

# **Understanding the Role of Historic Sacred Places in the Neighborhood and Community**

**Wartburg College Community Sociology**

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In May 2005 a research team of six upper-division Wartburg College Community Sociology students, supervised by their community sociology professor, partnered in a research endeavor with the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program of Historic Denver, a community-based program in Denver Colorado. Students developed a research proposal for review and approval by the partner organization and subsequently conducted research with the intent of informing the organization's activity and effectiveness.

For the students, this research was a component of their Field Sociology course in Community Sociology, a qualitative research methods course. Integrating community into research methods is an accepted practice in sociology and integral to student learning in community sociology. Community-based course activities such as these not only serve the interests of the learning process, they help students prepare for life-long community leadership and civic engagement. At the same time, community partners benefit from the completed research. As resources for community-based research diminish, partnerships with institutions of higher education have become important in continuing this important work.

As the faculty member supervising this research, I am pleased to present this final report. It is my sincere hope that the students have merged community theory and practice in a way that informs the important work of Historic Denver

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Inner-city historic places of worship are both significant landmarks and places where people access programs and community services. These dual roles are specifically explored in this examination of historic sacred places in Denver Colorado. Research was conducted on behalf of the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program of Historic Denver, a local agency providing technical assistance to sacred places undergoing structural restoration and preservation.

Many organized religions and specific denominations have a history of political activity and success in initiating grassroots activism. Sacred places continue to be a regular venue for social interaction, creating networks and norms, and are effective in initiating community development activities (Persons 2004). Since the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which called for sacred places to take on the formal role of social service provider and implementer of policies (Persons 2004), there has been a growing need for social services provided by sacred places. Sacred places also play a role in developing a sense of community, and people who participate frequently in religious services and church activities have greater attachment to their community (McIntosh, Sykes and Kubena 2002).

This examination of the role of historic sacred places in Denver, Colorado employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted by a team of undergraduate researchers from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa supervised by their professor. The three primary methods for collecting data were a congregation survey of nine sacred places, 180 neighborhood interviews, and nine key informant interviews. Unobtrusive field observations were also made during the course of the research. Four key findings are the result of this examination.

- 1. Denver's historic sacred places play a trio of roles in their neighborhoods and the broader community. They serve as places of worship, providers of community services, and a focus of neighborhood physical and social identity.***
- 2. Centrality of neighborhood historic places is pointed to by all stakeholder groups, but different groups have different reasons for the importance of historic sacred places.***

Of those attending worship services at historic sacred places, most do not live in the neighborhood but participate in some form of programming offered at their place of worship. Most frequently noted were music and entertainment followed by receiving some type of service or attending a class at the sacred place.

Most neighbors of sacred places suggest it promotes a sense of community within their neighborhood, noting it's a place for people to gather and access a variety of programs. They most frequently noted the important architectural role the sacred place plays in their neighborhood.

Key informants note the multiple roles of the city's historic sacred places, including serving as important community landmarks, providing social services, educating people about history, lending support to the community, increasing development in the area, being a catalyst for revitalizing the neighborhood, and providing religious services to the community.

3. ***If programs and services currently provided by historic sacred places were eliminated there would be increased stress put on similar programs at other sacred places and community organizations. These would be located outside the neighborhood.***

When asked where they would go for programs or services if they were not available at the sacred place, worshipers who were also program participants stated they knew of programs or organizations in another neighborhood, another church, other Christian groups, or of community sponsored organizations. However, about one-third said they were not aware of any other programs they could access. Key informants agreed that the impact would be great if programs and services provided at Denver's historic sacred places were eliminated. The primary impact they noted would be the loss of social service providers.

4. ***While preservation of historic sacred places was noted as important by all groups examined, neighbors and worshipers were not knowledgeable regarding the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program.***

Key informants were the most informed about Historic Denver and the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. Most noted that Historic Denver has provided information to area sacred places on the correct way to restore and preserve their buildings, providing help during the grant writing and contracting processes, and guidance through each step of restoration and preservation. Another key way the program has helped to preserve sacred places is by increasing awareness through lectures, talks, brochures, and websites.

While worshipers acknowledged the importance of sacred places preservation, they were less familiar with the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. Neighbors of historic sacred places were largely unaware of the program or did not view it as helpful.

## INTRODUCTION

Sacred places are resources for the neighborhoods and communities where they are located, but the role of sacred places in communities is often overlooked and underestimated. These places of worship regularly provide programs and services in their buildings and sponsor many more that occur outside of the facility (Ramsey 1999). The role of a sacred place may be most clear to those who are most closely connected with it, and many times it's considered a multi-purpose community center, acting as a shelter, food bank, health center, education program, and more (Kahera 2002).

Clearly, inner-city historic places of worship are both significant landmarks and places where people access programs and community services. These dual roles are specifically explored in this examination of historic sacred places in Denver Colorado. Research was conducted on behalf of the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program of Historic Denver. The Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program provides technical assistance to sacred places undergoing restoration and preservation of the original architecture and design of these landmarks.

