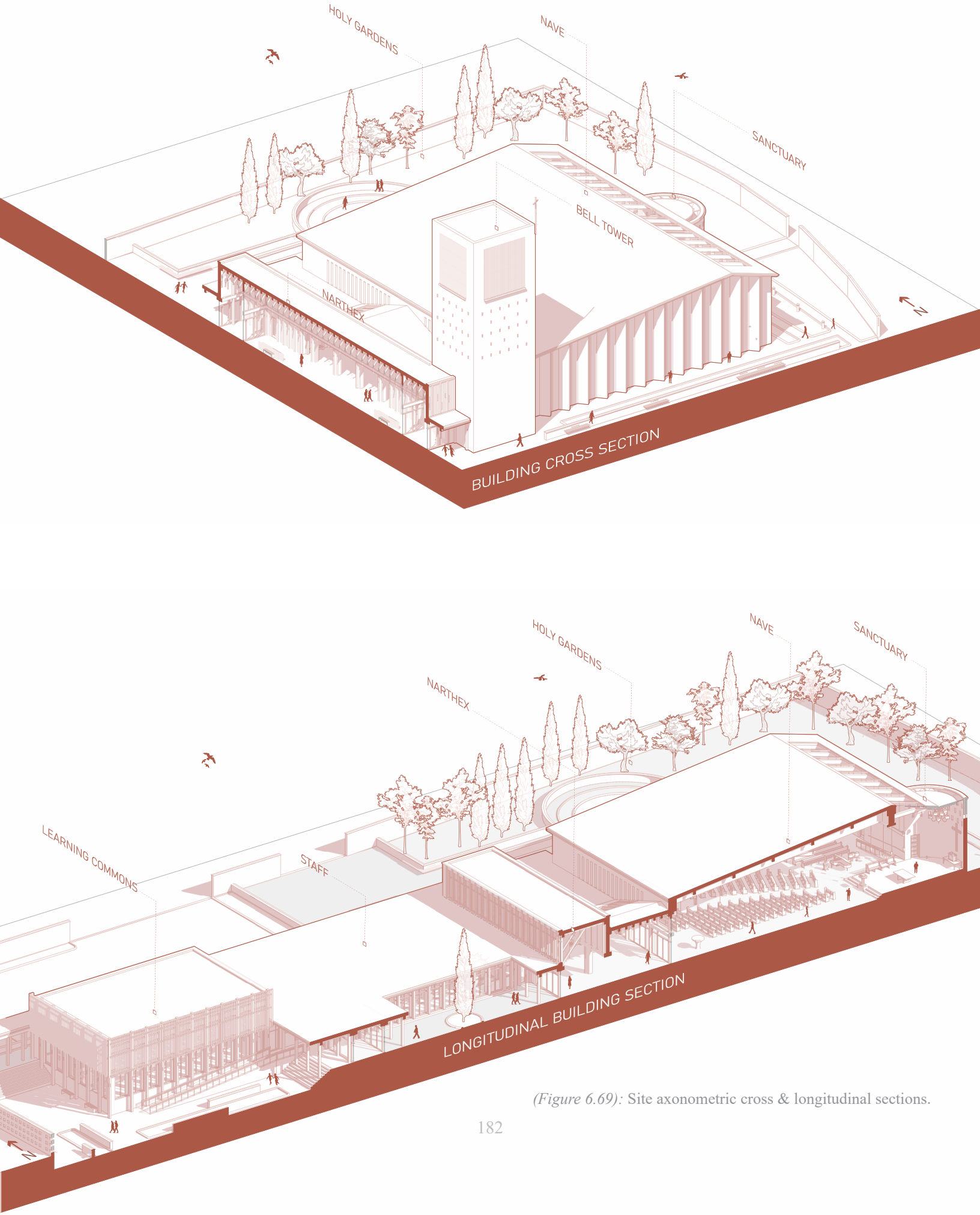
6.7 Building Section Development: Phenomenology, Memory, & Spiritual Ascent

While the floor plan was effective in establishing the key organizational and programmatic structure of the church, the section drawings showcase how the sacred experience is made spatially through its volume, light, and human movement. The sections depict the emotional and phenomenological connections to the site, and how the architecture guides the parishioners through the slow process of spiritual fulfillment. This sub-chapter frames sacredness as something experienced progressively through ascent and illumination.

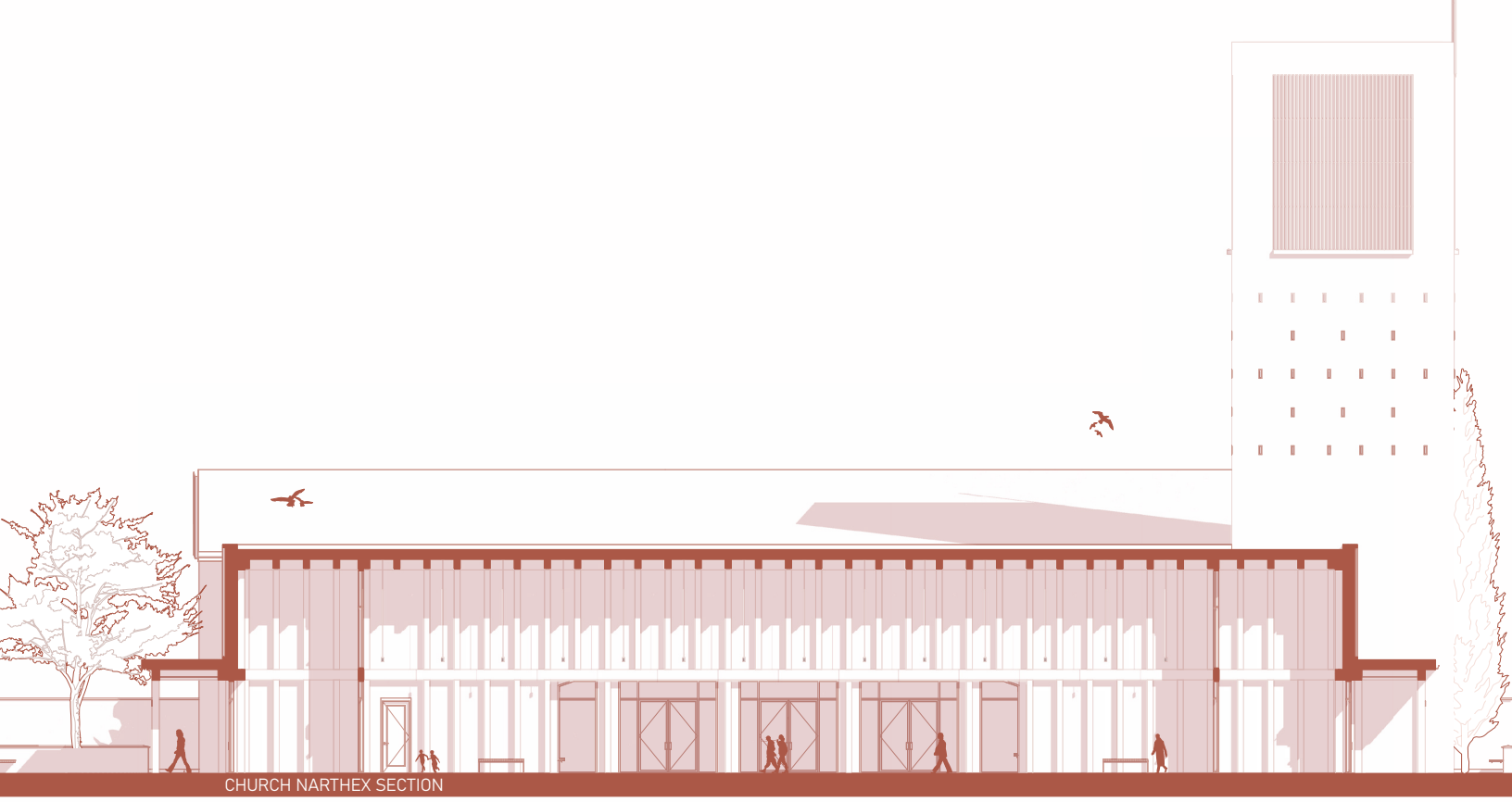
The longitudinal sections express the progression clearly as the sequence begins at the lower and more compressed entries at the narthex and secondary transitional spaces. These ceiling heights remain limited as the atmosphere is intentionally left intimate. These compressed thresholds create a sense of stillness and humility before entering the nave. As one progresses through the nave, the roof gradually rises, its spatial volume expands simultaneously, which then terminates at the sanctuary and altar. This is where the architecture reaches its greatest vertical height. This elevation difference transforms human movement through the church into a symbolic but still spiritual experience.

