

# Villa Chapel Re-use Report

November 2, 2012  
Erie, Pennsylvania





## History

In 1892 the Villa Maria convent was constructed to house the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and the academy was formed to educate the young women of Erie, Pennsylvania. The Villa Chapel was constructed in 1924. In 1954 the Academy moved a few miles west to Millcreek, and the original school building on the 800 block of West Eighth Street became the Villa Maria Elementary School.

In the late 1990s the Sisters of St. Joseph constructed a new motherhouse in Millcreek, Pennsylvania. The convent and school in the existing historic complex were then renovated as affordable apartments for seniors and families. This rare, intact ecclesiastical compound is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Owners

The Villa Chapel has three owners:

- Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (10% share)
- Sisters of St. Joseph (10% share)
- Pennrose Properties (80% share)

## Chapel Charrette - September 2011

The Villa Chapel Charrette was held at the Temple Anshe Hased on September 6, 2011. Participants included thirty community members representing an array of interests. Joined together by a single objective, local businesses, artists, architects, preservationists, neighborhood residents and representatives of local government and the Erie Community Foundation devoted a day to finding viable reuse options for the Villa Chapel.

### Process

Architects from firms in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Erie, along with community volunteers, toured the chapel and studied copies of the building's original architectural plans. Several hours later, after lengthy discussions, three re-use options were selected:

- 1) **DAY-CARE + MIXED-USE VENUE** consisting of a day-care and multi-purpose space (estimated cost: \$1,980,000).
- 2) **RESTAURANT** (estimated cost: \$2,300,000)
- 3) **MULTI-RESIDENTIAL** (estimated cost: \$3,700,000)

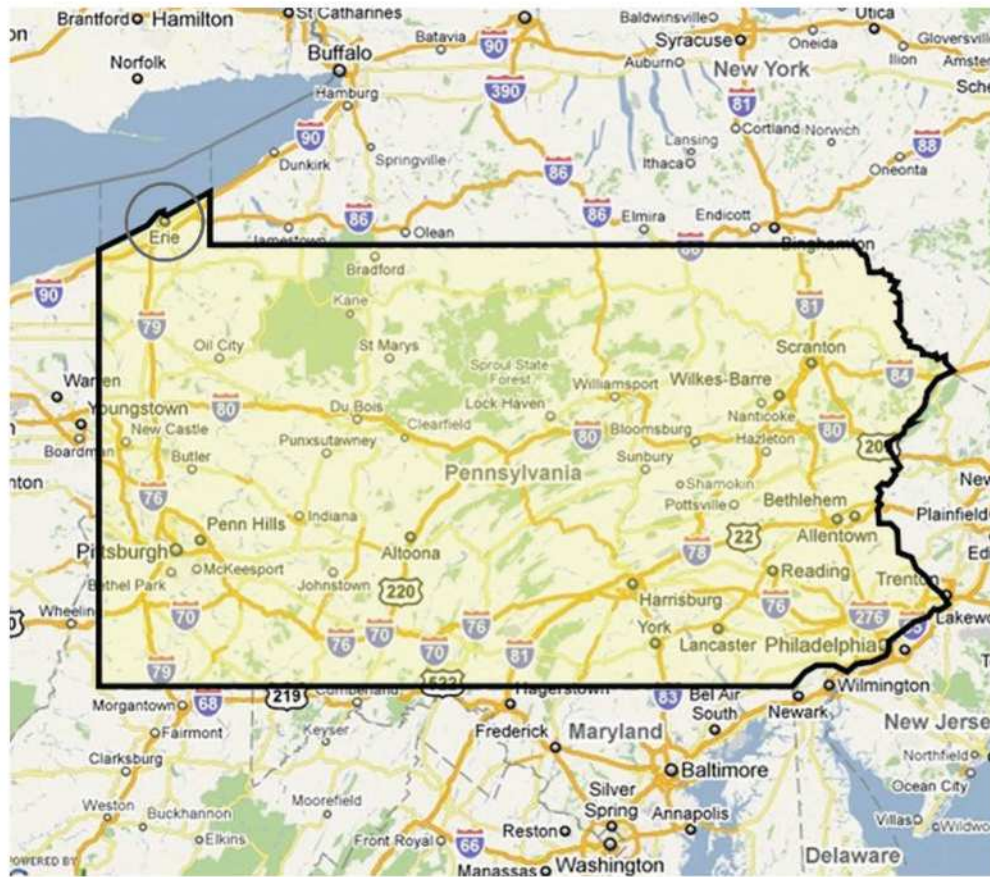


**charret**, *n.* Chiefly N. Amer. (*orig.* *Archit.*). A period of intense (*group*) work, typically undertaken in order to meet a deadline. Also: a collaborative workshop focusing on a particular problem or project; (*Town Planning*) a public meeting or conference devoted to discussion of a proposed community building project.

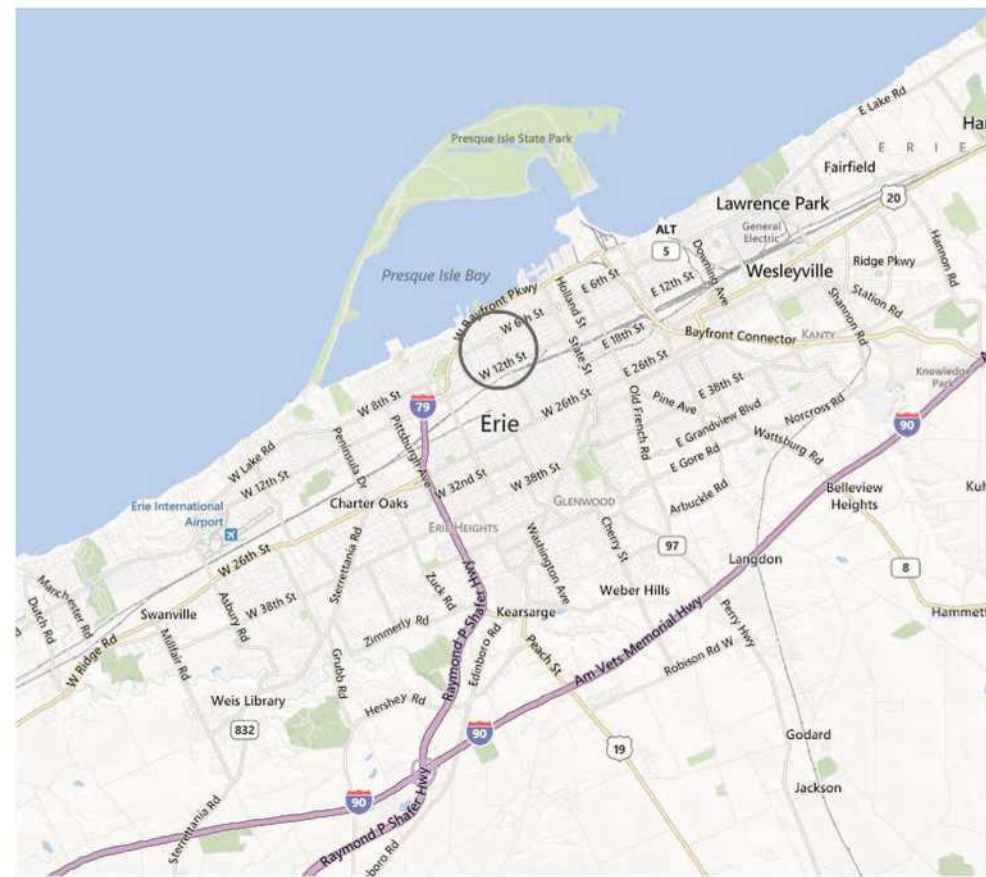
[Probably originally with reference to the former custom among French architecture students of using a cart to carry their work on the day of an exhibition: see *Trésor de la Langue Française s.v. charrette.*]

-Oxford English Dictionary

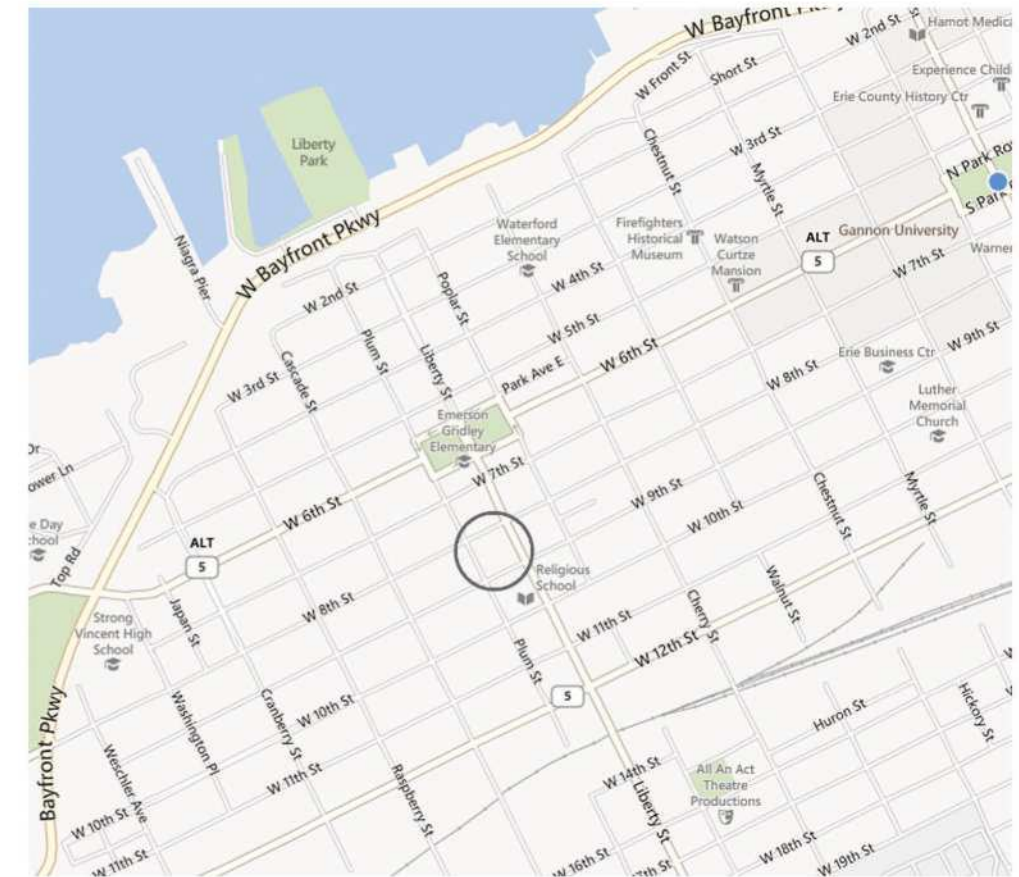




City of Erie, Pennsylvania



Location of Villa Chapel in the City of Erie and Erie County



Location of Villa Chapel

## Erie, PA

### Getting There

Located in the northwestern corner of Pennsylvania on the shore of Lake Erie, Erie is halfway between New York City and Chicago, and less than a two hour drive from Cleveland, Ohio; Buffalo, New York; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In addition to being located at the crossroads of interstates 90 and 79, the region is served by daily Amtrak service, freight rail, and the Erie International Airport.

### Attractions

Erie's main attraction is Presque Isle State Park, a peninsula that forms a bay along the city's shoreline. Residents and tourists alike enjoy swimming, sailing and water skiing during the summer months and skating, skiing and ice fishing during the winter. The bayfront, once the site of industry, is now home to parks, restaurants, town homes, water sports, marinas, a convention center and hotel, the Erie County Library, a maritime museum and Donjon Shipbuilding and Repair. Downtown Erie is home to art, history and children's museums, a ballpark, the Erie Philharmonic orchestra, theaters, dance companies, restaurants and retail stores in addition to several major Erie County employers.

## Economy

Education and healthcare dominate the economy. The largest medical school in the country, Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, has a branch campus in Erie. Penn State Erie - The Behrend College, Edinboro, Gannon and Mercyhurst Universities all contribute to the local economy. There are five medical centers: St. Vincent, UPMC Hamot, Veteran's Affairs Medical Center, Shriners' Hospital for Children and Millcreek Community Hospital. GE Transportation and Erie Insurance are also headquartered here. The waterfront maintains some shipping, boatbuilding and repair facilities. A strong metals fabrication and casting industry remains and is complemented by an expanding plastics industry. In addition to "Eds and Meds," manufacturing and tourism contribute significantly to the local economy.

## The Neighborhood

Andrew Ellicott designed the plan for the City of Erie in 1795. The city grid is defined by streets that run parallel and perpendicular to the shore line of the natural harbor formed by Presque Isle Bay. Soon after the surveying crew began laying out the plan, settlers arrived, initially occupying the bluff overlooking the waterfront. As the city grew, new developments spread east and west along the bluff and south to 26<sup>th</sup> Street. The Villa Maria Chapel is located eight blocks west of State Street, the center of downtown Erie, and nine blocks south of the water's edge. Three blocks south of the chapel is Erie's historic industrial corridor.

The Villa Maria campus is located in a predominantly residential neighborhood that was established between 1890 and the 1930s. Most of the buildings were originally constructed as one or two family homes. The neighborhood remains a stable residential community, with some structures converted to rental housing. Commercial uses are limited and include religious facilities, a funeral home, a social service agency, limited retail and a neighborhood bar/restaurant.