Previous research with a similar focus was completed in 1999 by The Center for Human Investment Policy at the University of Colorado. That quantitative examination, *Vital Institutions: Sacred Places*, was also conducted on behalf of what is now the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. The Center examined 26 historic sacred places in Denver and found that all of these places served as both a place of worship and a community center. And while 96 percent of the congregations of the historic sacred places had increased in the three years prior to the research, only 26 percent of congregants were also consumers of services or programs available at the sacred place (Faith Action 1999).

The purpose of this examination is to build on the previous quantitative examination by taking a qualitative approach to explore the following questions.

*What is the role of Denver's historic inner city sacred places in their neighborhoods and the broader Denver community?*

*In what ways do Denver's historic inner city sacred places promote vital neighborhoods and a sustainable community?*

### **Sacred Places as Community Resources**

Faith-based organizations have become increasingly important organizations in recent years, offering a variety of social services for congregants and community members. Since the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which called for sacred places to take on the formal role of social service provider and implementer of policies (Persons 2004), there has been a growing need for social services provided by sacred places. The use of faith-based organizations to address community needs has also been pushed by the

current administration (Hackett, Wuthnow, and Yang Hsu 2004). President George W. Bush believes faith based social services will improve program delivery. To support this work he created the Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives and directed government agencies to examine the restrictions and opportunities for religious groups to receive federal funding and assistance for their social programs (Ebaugh et al. 2003).

People go to sacred places seeking assistance with utilities, food, employment, and their physical and mental health needs (Hackett, Wuthnow, and Yang Hsu 2004). Sacred places provide activities and programs for children, youth, adults and seniors, including youth groups, mentoring programs and workshops for teens (Rubin and Billingsley 1994). Many sacred places also offer educational opportunities such as parenting and art classes, while others offer programs to help students succeed in education such as Head Start and tutoring programs (Cook 2000). Sacred places are resources for information on housing, welfare, and banking (Alex-Assensoh 2004). People go to faith-based organizations rather than nonsectarian organizations that offer social services for many different reasons (Hackett, Wuthnow and Yang Hsu 2004), and while programs and assistance are regularly provided by many religious institutions, the emphasis of programs and assistance varies across denominations (Barnes 2004).

Sacred places can have an impact on political socialization. Many organized religions and specific denominations have a history of political activity and success in initiating grassroots activism. People believe in what their religion professes, and sacred places are able to mobilize congregants by connecting social movements to those beliefs (Cavendish 2000, Candland 2000). Although churches approach grassroots activism in different ways, their effectiveness is evident (Candland 2000). Quakers played an important role in abolition, Protestant denominations in the 1960s antiwar movement, and historically Black churches in the Civil Rights Movement (Greenberg 2000).

Politics can also find their way into religious services and sermons, and because sacred places serve as a center of information and opinion leadership, these sermons are taken very seriously by congregants. Stances on sexuality, abortion and gender roles are often professed at sacred places. Voting itself is encouraged in sacred places as congregants are encouraged by their pastors to vote so that a religious voice will be heard at the polls. Evidence of the effectiveness of this encouragement is the strong link between church attendance and voter turnout (Greenberg 2000). Columbus Ohio, home to one of the most impoverished and disadvantaged African-American populations, provides an example of this activism related to sacred places. African-American Baptist pastors in Columbus developed a strong organizational association to access mainstream politics by communicating the view of their African-American congregants to interested elected officials and supporting African-American candidates seeking political office (Alex-Assensoh 2004).

Sacred places play a role in developing a sense of community, and people who participate frequently in religious services and church activities have greater attachment to their community (McIntosh, Sykes and Kubena 2002). Congregations also expand their available services to fit the needs of the local community, and as the community

changes, services that are offered through sacred places also change. Sacred places not only bring people together, they also help build and sustain the community in which they are located (Wallace 2003). While the church reaches out with its programs and services, the community is brought together (Boddie 2002).

In addition to developing a sense of community, sacred places can serve as a catalyst in the revitalization of their neighborhoods. When a sacred place is well cared for, residents are more likely to take care of the neighborhood. Congregations often hear they should love their neighbor, reach out to those in need, and other such neighborly activities, which is helpful in neighborhood revitalization (Greenberg 2000). Sacred places are a regular venue for social interaction, creating networks and norms, and are effective in initiating community development. African-American churches have historically been very involved in community development, even before sacred places were eligible to receive funds from the government for community initiatives. And while there has been an increase in funding from the government, it is suggested that we need to be careful not to let the government's policies curb the direction that sacred places were already heading, or curb existing work of sacred places (Persons 2004).