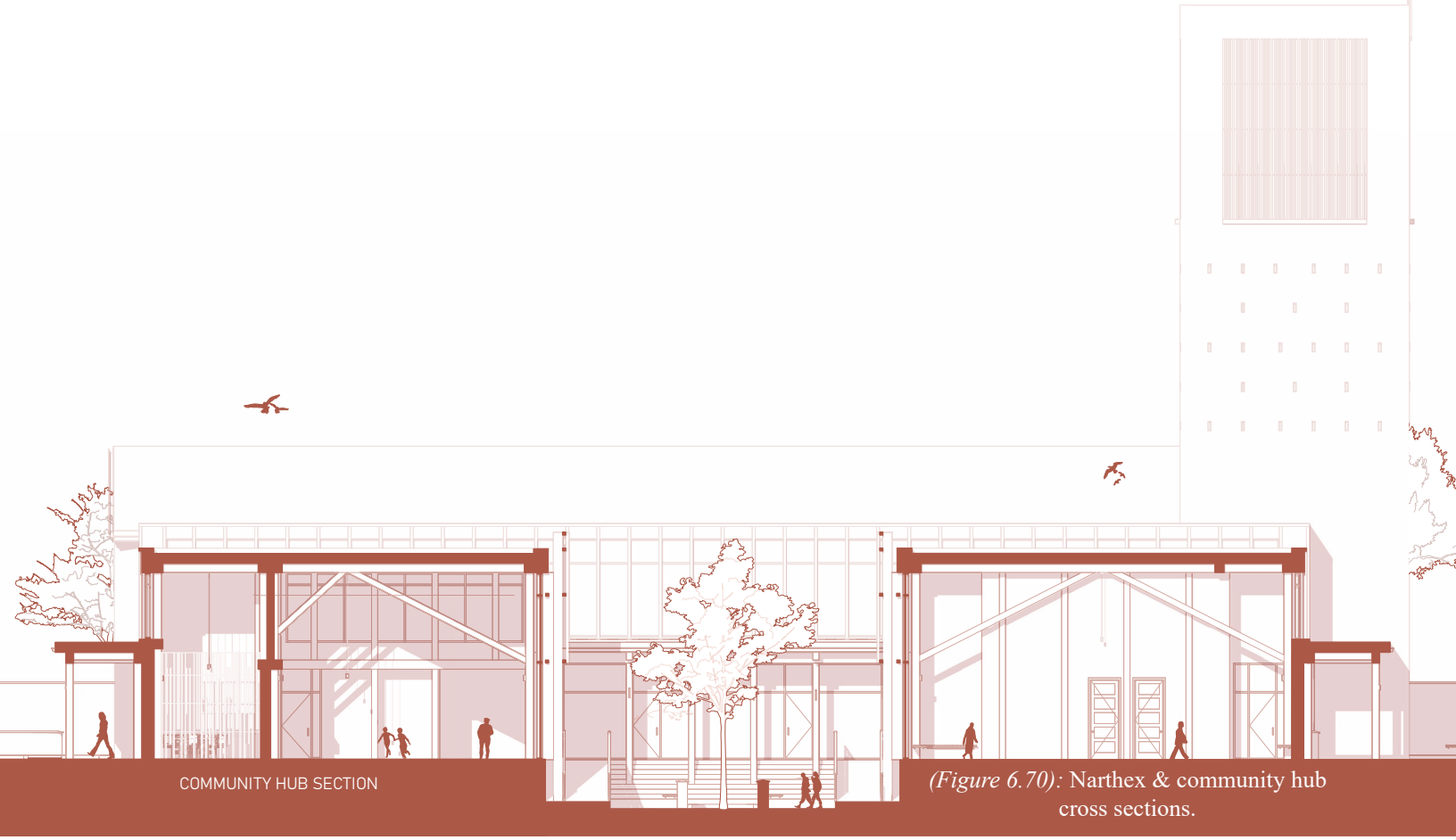
The sectional organization is directly connected to Frédéric Ozanam's understanding of Dante's Divine Comedy, especially in the movement from Inferno through Purgatorio toward Paradiso as seen in the sacred axis. Ozanam describes the spiritual transformation as a slow process of human purification and transcendence, rather than an instant destination. This concept becomes inherent within the architecture itself. [199]

[199] Dirvin, Frédéric Ozanam: A Life In Letters.



(Figure 6.69): Site axonometric cross & longitudinal sections.





(Figure 6.70): Narthex & community hub cross sections.

The weight of each threshold space corresponds to moments of reflection and preparation while ensuring that its verticality is increased. The openness of the nave as people move evokes movement toward clarity and the divine experience. The sanctuary becomes the architectural collection of a true spiritual journey as light, height, and birch wood materials strengthen the liturgy.

This was heavily influenced by the spatial strategies used in both Holy Trinity Church by Tamás Nagy and St. Gabriel's Passionist Church by Larkin Architect Limited. In each case, light and verticality are focused in the sacred center to ensure theological hierarchies are left without intense ornamentation. The proposed church uses these principles through sectional illustrations instead of the over reliance of symbolism. Height becomes an instrument that enhances reverence, which directs both the body and mind upward while still maintaining the softwood architectural language throughout the design.[200] The subsequent sections further underline how sacred atmospheres emerge through phenomenology. Juhani Pallasmaa's writings are essential in how we understand this component of a Roman Catholic church design. Pallasmaa argues that architecture must have the entire body as a part of the puzzle instead of acting only as a visual frontispiece.[201]

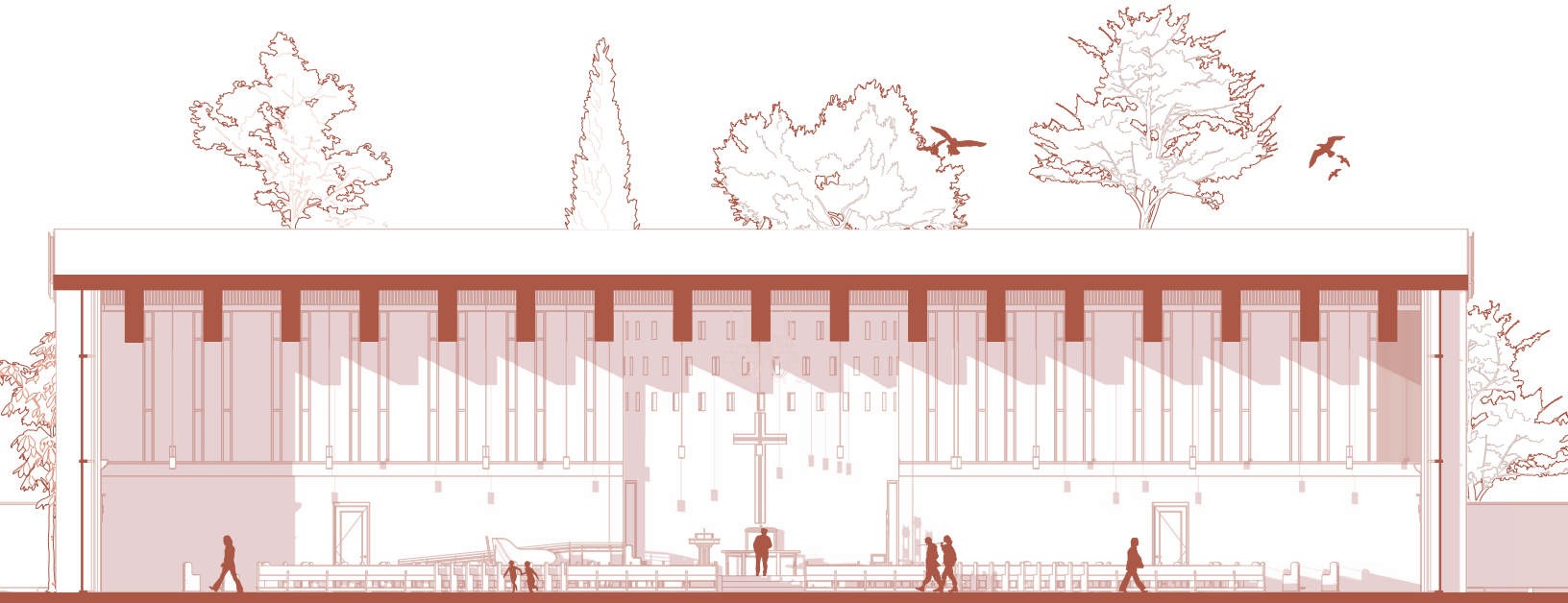
With that said, sacredness is experienced through bodily perception, how materials are felt, and surrounding acoustics. The changing ceiling heights, filtered slim window conditions, and textured surfaces shown in many of the spaces create an architecture that impacts the emotional and physical aspects of a community. Acoustics are also central to the entire building through the array of ceiling heights, which allow sound to resonate and expand during different events. For example, the lower parts of the narthex, chapel, and corridors create quieter, more intimate moments while the larger spaces evoke holy chants from heaven. This layering of acoustic pieces supports how phenomenological moments can allow for different forms of spiritual encounters to exist within the same realms of architecture.

The sections below reveal how natural light enters all areas of the church through skylights, clerestory windows, and perimeter glazing. These help us understand that illumination can never be uniform but becomes a controlled device to strengthen atmospheric depth and spiritual hierarchies. The indirect or indirect light bathes the timber ceilings and wood surfaces while allowing light to concentrate on the altar and its sacred focal points. This strategy relates to Rudolf Otto's concept of sacred experiences, which are found between the tension of revelation and mystery**.** [202]

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[200] Metszet, Holy Trinity Church, Gödöllő – Tamás Nagy; Gabriel's Parish, Toronto, Ontario.; Ontario Cast-In-Place Concrete Development Council, St. Gabriel's Passionist Church Case Study
[201] Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses.
[202] Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational - Translated by John W. Harvey.