Villa Chapel



VIEW LOOKING NORTH

Villa Chapel



VIEW LOOKING WEST

Villa Chapel



VIEW LOOKING SOUTH

Villa Chapel

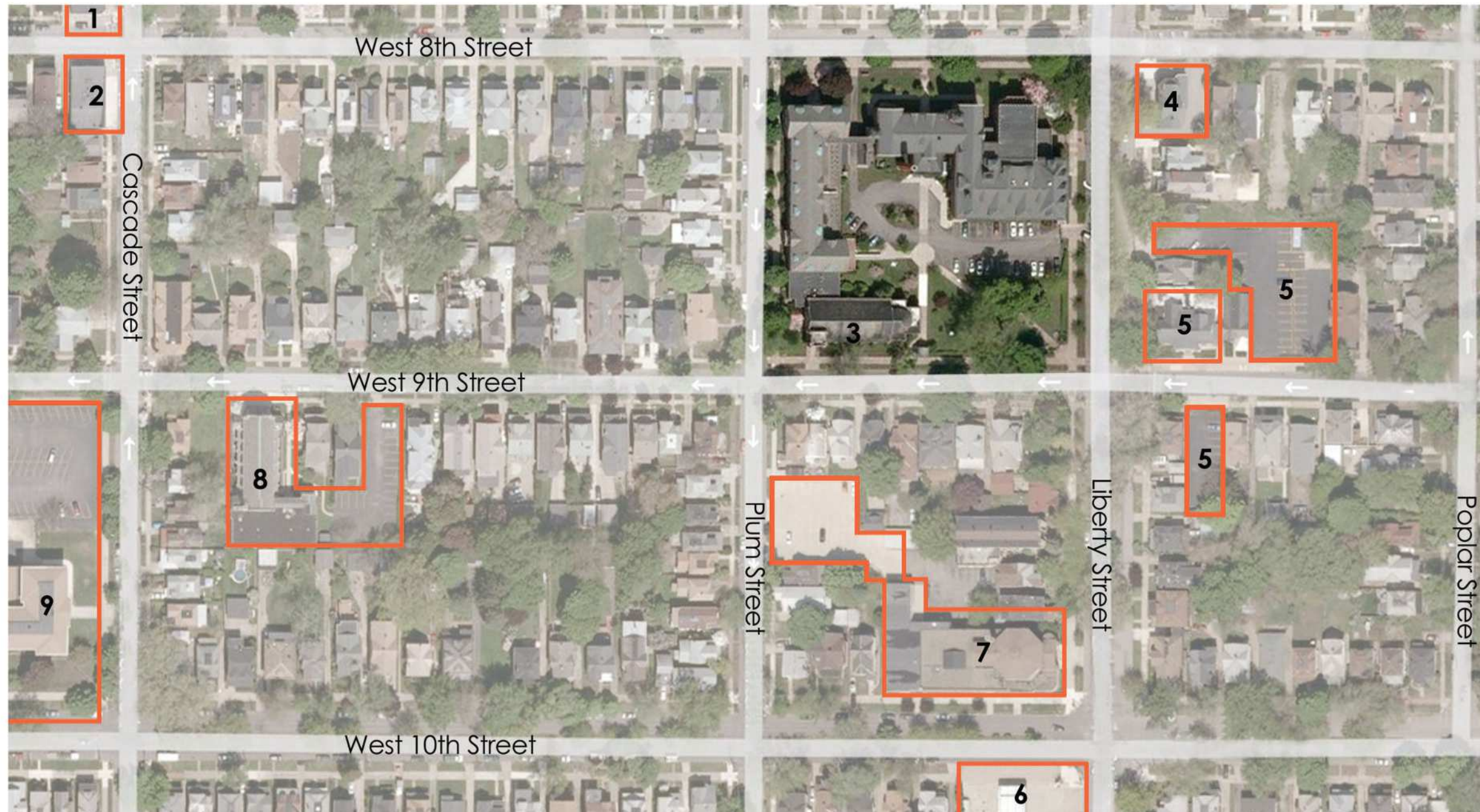
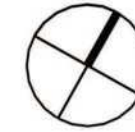


VIEW LOOKING EAST



## Commercial Properties

- |                         |                       |   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Wagner's Bar & Grill | 4. U-Frame It Shop    | 7. Temple Anshe Heses   |
| 2. Vacant Storefront    | 5. Quinn Funeral Home | 8. New Revelation Full Gospel Church (formerly Sarah Hearn Presbyterian Church) |
| 3. Villa Chapel         | 6. Vacant Gas Station | 9. Greater Erie Community Action Committee                                      |



## Context

The Villa Chapel is located eight blocks west of State Street, the heart of the downtown. A bus line runs one block south of the chapel on 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The neighborhood surrounding the chapel has retained much of its original 19<sup>th</sup> century character and is primarily residential, with locally owned small businesses interspersed throughout. Single-family homes are mixed with multi-family homes and the occasional apartment building. Emerson Gridley School and Gridley Park are two blocks north. Liberty Street bluff, eight blocks north of the chapel, offers pedestrian access to the bayfront's Liberty Park, where hundreds of people gather to enjoy summer concerts and other events, including the Summer Arts Festival.

At the corner of Liberty and West 9<sup>th</sup> Streets, an elaborate ironwork entrance gate frames the Villa Chapel. Anchoring the corner of West 9<sup>th</sup> and Plum Streets, the chapel's height, scale and ornamented brick and stonework contributes to the neighborhood's character. Known as Our Lady's Chapel, the neo-Gothic Villa Chapel was left untouched during the renovations to the rest of the complex. The chapel has not been used for several years, and has not been properly maintained. With a leaking roof and lacking heat, the chapel is suffering from "demolition by neglect." The demolition of the chapel and its adjacent grotto and garden would diminish the rich fabric of this residential block and destroy the ecclesiastical complex.





Plum Street and West 9<sup>th</sup> Street - Southwest Elevation



West 9<sup>th</sup> Street - South Elevation

### Structure

The chapel is a two-story building consisting of a masonry envelope with steel primary framing (beams, columns and floor joists) with wood infill framing for portions of high and low roofs. The main floor of the chapel is framed with steel and supports a cast-in-place concrete floor slab. The chapel roof is a combination of fabricated steel roof trusses and steel purlins supporting wood framing and roof decking. The lower roof areas over peripheral spaces are principally constructed of wood roof framing and decking. The exterior walls are a combination of brick masonry and structural clay tile with cast-in-place concrete foundation walls below grade. The foundation is thought to be conventional shallow spread footing bearing on suitable available sub-grade materials.



West 9<sup>th</sup> Street - Southeast Elevation



East Elevation



North Elevation





View of Nave from Choir Loft



View of Sanctuary Ceiling

### Architectural Significance

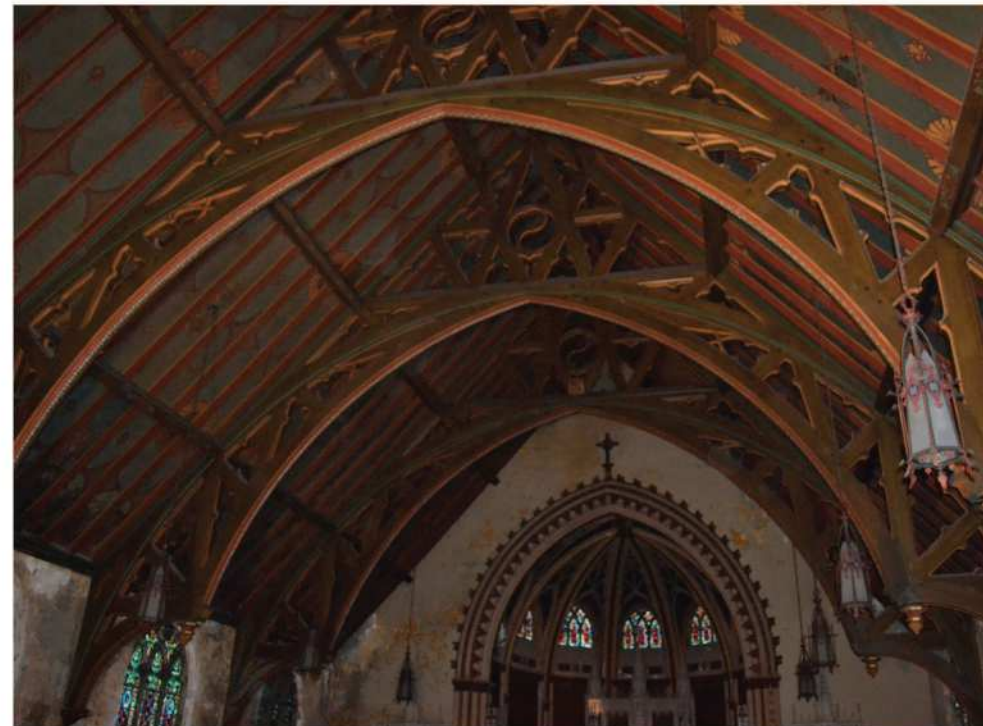
The Villa Chapel embodies the aspirations of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the citizens of Erie who built it. This beloved building must be preserved to maintain Erie's sense of place. The Director of the Institute for Sacred Architecture and University of Notre Dame professor of architecture Duncan Stroik said the Villa Chapel is "a gem that should be saved."

*Architecture, of all the arts, is the one that acts the most slowly, but the most surely, on the soul.*

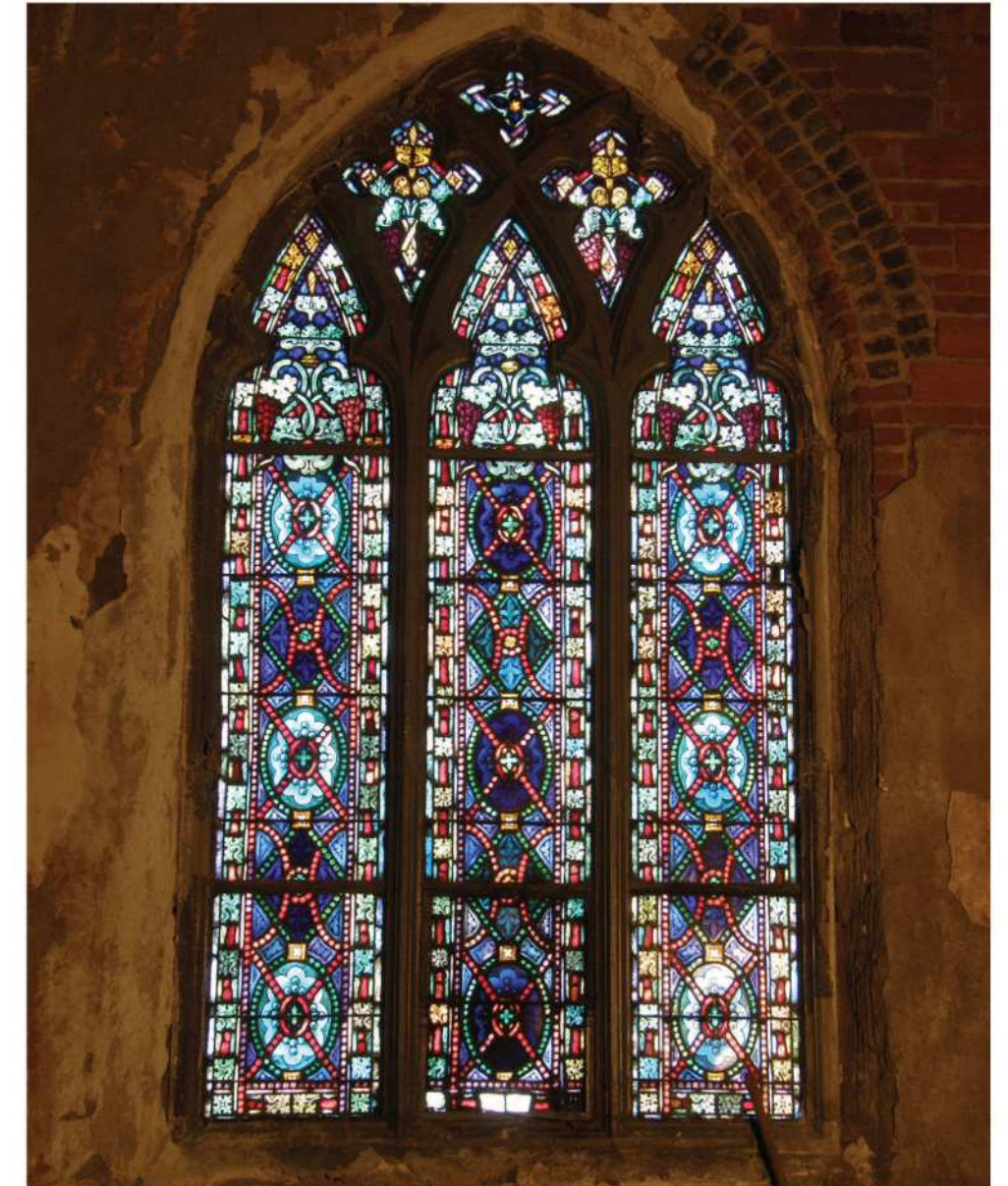
*-Ernest Dimnet*



View of Ceiling Detail and Light Fixture



View of Ceiling Detail



View of Stained Glass Window





View of Nave from Narthex



View of Choir Loft from Sanctuary

### Interior

The building consists of a full chapel space with a narthex (lobby) and sanctuary at opposite ends of the nave along the building's spine. The narthex exits to grade via an exterior stair on one side and previously provided connection to the school on the opposite side. The connection was closed off during the conversion of the elementary school into apartments. There is a choir loft above the narthex, accessible by a small stair, and a small priest's apartment

above the sacristy. The building has a full basement, which is set up as a kitchen with a dining/multi-purpose space. Majestic carved beams support the slate roof. Highly decorative, non-representational stained glass windows project a quiet kaleidoscope of moving color. Water damage from the leaking roof has destroyed much of the plaster walls and threatens permanent damage to the interior. The chapel's tile floors retain their luster.





View of Southwest Corner of Nave

### Engineer's Report

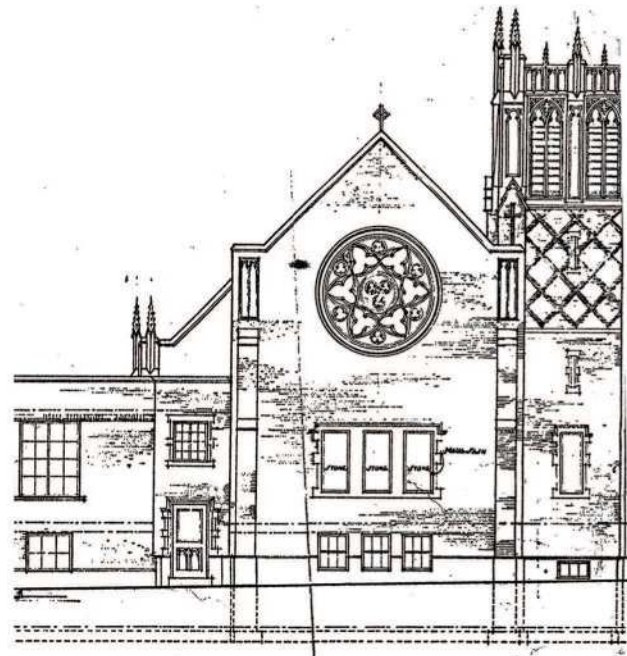
In January 2010 the Villa Chapel Committee hired Atlantic Engineering Services of Pittsburgh, PA to evaluate the chapel's structural condition. Engineer J. Gil Kaufman noted, "there is no evidence of movement or failure of any primary structural systems such as walls, beams, trusses, floor and roof joists and concrete floor deck. There is clear and significant damage to wood framing and wood roof decking at the apartment roofs and to wood decking in the lowest section of the chapel roof. The high roof over the chapel remains high and un-deformed. No sway or

displacement is observed in the roof ridge, and no cracking or separation of the wood finish trim for the trusses was observed. With the exception of the floor deck in the chapel, which is an applied surface over the primary structural deck, the floors are flat and solid. The most severe areas of distress are attributable to water intrusion of significant amounts in the areas of the apartment roofs, the roof area near the bell tower and the areas immediately below the chapel nave windowsills."