Sacred places are sources of community capital, the most evident being human capital. Sacred places are staffed by people with special skills and training, and members of sacred places have a variety of talents and skills that can be accessed. Another resource is built capital, the facilities and equipment of sacred places including meeting rooms, classrooms, kitchens, and parking lots. Larger sacred places may have schools, libraries or gymnasiums, and equipment such as copiers, computers, educational resources, and furniture. Sacred places also have economic capital. They can purchase materials and supplies for community programs and may have resources to employ neighborhood residents to staff projects and initiatives (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Sacred places are important financial donors to civic initiatives; more than \$21 billion is given annually by sacred places (Ramsey 1999). However, most sacred places have modest budgets, so donating money for projects is not always easy, particularly in low-income communities (Wallace 2003). To make up for their modest budgets, many sacred places regularly host fundraisers such as bake sales and bazaars (Este 2004). Organizations of sacred places also build social capital - the networks, norms, and values that tie neighborhoods together. Local groups then function as part of the larger community, mobilizing people into active public life (Greenberg 2000).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This examination of the role of historic sacred places in Denver Colorado employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted by a team of six upper-division undergraduate researchers from Wartburg College in Waverly Iowa. Most researchers had previously completed research methods courses and projects, were currently enrolled in a qualitative research methods course, and have a major in community sociology. Research was supervised and reviewed by their professor, who holds a Ph.D. in rural sociology with an emphasis in community development and social change, and has 13 years of community development experience. Prior to data collection, the research proposal and all instruments were approved by the sponsoring agency (Historic Denver) and the Wartburg College Human Research Review Committee.

The three primary methods for collecting data were a congregation survey, neighborhood interviews, and key informant interviews. Field notes were also recorded in the different neighborhoods of the historic sacred places included in the research. Most field notes were unobtrusive observations made while delivering or picking up congregation questionnaires or while completing neighborhood interviews. The researchers also attended worship services at some of the sacred places.

### **Congregation Survey**

The first method used to collect data was a questionnaire administered at eleven historic sacred places to be completed by both congregants and program users. The response was 91 completed questionnaires. The research plan identified 17 sacred places to be included, using a geographic distribution. These places had advised the sponsoring agency that they were willing to participate in the research project, but when contacted by researchers, six sacred places indicated they were not interested in participating.

The congregation questionnaire contains a total of 13 questions (Figure 1). The first five questions collect demographic information, including church membership, sex, race and/or ethnicity, neighborhood residence, and age. The next seven questions, a combination of closed and open-ended inquiries, collect information regarding programs offered at the sacred place. And the final open-ended question asks the respondent for anything else they would like the researchers to know about their sacred place. An informed consent form, attached to each questionnaire explained that the research was being done to investigate the role of historic sacred places in Denver and the roles they played in neighborhoods and the broader Denver community (Appendix A). In the cover letter (Appendix B) participants were told that it would take no more than ten minutes to fill out the questionnaire, and they could stop participating at any time or chose not to answer a question. It was also explained that the answers would be assigned a number and the researchers would not attempt to link any answer to a specific individual. Participants were also provided with contact information for the professor with oversight of the research and the Program Coordinator at Historic Denver for any questions regarding the research or research findings.

Questionnaires were brought to the sacred places and placed in an area accessible to both congregants and program users. A sealed box was placed near the questionnaires with a sign explaining that completed questionnaires should be placed in the box, and that respondents should detach the informed consent document for their own records. Each sacred place was also asked to make an announcement about the questionnaires during their services and programs. After four to six days (making sure to include a holy day) questionnaires were collected by the researchers from the eleven sacred places. However, not all of the questionnaires were completed at each sacred place. Two sacred places did not have any of the questionnaires completed and are therefore not in the data analysis. Out of 220 questionnaires distributed, 91 were completed.

After questionnaires were collected, each was given a number and letter. The number corresponded to the sacred place in which the questionnaire was obtained. Each questionnaire from a given sacred place was then lettered in alphabetical order. If the informed consent forms were signed and still attached to the questionnaire, they were removed before they were assigned a number and letter. This insured that the only identity the questionnaires had was to a sacred place and not an individual person.

### **Neighborhood Interviews**

Another method used to collect data was neighborhood interviews. There were 180 structured interviews conducted from a demographically diverse area with twenty interviews completed in each of nine historic sacred places neighborhoods.

The research plan was to begin the first five interviews based on recommendations from a contact at the historic sacred place. These five respondents would then recommend additional people, and this process would continue until twenty interviews were completed in each of the neighborhoods. When this sampling plan was initiated it was discovered that the staff at the historic places did not feel able to provide these names. An alternative sampling plan was developed that included conducting individual interviews within a 5 block radius of each historic place until 20 interviews were completed. Residences were selected in terms of their proximity to the sacred place, with those closest to the sacred place first contacted.

Before anyone was interviewed, an informed consent form (Appendix C) was given to the respondent to read and sign. This advised them that they would be asked four questions, the interview would last no longer than seven minutes in length, the purpose of the research, that their participation was voluntary, and they could chose not to answer a question or stop the interview at any time, as well as contact information for the professor supervising the research and Historic Denver.

During the interview a total of four questions were asked. The first question, "What role does (the specific sacred place) play in your neighborhood?" was open ended. This addressed the first research question. The second interview question, "Do you feel (the specific sacred place) plays a role in the broader Denver community?" was a closed

ended question and also addressed the first research question. The third interview question had two parts, the first being, “Do you feel (the specific sacred place) promotes a sense of community within our neighborhood?” and, “Why or why not?” This question addressed the second research question by answering how the sacred place may or may not promote a vital neighborhood as well as a sustainable community. The final interview question was closed ended and asked “Do you feel the Sacred Landmarks program has been helpful in preserving (the specific sacred place) as a center in your community?” This addressed the final research question regarding impact of the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. The sex of the respondent was noted and recorded by the interviewer.