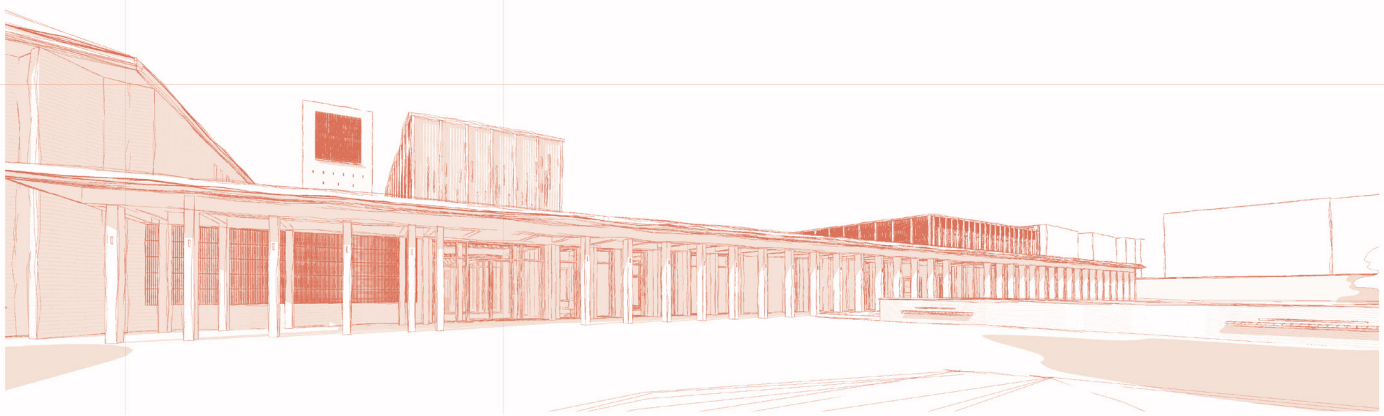


(Figure 6.71): Church nave cross & longitudinal sections

Certain spaces in the church, such as the side and back aisles, remain partially hidden in the shadows, but others glow with immense brightness to reveal intimacy and love. The spatial relations between large and smaller volumes were drawn a lot from Gaston Bachelard's view on memory and intimate space.[203] Bachelard argues that architecture is always shaped around emotional life through enclosure and retreat within a dwelling.[204] Within the nave, chapel, narthex, and community hub are spaces of introspection that partake in the larger communal experience of worship. The building is carefully balanced with intimacy, which allows both collective and personal thinking.

This connection between enclosure and openness is very important when it comes to the Cornell community. Modern suburban environments are usually controlled by typical spatial experiences, consistent ceiling conditions, or highly decorative rooms. The church was intended to resist these conditions by enabling vertical hierarchy, rhythms, and moments for silence. Proportion and atmosphere help the church reintroduce existential orientation into environments that are overshadowed by a lack of placemaking.

[203] Bachelard, The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.
[204] Bachelard, The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.



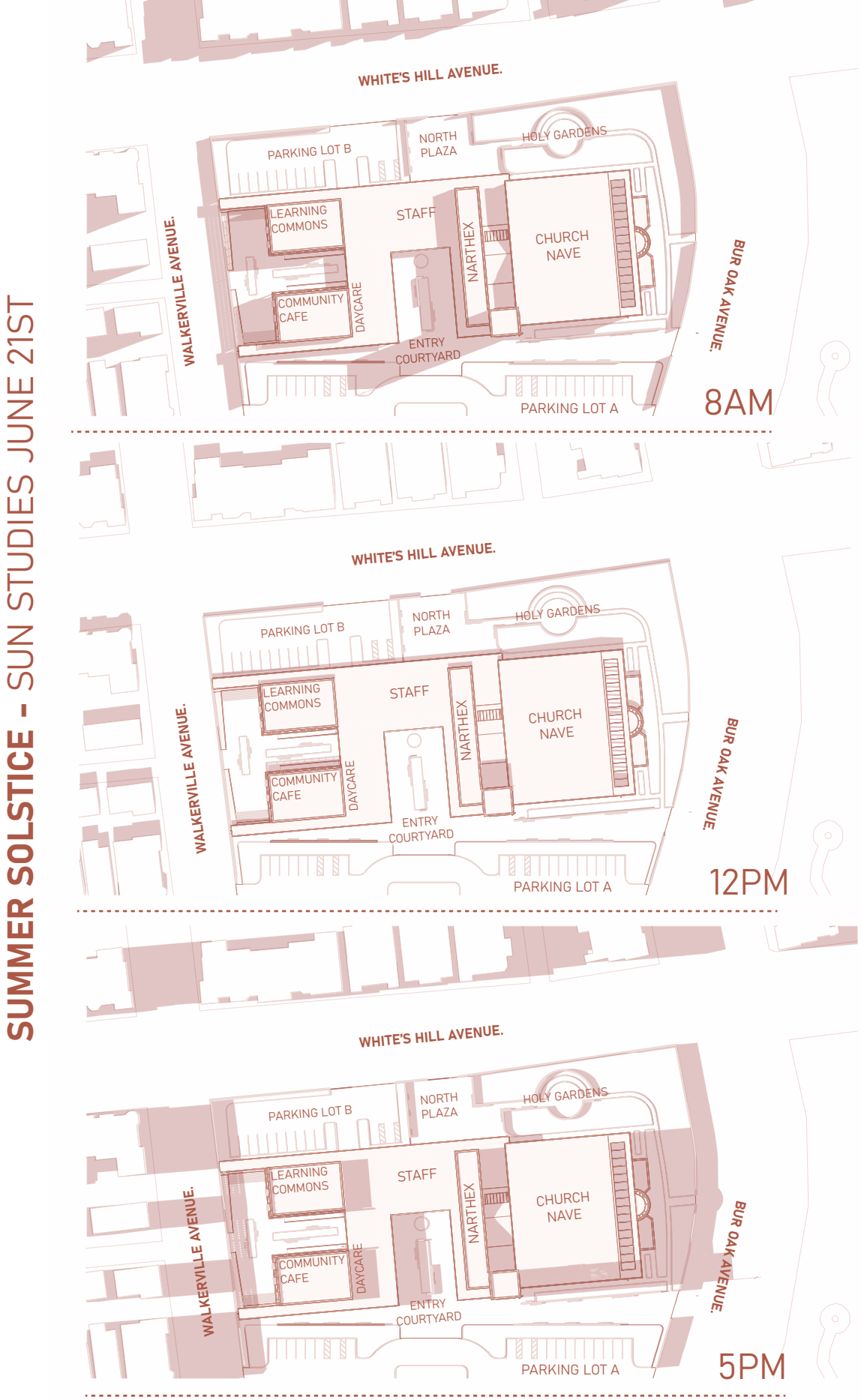
(Figure 6.72): North entry plaza contour drawing.

6.8 Light, Materiality, & The Architectural Solution

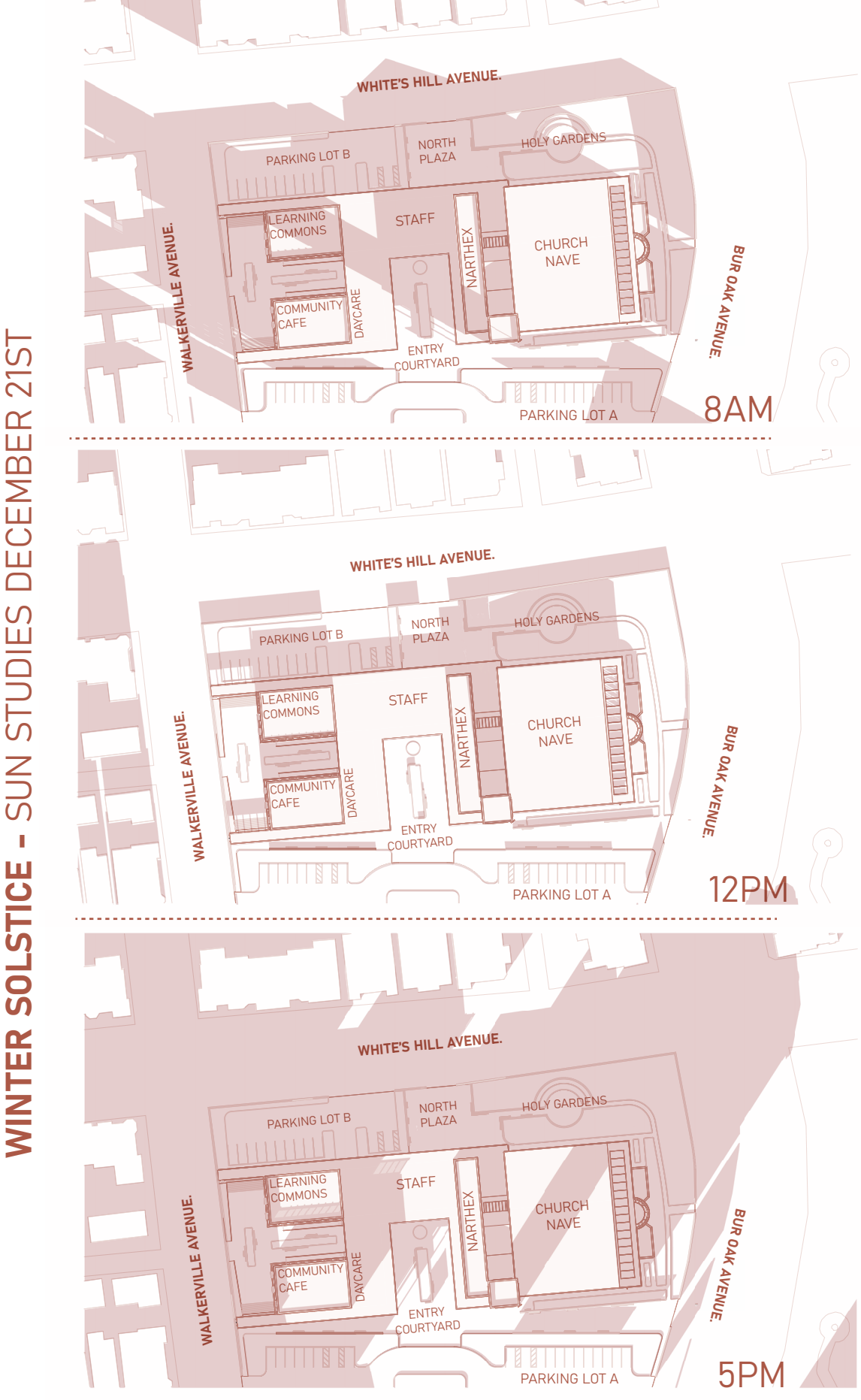
The final solution to this architectural problem culminates with the theoretical, phenomenological, and liturgical ambitions of the thesis through the use of light, materials, and how the atmosphere is shaped. At this stage of the church design, architecture now surpasses formal organization and is a vessel for memory and a collective parish. The final building express the church's goal to cultivate sacred placemaking as a cornerstone within Cornell through the focus on deep spatial experimentation. Light is at the core of the project's architectural tool. Daylight is used to shape emotions, spirituality, and the sensory depth throughout the church. The solstice light studies reveal a careful understanding of orientation to control interior spaces during different times of day. Morning light enters the nave completely through its all-eastern slim windows while its afternoon light filters across the skylights and surrounding timber structure.

