

# ADVANCING THE ART OF MINISTRY

## • Saint Peter's Lutheran Church, New York, NY

In the 1970s, Saint Peter's Lutheran Church in Midtown Manhattan was facing myriad maintenance needs—and rising costs—with its aging, turn-of-the-century building.



Then a door opened. Looking to build a signature headquarters tower, Citibank and Saint Peter's formed a unique condominium relationship so the tower and a new Saint Peter's Church could be built. Completed in 1977, the tower was constructed on 100-foot supports with room at ground level for an entirely rebuilt Saint Peter's Church.

The congregation then began

“a kind of ministry that took the neighborhood seriously,” says the current pastor, the Rev. Amandus Derr. The church became even more of a reflection of the surrounding community, with gallery spaces for visual artists, a black box theater, and a jazz program with weekly summer concerts and a jazz liturgy every Sunday afternoon.

That devotion to the arts was also evident in the church's Chapel of the Good Shepherd, designed by celebrated sculptor Louise Nevelson. “It's a treasure in the city,” says Pastor Derr of the chapel, defined by magnificent wood sculptures, all painted white and affixed to the walls. The work is timeless, but the materials used were not, and heat and humidity have caused major deterioration of the sculptures.

A Mission Investment Fund loan has allowed Saint Peter's to begin the extensive renovation of the chapel and the artwork. At the same time, the loan is enabling the church to make essential repairs and upgrades to create a more functional and safer building, with new windows, a new HVAC system and more efficient lighting.

“MIF was really excited and eager to help us out,” Pastor Derr says. “It was a breath of fresh air that said the ministry we're doing at Saint Peter's is important.”

With MIF's loan reserved for building renovation, Saint Peter's is allocating other resources to fund its far-reaching ministry efforts. Saint Peter's has programs that touch the city's homeless people, those suffering with HIV/AIDS, and seniors.

Saint Peter's has also forged a special relationship with the congregation of Iglesia Luterana de Sion, the largest Spanish-language Lutheran church in New York City. In 2012, following the collapse of their own church building, Sion found a new home at Saint Peter's and holds Spanish-language services in the church every Sunday.

“Today, we are recognized for ministry to the community in east Midtown New York,” Pastor Derr says. “Our mission statement is, ‘Creatively shaping life in the city,’ and that's exactly how the congregation functions.”



Saint Peter's Lutheran Church in Midtown Manhattan reaches out to its members and its New York City neighbors with welcoming ministries and a focus on the arts.



Restoration is beginning on the church's Chapel of the Good Shepherd and its wooden sculptures thanks, in part, to an MIF loan.



THE FOOTPRINT DIDN'T  
CHANGE, BUT THE

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## Shepherd of the Hills

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Without extending the borders of its campus even an inch, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas, has grown closer to the surrounding community.

In 2018, Shepherd of the Hills completed an ambitious renovation. It included removing a wall and adding oversized windows to the sanctuary to make it brighter, more visible and more inviting. The AV system, lighting and flooring were updated, and what had been the church gym became a multipurpose activity center, beautifully suited for all sorts of events, including banquets—for the congregation and the residents of the community at large.

And in an area with a surprising shortage of parkland, Shepherd of the Hills invested in landscaping to carve out a park-like outdoor space right on the campus. The Rev. Tom Grevlos, the congregation's pastor, says the space is ideal for worship services as well as family movie nights and even "good old Texas barbecues. You can do a lot of different things out there."

He continues: "That was a big driving force for us, to really see ourselves as part of this community. Our mantra is 'A Church Without Walls.' We keep saying it and praying it, and it has really gotten into the mindset of the congregation that this is what we're about."

In fact, the pastor says, outreach and benevolence are "just part of the DNA of the church." Shepherd of the Hills is involved in Austin City Lutherans, a collaboration of local Lutheran churches that operates the Bread for All food pantry, plus an early childhood learning center in one of Austin's most underserved areas. The church also has long-running ministries in Guatemala and Haiti.

As for the campus redevelopment, once the congregation had a well-articulated plan and a capital campaign in place, it turned to a trusted partner for financing. "We've had a long-term relationship with the Mission Investment Fund, which was great," Pastor Grevlos says. "MIF stepped right in and provided a great level of support and trust. And ease. I know the congregation is very appreciative of the ease with which this all happened.

"Certainly MIF's interest rates are competitive. Even more important, when we work with MIF, we feel like we're doing something for the greater church."