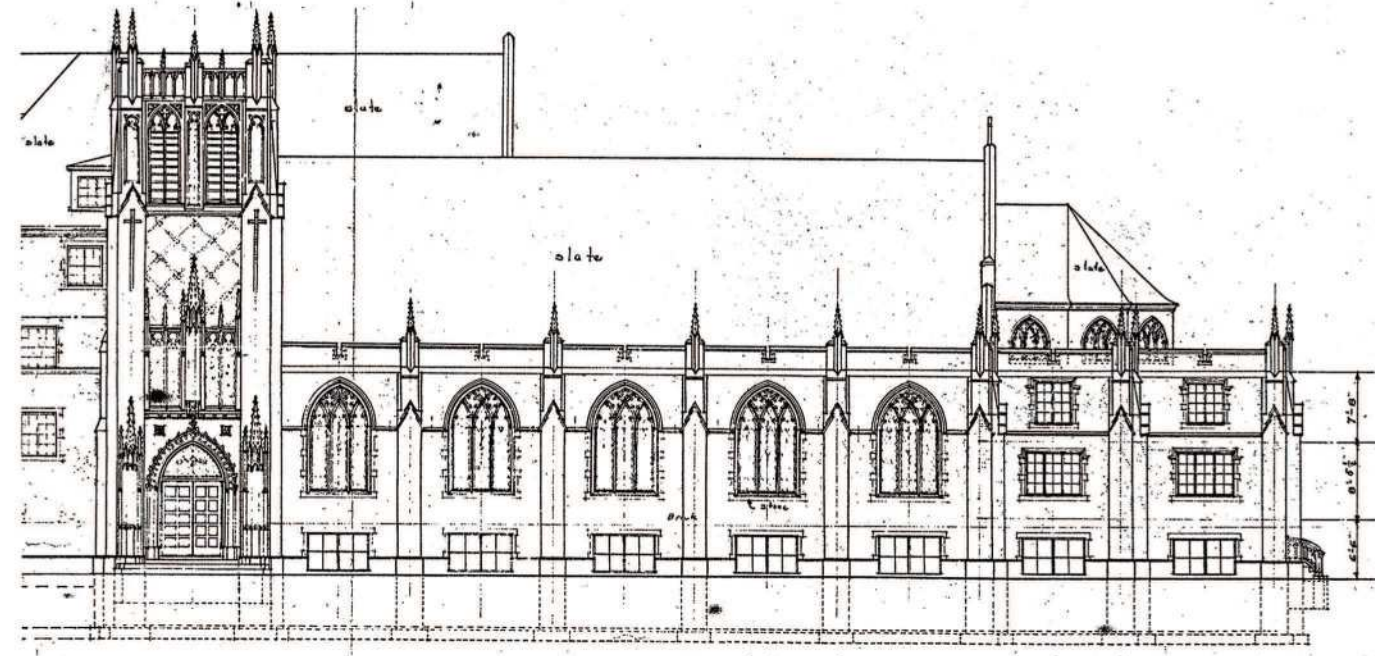


View of Basement Dining Room Looking West

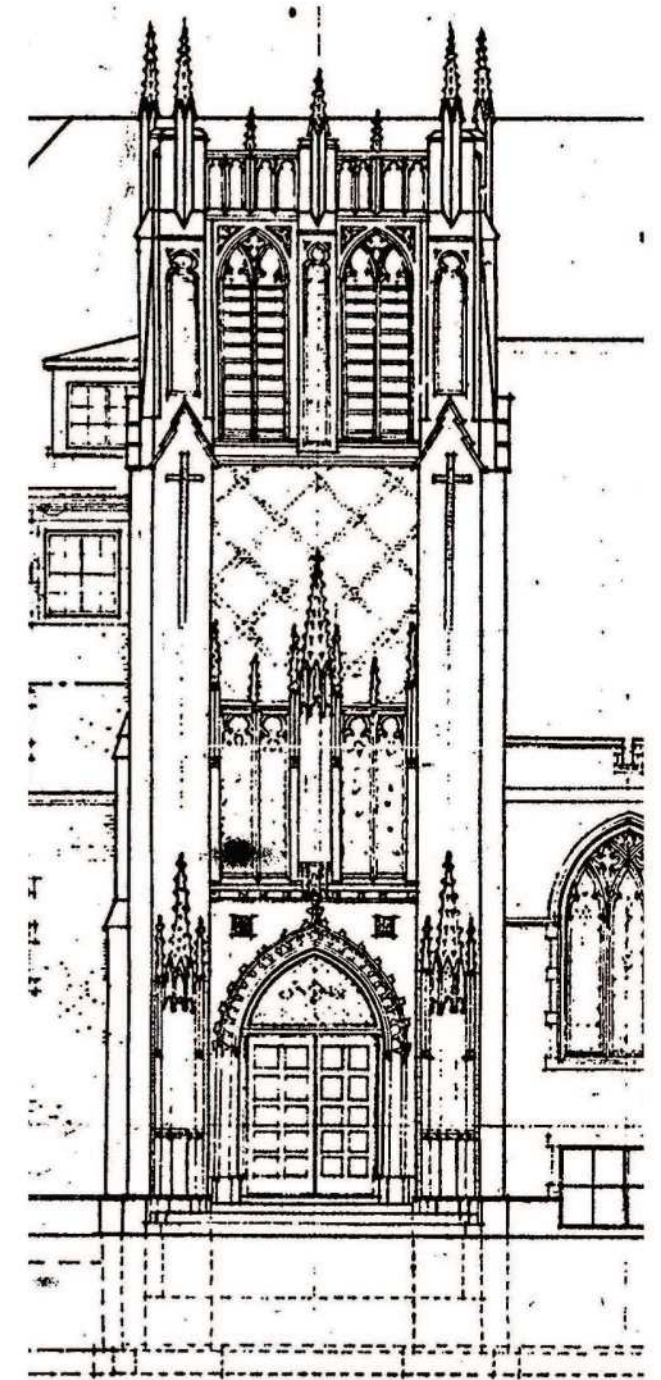




~PLUM~ST~ELEVATION~  
SCALE = 1/8" = 1'-0"

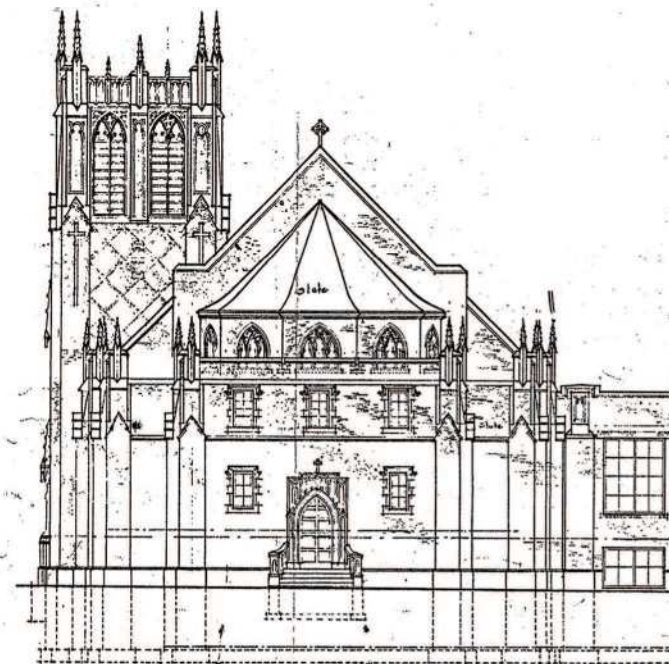


~NINTH~STREET~ELEVATION~  
SCALE = 1/8" = 1'-0"

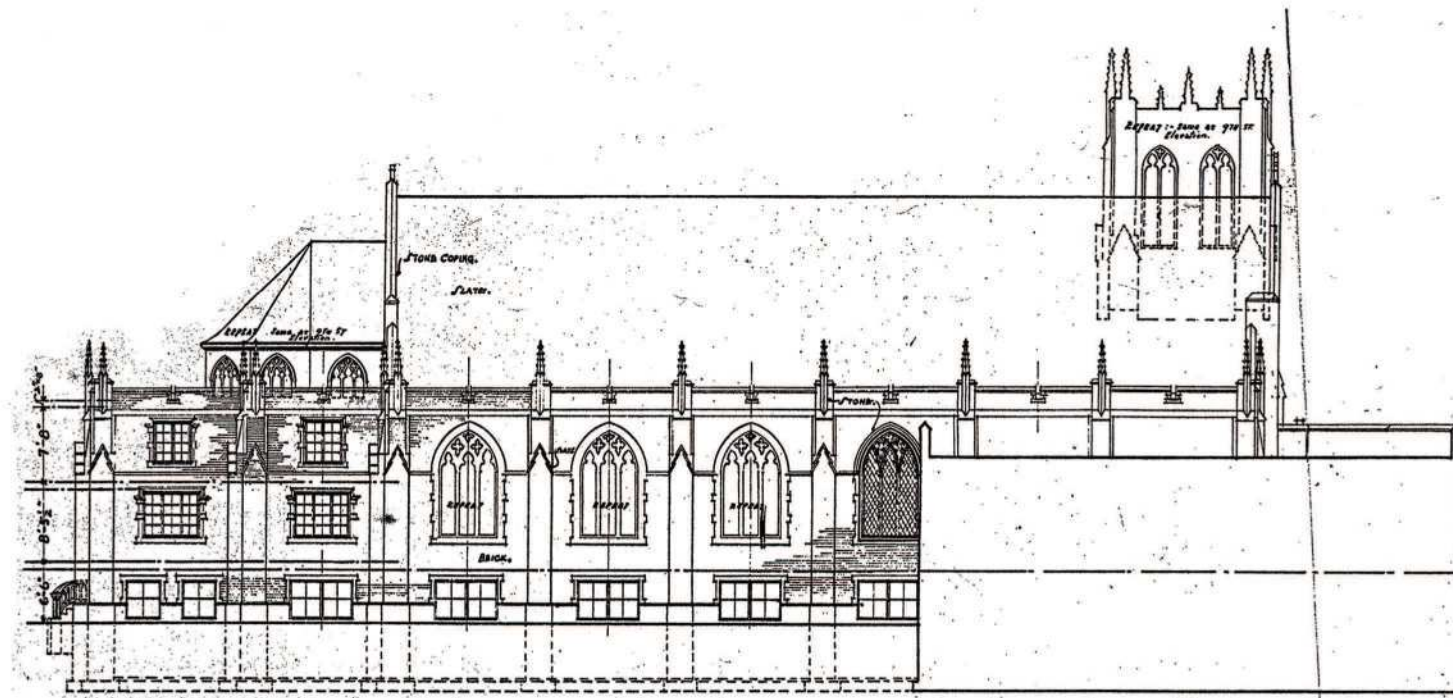


**Architectural Changes**

The bell tower and ornamental stonework visible on the original architectural drawings must have been removed over 30 years ago.

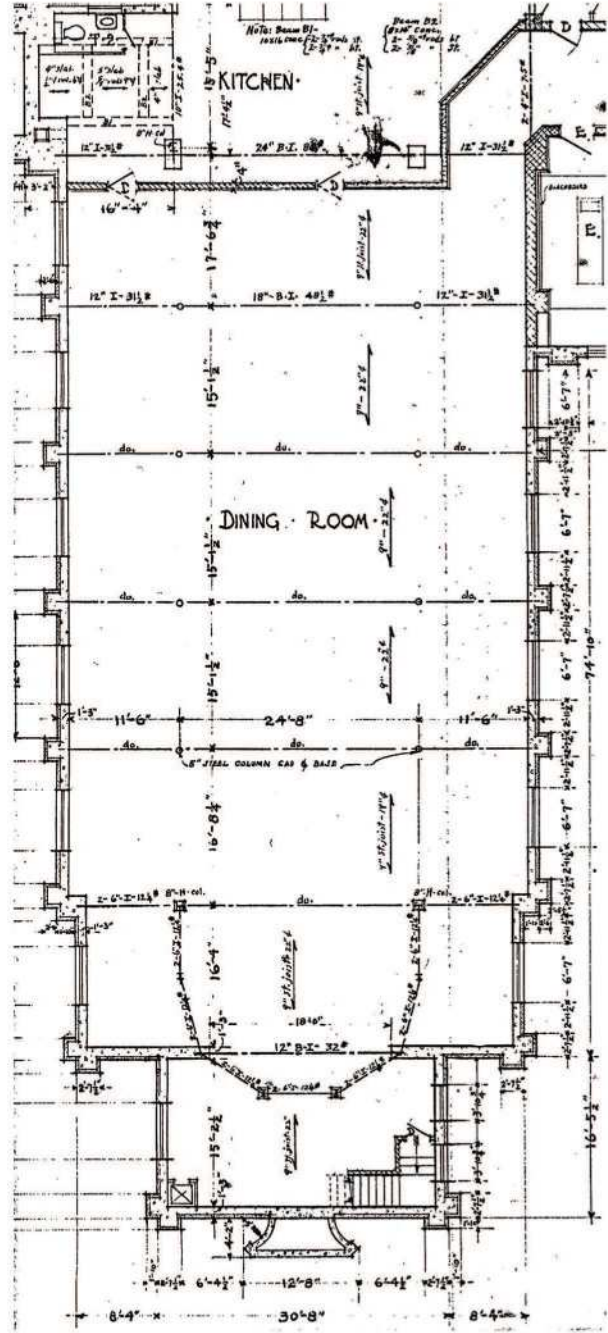


~LIBERTY~STREET~ELEVATION~  
SCALE = 1/8" = 1'-0"