Its masonry walls show the robustness of the secular world, but then become very soft with its wood interiors, such as the nave, chapel, narthex, and community hub. The masonry walls produce shifting atmospheric conditions from the exterior until interior spaces are reached. The nave and narthex use subtle pendant lights as a vessel for its pews, and allow the glu-laminated timber structure to be responsive instead of static. Hanging pendants complement the wood interiors and express soft lighting in the nave during evening masses to maintain the calmness in Paradiso. This approach is deeply rooted in Luis Fernández-Galiano's perspective of architecture as a camera that records time, energy, and ecological transformation. He suggests that meaningful buildings experience structural permanence but register the passage of time and Cornell's development.[205] Within the building's entirety, shifts in daylight allow the architecture to be active in lived experience and enable sacredness to be a cyclical event.

[205] Fernández-Galiano, "Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy."



(Figure 6.73): Summer solstice sun study drawings



(Figure 6.74): Winter solstice sun study drawings.

Emotional healing and spiritual restoration within this proposal are also witnessed through the sensory harmony. Aligned with Christopher Day's belief, light is modulated to create calmness, silence, and more focus on the church's visuals.[206] Entry and community spaces, such as the open learning commons and community cafe, maintain bright and more transparent sequences. Meanwhile, I aimed to produce an endless feeling of openness and gathering as the nave and adoration chapel increase their filtered illuminance over time.

This is seen in the nave, especially through the stained-glass skylights that surround the sanctuary. This was intentionally designed to bathe the walls where the highest point of scaredness is. All in all, each space creates its own version of emotions through indirect and direct light in conjunction with the site's orientation.

The relationship between brightness and shadow is also of immense importance within the openness of the community and sacred spaces. The surfaces in the narthex are illuminated differently from those in the entry to the nave to maintain mystery and hierarchy, which allows the architecture to feel intimate and powerful. The sacred is then experienced through visibility, but also in mystery and phases of spirituality.

Materiality contributes to these atmospheric conditions through its permeance, tactility, and sensory impact. The material palette of timber and masonry was selected for its phenomenological and symbolic ability to support long-term place attachment.

Timber brings feelings of warmth, texture, and a more focused human intimacy into spaces such as the narthex, nave, chapel, and even the community hub. A form of evangelization was used through the narratives of materiality. I wanted to raise the question of how materials can add warmth in its interiors but also contribute to an ongoing pilgrimage on the sacred axis. Its visible grains throughout its spaces answer this question by harnessing natural light from all cardinal directions to create tactile elements between the worshipper and the architecture.

[206] Day, Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment.

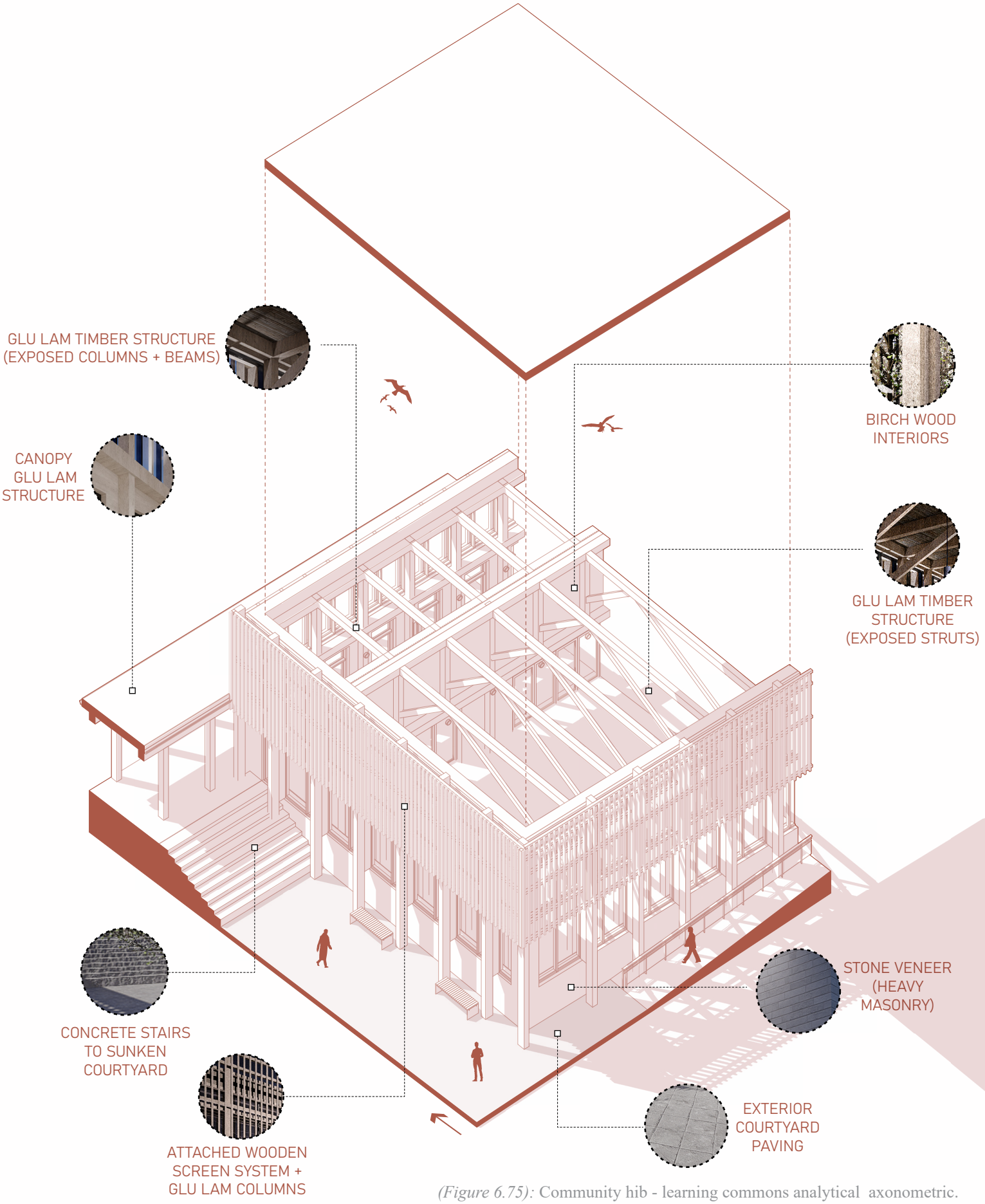
On the other hand, the exterior masonry elements provide more weight, solidity, and permanence, which expresses the physical and symbolic nature of the subrua landscape. It adds stillness, structural clarity, and more subdues monumentality without depending on large decoration.

Juhani Pallasmaa's phenomenological theory was crucial to the simple material strategy. Pallasmaa argues that fulfilling architecture must engage the haptic sense and enable its visitors to experience the building's bodily elements rather than its visuals.[207] Within the nave itself, material wood and dry wall surfaces are designed to be felt through closeness, texture, acoustics, and light properties. Sacredness here is then unleashed in a multisensory way for complete engagement within Paradiso. Every space's warm timber beams, purlins, deck, and partitioned wood walls contribute to inner reflection and the full embodied experience of a pilgrimage.

