

A HOUSE FOR THE FAMILIES OF ABRAHAM

A MUTLI-FAITH COMMUNITY CENTER FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

LUKE T. RUMAGE



A House for the Families of Abraham:

A Multi-Faith Community Center for Interfaith Dialogue

Luke T. Ramage

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Jodi L. La Coe, Chair

Randall A. Mars

Marcia F. Feuerstein

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ABSTRACT

Religion has the ability to bring a diversity of people together in a way that crosses political, social, and economic boundaries, but divides them through conflicting worship practices, rituals, and teachings. This is especially true with the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The unique aspect to the Abrahamic religions is that they all claim Abraham as a common ancestor. Unfortunately, over the two millennia since the founding of these religions, interpretations of each religious text has drastically divided the three religions. Guy Stroumsa, Professor Emeritus of the Study of Abrahamic Religions at the University of Oxford, states that after such a long time the “Jewish Avraham is no more the Christian Abraham than the latter is the Islamic Ibrahim... and there is more than one Jewish (or Christian, or Muslim) Abraham.”¹

This project is designed to create a multi-faith building that crosses the religious divides in the Abrahamic faiths and encourages inter-faith dialogue by looking at commonly used ritualistic items. Three basic items - water, a meal, and the scripture – all hold reverence in all three religions, but each religion has its own unique rituals and traditions surrounding them. This building attempts to express the similarities and differences through the built environment in a way that increases communication and understanding between the religions and the surrounding community.

¹ Stroumsa, Guy D. 2010. “From Abraham’s Religion to the Abrahamic Religions.” *Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford*. Oxford, May 12, p.14

A House for the Families of Abraham: A Multi-Faith Community Center for Interfaith Dialogue

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Religions divide people. Architecture brings people together. Can architecture help bridge the divide between religions?

This project is designed to create a multi-faith building that crosses the religious divides in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and encourages inter-faith dialogue between them by looking at three commonly used sacred items and their rituals and traditions.



Dedicated to

GOD

I could not have done this project without you.

Literally.



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I would like to thank Pastor Jeanette Leisk for working with me not only through crises in this project, but also crises in my own faith.

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A multi-faith center could not have been possible without the support of everybody involved. Designing a multi-faith center requires a multi-faith community. Thank-you for your support.



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Author's Note

I am a Lutheran. I acknowledge that I am bringing an inherently Christian bias towards this project. With that being said, I will attempt to be as unbiased in my research and data collection, drawing from research of Jewish Synagogues, Christian Churches, Islamic Mosques, and interviews with people in all three religions. To paraphrase Guy G. Stroumsa, I will attempt to be a methodological atheist by treating each religion as social facts and approach them all with the same criteria. I will attempt to study other people's religions as if they were my own, and my own religion as if it were that of others.²

I am also not a theologian. I have not studied the Torah, Qur'an, or even the Bible (as much as I hate to admit it) to the full extent to present a flawless theological argument. For that reason, I have attempted to distance myself from a theological argument for or against the social interactions project would create. I have instead attempted to create a place to host those theological arguments.

I did not undertake this project to discredit the history of either Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, to create a whole new religion, or to influence the reader towards one faith over the other. This project was undertaken to learn about the shared history of each religion and explore the similarities and differences of each religions' built environment.

2 Guy G. Stroumsa, From Abraham's religion to the Abrahamic Religions, p 11



A House for the Families of Abraham

Just under eighty-five percent³ of the roughly eight billion⁴ people on the planet are religious. Of that eighty-five percent, fifty-five are either Jewish, Christian, or Muslim.⁵ These three religions can be grouped into a subset of religions called monotheistic religions (meaning they all believe there is only one god). These three religions can be further grouped into faiths that trace their lineage to a single historical figure – Abraham. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars started calling this group the “Abrahamic Religions.”⁶

Historians, both secular and religious, have attempted to find the ‘historical’ Abraham to announce or renounce the specificity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁷ Unfortunately, historians have not been able to. This has allowed all three religions to flourish while at the same time causing tension between each claiming that their Abraham is the true Abraham. After two millennia of studying and interpreting religious texts, one can even claim that, “the Jewish Avraham is no more the Christian Abraham than the latter is the Islamic Ibrahim... and there is more than one Jewish (or Christian, or Muslim) Abraham.”⁸ The preceding quote stated by Guy Stroumsa, Professor Emeritus of the Study of Abrahamic Religions at the University of Oxford, starts to probe at why various interpretations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are so vastly different, yet still hold commonalities. He goes on to discuss this phenomenon in his inaugural lecture at the University of Oxford through a story from

the Hebrew *Midrash*:

3 Future of World Religions, Pew Research Center

4 World Population Prospects: 2017 Revision, United Nations

5 Future of World Religions, Pew Research Center

6 Stroumsa, 19

7 Stroumsa, 14-16

8 Stroumsa, 14

Moses once came to listen to Rabbi Akiba as the latter was teaching the Torah to his students. At some point, Moses turned to God in surprise: he was unable to recognize his own Torah in Akiba's teachings... Can we imagine Abraham returning incognito to sit on the back bench of a *yeshiva* (an orthodox Jewish college) in contemporary Israel, or of a *madrassa* (a college for Islamic instruction) in Pakistan, or even, I dare say, at a lecture by an Oxford Professor of Theology? He would probably be as puzzled as Moses in Akiba's classroom.⁹

The reality that this passage reveals to us is that religious interpretations have adapted and changed over the millenia and will continue to adapt and change in the future. Traditions and rituals based around core principles and symbolic religious objects are added, updated, removed, or tweaked for their times. These changes even go so far as to create whole new sects and denominations within the religions.

Religious populations

Where two or three are gathered...

As religions grow and change, people start to debate and divide along different interpretations of the holy texts, traditions, and rituals. The best – and most extreme – example of this is the split between Christianity and Judaism. Christian tradition holds that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he fulfilled the Jewish prophecies. Jews reject that idea, and many Christians blamed the Jews for Jesus's crucifixion. What makes this the best and most extreme split in religions is that Jesus was Jewish. Dr. Cohen, Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University, is quoted as saying:

Of course, Jesus was a Jew. He was born of a Jewish mother, in Galilee, a Jewish part of the world. He regularly worshipped in Jewish communal worship, what we call synagogues.

⁹ Stroumsa, 15

He preached from Jewish text, from the Bible. He celebrated the Jewish festivals. He went on pilgrimage to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem where he was under the authority of priests... He was born, lived, died, taught as a Jew.¹⁰

It wasn't until after the death of Jesus, which is believed to take place somewhere between 30 and 33 CE, that people began differentiating between the followers of Jesus and the traditional Jews. These followers of Jesus became Christians as noted by Luke in Acts when he documented trips taken by the disciples to spread the word of God through the teachings of Jesus Christ. He writes in Acts 11:26, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

While that example showed a split from religions, the religions themselves are growing and dividing (See Appendix B). A study put out by the Pew Research Center (Appendix C) projects that by 2050, the religious population of the world will increase from just under 85% of the world's population to 86.8%. The Abrahamic faiths will increase from roughly 55% to a little over 63% of the world population (*Figure 1*). That may not sound like a lot, but with that increase, the cohort of worldwide religious Muslims is expected to add around one billion people, taking their total world population from almost 1.6 Billion people to just over 2.75 Billion. Nationally, the religious population of the United States is projected to drop from 83.6% to 74.4%. This is most noticeable within Christianity where there will be an estimated 12% decrease in the worshipping community (*Figure 2*).

Another study was published in 2014 by the Pew Research Center called, "How Americans Feel About Religious Groups" (Appendix C). This study looked at people's viewpoints on both their own and other religions. Figure 3 shows how the