As a way of keeping responses confidential, a code was assigned to each completed questionnaire and the signed consent form was immediately removed at the conclusion of the interview. To maximize contacts made during the time spent in the field, individual interviews were conducted between 3:00 and 8:30 p.m.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Nine key informants were identified to provide additional qualitative data to inform the research. The semi-structured interviews averaged 15-30 minutes in length. Three key local agencies were selected, and persons most related to the work of Historic Denver were identified. The names of the remaining six informants were obtained through a snowball sample beginning with the initial three informants. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked if they knew anyone else who could inform the research. These individuals were then called, and an interview was requested.

Interviews were conducted in the offices of seven of the key informants. At the beginning of the interview, a tape recorder was set up, the informed consent was explained, and signed by the informant. Two of the interviews were conducted by email because of time constraints. Key informants were sent an email with two attachments; the informed consent form, and the questions typed in questionnaire format. The email informed the respondent that by completing the questionnaire and returning it to the research, they were “signing” the attached consent.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected in the congregation survey and neighborhood interviews was analyzed using two computer analysis programs – the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Qualrus to identify both frequencies and correlations. For the congregation survey, Qualrus was used to analyze all of qualitative data collected (questions 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). Qualrus codes data and helps identify patterns and connections within the data. It was used to both organize and summarize the qualitative data. SPSS was used in a similar manner but was used with the quantitative data (demographic data and questions 1 and 2a). Transcripts of key informant interviews were also analyzed using Qualrus.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This examination identified several consistent themes regarding the role of sacred places in Denver. These themes are discussed in this section within each of the research methods.

### **Congregation Survey**

Questionnaires provided for members and program users at the sacred places yielded interesting data that helped answer two of the three research questions. Of the 91 respondents in the sample, 88 percent were members of the sacred place where they completed the questionnaire, and 99 percent attended worship services. About two-thirds of the respondents (63%) did not live in the neighborhood of the church. The sample included 23 males (25%) and 67 females (74%). About one-half (54%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 12 percent were Hispanic, eight percent were African-American, four percent were Native American, and two percent were multi-racial. Almost 20 percent of the respondents did not provide their race or ethnicity.

Program participation. Of the fifteen respondents who were members but indicated they did not attend programs offered at their sacred place, only two provided reasons for this. One was proximity - the participant stated “We live 30 miles away” - and the other was that they had only recently started attending their sacred place.

Those who did participate in programs provided a wide range of responses when asked about the specific programs they access at the sacred place. Programs included religious study, counseling, workshops, classes, entertainment, and Sunday services. Other than attending a religious service, music and entertainment were the most often cited programs (27 respondents). Music included band and choir programs, and entertainment included activities such as concerts, plays, and speakers. Community service was the next most frequently cited service accessed (20 respondents). Programs include food banks, shelters, employment programs, and medical assistance. Twelve respondents attend some type of class at a sacred place. Some examples of classes included sewing, parenting, English, yoga, Tae Kwon Do, and psychology.

Reasons why people participate in programs at sacred places were also quite diverse. The most common response was the general theme of education (12 respondents) with 6 of these responses coupled with faith, for example, “spiritual growth and Christian education.” Ten respondents stated they attended for spirituality but did not connect this to education. The next most common reason cited for attending programs is to feel a sense of community or to feel closer to their community (10 respondents). Some noted they are able to support their community and learn information about their community by being involved in programs sponsored by sacred places. Seven respondents stated that they attend programs for support reasons, while six people attend programs for community/social services. People said they attended programs for these services because they were free or reasonable in cost.

When asked where they would go for programs or services if they were not available at the sacred place, about half of the respondents (46 out of 91) stated they knew of programs or organizations where they could obtain services. Some said they would go to another neighborhood, another church, other Christian groups, or to community sponsored organizations. However, about one third of the respondents (34 out of 91) said they were not aware of any other programs they could attend if the sacred place no longer offered the program.

Promoting a sense of community Of the 91 respondents, almost one third (31) stated that the sacred place helps make the neighborhood feel like a community. One respondent said the sacred place is the “glue that holds [the community] together.” Respondents noted the sacred place provides a place for neighbors to gather, serves as the focal point of the neighborhood, gives a Christian presence to the neighborhood, and offers neighborhood members a place to go for comfort. Twenty-seven respondents mentioned the spiritual/religious role, and many of these indicated the primary role of their sacred place was to bring God to their community.

Providing programs and community services are a role sacred places play, according to 19 respondents. Most (17) said the role of the sacred place in which they associate is to provide guidance, caring for others in various ways, and providing support for the community. Eleven respondents specifically noted community service programs and education.