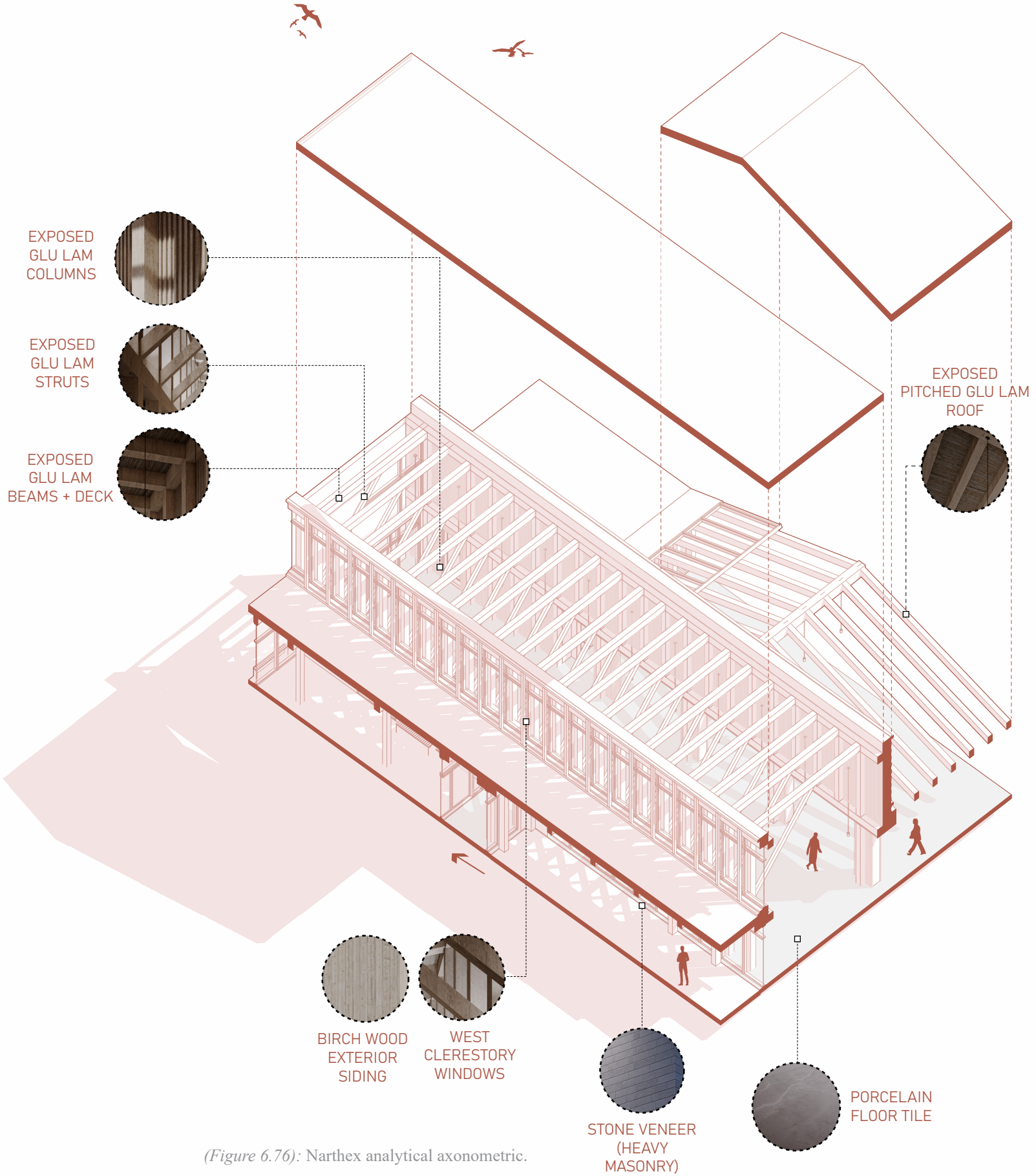
The emphasis on spiritual permanence also addresses the key concerns through the thesis literature, which is the loss of continuity and the connection to modern communities. Edward Relph's view on placelessness becomes effective in this case as many suburban communities prioritize temporary construction or efficiency over a long-lasting identity.[208] My proposed church neglects this thinking through its construction and authentic, warm materials. I wanted a design that ages with dignity and collects over time to create more meaning throughout all generations. The axonometric drawings below depict it at a high level

Dolores Hayden's writings on public memory were critical when analyzing the philosophy of the site. I agree with Hayden's beliefs that architecture becomes culturally important when it is supported by the continuous shared experiences over time.[209]

[207] Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses.
[208] Relph, Place and Placelessness.
[209] Hayden, The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History.



(Figure 6.75): Community hib - learning commons analytical axonometric.



(Figure 6.76): Narthex analytical axonometric.

My proposed community hub and shared spaces operate within a realm that forms placemaking through frameworks for collective memory. The profane offers a sense of place and belonging with its amenities, but also a warm and welcoming atmosphere. In terms of the sacred nave, baptisms, funerals, weddings, feast days, and weekly masses gradually collect meaning and significance into the building and its surrounding holy gardens.

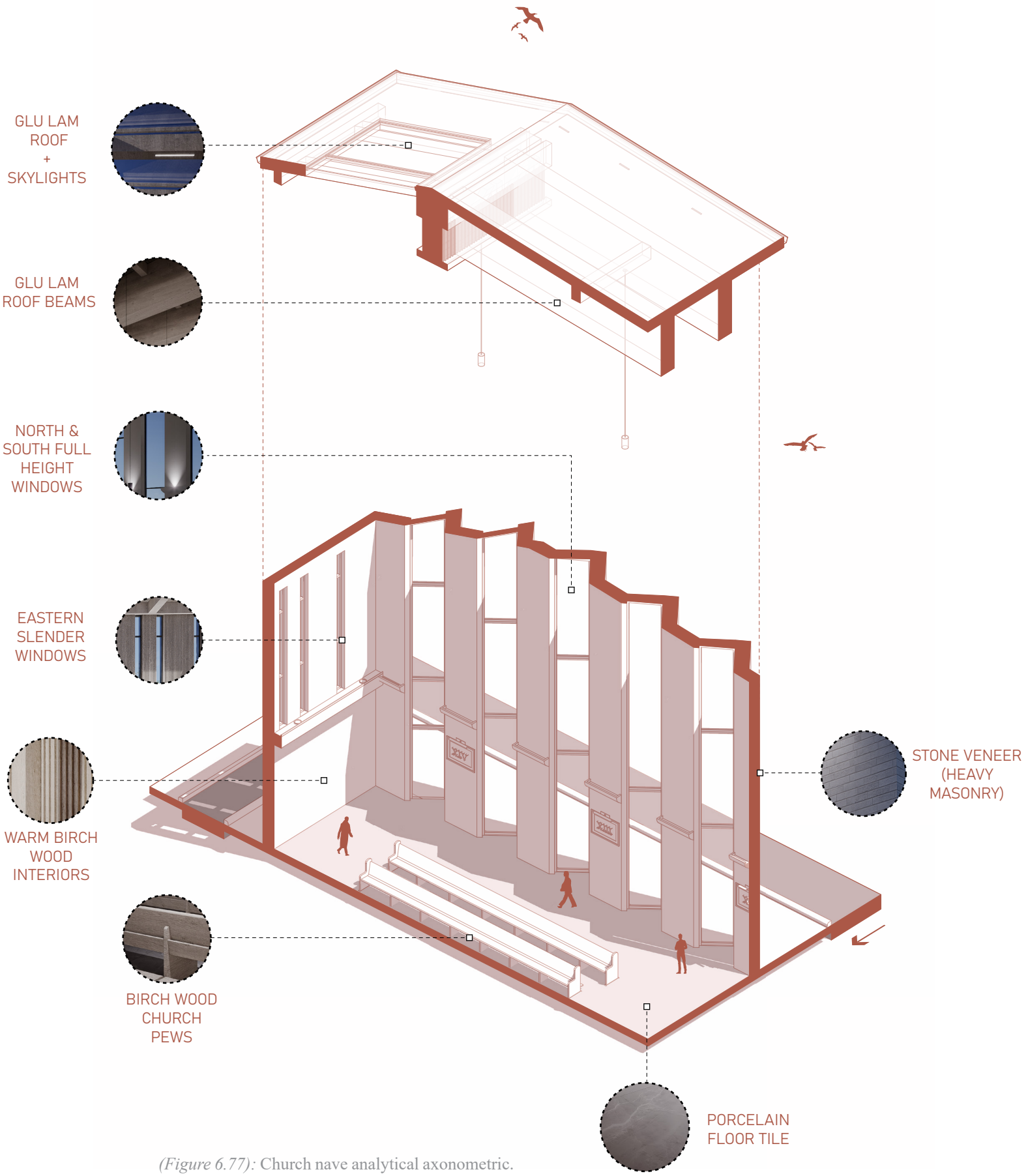
Likewise, Sanjay Mazumdar and Shampa Mazumdar's studies contributed to my proposal by developing each space through constant ritual involvement within a growing environment.[210] For the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish, this permanence has a lot of weight, and for years, this parish has worshipped in a high school cafeteria.

Thus, the proposed church tackles this missing component by creating a permanent sacred home fixed in culture, Catholic ritual, intentional use of materials, and communal programs.

The final solution embodies an intellectual and spiritual depiction of Frédéric Ozanam within Cornell. With principles rooted in education, lay holiness, and charity, the creation of a secular and sacred space is imagined in built form.

The church not only maintains this idea in its liturgical spaces but also through the integration of a learning commons, daycare, community café, and holy gardens. Therefore, sacred architecture in this proposal is understood as a lived social and spiritual framework and becomes a member in everyday life.

[210] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."



(Figure 6.77): Church nave analytical axonometric.

Chapter Seven
Closing Thoughts

7.1 Reclaiming Sacred Architecture within the Suburban World

This thesis started with understanding how a church in suburbia can face the ongoing crisis of churches and their purpose in modern contexts. Churches are not simply architectural spaces but a matter of existentialism. While worship communities continue to grow, such as the Cornell community, the spaces are typically temporary, fragmented, and disconnected from the deeper spatial experiences that have historically allowed them to flourish. Many conditions have accommodated sacredness instead of something that is spatially ingrained in the community's life. The proposed church for Blessed Frédéric Ozanam responds to this condition by reframing sacred architecture as a long-lasting civic, spiritual, and phenomenological backdrop within suburbia. Instead of copying historical styles or relying solely on nostalgia, the project showcases that sacredness can be found through sequences, material permanence, and atmospheric rootedness. Therefore, this thesis argues that the future of sacred architecture must not rely on stylistic imitation of the past but on reforming architecture's capacity to gather and transform the human experience of a certain place.