10 PBS.org Frontline

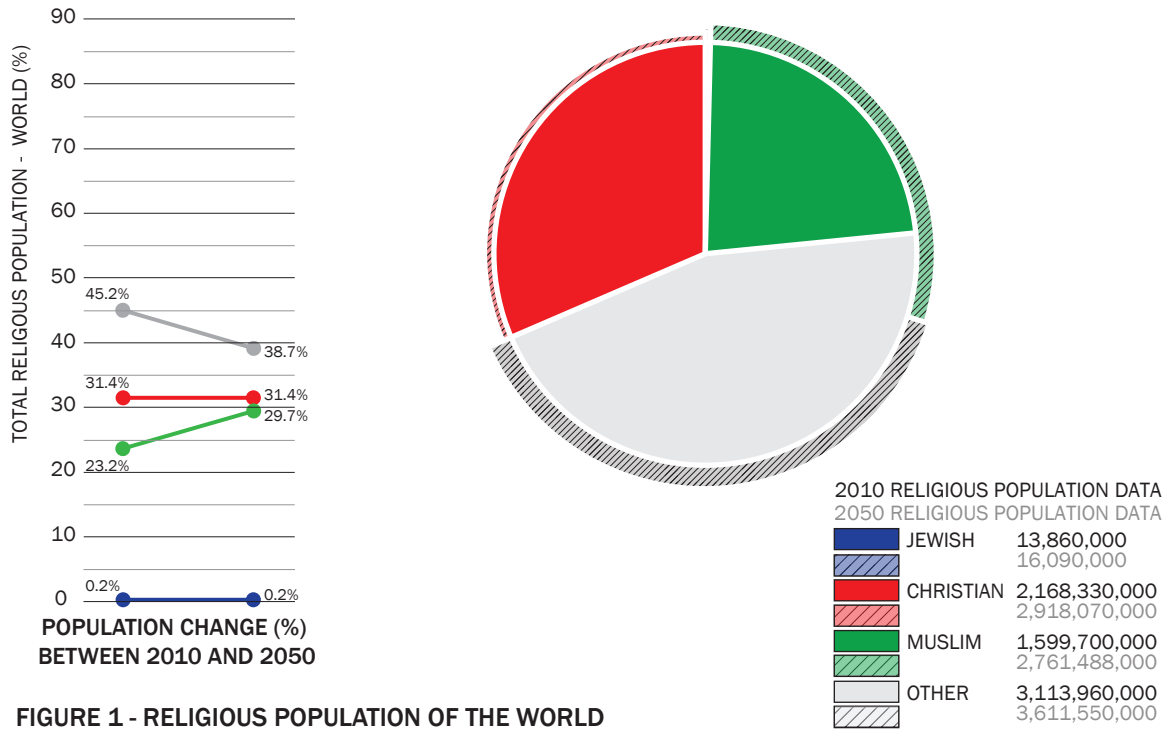


FIGURE 1 - RELIGIOUS POPULATION OF THE WORLD
 FUTURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015

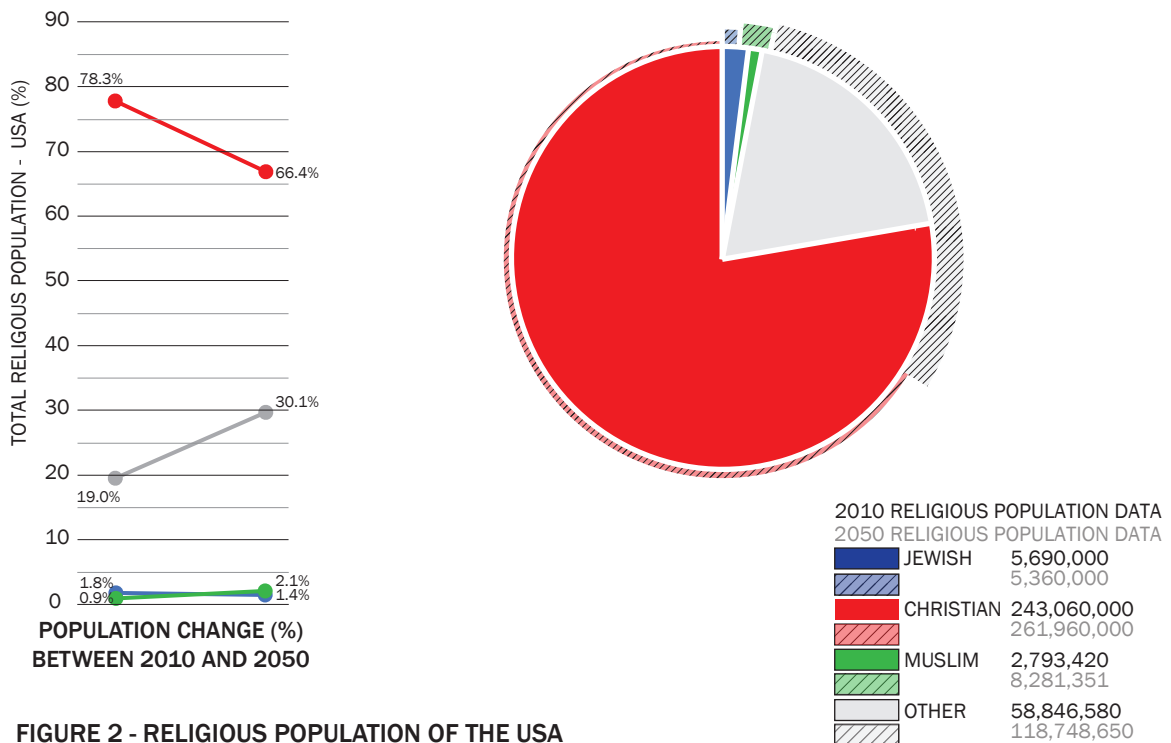


FIGURE 2 - RELIGIOUS POPULATION OF THE USA
 FUTURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015

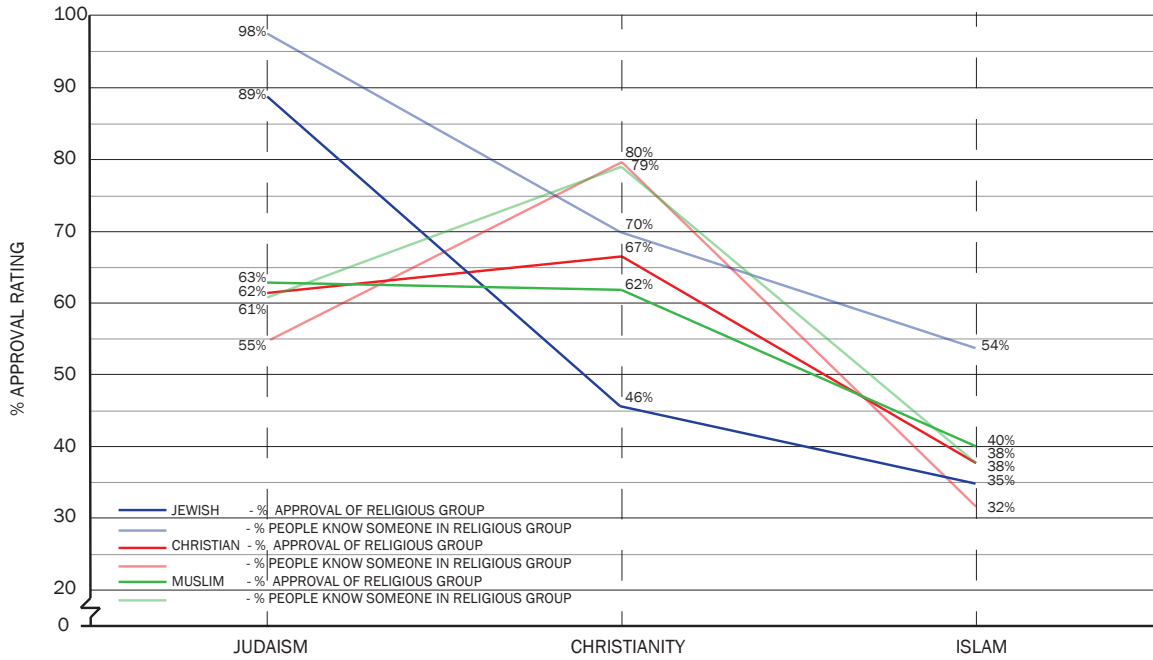


FIGURE 3 - APPROVAL/ACCEPTANCE OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT RELIGIOUS GROUPS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2014

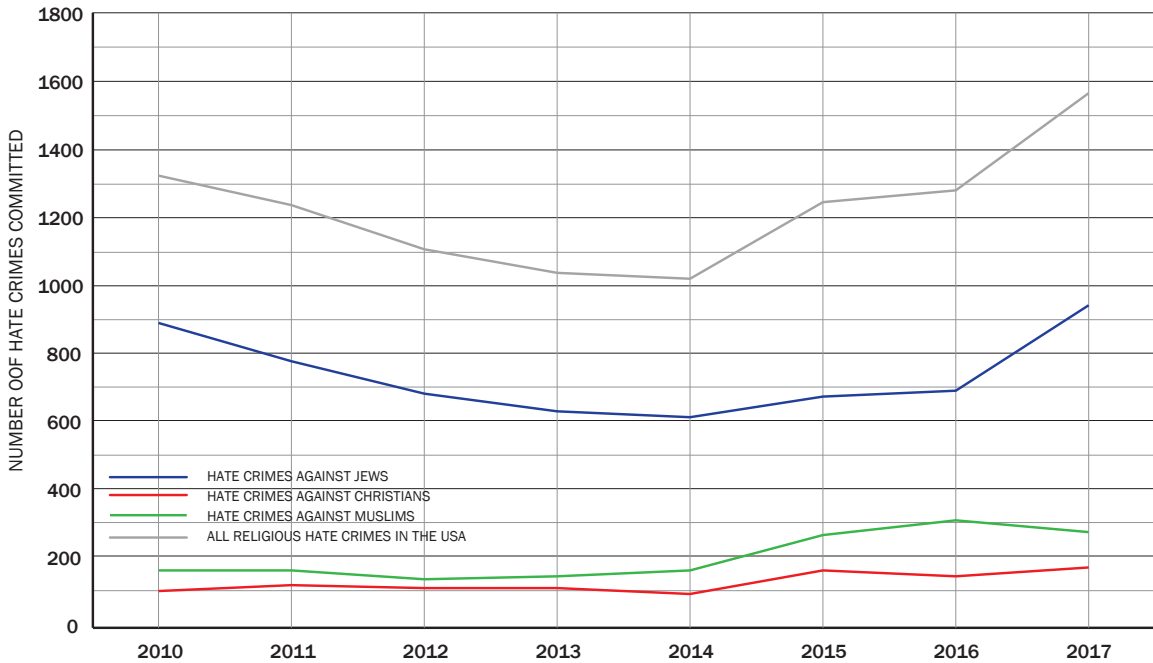


FIGURE 4 - HATE CRIMES AGAINST RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 2010

FBI HATE CRIME STATISTICS 2010-2017

three Abrahamic Religions view each other, and, not surprisingly, each religion views their own religion in a more favorable light than the others. What this study does not analyze is whether or not knowing someone in a specific religion improves or diminishes one's approval of said religion.

If both Pew Research Studies mentioned are compared with the Federal Bureau of Investigation Hate Crime Statistics published every year (*Figure 4*), we can see that there is no discernable correlation between religious populations, approval ratings of religions, and the crimes committed against those religions. This may be due to a wide range of factors like, but not limited to, a lack of evidence or the wide range of multiple sects and denominations within each religion.