### **Neighborhood Interviews**

Another method used to collect data was neighborhood interviews. There were 180 structured interviews conducted from a demographically diverse area with twenty interviews completed in each of nine historic sacred places neighborhoods. Of those interviewed, 52 percent were male and 48 percent were female. Racial and ethnic demographics were not collected.

Promoting a sense of community Of the 180 people interviewed, 110 (61%) said the sacred place promotes a sense of community within their neighborhood. Those who indicated the sacred place promotes a sense of community noted it’s a place for people to gather, it’s a location to access a variety of programs, it bring people together for non-religious functions, it provides food to those in need, it helps bring outsiders in by reaching out, and it offers English classes to non-English speakers and provides events for Spanish and English speakers. They also noted the programs provided to residents of the neighborhood and community.

Thirty-eight respondents (21%) said they did not feel the sacred place promotes a sense of community within their neighborhood, and thirty-two (18%) did not know whether or not their neighborhood sacred place promotes a sense of community. Those who did not feel the sacred place promoted a sense of community noted it was the people who create community, not the church, and that the sacred place is only for people who are members.

When specifically asked about the role the historic sacred place plays in the neighborhood, those interviewed noted the building appearance. Respondents noted that the sacred places looked “pretty,” that the sacred place was an old building, that it helped to contribute to a nice looking neighborhood, or that the sacred place had “nice architecture”.

Fourteen of the responses (8%) were connected to problems respondents perceived with the sacred place. These problems include parking issues, annoyance on Sundays, throwing of trash in neighborhood yards, honking car horns on Sunday morning, the sacred place increasing neighborhood property taxes, and the sacred place working to bring one population or ethnicity together but not others.

Role of sacred places in the broader Denver community. Ninety-four of the 180 respondents (52.2%) felt their neighborhood sacred place did play a role in the broader Denver Community, while 44 (24.4%) said that the sacred place in their neighborhood did not play a broader role in the broader Denver community. Just under one-fourth of the respondents (23.3%) said they did not know if the sacred place did or did not play a role in the broader community.

Importance of sacred places and the role of Sacred Landmarks Preservation. Thirty-seven of the respondents (20%) indicated the Sacred Landmarks Program has been helpful in preserving the sacred place for the community. The most common responses to this question discussed how important their sacred places were to their communities and neighborhoods, and this is why the preservation of the structure is necessary. Many of the respondents also gave responses related to how long they had been members of the church and if they were on the board or council at the sacred places.

However, the majority of respondents (80%) were either unaware of the Sacred Landmarks Program, or did not think it had been helpful in preserving the sacred place for the community. Forty-six respondents (26%) did not feel the program had been helpful, and 97 (54%) had no response.

Neighborhood observations. The researchers were in and out of most of the neighborhoods where the sacred places were located several times during the research process. They observed on those times that the sacred places varied from impressively restored structures to buildings on their way to being restored. A few had broken windows, while others had newly restored stained glass windows. When it was possible to go inside the sacred place, the same differences were observed - some of the buildings were still in the process of restoration, but it was clear in all cases that there was movement toward improving the condition of the building.

The neighborhoods where the sacred places were located ranged from what appeared to be lower-income to upper middle class. Some sacred places were surrounded by businesses, but most were located in residential areas. Of the surrounding buildings, many were also being restored. Specifically in one neighborhood, many of the houses were vacant and doors were leaning up against windows. Ladders and paint buckets were

visible outside. This neighborhood was difficult to find people to talk to, as there were also many rental units along with the vacant buildings that were being restored.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Nine key informants were identified to provide additional qualitative data to inform the research. Three key local agencies were selected, and persons most related to the work of Historic Denver were identified. The names of the remaining six informants were obtained through a snowball sample beginning with the initial three informants.

Of the nine key informants, two worked for a government agency, two were elected officials, five were employed by a community-based non-profit agency, and one worked in the private sector. Seven of the respondents were female, and two were male.

Role of historic sacred places in the broader Denver area. All of the key informants noted that the city's historic sacred places play multiple roles. Eight mentioned specifically that they serve as important community landmarks. Their role as community service providers was noted in six of the nine interviews. Specifically identified in the social services provided by sacred places were food banks, Head Start programs, classes for children with divorced parents, English as a second language classes, health and emergency services, music programs, transitioning for immigrants, soup kitchens, and overnight shelters. Educating people about history, lending support to the community, increasing development in the area, and being a catalyst for revitalizing the neighborhood were also noted frequently. The role of providing religious services to the community was noted in five of the nine interviews.

When asked what additional roles they would like to see historic sacred places play in Denver, it was mentioned several times that sacred places could open up their doors to more people. One person said, "I think that people often walk by historic places for years without ever going in. Opening the doors of a historic sacred place for a community open house would be wonderful" (Key Informant HH). Increased availability of the sacred place to the public could increase awareness of the historical value of sacred places and lead to this designation for other places. Specifically noted was use of sacred places as performance halls and for educational programs.