At the core of my exploration is the recognition that sacred architecture has functioned as more than an enclosure for worship in the past. Churches were once seen as immense civic centers for identity, collective memory, and symbolism within a structured neighbourhood identity. However, modern suburban development patterns have shown that standardized housing, infrastructure, and commercial-based planning models have contributed to what Edward Relph deems as placelessness.[211] These environments lose symbolic importance and existential weight. Within these circumstances, churches are frequently reduced to large halls, converted auditoriums, or temporary institutional spaces that aim to support liturgy but ultimately fail to cultivate enduring sacred presence.

The years of worship at the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Pairsh within a school cafeteria became a crucial piece to the thesis because it revealed the limitations of temporary sacred space. Although its community and faith remained very strong, the clear absence of primary architecture restricts opportunities for material continuity, ritual repetition, and collectiveness. This condition expresses the concerns raised by Sanjay and Shampa Mazumdar regarding the relationship between place attachment and the repetition of ritual.[212] Sacred identity grows slowly and develops gradually through constant occupation of important environments. If a space is lacking permanence, spiritual continuity becomes vulnerable to interruption.

[211] Relph, Place and Placelessness.
[212] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places."

The proposed church, therefore, arises as an architectural tool to provide permanence itself. The project does not achieve monumentality but seeks to understand permanence as an ethical and spiritual condition. Through robust stone materials, a careful use of procession, controlled light, and community integration, attempts to restore the long-term goal of sacred architecture as a long-term cultural framework within everyday suburban life.

7.2 Frédéric Ozanam & the Moral Responsibility of Architecture

The life and overall legacy of Frédéric Ozanam became a foundational piece to the development of this thesis because they provided a new outlook on faith, intellect, charity, and the responsibilities of its inhabitants. Ozanam's view of Catholicism was never missing from lived human experience. His academic thesis on Dante's divine comedy, his perspective on social justice, and his work with the less fortunate reflect a strong belief that spiritual life must remain intact with community and humanity.[213]

This connection has been a key driver for the architectural direction of my proposal. The church was never intended to be a detached monument or to become separate from the realities of suburban experiences. Instead, its main objective was to define spaces where liturgy, gathering, education, and charity can coexist within a collective architectural backdrop. The community café, educational learning spaces, daycare, and holy gardens offer a new perspective on the design as Ozanam's legacy sees faith as a tool for action and encounter.

Ozanam's ideas on Dante's Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso became central to the project's parti and spatial organization. In the readings of Dante, spiritual growth unfolds gradually through the struggles of morality and cleansing.[214] This theological framework informed the progression and sequence of the church. Movement is so crucial as the project becomes a gradual transition from the profane realm towards spaces of gathering and spiritual transcendence. For example, several thresholds, courtyards, corridors, filtered northern light, and growing volumes add to the never-ending sacred experiences.

The church is not only a representation of theology, but it also evokes an architectural feeling that takes its visitors on a spiritual journey. From this lens, architecture functions phenomenologically, shaping human awareness, emotions, rituals, and traditions over a given time.

[213] Slattery, Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outlin
[214] Slattery, Blessed Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Outline.

7.3 Phenomenology, Atmospheric Richness, and Sacred Experiences

One of my main goals of this project was the emphasis on phenomenology and atmosphere as key critical elements of sacred placemaking. Modern architecture often places visual merit and efficiency over other components, yet sacred architecture still requires an in-depth engagement with the sensorial and emotional aspects of its spaces. Juhani Pallasmaa, Gaston Bachelard, Christopher Day, and Rudolf Otto together become very essential in creating this framework.

Pallasmaa argues that meaningful architecture must engage with the entire human body instead of only prioritizing vision. Sacredness is felt and experienced through acoustic depth, tactility, temperature, weight, and how the human body moves from one point to the next.[215] Throughout the entire project, these qualities help inform the development of building sections, material choices, and the conditions of its atmosphere. Notable timber surfaces were chosen for warmth and intimacy, while its masonry evokes silence and stillness. Light was carefully integrated for filtered northern light and was controlled to avoid visual excess while maintaining the reverence and mystery of its interior spaces.

Bachelard's views on memory and intimate space further strengthen the importance of spatial experiences layered over time.[216] The smaller chapel, side aisles, courtyards, and the garden all form moments of emotional safety within the collective worship environment. Sacredness is not generated only through monument scale but also through the unified harmony of intimacy and spiritual transcendence.

Christopher Day adds to this idea that architecture can heal, which was also vital for the objectives of the final church design.[217] The proposal was not seen as a place of ritual agreement but an environment that restores the emotional weight of a sacred church nave. In a suburban realm that is dominated by movement, visuals, and fragmentation, the church brings forth stillness, silence, and thoughtful interior atmospheres. I wanted to argue that these qualities are necessary for communal growth and should always be included in sacred design.

[215] Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses
[216] Bachelard, The Poetics of Space Translated by Maria Jolas.
[217] Day, Spirit & Place: Healing Our Environment, Healing Environment.

7.4 Sacred Placemaking & the Future Role of the Suburban Church

In the end, this thesis positions the concept of sacred architecture at the forefront of future suburban growth and evolution. As populations in neighbourhoods rise, so does it culture and diversity. This calls for meaningful spaces that are important for its congregations and community users. Yet these spaces can't completely rely on functional programs and accommodation. This design fosters belonging, memory, orientation, and communal identities.

My proposed church reveals that sacred placemaking can still happen in suburban conditions where architecture can prioritize experiential depth over aesthetics and permanence over efficiency of spaces. Through procession, phenomenology, and atmosphere theology, my project seeks to revitalize architecture's historical role of being a community anchor.

Most importantly, this thesis does not claim to be a return to historical aesthetics or function of Gothic cathedrals but to be the future of essential spatial principles that can produce hierarchy, orientation, silence, and light.

The Blessed Frédéric Ozanam Parish then becomes both a design proposal and a wider argument for the continued practice of sacred architecture in modern society. It demonstrates that even in growing, diverse suburban landscapes, it's often associated with fragmentation and a lack of place. But my version of architecture aimed to possess an ability to foster collective memory, spirituality, and transcendence.

7.5 Final Reflection

Sacred architecture has always maintained the duality between permanence and transformation. While rituals and traditions change over time, the need for spaces that guide human life in a way that remains constant. This thesis has argued that sacred architecture endures and maintains its capacity to control the relationship between everyday life and spiritual transcendence.

My proposed church aimed to embody this notion with theological principles, phenomenology, material choice, and collectivism. It seeks to produce a building that is felt completely through worship but also maintains a spiritual framework that can further support future generations of parishioners in its surrounding community.

In many ways, the project expresses Frédéric Ozanam's own legacy, where most of his faith beliefs align with his intellectual, social, and human realities of time, without neglecting the spiritual depth. Likewise, this thesis explores contemporary sacred architecture as a response to the true realities of suburban life while sustaining reverence, mystery, and its spiritual placemaking.

The sacred is therefore not abandoned or lost within suburbia but must be maintained through architecture that can slow the body, orient views, foster memory, and gather the community once again.

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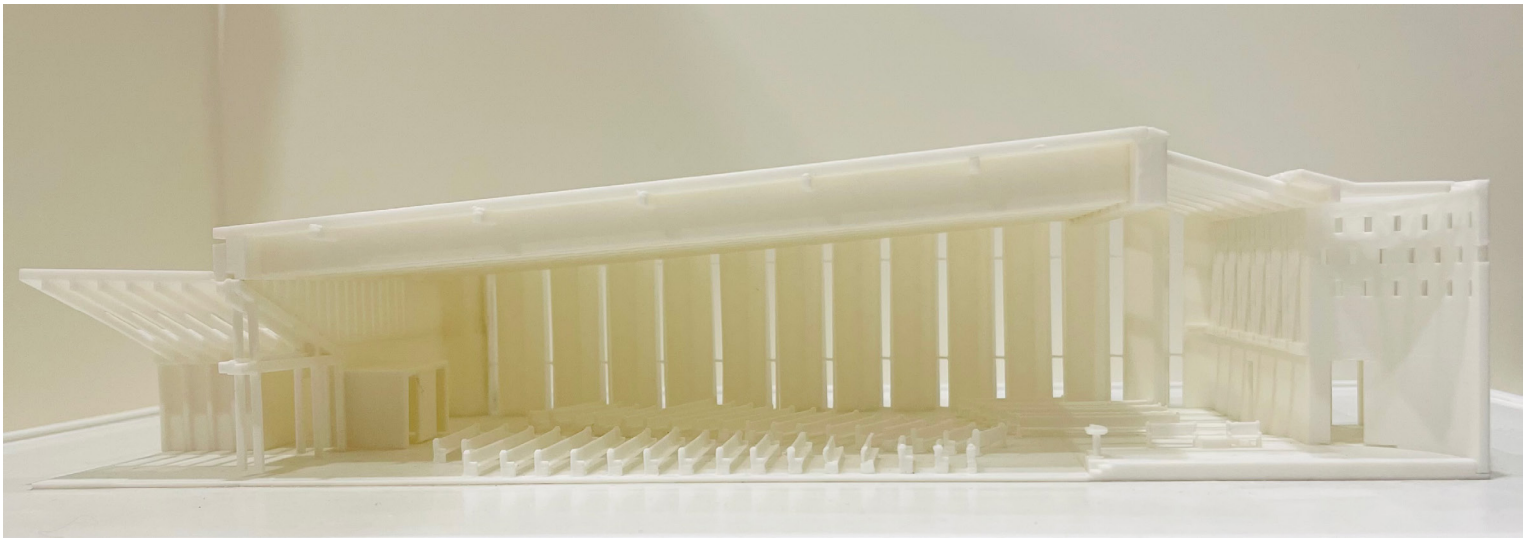
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Appendix