A Multi-Faith Community

³³When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not taunt him. ³⁴The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as a native from among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God. – Leviticus. 19:33-34

With this lack of empirical data to claim that knowing and interacting with people from other faiths decreases violence and increases understanding and



FIGURE 5 - Tri-Faith Initiative, Omaha, Nebraska
Temple Israel, American Muslim Institute, Countryside
Community Church UCC¹¹

tolerance, some religious communities have attempted to create their own multi-faith interactions. In Omaha, Nebraska, a community formed in 2006 between Temple Israel, Countryside Community Church, and American Muslim Institute to build a campus with four buildings – a

Synagogue, Church, Mosque, and a Community Center (*Figure 5*). Each building is used for its own intended worshipping community, and the community center hosts multi-faith events, presentations, and discussions between the three religions and the local community.¹¹

In 2019, the world got a glimpse into interfaith dialogue when Pope Francis of the Catholic Church, Dr. Ahmed At-Tayeb – Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, and Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig – a senior rabbi at Washington Hebrew Congregation and others came together under the umbrella of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity and decided on a design for another multi-faith campus. This campus, called the Abrahamic House, is designed to hold three religious buildings on one site with an outdoor community area between the buildings (*Figure 6*).¹² Differing from the Tri-Faith Initiative, the Abrahamic House tries to create interaction through allowing access to each religious building off the community courtyard. This allows people to mingle and meet while they are arriving or leaving their respective religious worships.



FIGURE 6 - The Abrahamic House, Abu Dhabi, UAE
The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity
Pope Francis Pope of the Catholic Church, Dr. Ahmed At-Tayeb,
Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig, Senior Rabbi at
Washington Hebrew Congregation¹²

In Berlin, Germany, there is a project currently under construction called the House of One (*Figure 7*). After construction, this project will house a Synagogue,

11 Tri-Faith Initiative

12 Higher Committee of Human Fraternity



FIGURE 7 - House of One, Berlin, Germany
*Pastor Gregor Hohberg - St. Mary's Lutheran Church, Rabbi Dr
Andreas Nachama - Reform Jewish Congregation, Imam Kadir
Sanci*¹³

Church, and Mosque in one building.¹³ As with the Abrahamic House, the House of One works to bring people even closer together and interact. Being in one building adds to the intimacy of people arriving and leaving their respective worship services and allows for easier assembly of large multi-faith events.

All three of these projects get progressively smaller, bringing people closer together and creating more opportunity for interaction and discussion. If this progression continues, the building will evolve into a single worship space with an adjoining community space. To increase interaction with the community, the building should also be designed with a community outreach program in mind. A building like this must also provide for the most important rituals for each religion and be flexible enough to allow for different religious holidays and events throughout the year. A building like this would be one step closer to creating a House for the Families of Abraham.

13 House of One

Rituals and “Holy Things”

Before making a house for the families of Abraham, one must first understand the important rituals that must take place and the holy things required for those rituals. Due to the shared ancestry of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the different rituals all focus on similar “Holy Things” – the holy book, prayer, water, and gathering in communion. These can be categorized into three ritual categories – purification, discussion, and communion. These holy things and categories do not stand alone though, they are intertwined with each other. As the Rev. Dr. Gordon Lathrop explains, the holy things are only simple items until they are used in the ritual, and then they bring symbolic resonance to the faith of the community.¹⁴ The holy book, prayer, water, and gathering in communion only become holy things when they are combined with the rituals of purification, discussion, and communion. The reverse is also true; the rituals of purification, discussion, and communion are only actions until they are combined with the holy book, prayer, water and gathering in communion.

Holy Book, Prayer, and Communion

Arguably the most important part of any religion is their doctrine. Coming together in a group to worship and share the doctrine is the foundation that the religion builds upon. It supplies the rigors, the rules, schema of practicing, and sets the basis upon which faith can be built.¹⁵ Because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trace their lineage to Abraham there are very similar teachings between the three religions. There is enough similarity and history between each religion, that the

¹⁴ Lathrop, 103

¹⁵ Bloom, 357

Qur'an even calls Jews and Christians "People of the Book."¹⁶ There are, however, enough differences that orthodox believers of each religion view the others as heresy. This is corroborated by Guy Stroumsa when he writes that early in the ecclesiastical history of Christianity the teachings of Christ were directly related to the "very first and most ancient and antique discovery of true religion by Abraham and those lovers of God who followed him."¹⁷ When Islam emerged, Muslims made the same claim that Christians made of Judaism: Muslims argued that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a "perennial believer and a Muslim."¹⁸

While the differences cannot be changed, the similarities can be enhanced, and the differences can be mollified to create a unique worship space for each religion. Through careful planning, a single worship space can be designed through the similarities.

The first commonality in the worship space is that each religion has a specific direction people face when praying and worshipping. For Jews, this prayer direction is facing Jerusalem, Christians face east, and Muslims face Mecca. Typically, there is a wall perpendicular to the prayer direction in the front of the worship space. While Jews and Christians do not have specific decorations for that wall, Muslims mark the wall with a niche called a mihrab.¹⁹ These directions require that the worship space be adjustable to make sure each religion is facing the correct way.

The second commonality is that each religion typically has a place to store the scripture. Scripture is important because it is considered the word of God. Gordon

16 Qur'an, Al Imran, 3:36

17 Stroumsa, 16

18 Stroumsa, 16

19 Kahera, 38

Lathrop states, “the words are symbols, gathering places of multilayered meaning and means to participate in that meaning... but they are not God. They are rather us waiting for God, appealing to God, they are witnesses to our need of God.”²⁰

This significance of holding the words of God means that the scripture is venerated and stored in a religiously significant place. Jews store the Torah in the Ark of the Covenant placed in a niche on the wall facing Jerusalem,²¹ Christians keep the bible on a stand, and Muslims store the Qur’an either in front of or inside the mihrab.²² Since the holy books are stored in the worship space, the House for the Abrahamic Faiths provides the niches with specially designed doors so they are only exposed for their respective worship.²³

Third is a table. The table evokes the altar and sacrifice in Jewish and Christian histories, albeit for different reasons. For Jews, sacrifice was a part of worship that took place in the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. After the temples were destroyed (the only remaining piece of the Second Temple is the Western Wall), the Bihma replaced the altar and it became the place where the worship leader stands to read the Torah and guide the congregation in prayer.²⁴ Christians no longer perform animal sacrifice because their religious teachings say that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. The table therefore becomes a place to celebrate the forgiveness of sins by sharing bread and wine symbolizing the body and blood of Jesus.²⁵ Muslims participate in a yearly ritual animal sacrifice called Eid Ul Adha as a part of Ramadan, but typically do not have a table in their worship. The

20 Lathrop, 99

21 Roberts, 55

22 Holt, 26

23 Roberts, 55

24 Synagogues of Europe, Carol Herselle Krinsky, 21

25 1 Cor. 11:26, NIV

table could be used as a lectern during Muslim worship.

The lectern is the fourth important commonality in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worship. This is the place where the scripture is read, and the doctrine is shared. Jewish Rabbis read the Torah from the Bimah or have a layperson read it from a reader's table, Christian ministers preach from a pulpit, and Muslim Imams give the sermon from a Minbar.

When these four requirements for worship – (1) the prayer direction, (2) scripture, (3) a table, and (4) a lectern – provided and accounted for in the worship space, worship leaders are able to hold their worship. There are other requirements specific to each religion that the religious leaders may have to bring into the worship space, but the minimum required to hold the ritual of worship is provided in the worship space.