The key informants all agreed that the impact would be great if Denver's historic sacred places no longer existed. The primary impact would be the loss of social service providers, and eight of the nine stated that people would be forced to look for help in other places. One informant noted that it might be possible for these services to be provided elsewhere, but it would be more difficult for people to access these services as they would most likely not be located in the same neighborhood. Another informant felt there would be no possibility that Denver could handle all the people who would be in need of assistance if sacred places closed. As an example, one informant noted the Church of the Annunciation serves "over 600 people a week on two days. [They] are open Tuesdays and Thursday only and [they] serve 600 people through [their] food bank and clothing bank" (Key Informant EE). The informant provided additional examples,

and predicted the city of Denver would be overloaded if these places ever closed with “a huge gap between services and those in need.” Even if public agencies could handle all people in need, some may not be comfortable receiving help from the government. Sacred places are a landmark, a solid place in the community. As one key informant noted, people feel comfortable going to sacred places for help when they are in need, particularly among those who are new to the country and may not trust the government.

Another impact noted was the loss of historical value to the community. As one individual stated, without these sacred places, we would not know “the history of what’s going on there, the history of what the neighborhood was like then, and what it is now...how it’s changed for the good and for the bad” (Key Informant AA).

If these buildings no longer existed, it would “take away a certain amount of basis for the community” (Key Informant BB). As this informant said earlier, these sacred places are the center of the communities in which they are located, and losing the center of a community will tear it apart. The neighborhood itself would also lose some of its beauty. These historic sacred places are viewed as beautiful pieces of architecture that are to be highly valued. If these no longer existed, the aesthetic feel of the community will decrease greatly.

Promoting vital neighborhoods and sustainable communities. Eight of the nine key informants felt historic sacred places do promote vital neighborhoods and sustainable communities. Five of the nine referred to the sacred places as being the reason why neighborhoods were being restored. They stated that once the congregation and surrounding community began putting time and money into the sacred place, the neighbors around that sacred place began to have pride in their neighborhood and improve the look of their houses as well. This also brings in people to visit restored sacred places and the businesses from other areas that come to work on restoration efforts. Other responses included statements referring to the sacred place as being “at the heart,” or center of the community. These sacred places serve as “anchors” or landmarks in the community, a solid fixture that represents a strong cornerstone of their community.

One of the key informants mentioned that sometimes sacred places can be more exclusive than inclusive, meaning that “some places will be very self-focused and very directed upon particular things that are important to them, which may or may not get the community involved” (Key Informant DD). Specifically stated were sacred places with “drive-in” congregations who lived in different neighborhoods than where their place of worship is located. These sacred places did not necessarily *detract* from the neighborhoods where they were located, but the informant felt they did not add to the neighborhood.

Role of Sacred Landmarks Preservation. Key informants feel Historic Denver has primarily helped by providing information to area sacred places on the correct way to restore and preserve their buildings. One informant said that “it’s been a place where people can go and get some information and to get some guidance” (Key Informant FF). Seven people noted that information was the key role for the Historic Sacred Places

Program. Specifically, providing help during the grant writing process, the contracting process, and guidance through each step the sacred place takes to restore and preserve the building.

Another key way the program has helped to preserve sacred places is through grassroots awareness. Lectures, talks, brochures, and websites help to inform the public as a whole about the different ways individuals can help and make a difference. The help in general that this program has given was described as “life-giving” by one of the informants (Key Informant DD).

## CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

### **Question One: What is the role of Denver’s historic inner city sacred places in their neighborhoods and the broader Denver community?**

Of those attending worship services at historic sacred places, most (63%) do not live in the neighborhood. Of those who are members, most (74%) also participate in some form of programming offered at their place of worship. Most frequently noted were music and entertainment (31%). 20 members (23%) receive some type of community service through their sacred place, and 12 (14%) attend a class at the sacred place. This is a somewhat different finding than the 1999 research that identified 26 percent of congregants as program beneficiaries.

Fifteen distinct reasons were given why people who worship at the sacred place also participate in programs at sacred places, with no significant pattern in their reasons. One pattern identified among those completing the survey, however, is that they attend these programs or services because they are free or reasonable in cost. When asked where they would go for programs or services if they were not available at the sacred place, about half of the respondents (46 out of 91) stated they knew of programs or organizations where they could obtain services at another neighborhood, another church, other Christian groups, or to community sponsored organizations. However, about one third of the respondents (34 out of 91) said they were not aware of any other programs they could attend if the sacred place no longer existed or stopped offering the program.

Neighborhood residents were also asked about the role the historic sacred place plays in the neighborhood, and their most frequent response noted the building appearance. Respondents noted that the sacred places looked “pretty,” that the sacred place was an old building, that it helped to contribute to a nice looking neighborhood, or that the sacred place had “nice architecture”. Ninety-four of the respondents (52.2%) felt their neighborhood sacred place did play a role in the broader Denver Community, while 44 (24.4%) said that the sacred place in their neighborhood did not play a broader role in the broader Denver community. Just under one-fourth of the respondents (23.3%) said they did not know if the sacred place did or did not play a role in the broader community.

All of the key informants noted that the city’s historic sacred places play multiple roles. Eight mentioned specifically that they serve as important community landmarks, and six noted their role as community social service providers. Educating people about history, lending support to the community, increasing development in the area, and being a catalyst for revitalizing the neighborhood were also noted frequently. The role of providing religious services to the community was noted by five of the key informants.