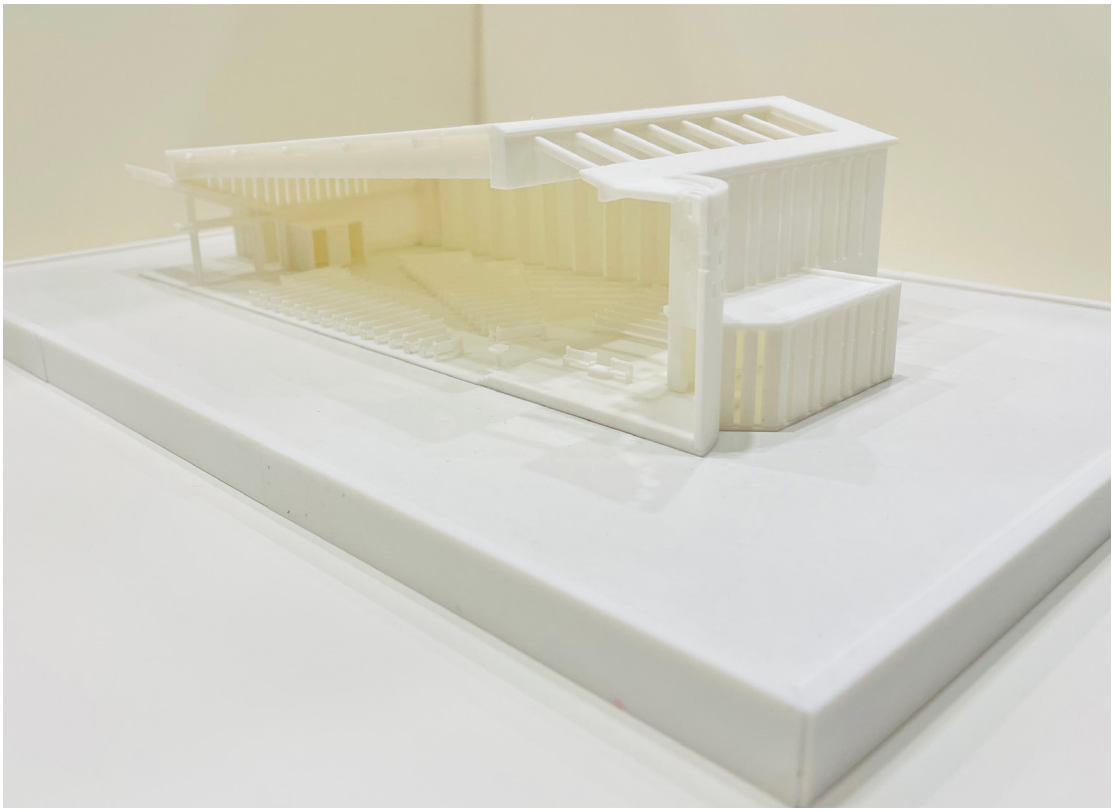
August 7th 2026

1:125 Sectional 3-D Printed model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Church ***(looking north)****.*



August 7th 2026

1:125 Sectional 3-D Printed model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Church ***(north elevation)****.*



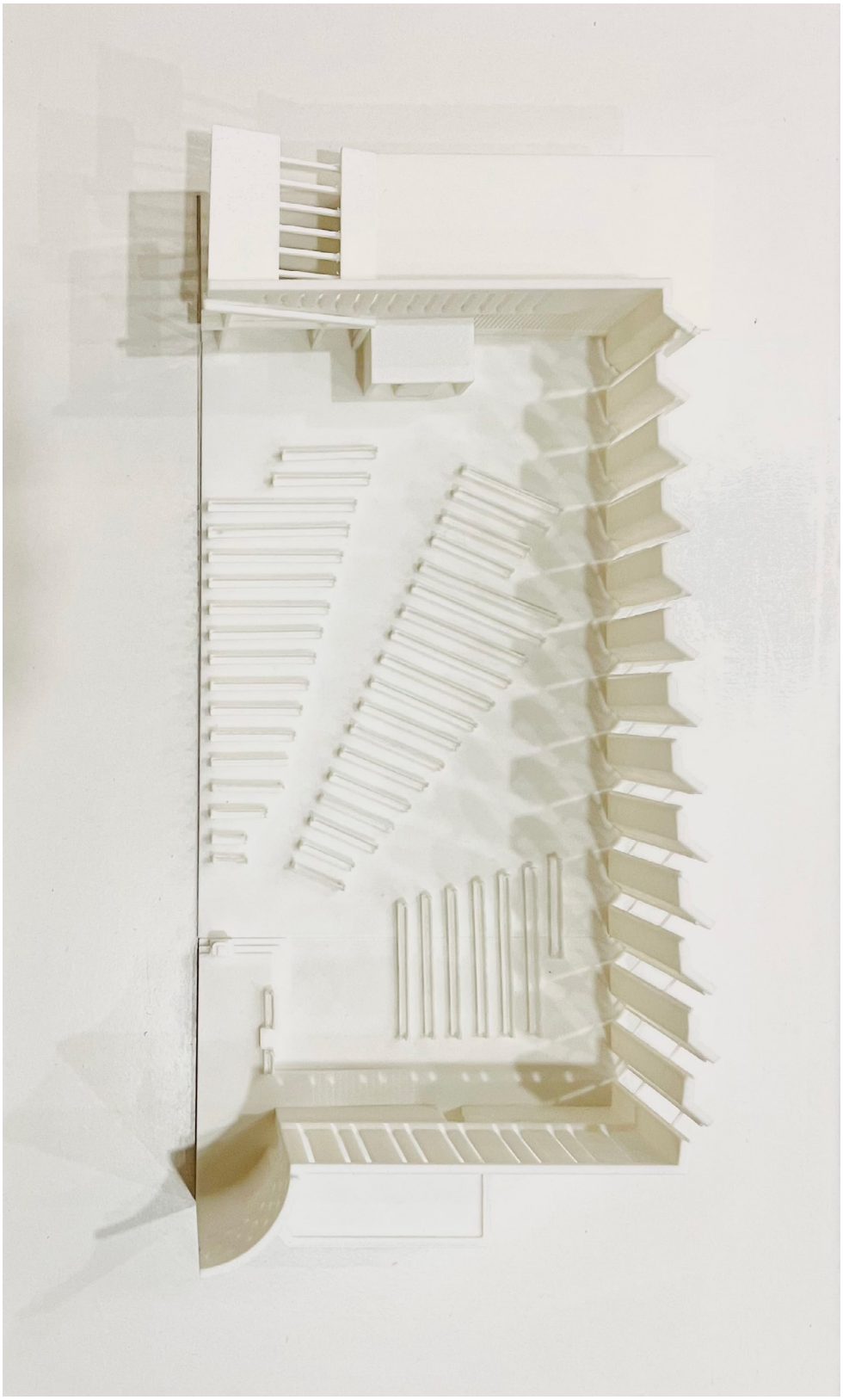
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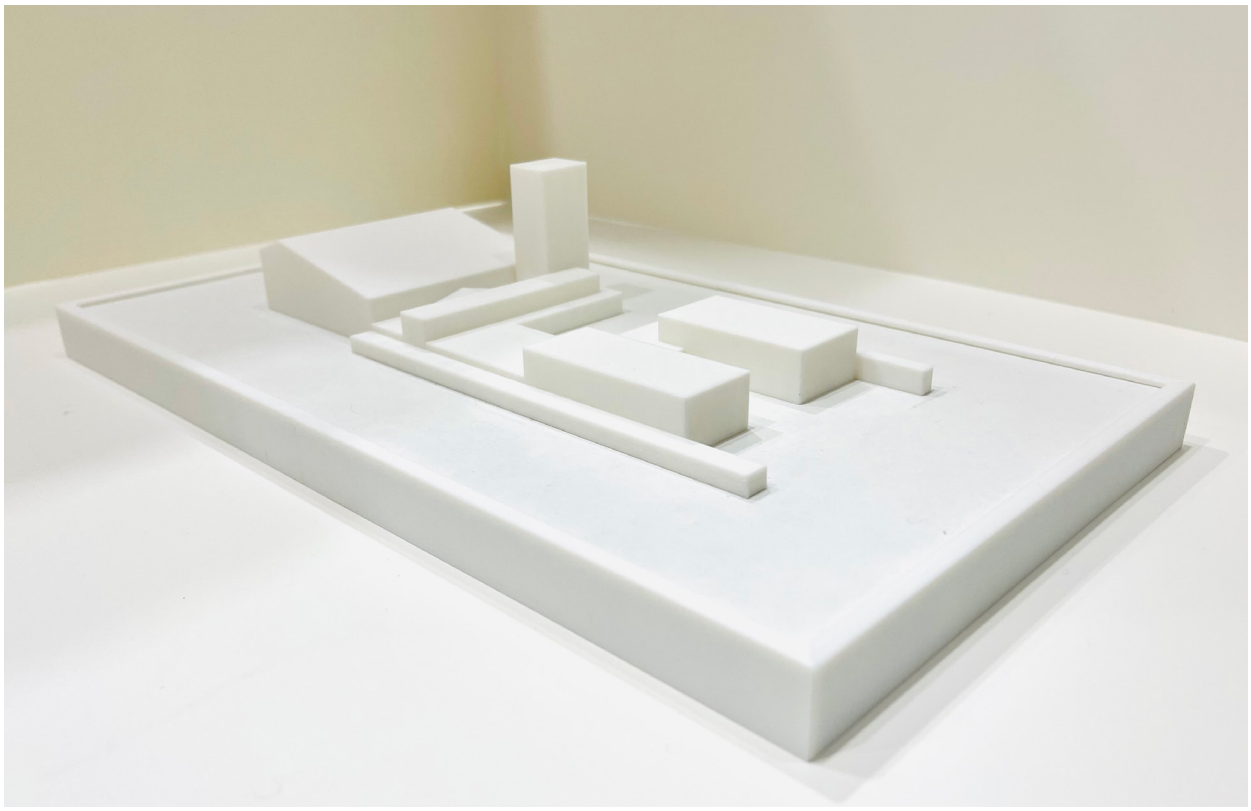
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1:125 Sectional 3-D Printed model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Church ***(north east perspective)****.*