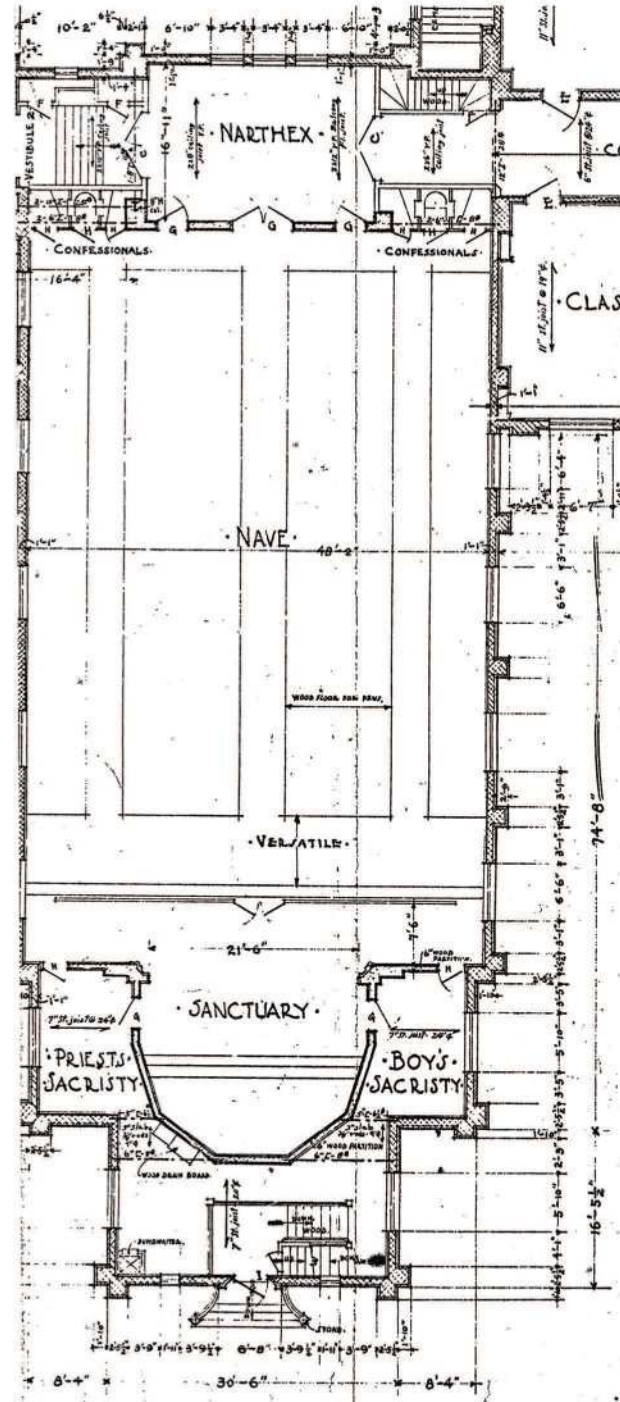
~NORTH~ELEVATION~OF~CHAPEL~  
SCALE = 1/8" = 1'-0"





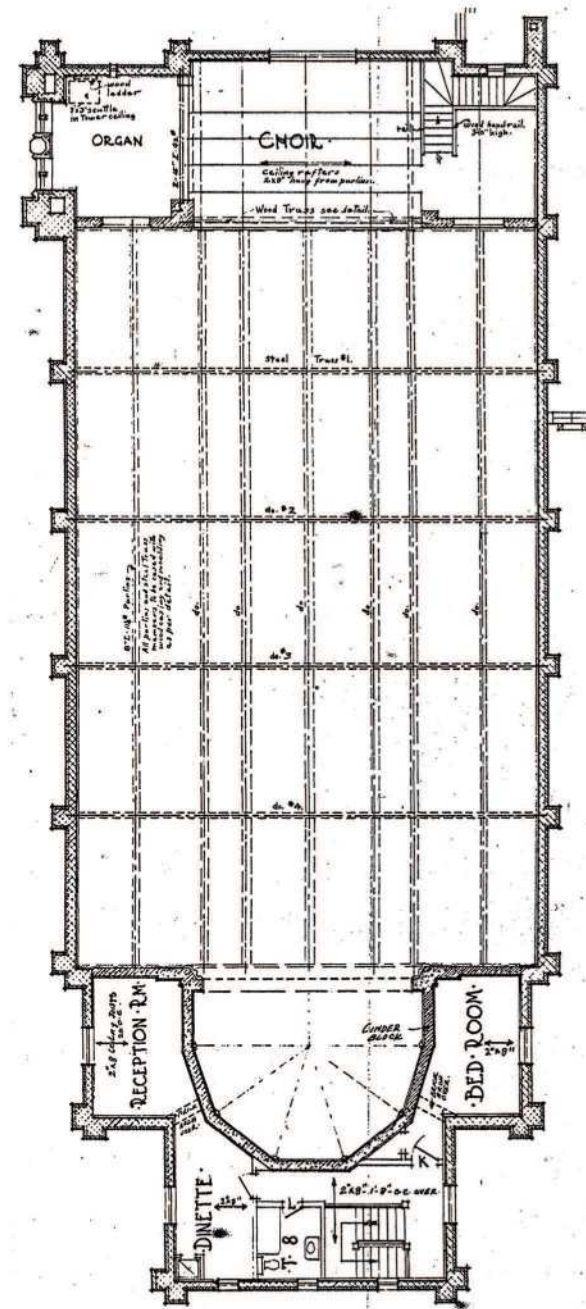
CHAPEL

GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



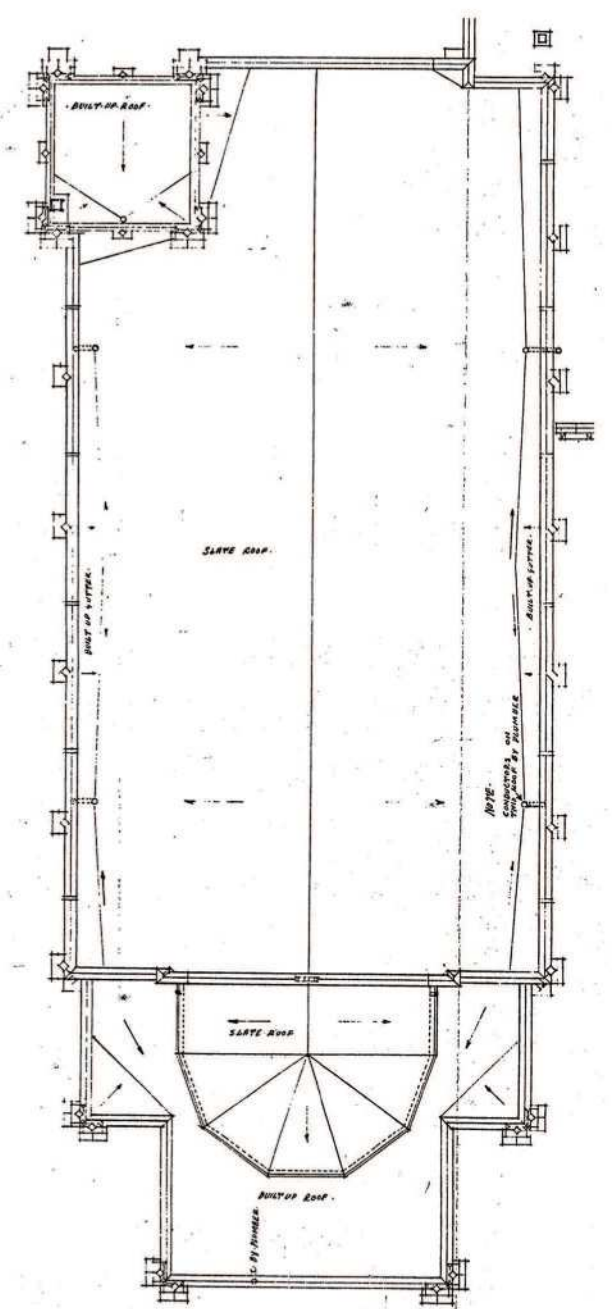
CHAPEL

FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



CHAPEL

SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



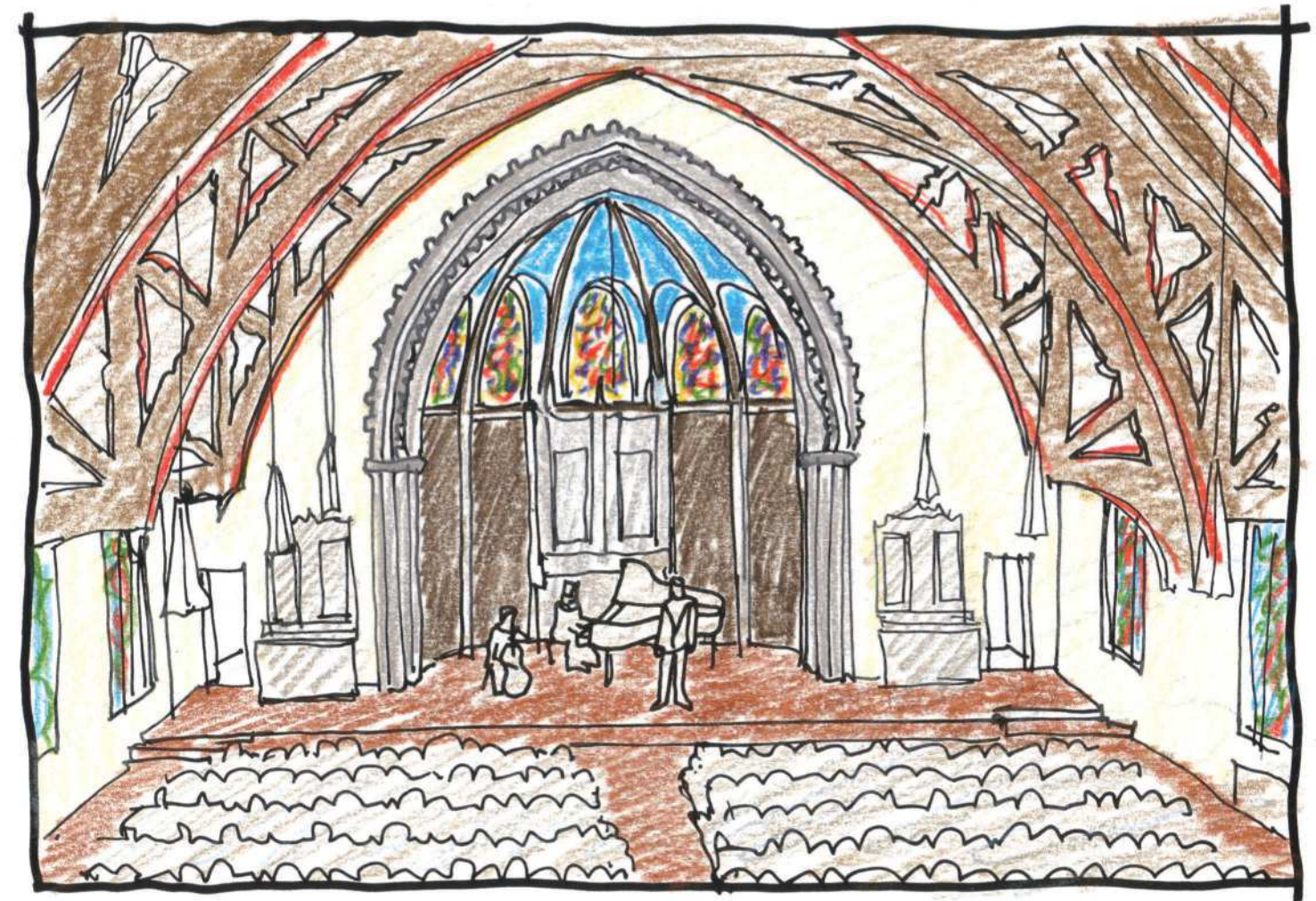
CHAPEL

ATTIC & ROOF PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"





Daycare (Ground Floor)



Multi-Use Venue (Main Chapel Space)

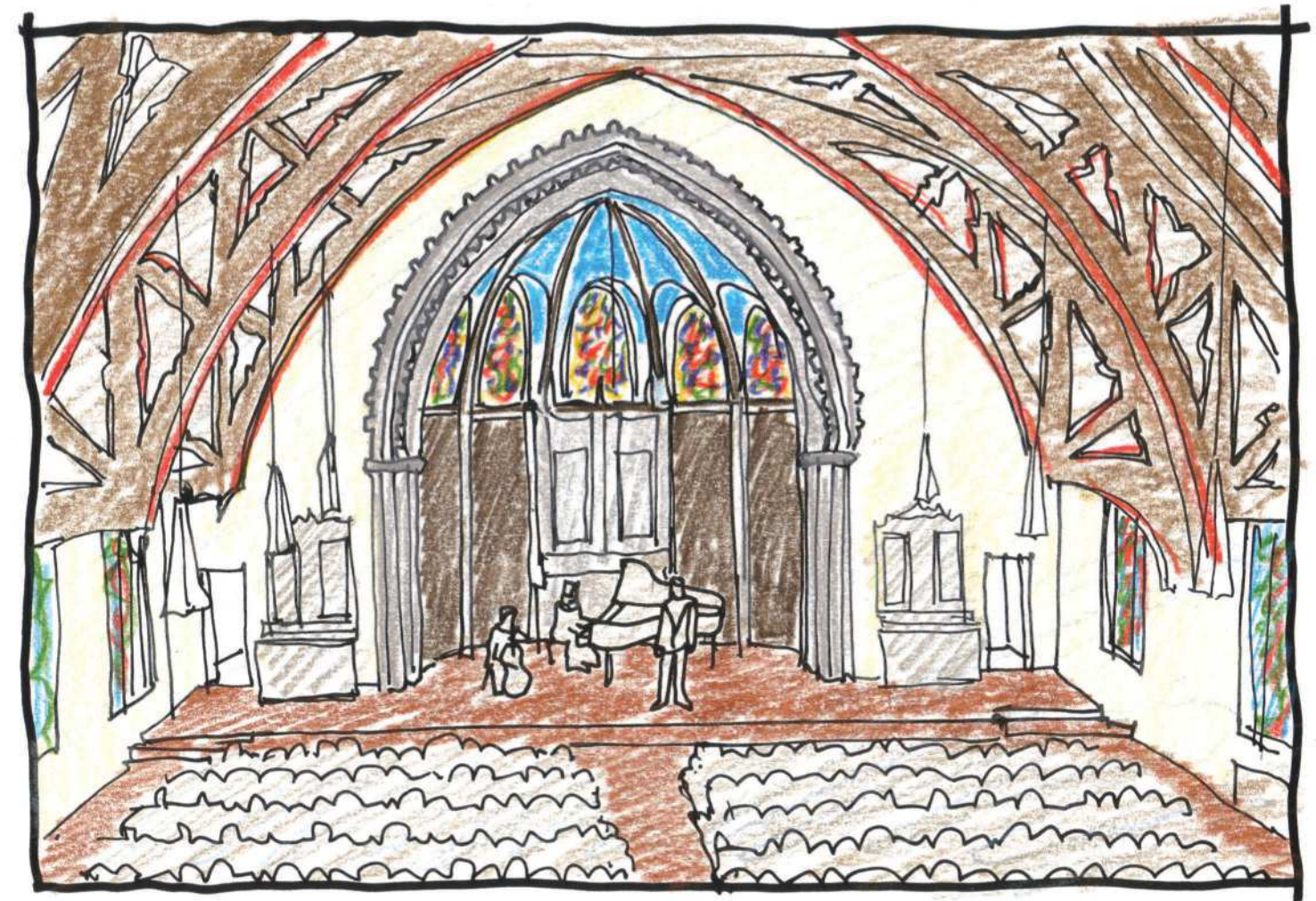
The nave and sanctuary can be converted into a multi-use space for a variety of functions including:

- Catering hall for private dinners and fundraising events
- Wedding receptions
- Space for film screenings
- Space for music and dance recitals
- Space for performing art productions
- Art exhibitions and other community events
- Receptions for nearby funeral home
- Conference center/satellite space





Daycare (Ground Floor)



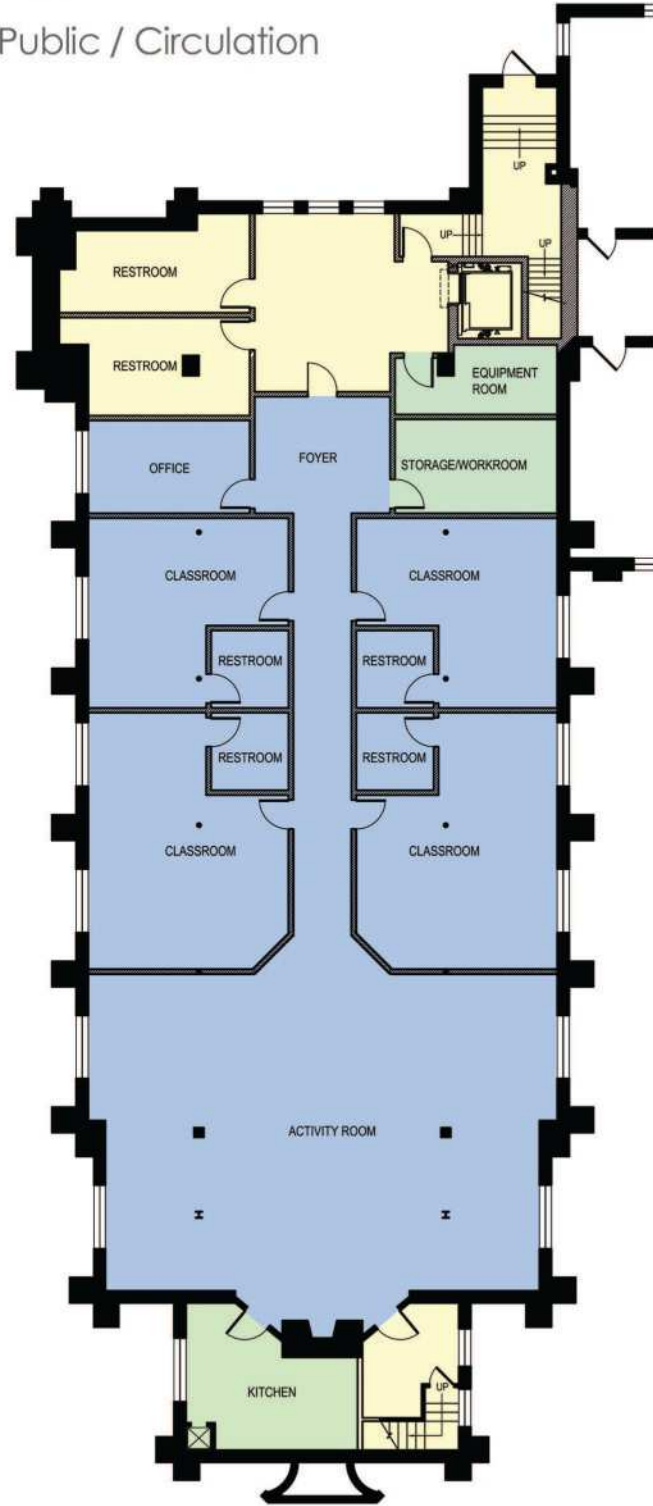
Multi-Use Venue (Main Chapel Space)

The nave and sanctuary can be converted into a multi-use space for a variety of functions including:

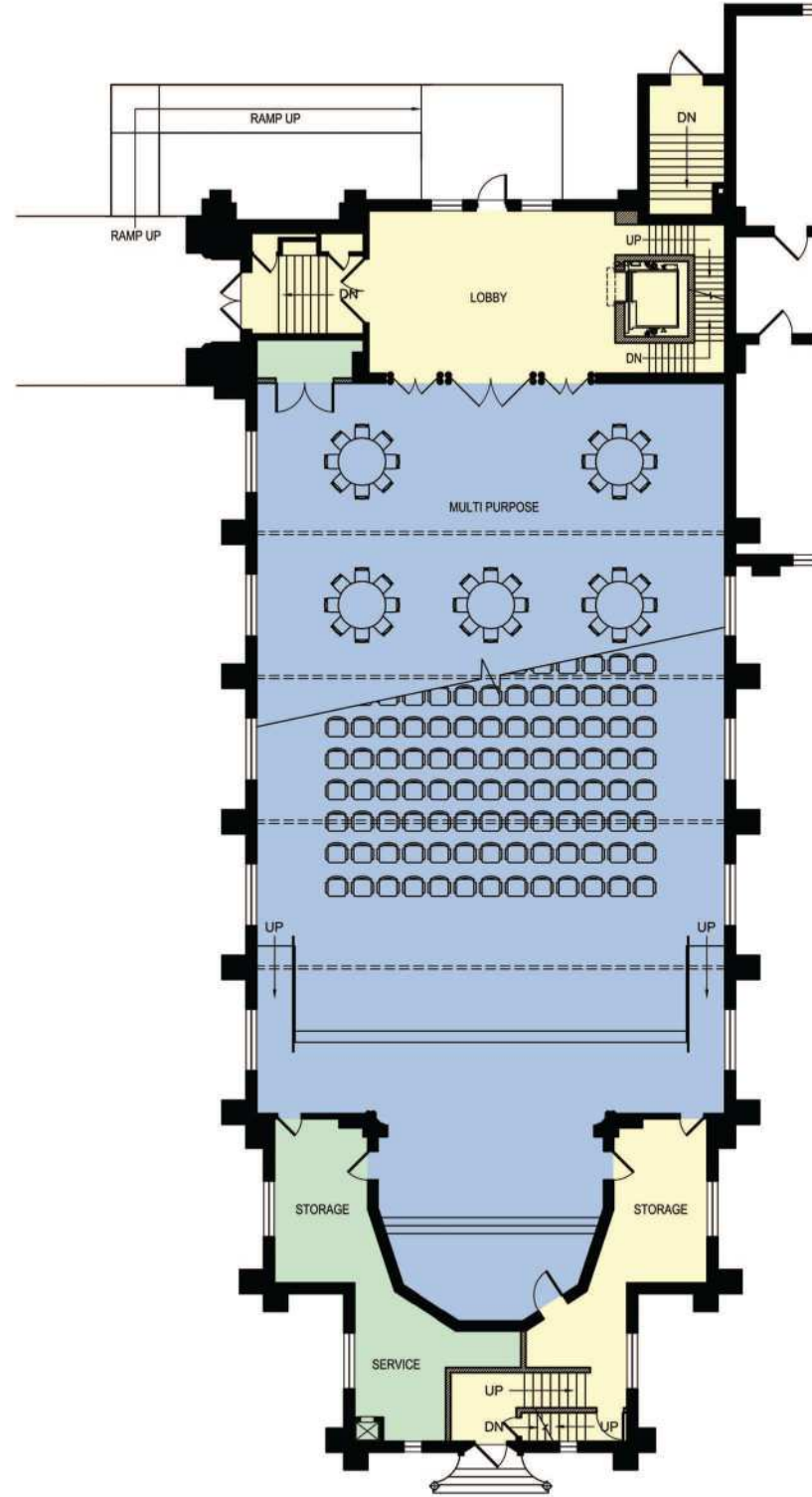
- Catering hall for private dinners and fundraising events
- Wedding receptions
- Space for film screenings
- Space for music and dance recitals
- Space for performing art productions
- Art exhibitions and other community events
- Receptions for nearby funeral home
- Conference center/satellite space



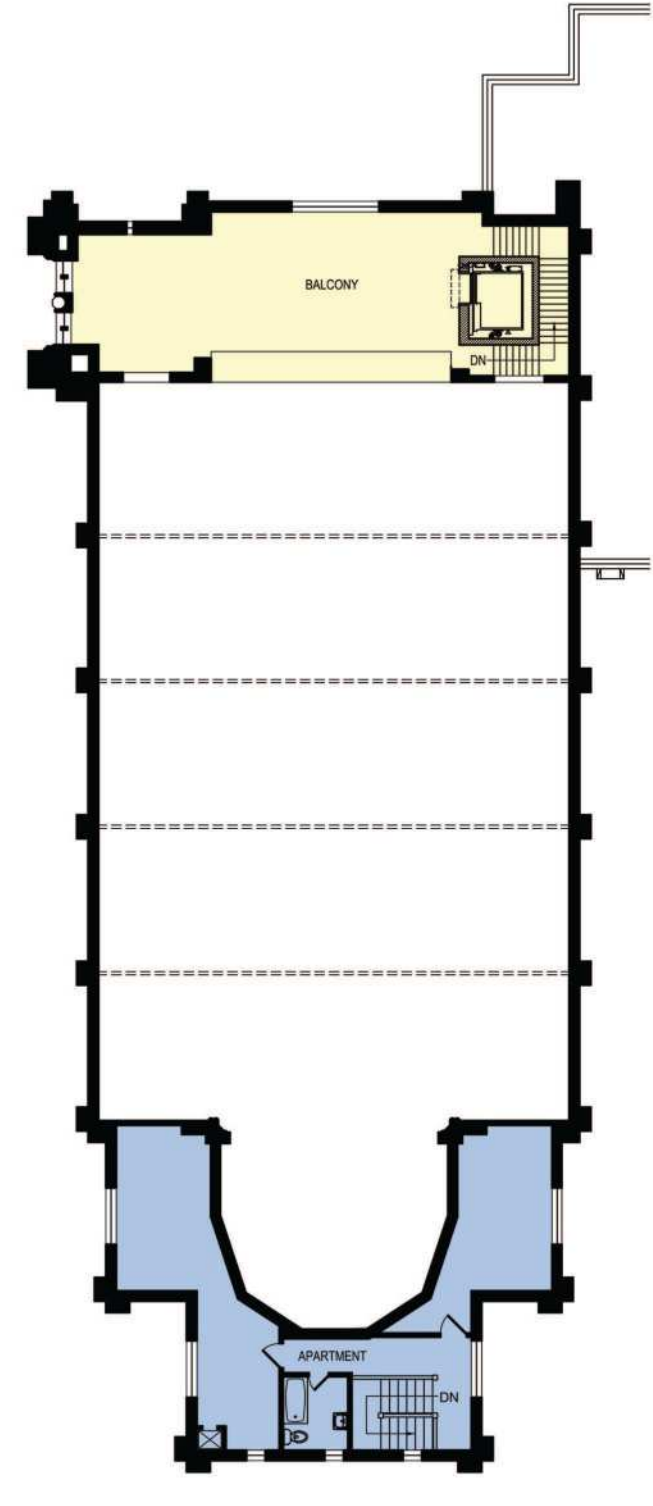
- Day Care / Multi-Purpose
- Support
- Public / Circulation



**BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



**SECOND FLOOR LOFT PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



## Restaurant Option

Option 2 for the adaptive reuse of the Villa Chapel is a single use, commercial approach that respects the physical characteristics of the original interior spaces. The proposed use includes a restaurant, bar and private meeting rooms.

The restaurant option converts the nave and sanctuary into a single dining space with booths and individual tables. Anchoring the center of the space are "community tables," also known as communal tables. This type of dining arrangement allows for socialization and can accommodate anything from a single diner to a large group very easily. The conversion of the nave into a dining hall allows the original space to remain one large room and seat up to 175 people. The one physical change to the space is the insertion of an open stair in the original sanctuary to provide access to the basement.

Located in the basement is a bar/casual dining area for 100 people, a private party room for up to 40 people, restrooms and the kitchen. The advantage of locating these spaces in the basement is that it preserves the nave as a single space. The second floor choir loft would be a private dining area and the former priest apartment would be offices for the restaurant.

Public access to the building would be through the narthex accessed by a handicap accessible exterior entrance constructed on the Plum Street side of the chapel. An elevator installed at the north end of the narthex would provide accessibility to the basement, first floor and choir loft.