When asked what additional roles they would like to see Denver’s historic sacred places play, key informants noted that sacred places could open up their doors to more people. They suggested that increased availability of the sacred place to the public, such as use for performances and education programs, could increase awareness of the historical value of sacred places and lead to this designation for other places.

The key informants all agreed that the impact would be great if Denver's historic sacred places no longer existed. The primary impact would be the loss of social service providers. One informant noted that it might be possible for these services to be provided elsewhere, but it would be more difficult for people to access these services as they would most likely not be located in the same neighborhood. Another informant felt there would be no possibility that Denver could handle all the people who would be in need of assistance if sacred places closed. Even if public agencies could handle all people in need, some may not be comfortable receiving help from the government. Sacred places are a landmark, a solid place in the community. As one key informant noted, people feel comfortable going to sacred places for help when they are in need, particularly among those who are new to the country and may not trust the government.

Another impact noted was the loss of historical value to the community. The neighborhood itself would also lose some of its beauty. These historic sacred places are viewed as beautiful pieces of architecture that are to be highly valued. If these no longer existed, the aesthetic feel of the community will decrease greatly.

**Question Two: In what ways do Denver's historic inner city sacred places promote vital neighborhoods and sustainable community?**

Promoting a sense of community was noted by many worshipers, neighbors, and key informants. Of the 91 respondents in the congregation survey, almost one third (31) stated that the sacred place helps make the neighborhood feel like a community. Respondents noted the sacred place provides a place for neighbors to gather, serves as the focal point of the neighborhood, gives a Christian presence to the neighborhood, and offers neighborhood members a place to go for comfort.

Of the sacred places neighbors, 110 (61%) said the sacred place promotes a sense of community within their neighborhood. They noted it's place for people to gather, it's a location to access a variety of programs, it bring people together for non-religious functions, it provides food to those in need, it helps bring outsiders in by reaching out, and it offers English classes. However, 38 respondents (21%) said they did not feel the sacred place promotes a sense of community within their neighborhood, and 32 (18%) did not know whether or not their neighborhood sacred place promotes a sense of community.

Eight of the nine key informants also felt historic sacred places support vital neighborhoods and sustainable communities. Five of the nine referred to the sacred places as being the reason why neighborhoods were being restored. They stated that once the congregation and surrounding community began putting time and money into the sacred place, the neighbors around that sacred place began to have pride in their neighborhood and improve the look of their houses as well. This also brings in people to visit restored sacred places and the businesses from other areas that come to work on restoration efforts. This was also noted by the researchers. They observed that the sacred places varied from impressively restored structures to buildings on their way to being

restored. Some were surrounded by businesses, but most of the sacred places were located in residential areas. It was clear in all cases that there was movement toward improving the condition of the building.

Key informants were the most informed about Historic Denver and the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. Most noted that Historic Denver has primarily helped by providing information to area sacred places on the correct way to restore and preserve their buildings. Specifically, providing help during the grant writing process, the contracting process, and guidance through each step the sacred place takes to restore and preserve the building. Another key way the program has helped to preserve sacred places is through grassroots awareness. Lectures, talks, brochures, and websites help to inform the public as a whole about the different ways individuals can help and make a difference.

The congregation survey suggested a decreased level of familiarity with the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program. Thirty-seven of the respondents (41%) indicated the Sacred Landmarks Program has been helpful in preserving the sacred place for the community. The most common responses to this question discussed how important their sacred places were to their communities and neighborhoods, and this is why the preservation of the structure is necessary. However, neighbors are largely unaware of the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program (54%) or did not feel the program had been helpful (26%).

## **Key Findings**

- 1. Denver's historic sacred places play a trio of roles in their neighborhoods and the broader community. They serve as places of worship, providers of community services, and a focus of neighborhood physical and social identity.***
- 2. Centrality of neighborhood historic places is pointed to by all stakeholder groups, but different groups have different reasons for the importance of historic sacred places.***
- 3. If programs and services currently provided by historic sacred places were eliminated there would be increased stress put on similar programs at other sacred places and community organizations. These would be located outside the neighborhood.***
- 4. While preservation of historic sacred places was noted as important by all groups examined, neighbors and worshipers were not knowledgeable regarding the Sacred Landmarks Preservation Program.***

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## Informed Consent for Questionnaire

### Understanding the Role of Historic Sacred Places in the Community

You are being asked to participate in a study investigating the role of historic sacred places in the Denver community.

We are interested in determining the role sacred places play in the neighborhoods and in the broader Denver community. Your participation will help to identify these roles and perhaps better understand the purposes of these sacred places.

You are being asked to complete a questionnaire pertaining to this research. The activity should take no more than 10 minutes.

To ensure anonymity, your answers will be assigned a number. There will be no attempt to link your identity to your questionnaire, as individual identities are of no interest in this study.

Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential in this investigation is quite minimal. All performance is completely anonymous, as previously mentioned. You will not incur any costs as a result of your participation in this study.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so.