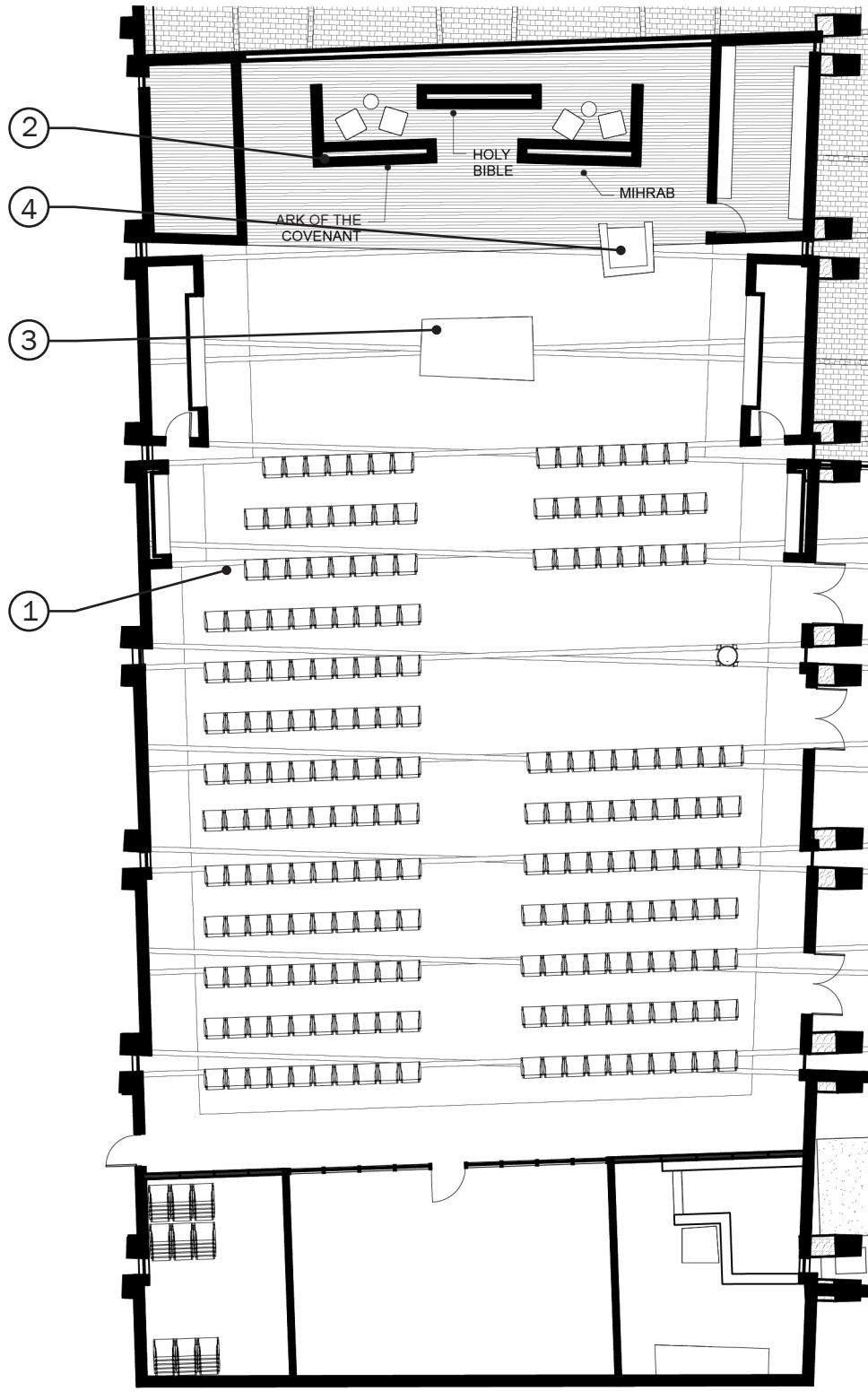


FIGURE 8 - Worship Floorplan

Water and Purification

Water evokes the transformation from ordinary and unclean to pure in all three religions, but the path to purification is different in each. Not only that, but each religion has a different level of purification as well. Jews have private purification rituals for different stages of a person's life. These stages range from getting married, to having kids, to conversion, and even – for some more traditional women – once a month. Christians have purification rituals that deal primarily with conversion. Because the rituals are based around conversion, they typically only happen once in a person's life and these moments become joyous celebrations within the worshipping community. Muslims perform their purification rituals the most often because they purify every time before participating in salat (prayer). This also adds a layer of meaning to the ritual, it is no longer about spiritual cleanliness, but physical cleanliness as well. Because each Abrahamic faith has different rituals, they all have different requirements, preparations, and actions and require their own space in the building.

The Jewish purification ritual originates from the laws written in the Torah, specifically the book of Leviticus. The laws describe what is clean and unclean, and how the unclean can be purified. Most early Jewish purifications took place in flowing water to wash away the impurities following the rules laid out in Leviticus. As Judaism expanded and moved from what is now called Israel and the Middle East, natural running water that was warm enough to perform purification rituals, especially in winter, was harder and harder to come by. From this limitation, the mikvah was born.²⁶

²⁶ Understanding Mikvahs, p 27

The modern mikvah must meet certain criteria for the purification ritual to be completed. The mikvah must be able to hold 40 se'ah (somewhere between 100 and 200 gallons) of water, the water used must be gathered, and, most importantly, the water must be from a natural source.²⁷ The person using the mikvah also must meet certain requirements, namely that they must be completely clean and enter the mikvah as naked as the day they were born.

Jewish purification is deeply personal, and the space should reflect that. The person attending the mikvah must first wait for their ritual to start (*Figure 9-1*). When their ritual begins, the person enters a hallway leading to preparation rooms (*Figure 9-2*). The mikvah designed for the House of the Families of Abraham (*Figure 9*) angles this first hallway's walls in to assist the person on reflecting on the experience they are about to receive. Once in the preparation room (*Figure 9-3*), the person removes all garments, jewelry, makeup, and any other items that would render the ritual unclean. This includes taking a shower to remove any foreign matter. After

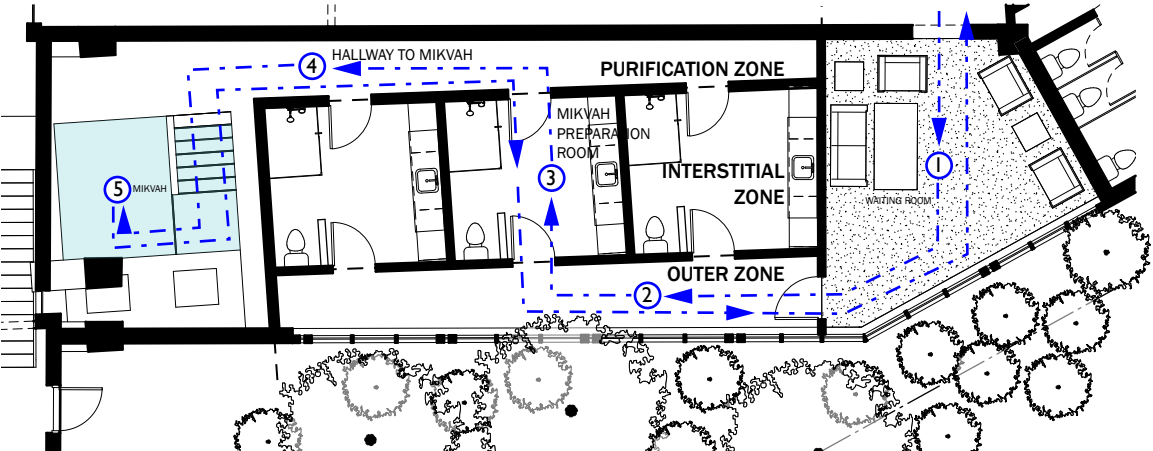


FIGURE 9 - Mikvah Floorplan

27 For a more in-depth look into the requirements for a mikvah, see *Understanding Mikvahs* by S. Z. Lesches.

a thorough cleaning, the person enters a second hallway (*Figure 9-4*) that widens, exposing the mikvah itself (*Figure 9-5*). The person enters the water, immersing and praying according to a selected ritual and blessing. Once the ritual and blessing is finished, the person re-traces their footsteps – walking down a narrowing hallway reflecting on their experience, getting dressed in the preparation room, and expanding out into to the world as a purified and cleansed person.

The Christian purification through an immersion baptism is very similar to the mikvah in action, but there are striking differences in ritual.²⁸ Like the mikvah, the ritual of baptism can be found in the Scripture. All four Christian gospels talk about baptism with water as a way of being free from sin and emerging reborn into the Christian faith. Specifically, each gospel explicitly states or references Jesus Christ being baptized in a river. After this baptism, the scripture recites that:

Heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, you are my beloved son; in You, I am well pleased.²⁹

This idea of being “reborn” into the Christian faith through baptism has become a cause for celebration. Unlike a mikvah, baptism is performed with the entire worshipping congregation’s involvement. But, for the congregation to participate in the celebration, the baptistry – where the baptismal immersion pool is held – must be connected to the sanctuary.

The baptistry designed for the House of the Families of Abraham is situated

²⁸ I specified immersion baptism because there are also affusion (pouring) and aspersion (sprinkling) baptisms. Affusion and aspersion baptisms are easier to perform because they only require a bowl and water, but I will be discussing immersion baptism for this project.

²⁹ Luke 3:21-22, NIV

in the back of the worship space, with a moveable wall to close it off when it is not in use. During a worship with a baptism this wall is opened and the baptistry is visible (*Figure 10-1*). Behind the wall – and behind the immersion pool – stands a

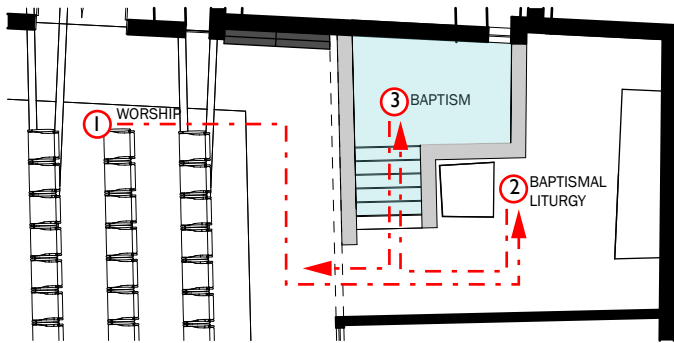


FIGURE 10 - Baptistry Floorplan

podium for sharing the baptismal liturgy and for sponsors of the baptismal candidate (*Figure 10-2*). After the baptismal liturgy is shared, the candidate is then immersed in the pool (*Figure 10-3*). During and after the

immersion, blessings and prayers are said and the candidate is welcomed into the church family as a son or daughter of God.

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islamic purification rituals of Wudu are not related to conversion but are more aligned with the Jewish purification rituals of cleanliness. Like the mikvah and baptism, the water used in wudu must be flowing to carry the dirt and sin away, but it differs from the previous two because there is no immersion and it is not a requirement for conversion. Even with those distinctions, Muslims perform their purification more often than Jews or Christians because they are required to perform it before each prayer session. Islam is also the strictest of all three religions in relation to the purification rituals; the Torah only informs Jews when they should use a mikvah, the Bible describes a baptism, but the Qur'an gives specific guidelines to follow for the wudu:

O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankle... Allah

does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.³⁰

The House of the Families of Abraham provides space for men and women to perform wudu before entering the worship space. Upon (1) entering the building, the observant Muslim will (2) remove their shoes and socks and place them on a shoe rack. They will then (3) proceed into the wudu to perform the ablutions as laid out in the Qur'an. After completing the ablutions, the Muslim leaves the wudu and moves into a "clean" area before entering the (4) worship space. This keeps the worship space free of dirt and dust that entered the building on the soles of the worshipper's shoes.³¹