During the pandemic, shifting to livestream worship services extended the "Church Without Walls" even further. "The result has been extraordinary viewership, more than quadrupling normal worship attendance," Pastor Grevlos says. "This could never have happened without our campus renewal and funding from MIF."

The congregation's Bread for All food pantry was one of only eight food pantries in Austin that remained open throughout the pandemic, continuing to serve more than 800 families. And with in-person worship reopening in June, the congregation is moving to outdoor services in its new courtyard.

Entering into the redevelopment process had enormous benefits for the people of Shepherd of the Hills.

Says Pastor Grevlos: "It gave the congregation a strong sense of its future, to say 'Okay, this is what's possible and this is the potential that's here. How do we best utilize this to grow ourselves, to grow our community of faith and to grow our impact in the community?'"

# OFFERING A HOME TO THOSE IN NEED

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH / TACOMA, WASHINGTON

When you visit the neighborhood just up the hill from downtown Tacoma, Washington, the signs of gentrification are all around you.

In the area known as the Hilltop, new tenants are leasing space in long-empty buildings. Developers are building condominiums, many of which will house employees of the burgeoning University of Washington-Tacoma campus. And the planned expansion of the Tacoma Link system will connect the community to other parts of the city via light-rail service.

All of that activity is helping revitalize a historically disadvantaged area which, through much of the 1980s and '90s, was riddled with crime and violence. But the gentrification also has a downside.

"We're seeing families of low-income backgrounds who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time having to move out because they can't afford the rent here," said the Rev. John Stroeh, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, the Hilltop's neighborhood Lutheran church and one in which about half of the congregants are people of color. "We want to maintain the mixed-income neighborhoods and the beautiful diversity. The gentrification trend is one of the reasons affordable housing is very near and dear to our congregation.

"MIF was very helpful in encouraging our idea to purchase homes in the Hilltop and make them available to families in need," Pastor Stroeh recalled. "MIF saw this as a really great mission opportunity."

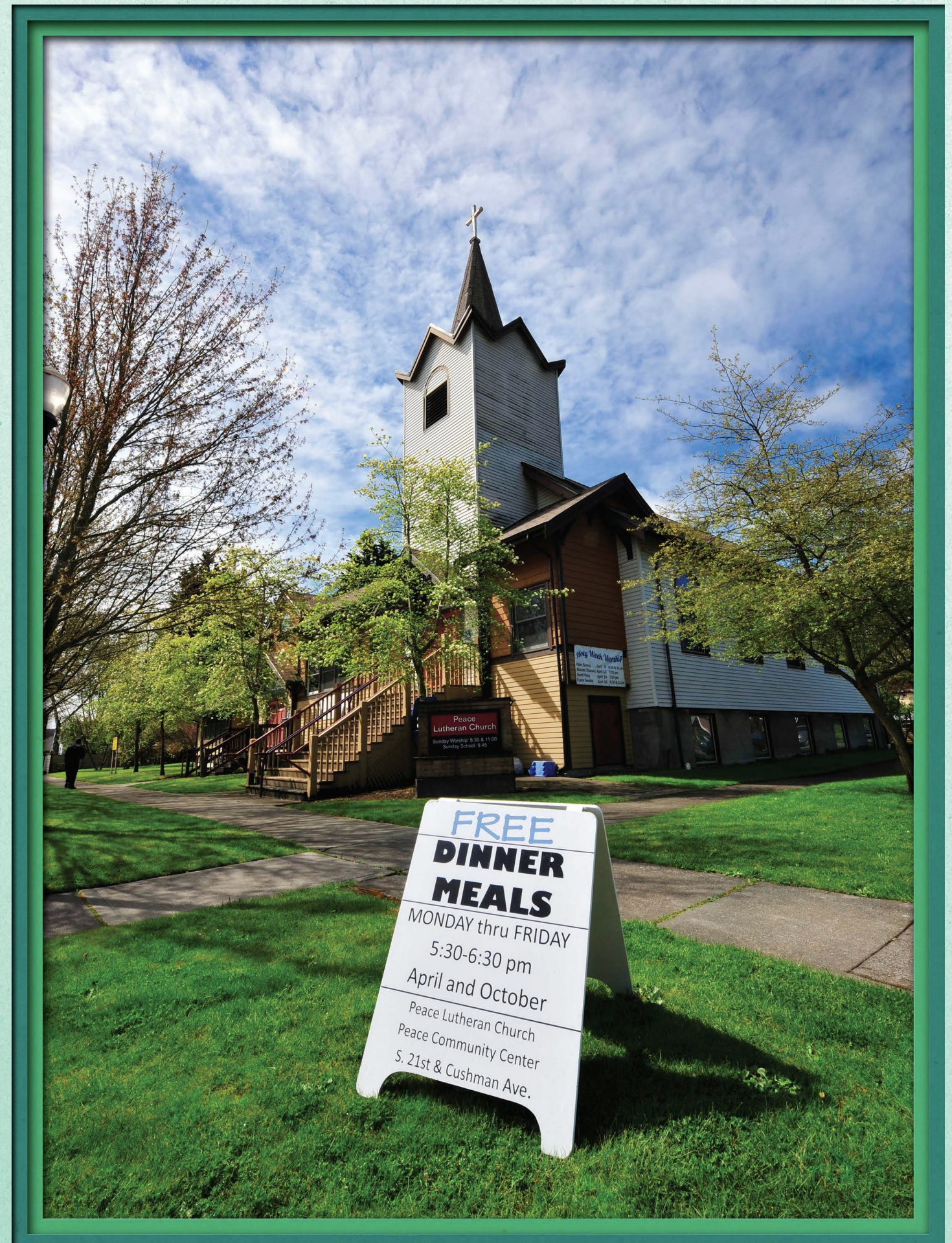
After securing a loan from the Mission Investment Fund, in which Peace Lutheran is also an investor, the congregation purchased two homes directly