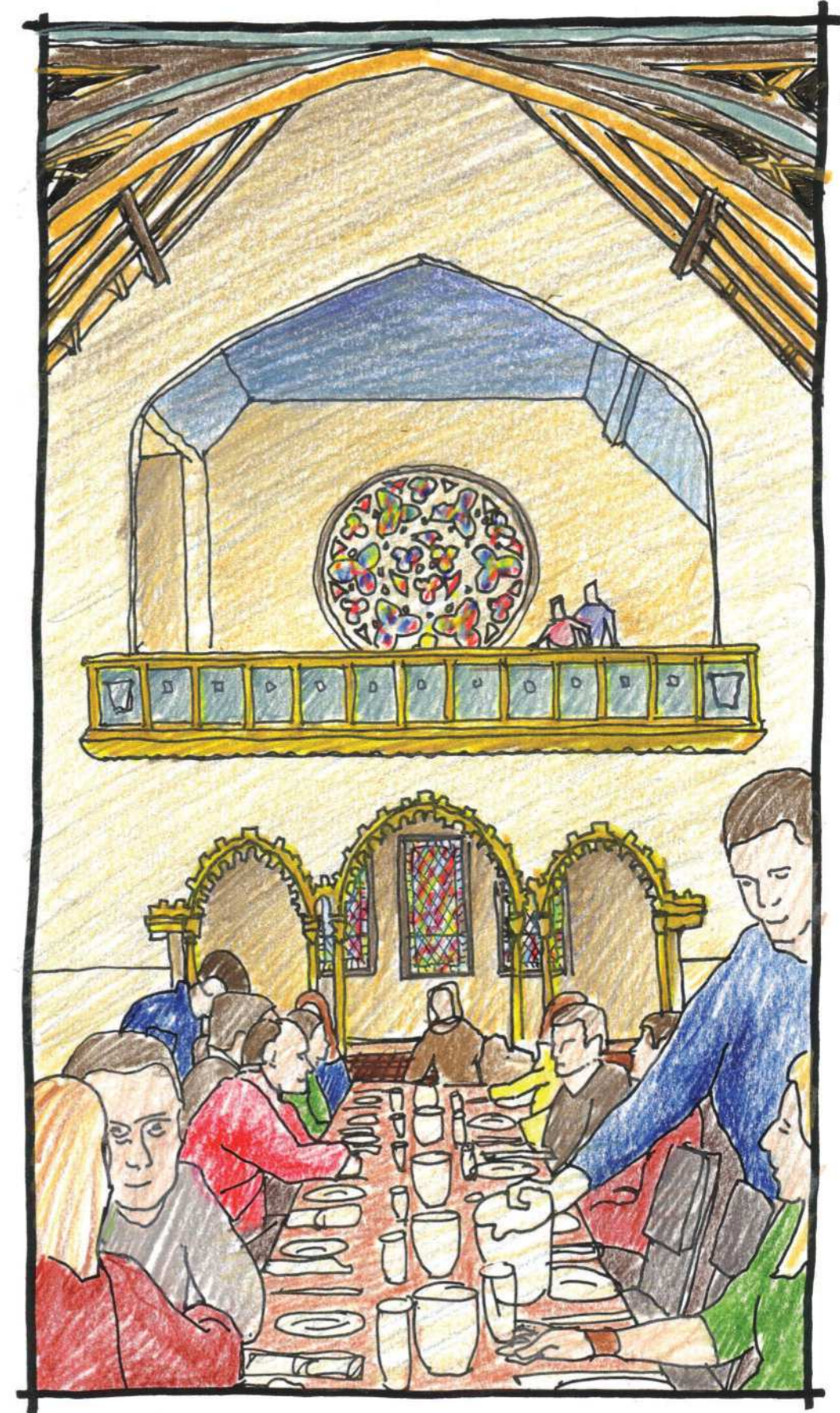
The exterior of the chapel would receive a new roof, masonry restoration, window replacement and repair. The overall exterior appearance would remain as it currently exists. The fence around the chapel would also remain with the corner lawn area being converted into a landscaped area for an exterior gathering and dining area when weather permits.

This renovation option will require a complete interior and exterior renovation including all finishes and systems. New construction within the historic narthex, nave and sanctuary is limited as the proposed uses work well within these historic spaces. The basement will require new construction to accommodate the proposed uses. The interior (net) size of the chapel is as follows:

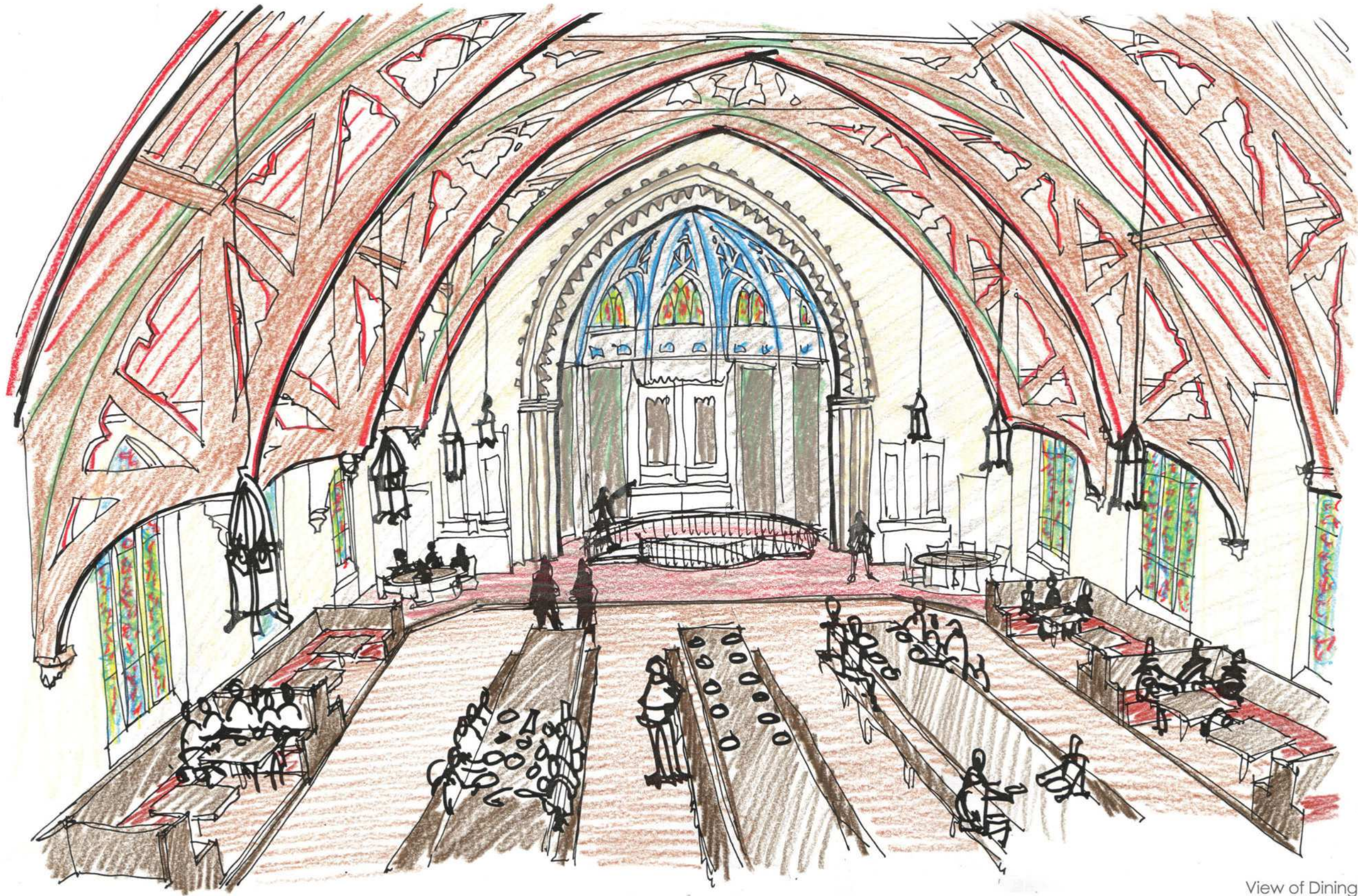
Basement:	5,900 Sq. Ft.
First Floor:	5,800 Sq. Ft.
Second Floor:	1,500 Sq. Ft.
TOTAL	13,300 Sq. Ft.

Estimated cost of construction for this option is \$2,300,000. This is higher than Option 1 as it includes a commercial kitchen, bar, dumbwaiter, service areas, new stair, larger restrooms, and built-in seating.

The impact on the neighborhood would be increased traffic during evenings and weekends. No off street parking for the restaurant will be provided. All off street parking on the Villa Maria campus is reserved for the apartment residents. Non-metered on street parking is provided throughout the neighborhood. There are several commercial and religious facilities within a one block radius of the Villa Chapel that have off street parking lots that may be available. Restaurants and bars located in residential neighborhoods can be found throughout the City of Erie.