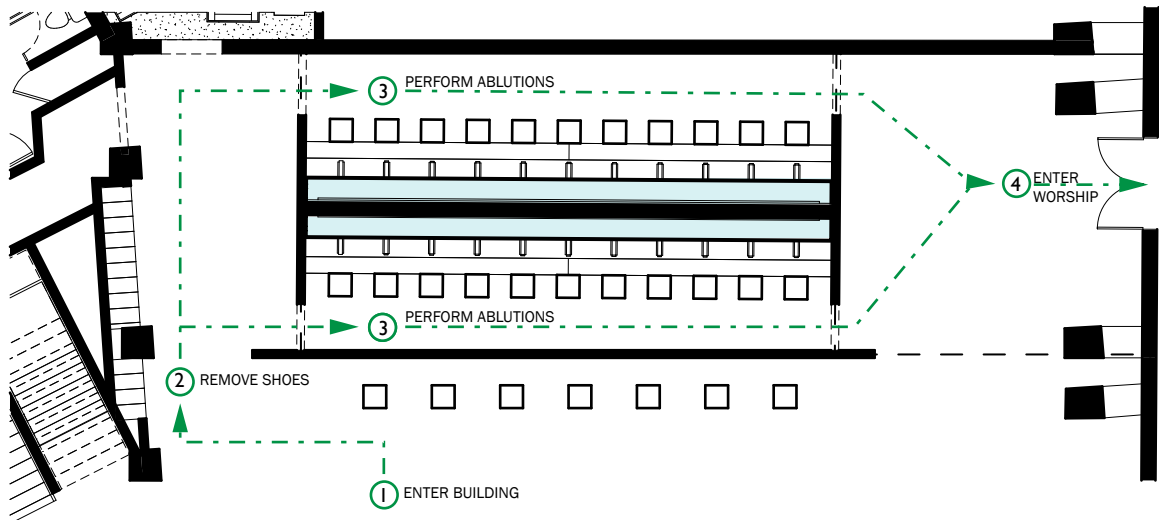


FIGURE 11 - Wudu Floorplan

30 Qur'an 5:6

31 Mokhtar, 168-169

Gathering and Discussion

Any worship space is just a building when there are no people to frequent it and breathe life into it. As mentioned earlier, religion creates a scaffolding that faith is built upon. Faith comes alive when people act. Through this action, the religion becomes a gathering of people in worship and celebration, and the building becomes a catalyst.

To act out their faith, the worshipping community needs more than just a worship space and a purification space: they need a gathering space. This gathering space must be a multi-purpose space that can accommodate different religious events throughout the year as well as meetings, presentations, and celebrations. It should also be a place where people from all three religions and the surrounding community can come together. The community and outreach spaces within the House of the Families of Abraham are multi-functional to handle the different events and celebrations needed for each religion.

The community area is designed to host communal meals for major religious holidays like Passover, The Last Supper, and Ramadan. In order to do this, there are three sets of kitchen equipment. Two sets are for preparing kosher meals, and one is for halal meals. This space can also be utilized as a community kitchen to feed the underprivileged in between holidays (*Figure 12*).

Re-organizing the community space turns it into a place of celebration. Weddings, baptisms, and bar mitzvahs are just a few celebrations that can take place. Religious Celebrations like Easter, Christmas, the High Holy Days, and can also take place in this space (*Figure 13*).

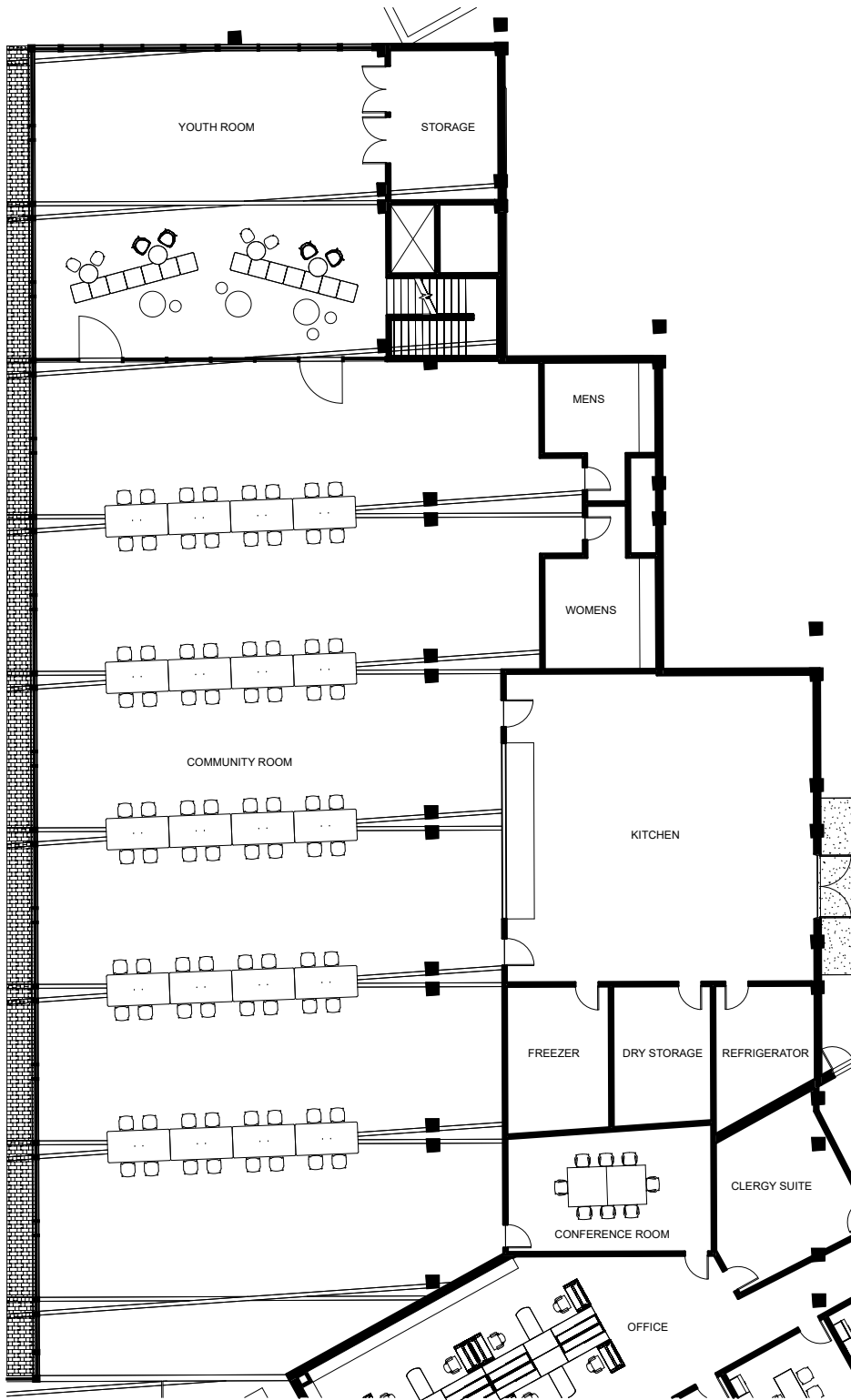


FIGURE 12 - Community Room (Communal Dinner)

Re-organizing the space again turns it into a place for meetings and presentations. It can be a place for alcoholics anonymous meetings, continuing education classes for the community, and faith-based presentations, lectures, and discussions (*Figure 14*).

The House of the Families of Abraham also provides outreach spaces outside in the form of an amphitheater and a community garden. The amphitheater can be used for public events like concerts and lectures (*Figure 15*), while the community garden can host sustainable food events and supply fresh produce to the community kitchen (*Figure 16*).

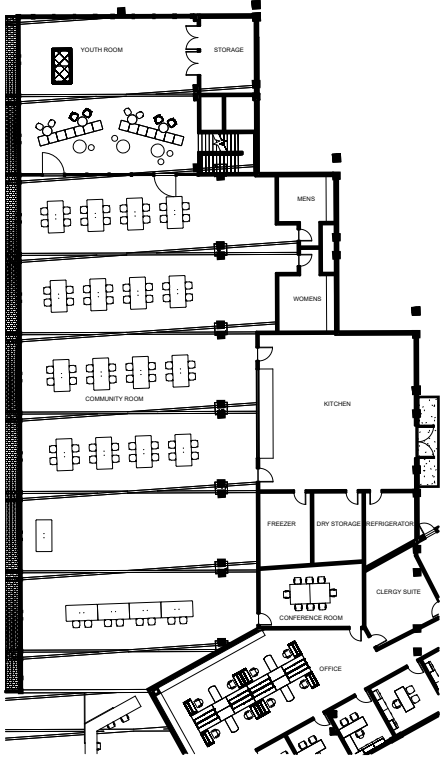


FIGURE 13 - Community Room (Wedding)

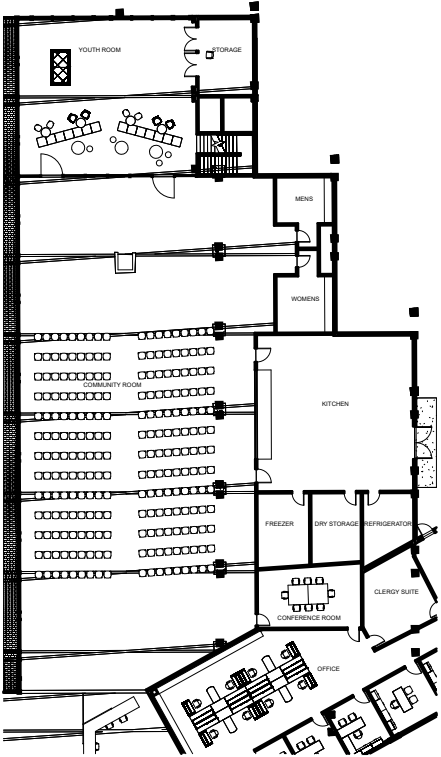


FIGURE 14 - Community Room (Presentation)