across from the church. Here, Peace Lutheran offers housing to families who need assistance. Peace Lutheran Church also gave birth to the nearby Peace Community Center, a social ministry of the ELCA. An MIF loan helped finish the Community Center building, and MIF loans assisted the Community Center in purchasing two additional houses, also for affordable housing. These contributions to the neighborhood's affordable housing stock have helped bring peace to the Hilltop in the largest sense.

"Peace isn't just the absence of violence," Pastor Stroeh said. "It's also the presence of wholeness, safety, justice, community and love. These are the things that we wish for our neighbors, for our community."

"Given all that the Hilltop has been through, we want to be a place of safety and health and wholeness for all people, old and young. That's a vision that we hold up."



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## Prince of Peace

BURNSVILLE, MINNESOTA

The ongoing renovation of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, Minnesota, is increasing the flexibility of its facilities. But flexibility of another sort has long been a hallmark of Prince of Peace. As the congregation's pastor, the Rev. Jeff Marian, explains, the congregation has found many different ways to live out the church's motto, "Called to Connect."

"We aim to connect with God and one another in this Christian community, but also with the community beyond ourselves, particularly in collaborative partnerships with others doing similar work," Pastor Marian says.

In 2012, on the heels of a visioning process, Prince of Peace identified significant maintenance needs in the church's two buildings. "We decided that rather than putting money into aging infrastructure, we would accomplish more by doing some new things, including bringing everything together under one roof," Pastor Marian says.

The first phase of the church's three-phase renovation—and a loan from the Mission Investment Fund—got that started. A 26,000-square-foot addition to the main building created a community room, chapel and new space for Prince of Peace's preschool.

The congregation is pleased with its choice of the Mission Investment Fund to finance its building project.

"MIF gave us flexibility, the ease of getting payments through to handle construction," says Prince of Peace Finance Director Jane Victorey. "There was also the personal touch, MIF's willingness to come out to look at the space, to visit. MIF's responsiveness has been wonderful."

The second phase will update and upgrade the other 40,000 square feet of the building and create a new home there for Mission Outpost. Called "a hub of hope and wholeness," it consists of a food pantry distributing 15,000 pounds of food weekly, a clothing closet, a dental clinic operated in partnership with a neighboring hospital, local dentists and hygienists, and additional services offered by the Salvation Army.

Of course there has been change during the pandemic. "While we're grieving the opportunity to gather with our faith community during this COVID-19 pandemic, we are also discovering opportunities for the Gospel. Our virtual worship attendance is over five times our regular worship attendance," Pastor Marian says. "We look forward to the day when we can gather again on our campus, but we don't want to miss the ways in which God is calling and guiding us in the wilderness."

The congregation's Mission Outpost has continued to distribute food, and plans are underway for reopening the dental clinic. Many support groups are meeting virtually, and the congregation has made care-calls to every member household.

Before the pandemic, Pastor Marian points out, the renovation of Prince of Peace increased fellowship within the congregation. And he has just the yardstick to prove it.

"We were making about three times as much coffee on the weekend because that many more people were staying to connect with one another. We're far from certain about what the future looks like, but we trust God is present and at work in the present."