If you have any questions prior to your participation or at any time during the study, please do not hesitate to ask us.

**AUTHORIZATION:** I have read the above and understand the nature of this study. I understand that by completing this questionnaire I have not waived any legal or human right and that I may contact the research coordinator at Wartburg College (Dr. Kathy Kremer, [kathy.kremer@wartburg.edu](mailto:kathy.kremer@wartburg.edu), 319-352-8389) or Historic Denver (303-534-5288) at any time. I understand that I may refuse to participate or I may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

**Please detach this page for your own information. Thank you for your assistance.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Questionnaire

**Understanding the Role of Historic Sacred Places in the Community**  
(NAME OF CHURCH)

Are you a member of \_\_\_\_\_(NAME OF CHURCH)\_\_\_\_\_: Yes No (circle one)

Sex: Male Female (circle one)

What do you consider to be your race and/or ethnicity (this is an optional)?

Do you live in the same neighborhood this church is located? Yes No (circle one)

How many people of each category live in your household, including yourself? (list number in space provided)

\_\_\_\_Children under 12

\_\_\_\_Teens 13-18

\_\_\_\_Adults 19-35

\_\_\_\_Adults 35-64

\_\_\_\_Seniors 65+

1. Do you attend worship services at \_\_\_\_\_(NAME OF CHURCH)\_\_\_\_? Yes No (circle one)

2. Do you or other household members attend other programs offered at this location? Yes No (circle one)

If *Yes* please go to question 3.

If *No*, are there reasons that you or other members of your household do not participate in the programs offered at this location? (Please go to question 6)

3. What programs or services offered at \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF CHURCH) \_\_\_\_\_ do you or other members of your household attend or access? Please list all programs and ages and sex of those who attend.

4. Why do you or members of your household attend these programs?

5. Where would you go for these types of programs if they were no longer available at this location?

6. What do you feel the role of \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF CHURCH )\_\_\_\_\_ is in your neighborhood?

7. Are there other things you would like us to know about \_\_ (NAME OF CHURCH)\_\_\_\_\_ that we have not already asked?

## Informed Consent for Neighborhood Interview

### Understanding the Role of Historic Sacred Places in the Community

You are being asked to participate in a study investigating the role of historic sacred places in the Denver Community.

We are interested in determining the role sacred places play in the neighborhood, and the broader Denver community. Your participation will help to us identify the roles and perhaps better understand the purposes of historic sacred places.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer four questions pertaining to this topic. The activity should last no more than 7 minutes.

To ensure anonymity, your answers will be assigned a number. There will be no attempt to link the number to your identity or signature provided on this consent form, as individual answers are of no interest to us. Your name will not be shared with any other participants in the study.

Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential is this investigation is quite minimal. Your responses will be kept anonymous. You will not incur any costs as a result of your participation in this study.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time during this study you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so.

If you have any questions prior to your participation or at any time during the study, please do not hesitate to ask us.

**AUTHORIZATION:** I have read the above and understand the nature of this study. I understand that by agreeing to participate in this study I have not waived any legal or human right and that I may contact the research coordinator at Wartburg College (Dr. Kathy Kremer, [kathy.kremer@wartburg.edu](mailto:kathy.kremer@wartburg.edu), 319-352-8389) or Historic Denver (303-534-5288) at any time. I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I may refuse to participate or I may withdraw from the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**Interview Protocol**

Hello my name is (\_\_\_\_\_) and I'm a researcher from Wartburg College. The purpose of my visit here today is to gather research for Historic Denver. Do you have five to seven minutes to answer some questions I have prepared? (Yes/No).

*If No:* Thank you for your time and have a nice day.

*If Yes:*

Thanks. You are being asked to participate in a research investigating the role of historic sacred places in the Denver community.

We are interested in determining the role sacred places play in your neighborhood, and the broader Denver community. Your participation will help to us identify the roles and perhaps better understand the purposes of historic sacred places.

Since you have agreed to participate, you will be asked to answer four questions relating to this topic. The activity should last no more than 7 minutes.

To ensure anonymity, your answers will be assigned a number. There will be no attempt to link the number to your identity or signature provided on this consent form, as individual answers are of no interest to us. Your name will not be shared with any other participants interviewed during this research.

Although all research has some degree of risk and the potential in this investigation is minimal. Your responses will be kept anonymous. You will not incur any costs as a result of your participation in this research.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time during this interview you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so.

If you have any questions during your participation in this research, please do not hesitate to ask us. I'm asking you to sign an informed consent form, saying that you've agreed to participate in this interview and I'm giving you one for your records.

Name of Sacred Place:\_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Male Female

(Read these questions out loud and record data)

1. What role does (Sacred Place) play in your neighborhood?

2. Do you feel (Sacred Place) plays a role in the broader Denver Community? Y N

3. Do you feel that (Sacred Place) promotes a sense of community within your neighborhood?

Y N Why or why not?

4. Do you feel that the Sacred Landmarks program had been helpful in preserving (Sacred Place) as a center in your community? Y N

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our research. Have a nice afternoon/evening.