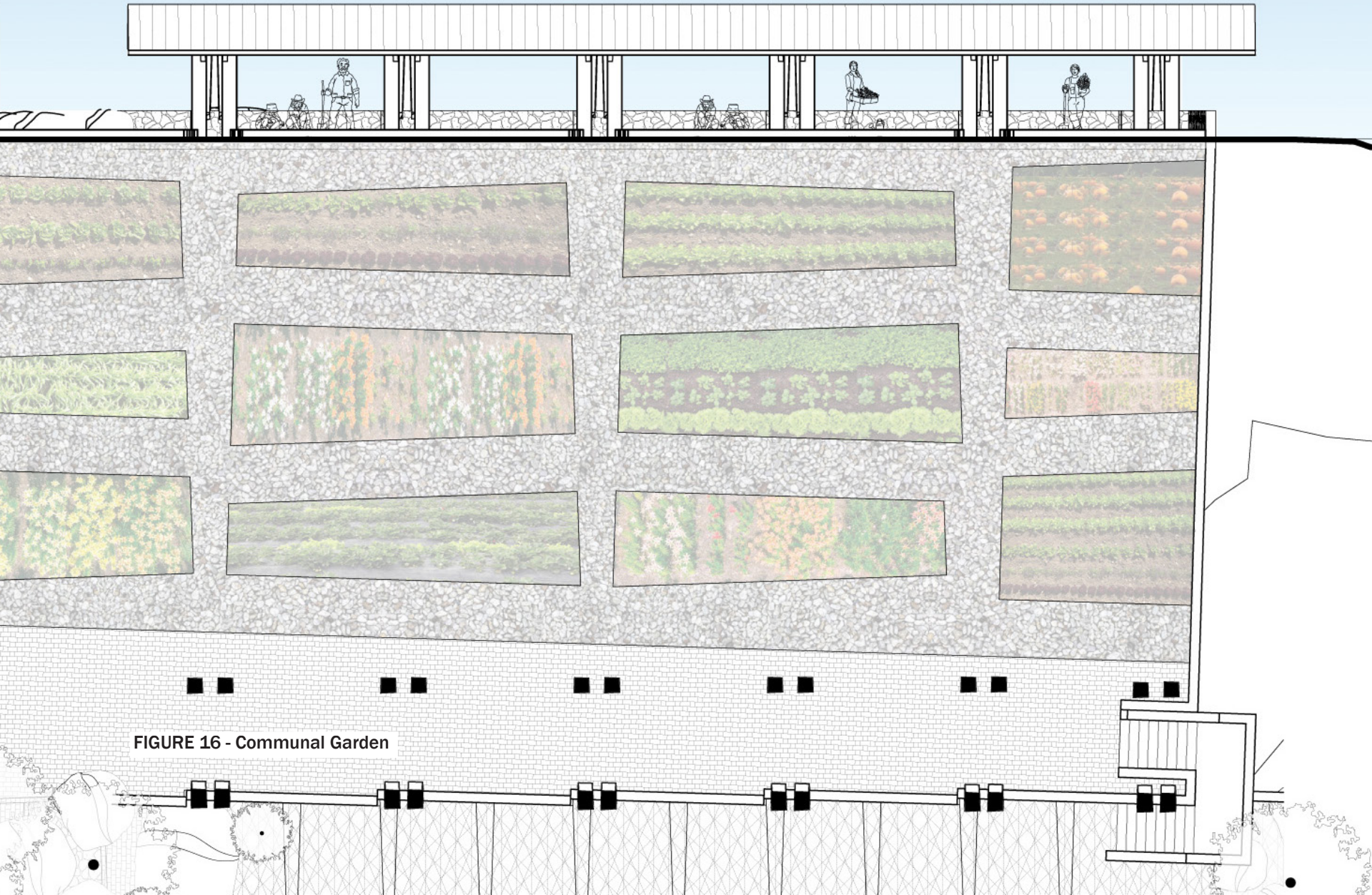


FIGURE 16 - Communal Garden

Designing the Multi-faith Community Center

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. - Exodus. 25:8, NIV

Combining all the rituals and holy things from each religion into one building and one worship space is a tedious and difficult task. Christianity and Islam do not explicitly lay out the worship building, and there are only interpretations of what the Jewish temples looked like based on the text in 1 Kings 6. (While the Qur'an stays quiet about the description of the Islamic space of worship, the Hadith – a source of Islamic law – describes the Prophet's house as the basis for the first mosques.) Adding to difficulty is the fact that none of the religious books explicitly lay out ideal things to look for in site selection, or really anything about the location of the worship space in general. The religious texts do come to a consensus about one thing though: wherever there is a group of believers, anywhere in the world, God is there.

There are three ideas that are reflected in most religious buildings that I will try to emulate in this project:

- (I) The building is a humble structure
- (II) The building is a configured space without prescribed structure
- (III) The building is a humble space determined for worship.³²

At first these seem to contradict each other; how can a humble structure be without prescribed structure while still being a worship space? The first idea that the structure is a humble structure is understood as the building itself is a humble building. People should go to a worship space to gather as a community to worship God, not to glorify the building or themselves. The second idea that a worship space is a configured space without prescribed structure is not talking about the specific building structure, but the programming of the space. The space itself should be

³² Kahera, 44

configured for worship, but not force the person to submit to the will of the building, especially when multiple worship types and styles will take place there. The third idea that the worship space is a humble space determined for worship ties the first two together. The building should be welcoming for people to gather and worship, but not overpower the gathering with its rigid programming. The sanctuary itself should focus the worship goer towards the act of worship itself: the prayers.³³

Outside of worship, the building should be an inviting place for people to gather and visit. It should be a place that transforms into a living and visible monument that invites everyone who is able to enter saying, “*This holy thing is for you.*”³⁴ It should not be a place that “stands tall in the day but [is] dead and locked at night,” but instead be a place that can be used all day and night by the entire community.³⁵

Site Analysis

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The entire earth has been made a place of prayer (masjid) except for the graveyards and the bathroom.” - Sunan At-Tirmidhi 317

Because the historical texts do not give descriptions of site locations, we need to look to contemporary sources and interpretations to understand the context and importance of site selection and location. Looking into the religious traditions of Christianity, we can understand that worship is a gathering place for people to commune together and share scripture and a meal.³⁶ Location is a major reason

33 Kahera, 63

34 Lathrop, 119

35 Kahera, 110

36 Lathrop, 107

for people's decisions whether or not to attend this gathering,³⁷ and the gathering size increases if the worship site is in an easily accessible location for everyone. While the main reason for attending religious services is for the community and message, the Pew Research Center reported that just over half (55%) of the American population is religious because their religious community was in a good location. More specifically, 43% of active religious people reported that their place of worship was easy to get to and 14% said it was easy to find. On the other end of the spectrum, passive- and non-religious people claim that they did not have good access to their religious community whether that was because the community was hard to find (24%) or that it was hard to get to (8%).³⁸ One could argue that, with a good site, a religious center could not only retain its community, but it could also expand the community and draw people who have not attended regularly, or even draw people who are curious about the religion.

It may sound like common sense, but Kahera reiterates that there is a correlation between the performance of a worship service and the location, size, and placement of the worship site within every city.³⁹ Lathrop gets a little more theoretical when he writes that it needs to be a place that is "here," a place that is connected to the streets, a place where everyone is able to access.⁴⁰ This means that there should be easy access to public transportation, major highways and freeways, and be

37 Choosing a House of Worship, Pew Research Center

38 Choosing a House of Worship, Pew Research Center; Active religious people are people who attend worship service at least once a week. Passive religious people attend worship service for important events like major religious holidays. Non-religious people do not attend a worship service unless a big life event is happening, e.g. Weddings or funerals.

39 Kahera was writing specifically about mosques. The original quote reads, "A correlation exists between the performance of congregational Friday prayer (*salat al-Jum'ah*) and the location, size, and placement of a mosque within every Muslim city." – Page 125

40 Lathrop, 106

close enough to residential areas so people can walk. These things are advisable to have around the worship site because it allows people of all economic and religious backgrounds to attend. Being within walking distance to residential areas allows for access by more traditional sects that discourage certain activities like driving on the holy days, e.g. Orthodox Judaism. A location near public transportation allows for people attending service that are poor, elderly, and people without cars. A location with easy access to the highways allows for people with vehicles and people who are travelling long distances to attend worship services and other events.

Being close to access by multiple modes of transportation also solves a unique problem that Lathrop proposes:

This gathering... will bring with it something of the self-selecting character that enables people to come together. We come into church and notice that the assembly is rather too much made up of people from one economic class or one race or one language. If the *ordo* is at the center, however, it will continually propose that this gathering is too small, too narrowly conceived. The holy circle is not holy enough, the sacred assembly not wide enough.⁴¹

This problem with certain religious communities is not completely solved by the location of the worship site. Having access to multiple modes of transportation is one way to alleviate this issue of worship being made up of one economic class, race, or language, by providing access for more people from different backgrounds so that they can gather and worship in a larger, more diverse community.

The following pages show maps that take this into consideration while searching for the best location for this building. The city of Alexandria, Virginia (*Figure 17*) was chosen for this project because of its location within the Washington DC Metro Area as well as the ease of access from Maryland, DC, and other parts

41 Lathrop, 114-115

of Virginia. After reviewing the maps, a vacant lot by the Eisenhower Avenue Metro station was the most suitable site. This decision was based on the ease of access

by pedestrians (Figure 18), pedestrian powered modes of transportation (Figure 19), public transportation (Figure 20), and private vehicles (Figure 21).