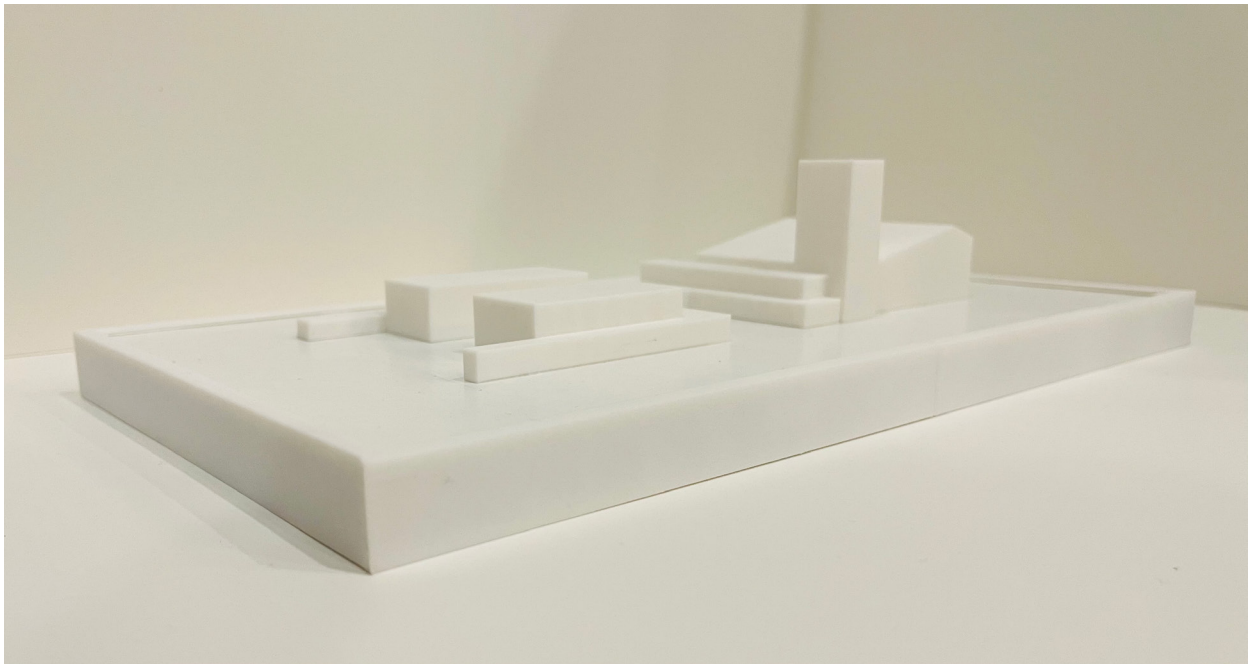
August 7th 2026 - detached roof

1:125 Sectional 3-D Printed model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam Church ***(bird's eye view or plan).***



August 9th 2026

1:1000 3-D Printed massing model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam church ***(north west perspective).***



August 9th 2026

1:1000 3-D Printed massing model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam church ***(south west perspective).***



August 9th 2026

1:1000 3-D Printed massing model of the Blessed Frederic Ozanam church ***(bird's eye view & plan).***

Glossary

Adoration

A form of prayer and devotion in which the congregation honours and reflects the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Altar

The central or main table of a catholic church in which the Eucharist is celebrated during a Mass.

Altar Server

Can be described as a lay minister to assist the priest and deacon during the celebration of Mass.

Associate Priest

A priest assigned to a parish to assist the priest in pastoral, liturgical, and administrative responsibilities.

Ambo

A raised platform within the church nave, on which scripture readings, the gospel, and homilies are read during the liturgy.

Apse

A semicircular form is typically located at the eastern point of the church and houses the altar and sanctuary.

Aisle

A passage running alongside the nave and the aisle helps with movement throughout the church.

Axis Mundi

A symbolic vertical relationship between heaven and earth. This is often seen in sacred architecture through towers, spires, and even central spatial elements.

Baptismal Font

A basin or vessel containing holy water used for the sacrament of Baptism. **Baptism** is the initiation stage (first sacrament) for a new Christian joining the faith.

Bell Tower

A tower intended to house church bells, traditionally serving as a visual piece with a call to worship.

Beatification

Is the recognition by the Pope that a deceased person lived a holy life and is given the title “blessed”. This allows limited public veneration and serves as a step towards becoming a saint.

Chapel

A small place of worship or reflection that functions independently of the larger church nave.

Charism

A distinct spiritual mission or identity is often associated with a religious group or individual. In this thesis, the term refers to the Vincentian values embodied by the Blessed Frédéric Ozanam parish.

Choir

A designated area in a church nave for singers and musicians who lead the congregation in worship and liturgical music**.**

Collective Memory

The shared experiences of people, events, traditions, and the rituals of a community. It is typically expressed through cultural practices and its physical surroundings.

Confessional

A private space within the church nave where the sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) is celebrated between a penitent and a priest. **Reconciliation** is the act of confessing all sins to God and asking for forgiveness.

Credence Table

A small table located within the sanctuary that is used to hold the liturgical vessels before and during a liturgical celebration of Eucharist.

Christianity

Monotheistic religion centered on the life, journey, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Community Hub

A gathering place that impacts and supports the social, cultural, educational, and spiritual experiences and goes beyond a single function.

Crucifix

A cross that bears the image of Jesus Christ, which is the central symbol of Christianity and Christ’s long-lasting sacrifice.

Dante's Forest (Dark Wood)

The forest in which Dante begins the Divine Comedy symbolizes spiritual confusion and the beginning of a transformative moral journey.

Divine

This reflects God, sacred realities, and a spiritual transcendence beyond the human world.

Garden of Eden

The paradisal garden seen in the book of Genesis (the first book of the bible). This represents innocence, harmony, and the original sin of humans.

Genius Loci

A Latin term that translates to "spirit of place" and the unique character or feeling of a location.

Holy Communion

A key sacrament of the Catholic Church in which its congregation can receive the Eucharist. The **Eucharist** is the sacrament in which bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which is then received by the congregation during the Mass.

Inculturation

The adjustment of religious practices to other local contexts while still maintaining the key theological meanings.

Inferno

The first element of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. This depicts the journey through Hell and symbolizes the embrace of sin and moral disorder.

Liturgy

This can be described as the formal public worship and rituals of the Catholic Church, especially the celebration of Mass.

Mass

The main act of worship in the Roman Catholic Church. It honors the celebration of the Eucharist. The mass includes prayers, scripture readings, the homily, and receiving communion.

Narthex

The entrance hall or transitional space is located at the front of the church. It also functions as a threshold between the secular and sacred realms.

Nave

The main congregational space of the church where its parishioners gather during Mass.

Paradiso

The third and final part of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. This describes the ascent through Heaven toward divinity and the harmony with God.

Parish

A local community of a Roman Catholic Church entrusted to the pastoral care of a priest. It is often organized around a specific church or place of worship.

Pew

A fixed bench within the nave space is designed to accommodate all members of the parish during Mass.

Phenomenology

A method for understanding the human experience through perception, emotions, and sensory engagement with the space.

Place Attachment

The psychological and emotional connection between people and a certain place.

Priest

An ordained minister in the Roman Catholic Church who celebrates the sacraments, leads worship during mass, and provides pastoral duties to the parish.

Purgatorio

The second phase of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. This represents the process of purification and spiritual transformation and the journey towards divinity.

Roman Catholicism

The largest sect or branch of Christianity, guided by the Pope and known for its sacramental tradition, apostolic sequence, and loyalty to Church doctrine.

Sacred Architecture

Architecture that is intended to assist with spiritual experience, worship, contemplation, and long-lasting religious traditions.

Sacred Axis

A symbolic processional line through a sacred space that helps navigate movement or initiation and the overall spiritual experience towards a focal point.

Sacrament

A sacred rite through Christ, through which divine grace is shown. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments.

Sacristy

A room beside the sanctuary space where liturgical vestments and other ceremonial items are prepared and take place.

Sanctuary

The most liturgical sacred space of the church, which surrounds the altar, is reserved for the celebration of Mass and other ceremonies.

Stations of the Cross

A key practice consisting of fourteen stations that commemorate key events in Christ's journey from suffering to crucifixion and then into burial. This is often seen in artwork or architectural elements inside a church nave. It comprises prayer reflection and spiritual pilgrimage.

Sin

In Christian belief, an act, thought, or omission that goes against the will of God and disrupts the relationship with God and other individuals.

Spiritual Placemaking

The creation of meaningful spaces and architecture that foster spiritual reflection, collectivism, belonging, and the relationship to the sacred.

Tabernacle

A secure receptacle within the Catholic church is used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament (consecrated Eucharistic hosts).

Transcendence

The journey or experience of moving beyond the ordinary conditions and towards a sense of divinity or the sublime.

Vincentian Tradition

The values, teachings, and mission of St. Vincent de Paul and Frédéric Ozanam. The emphasis on charity, service, and human dignity.