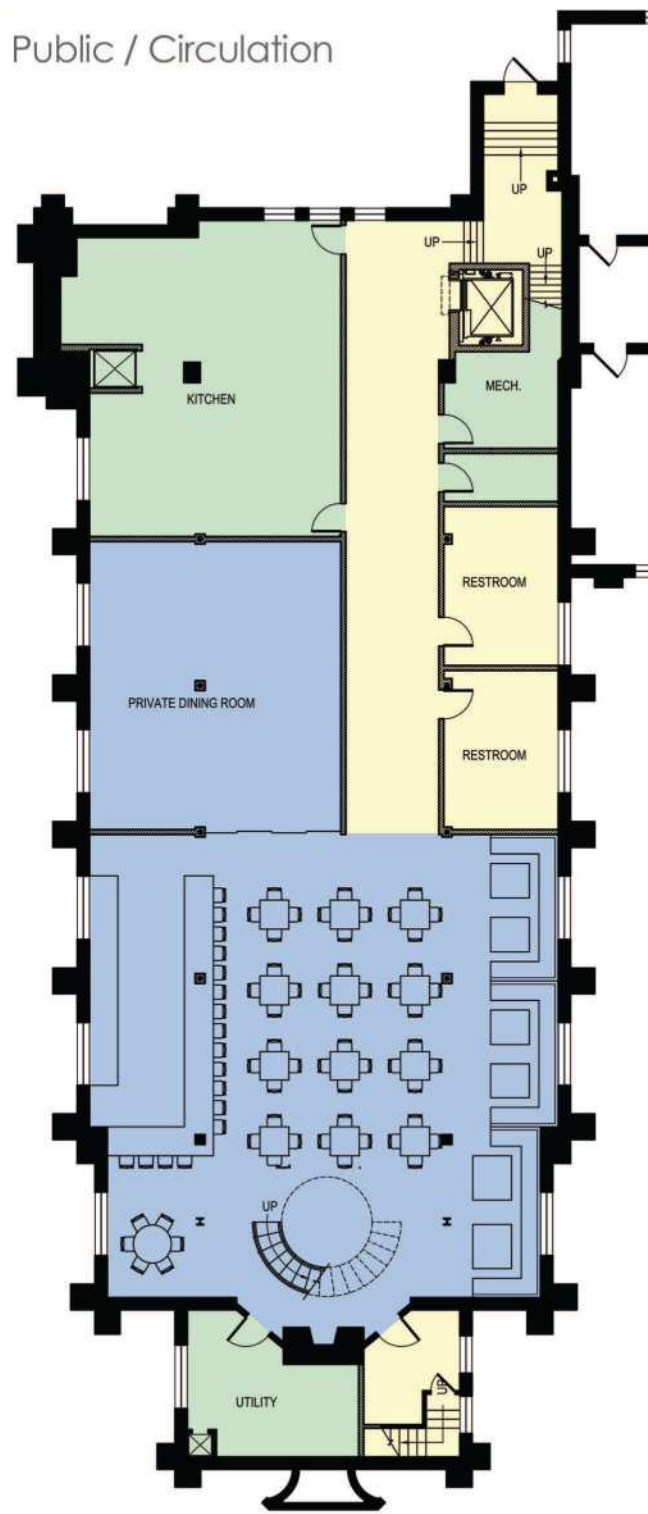




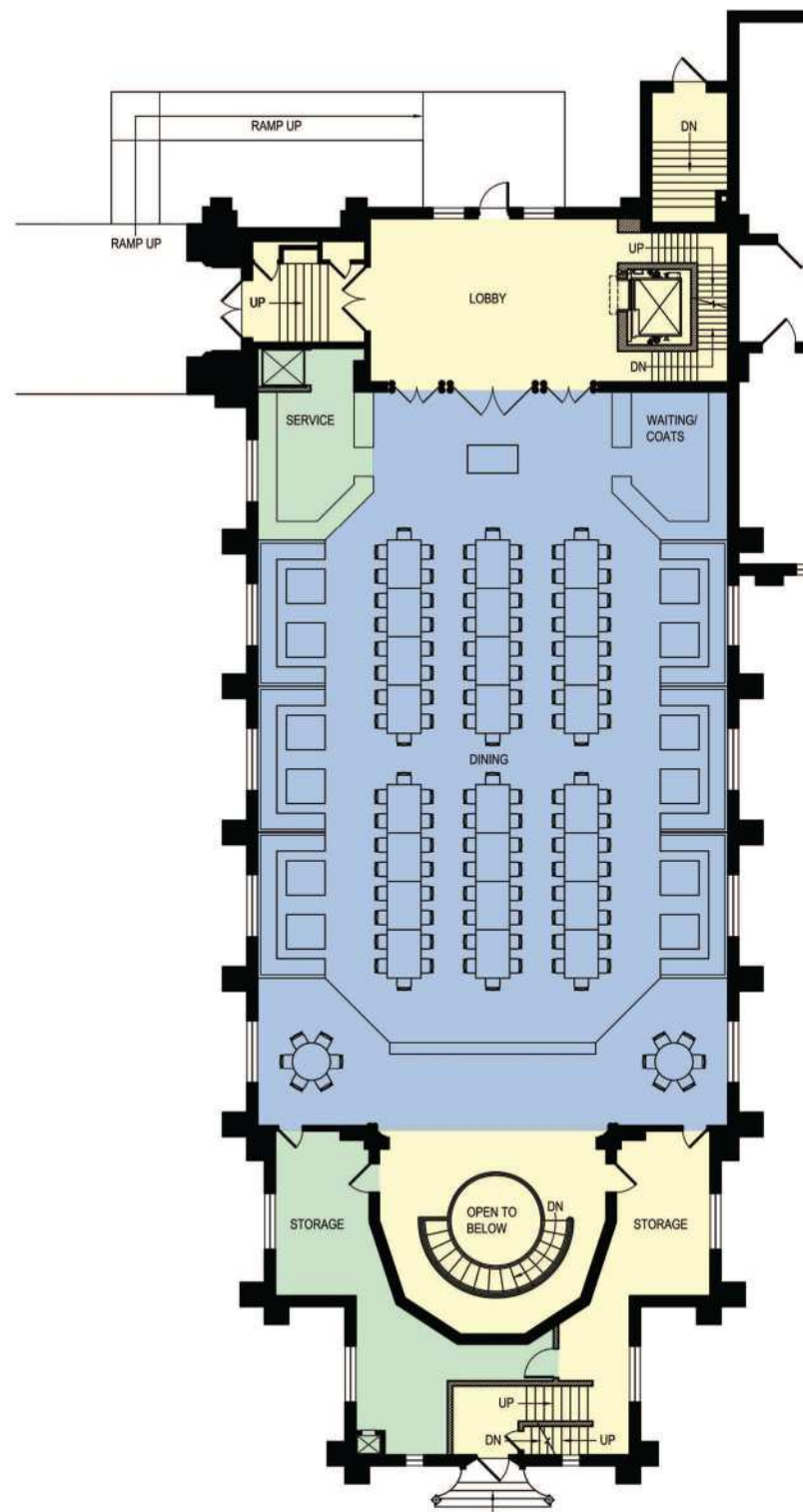
View of Dining Hall from Choir Loft



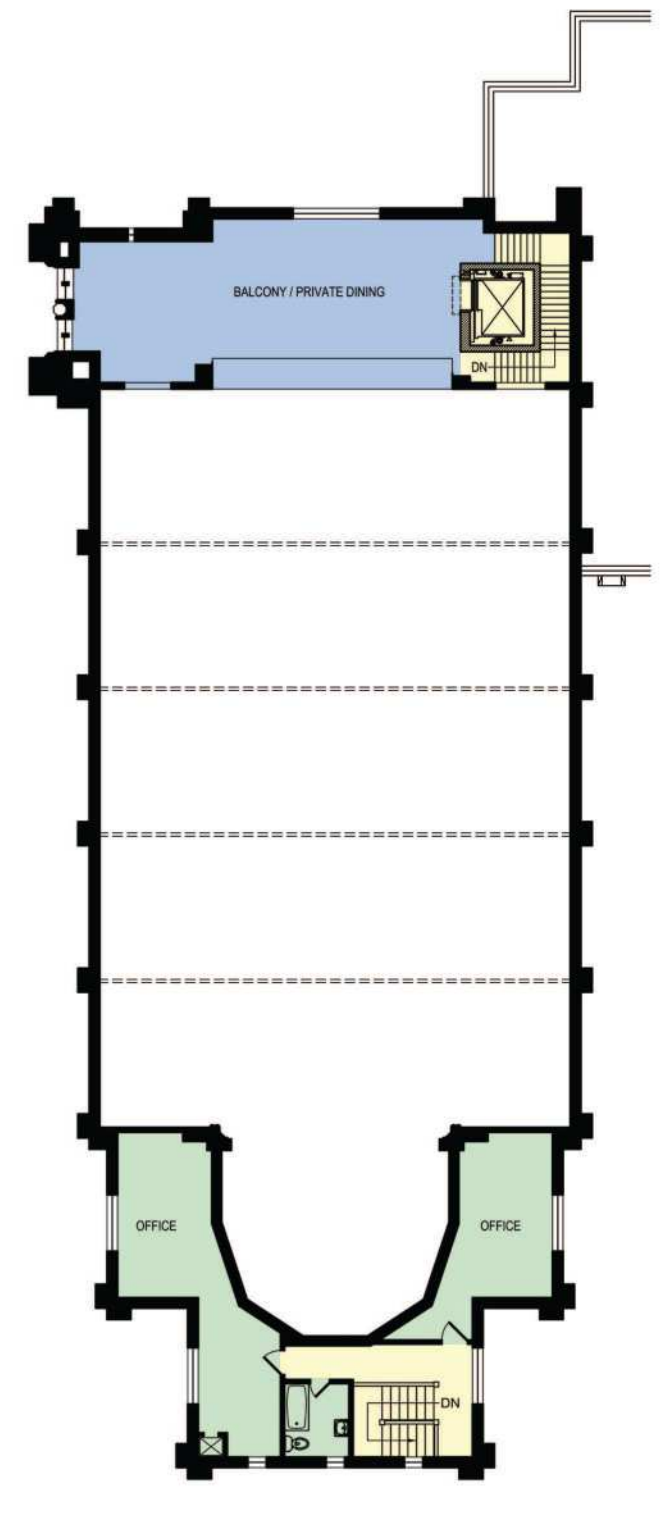
- Restaurant
- Support
- Public / Circulation



**BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



**SECOND FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



## Residential Option

Option 3 for the adaptive reuse of the Villa Chapel is to make it a multi-family residential building that would drastically alter the physical characteristics of the original interior spaces. The other historic buildings on the Villa Maria campus have been converted to rental apartments for seniors and families.

This housing option proposes constructing 12 one bedroom loft apartments within the existing nave, 5 one bedroom handicap accessible apartments in the basement and 1 one bedroom apartment at the former priest apartment. This solution requires the insertion of three floors of new construction within the existing volume of the nave with circulation corridors, an elevator and stair at the narthex/loft and a new stair within the volume of the sacristy. In order to fit the second level of loft apartments within the upper nave space, dormers would be constructed at the roof to create loft spaces and provide daylight to these units. Each apartment would be very unique with sections of the roof trusses exposed within each unit and a variety of ceiling heights throughout the units.

Tenant access to the building would be through the narthex accessed by a handicap accessible exterior entrance constructed on the Plum Street side of the chapel and an elevator installed at the north end of the narthex would provide accessibility to the basement, first floor and second floor units.

The exterior of the chapel would receive a new roof with dormers, masonry restoration, window replacement and repair. The overall exterior appearance would remain as it currently exists except for the addition of the ten new dormers. The fence around the chapel would also remain with the corner lawn area being converted into a landscaped area for the tenants.

This renovation option is by far the most extensive of the three and will require considerable interior and exterior work, including the installation of all new finishes and systems. New construction within the historic narthex, nave and sanctuary is complicated and will drastically alter the original space. The basement will require new construction to accommodate the new apartments. The total interior (net) size of the original chapel is 13,243 Sq. Ft. The proposed housing option increases the size of the building to 18,391 Sq Ft. The five basement apartments are 635 Sq. Ft. each, the six first floor loft apartments are 1,300 Sq. Ft. each and the seven second floor lofts are 600 Sq. Ft. each.

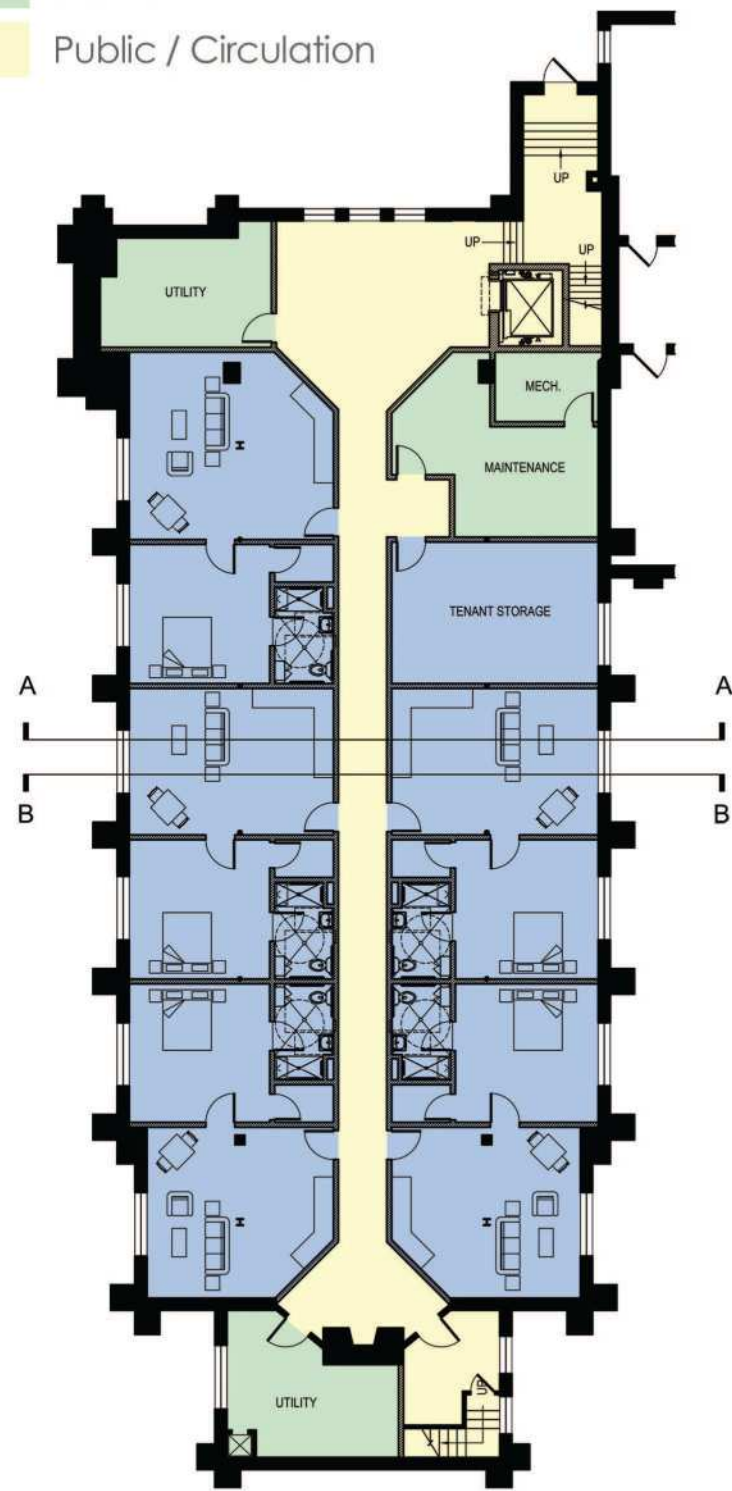
Estimated cost of construction for this option is \$3,700,000. This is higher than Option 2 as it includes extensive new construction: 18 kitchens and bathrooms, 18 utility systems and exterior modifications.

The impact on the neighborhood would be less than Options 1 and 2 since the occupant load is limited to residents of 18 apartments. No off street parking for the apartments will be provided. All off street parking on the Villa Maria campus is reserved for the existing apartment residents. Non-metered on street parking is provided throughout the neighborhood.

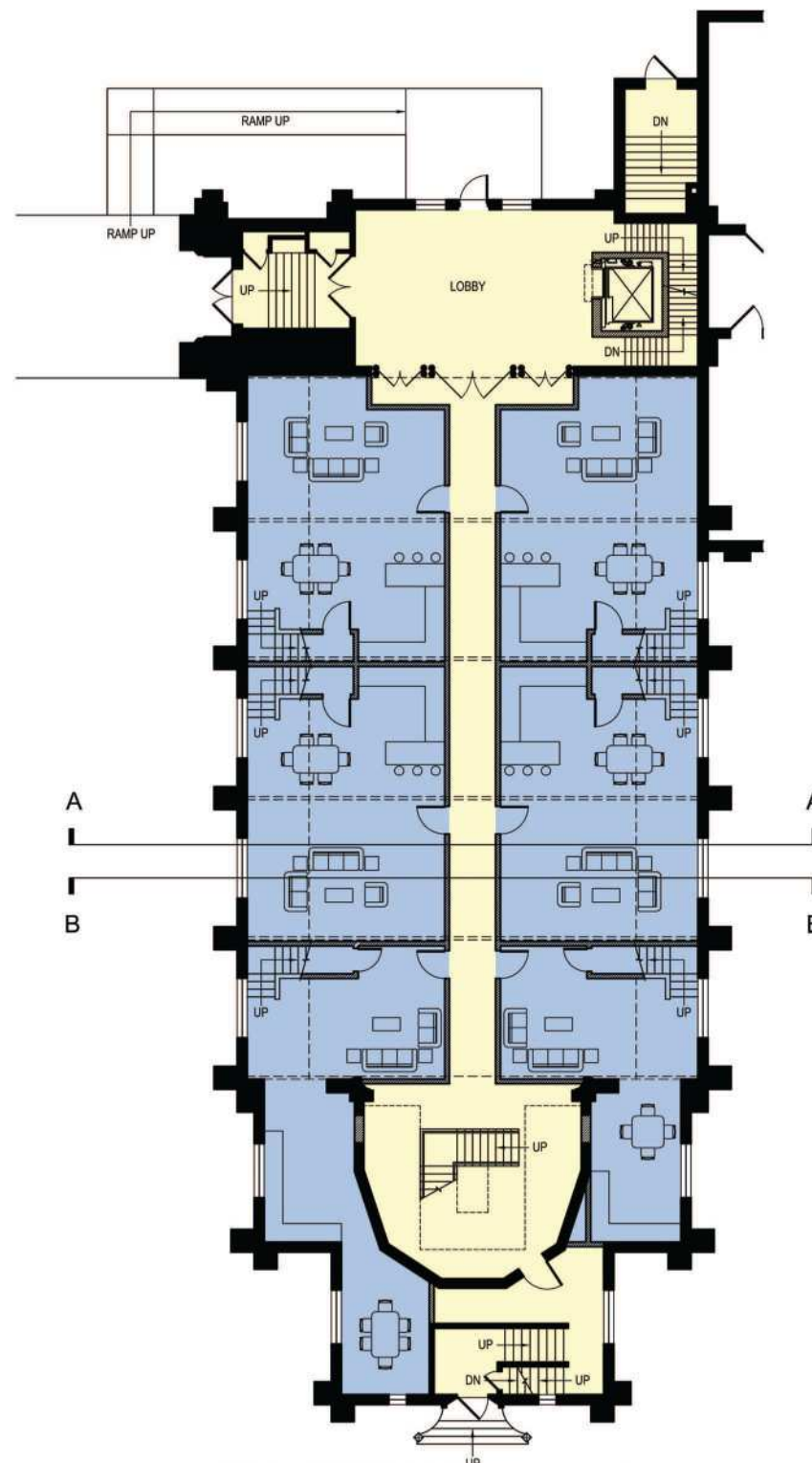




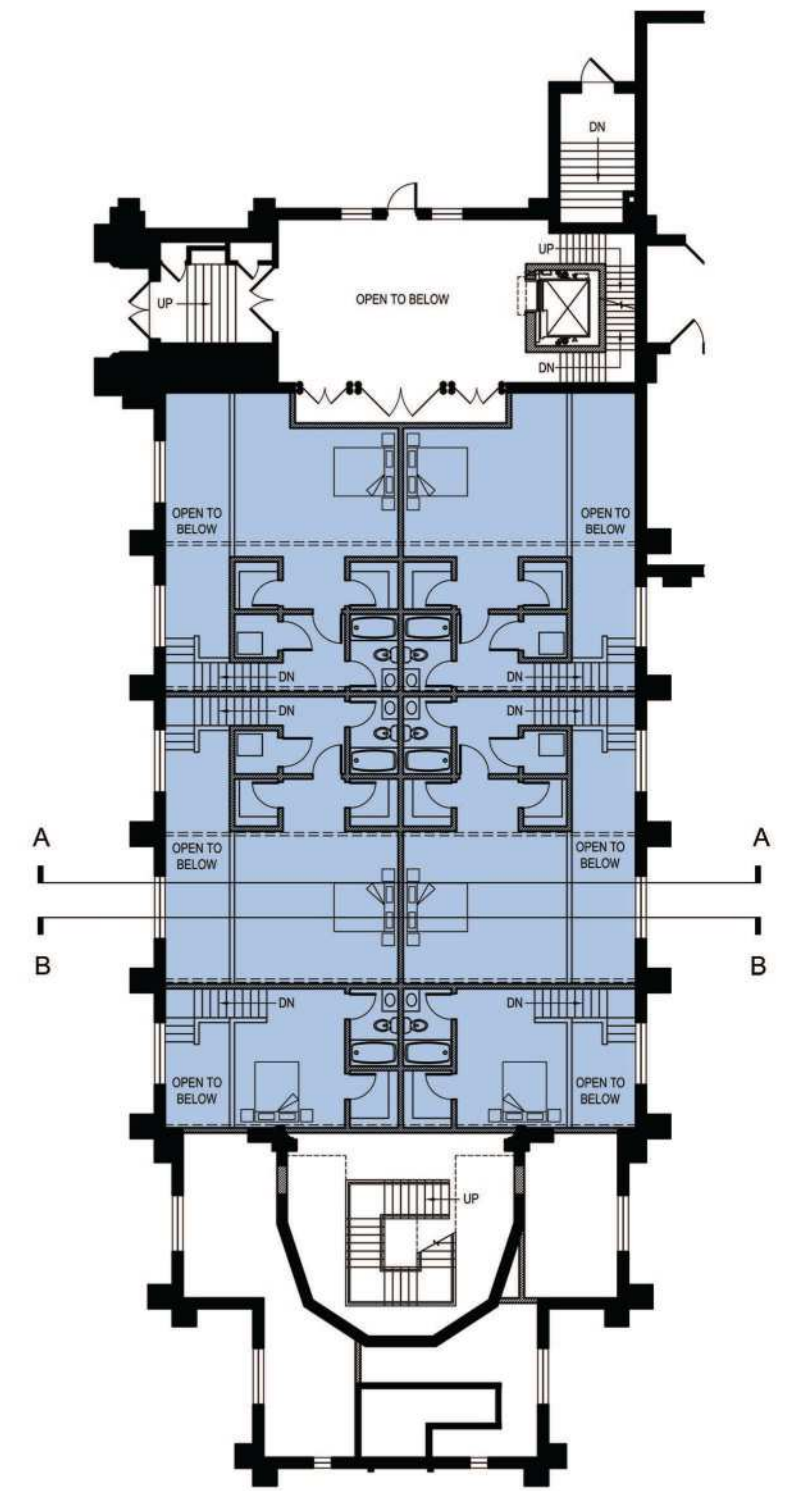
- Residential
- Support
- Public / Circulation



**BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



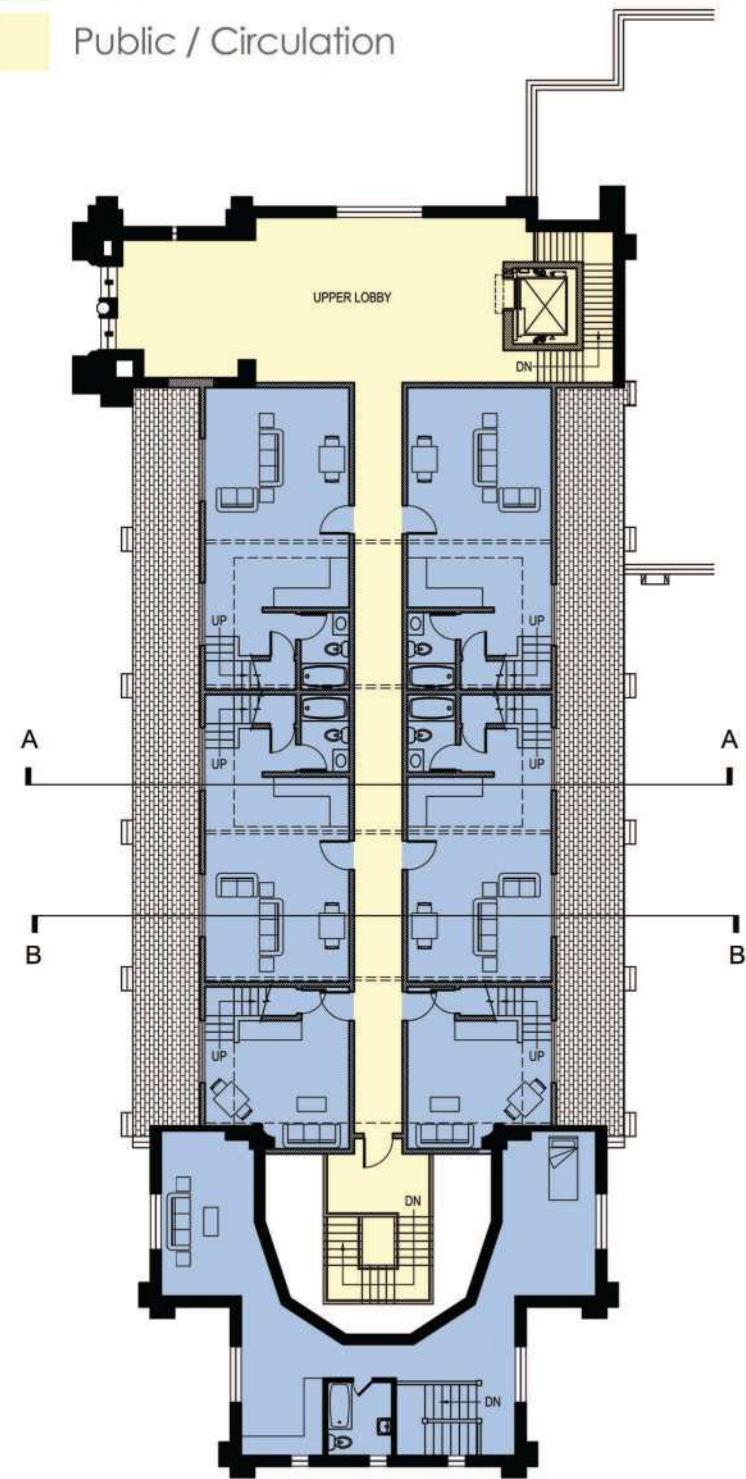
**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



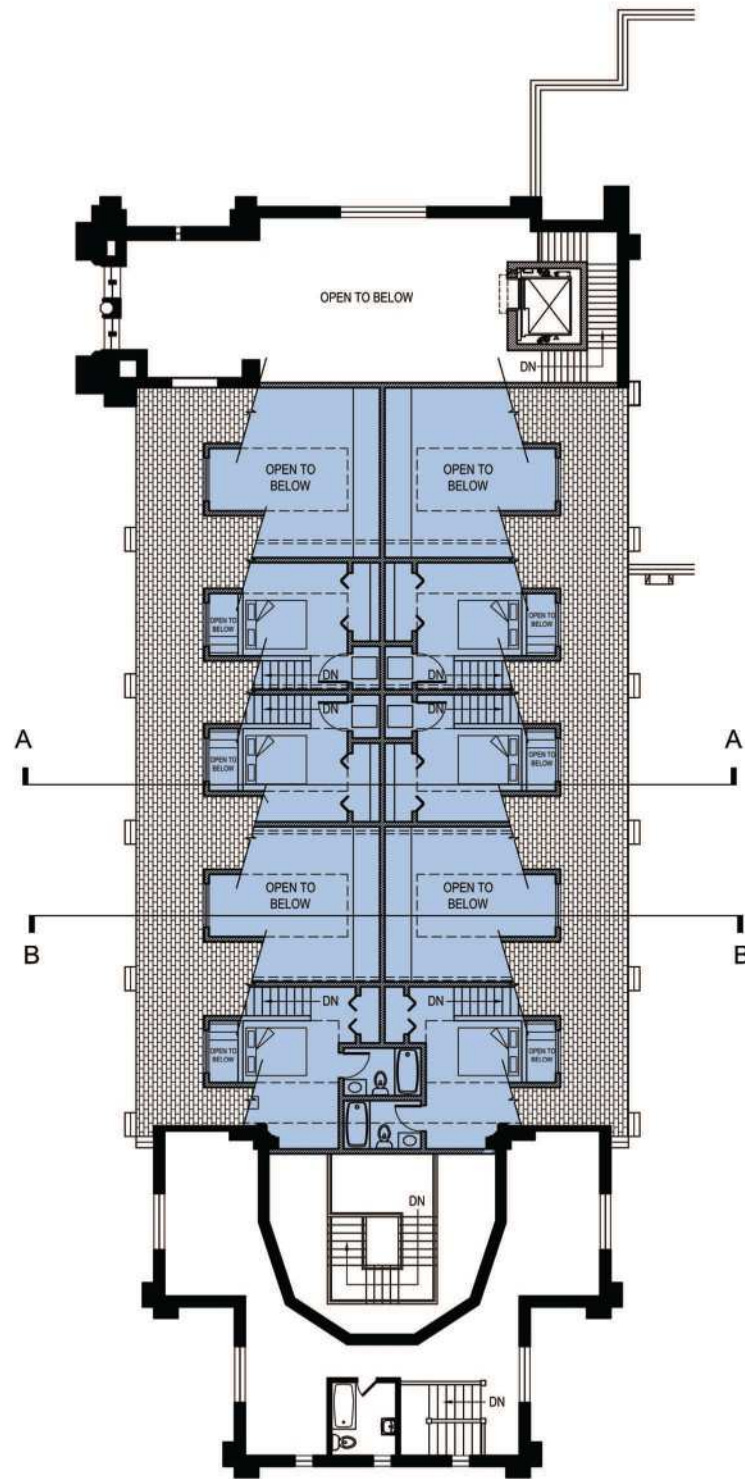
**FIRST FLOOR LOFT PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-8"



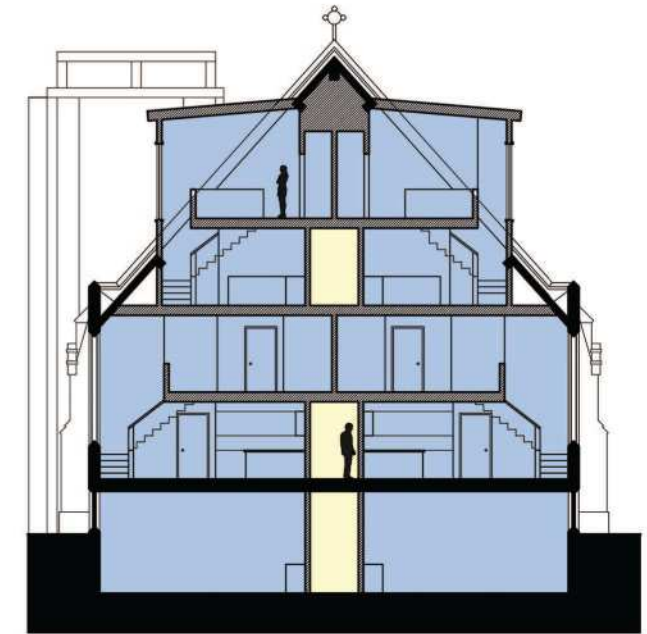
- Residential
- Support
- Public / Circulation



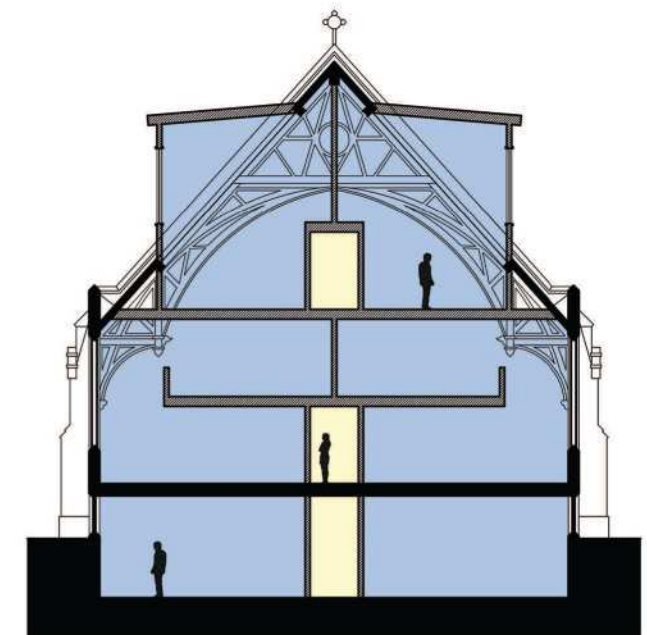
**SECOND FLOOR PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-0"



**SECOND FLOOR LOFT PLAN**  
1/8" = 1'-0"



**SECTION A**  
1/8" = 1'-0"



**SECTION B**  
1/8" = 1'-0"





View of West 9<sup>th</sup> Street Elevation with New Dormers



## Sponsors



Save the Villa Chapel Committee  
www.villachapel.com  
Judy Alstadt  
Lisa Austin  
Barbara Crone  
Sally Kohler  
Sue Moyer  
Sheila Murray  
Mary Pat Schlaudecker  
Timothy Donlin

## Partners



(Preservation Erie)  
www.eriectcp.org

**NATIONAL  
TRUST  
FOR  
HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION®**



## Charrette Participants

Judy Alstadt, Kelly Armor, Lisa Austin, Mike Baker, Dave Brennan, Dan Burdick, Barbara Crone, Timothy Donlin, Ed Goebel, Erin Hammerstedt, Jessica Horan-Kunco, Tom Kennedy, Jeff Kidder, Sally Kohler, Matt Lebowitz, Bill Lyden, Chris Magoc, Roberta McCall, Jim McCormick, Melinda Meyer, Sue Moyer, Sheila Murray, Rich Olaya, Craige Pepper, Mary Pat Schlaudecker, Ellis Schmidlapp, Amanda Sisseem, Lois Smith, Richard Wagner, Jerry Whitmeyer

## Architects



Dave Brennan AIA  
Economic Development Corp. of Erie County  
Erie, PA

## KidderWachter Architecture & Design

Jeff Kidder AIA  
Kidder Wachter Architecture and Design  
Erie, PA



Richard Olaya  
Olaya Studio  
Philadelphia, PA



Ellis Schmidlapp  
LDA Architects  
Pittsburgh, PA

*Preservation has become the means of downtown revitalization, neighborhood stabilization...heritage tourism, education and...economic development.*

*- Donovan Rypkema*

### The Case for Renovation

Preservation is about respect for one's culture, heritage and environment – all of which have strong economic significance. The appeal of historic preservation is tied to the aesthetics of period architecture and the enduring connection with community heritage. It is about honoring the people who built, lived and worked in our community before us. Great buildings invoke a social and emotional attachment. Those attachments impact our sense of place; continuity and even who we are (Vineberg & Fulton, Ltd.).

Adaptive re-use supports the local economy to a greater extent than does new construction. A renovation is generally labor intensive, requiring local tradesmen whose earnings tend to cycle through the community.

Renovating the Villa Chapel and other buildings in our community makes economic sense. The cost of renovation is recycled into the community. Renovation creates jobs by employing local contractors and laborers thus sustaining the regional economy.

### Erie Center for Design + Preservation (Preservation Erie)

The mission of the ECDP (Preservation Erie) is to promote, preserve, and enhance the distinctive character of greater Erie through community-based planning, design, and historic preservation.

*We regret much of what we've built; we regret much of what we've torn down. But we've never regretted preserving anything.*

*- Daniel Sack*

## Conclusion

21 - Villa Chapel Re-use Report