BIKE PATH

- BIKE LANE
- - - SHARED LANE
- ON STREET
- OFF STREET
- - - UNPAVED PATH

BUS LINES

- AT1
- AT2
- AT3
- AT4
- AT5
- AT6
- AT7
- AT8
- AT9
- AT10

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

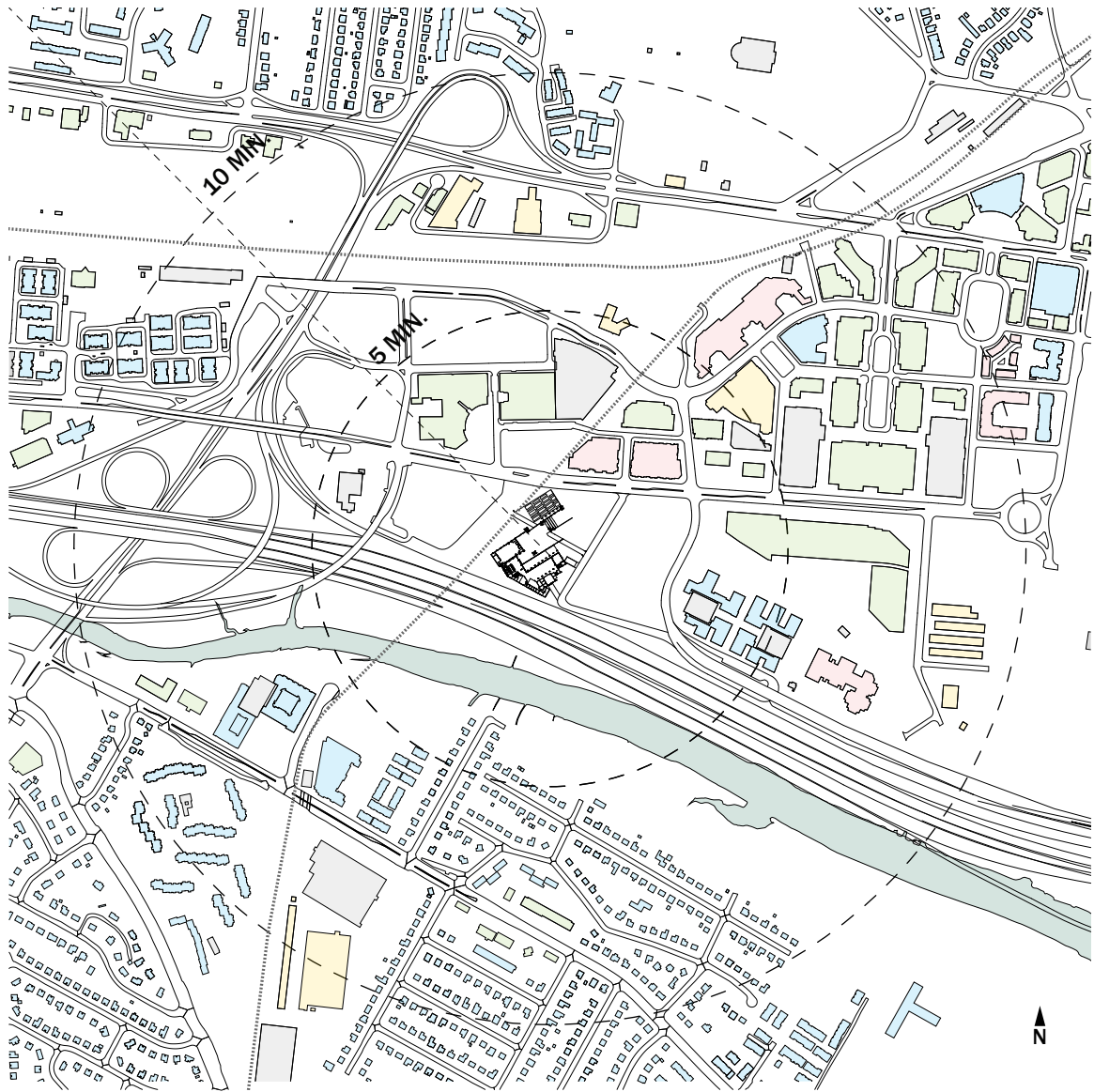
- CHURCH
- SYNAGOGUE
- MOSQUE

TRAINS

- METRO - YELLOW LINE
- METRO - BLUE LINE
- VRE - MANASSAS
- VRE - FREDRICKSBURG
- AMTRAK



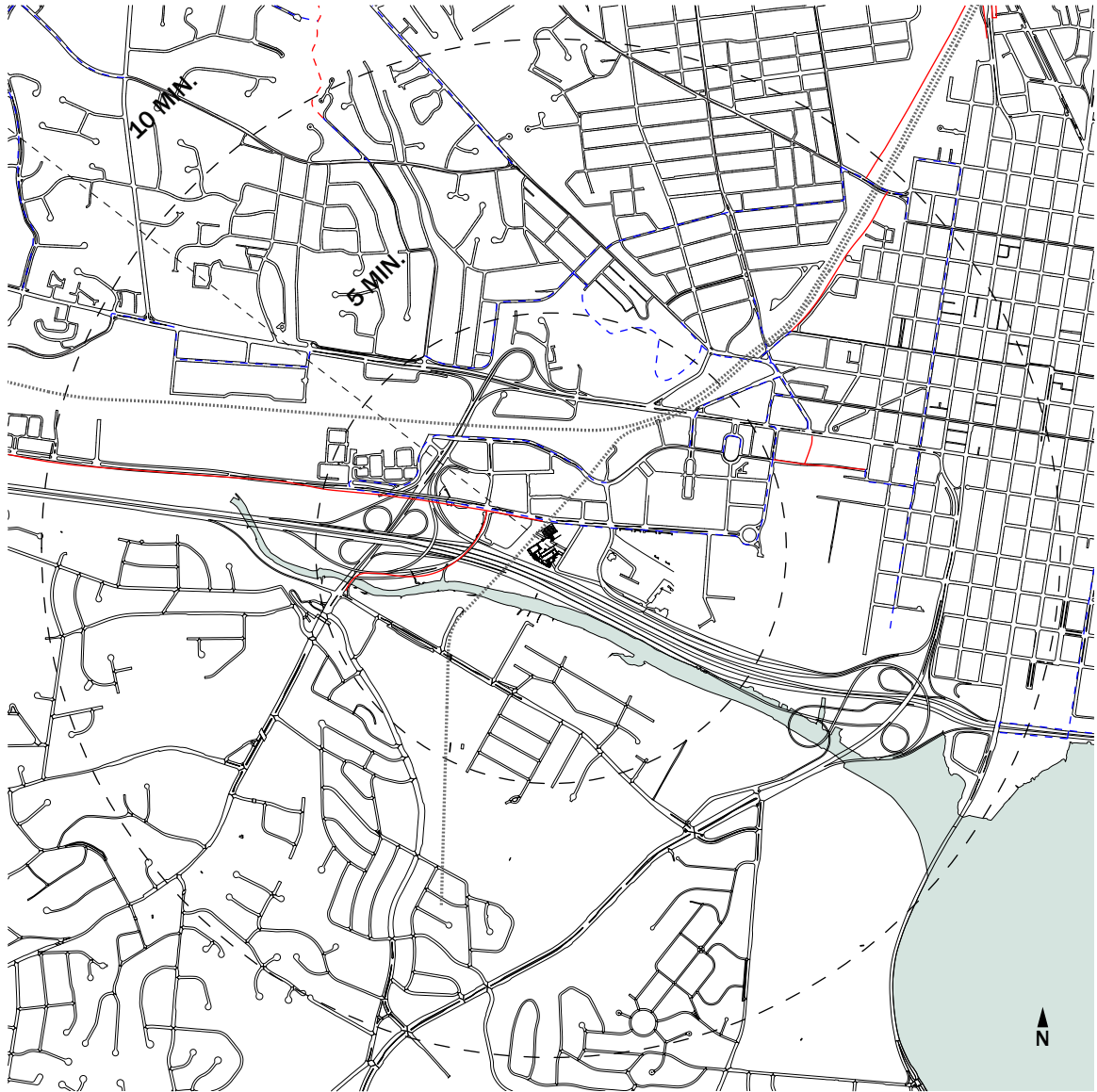
FIGURE 17 - TRANSPORTATION MAP OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA



- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- INSTITUTIONAL
- MIXED USE
- OTHER



FIGURE 18 - Pedestrian Access Map



BIKE PATH

- BIKE LANE
- - - SHARED LANE
- ON STREET
- OFF STREET
- - - UNPAVED PATH

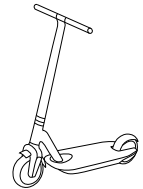
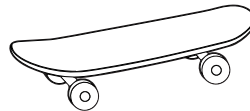
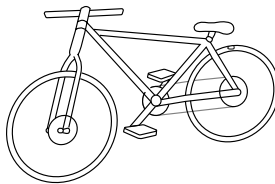
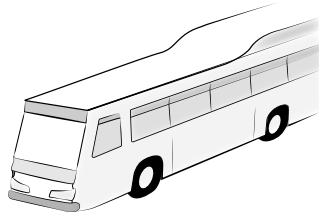


FIGURE 19 - Pedestrian Conveyances Access Map



BUS LINES

- AT2
- AT3
- AT4
- AT5
- AT6
- AT7
- AT8
- AT10



METRO

- YELLOW LINE
- BLUE LINE

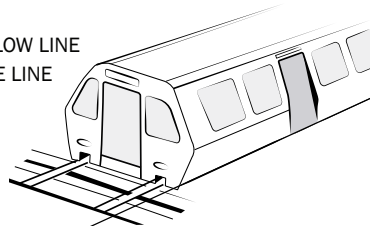
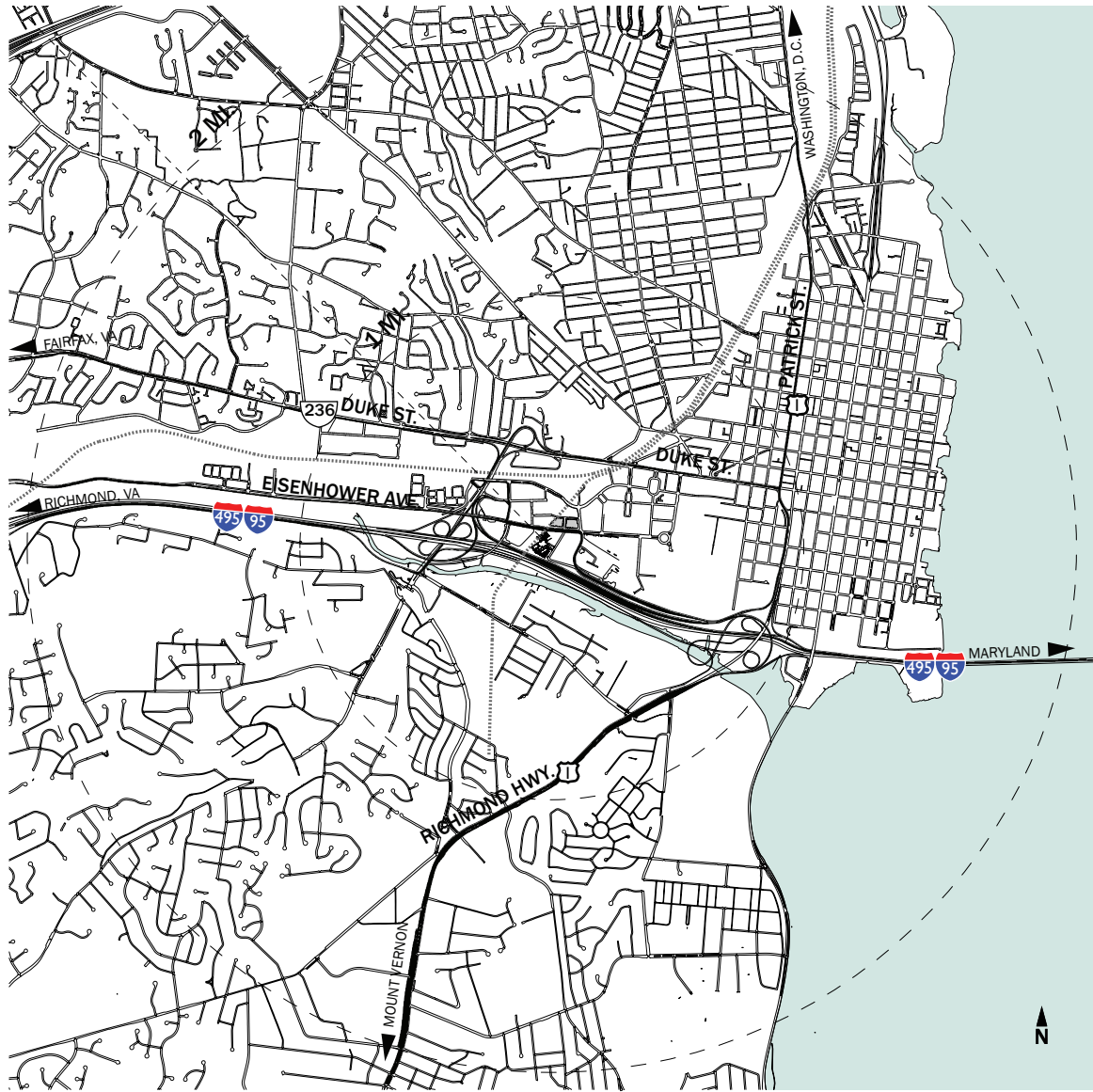


FIGURE 20 - Public Transportation Access Map



PERSONAL VEHICLES
 RIDESHARE SERVICES
 CHAUFFEURS

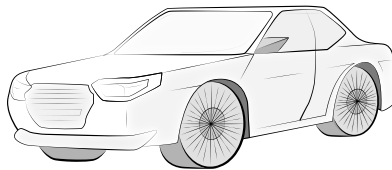


FIGURE 21 - Private Transportation Access Map

Orientation and Geometry

For where two or three gathers in my name, there am I with them. – Matthew 18:20

The orientation of the building, especially the prayer direction is deeply important to the Abrahamic Faiths. Jewish scripture says that after the first temple was built, God commanded King Solomon to pray towards Jerusalem.⁴² Following from this tradition, early Christians prayed facing East. This signified looking towards the future; facing east was considered to be waiting and watching for what is coming with the new day.⁴³ The Qur'an also explicitly states that, "wherever you are, turn your faces toward it [Mecca] in prayer."⁴⁴ This direction that Muslims are required to "turn their faces toward" is called the qiblah, and it points towards the most holy place in Islam - the Great Mosque of Mecca and the Kaaba.⁴⁵

The most direct lines from Alexandria, Virginia to both Jerusalem and Mecca are facing Northeast (52° East of North and 56° East of North, respectively).⁴⁶ This may sound contradictory due to the fact that Jerusalem and Mecca are southeast of Alexandria, Virginia on a standard Mercator projection, but that type of map has an increasing level of distortion as the map moves away from the equator. A more accurate map to show a straight line is a Dymaxion projection. Invented by Buckminster Fuller, this map can be rearranged to show the straightest path with the least distortion. Figure 22 shows the lines from Alexandria to Jerusalem and Mecca on a dymaxion map. When rolled into a globe and unrolled into a Mercator projection (*Figure 23*), one can see that the shortest line points northeast and follows the curve of the earth.

42 1 Kings 8:44, 48, NIV

43 Lathrop, 108

44 Qur'an 2:144

45 Kahera, 177

46 Levin, 33-35

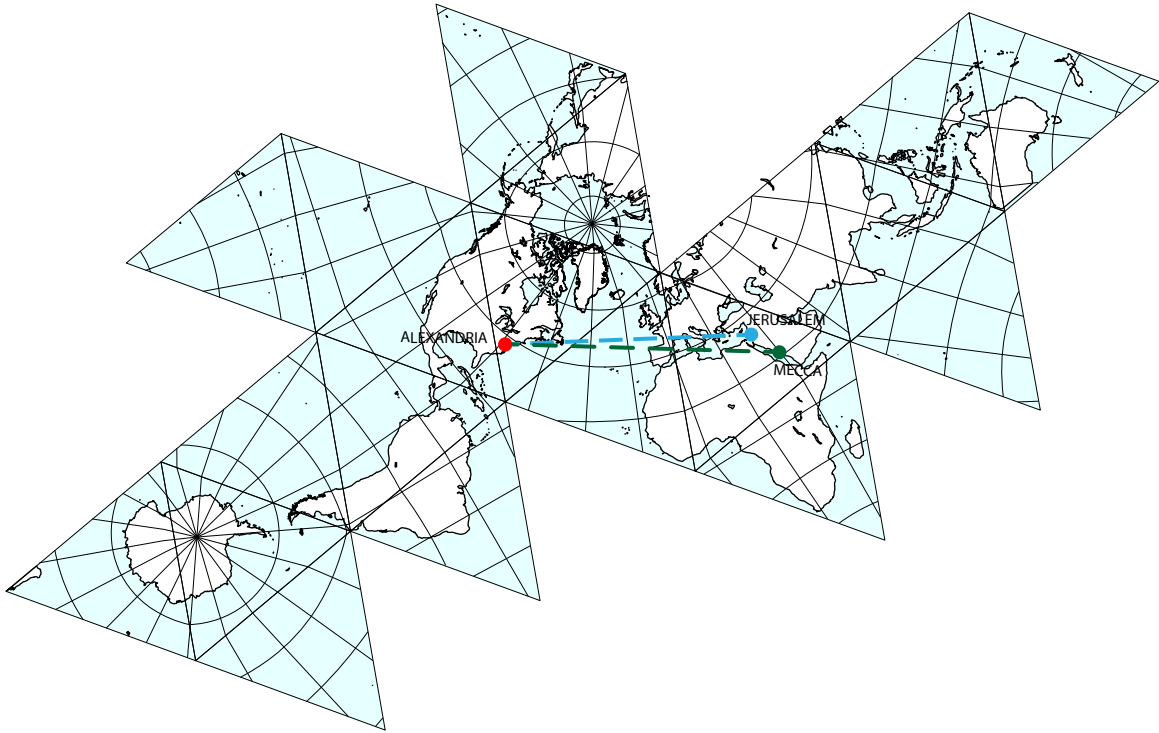


FIGURE 22 - Dymaxion Map



FIGURE 23 - Mercator Map

While the orientation of the building is dictated in Abrahamic religions' scripture, geometric patterns in worship spaces is a historical tradition that can be traced all the way back to Socrates. Socrates claimed that geometry was the knowledge of the eternal and that geometry would draw one's soul to the truth. He said, "all things [geometry] tend which compel the soul to turn her gaze towards that place, where is the full perfection of being, which she ought, by all means, to behold."⁴⁷ While Socrates may have not been talking specifically about architecture, one can interpret his words into saying that buildings with strong proportion and geometry attract the attention of the observer. He understood that we as a human race are drawn to geometric proportions. For this reason, we look to buildings like the Notre Dame Cathedral as architectural wonders. Proportions have a way of instilling feelings within us. They can create something aesthetically pleasing that calms and comforts the observer. In Socratic terms, the built environment draws the soul to the truth. Mathes Roriczer, a fifteenth century master mason,⁴⁸ and Issam El-

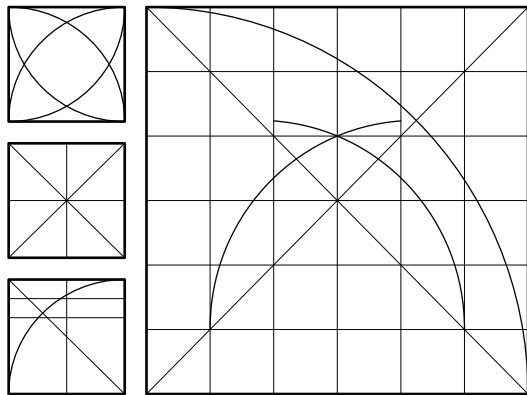


Figure 24 - Geometric Patterns in Religious Buildings

Said, twentieth century artist,⁴⁹ codified and described how geometry was used in gothic cathedrals and Islamic art, respectively. Interestingly, they use the same diagrams to explain the base geometry of art and architecture (*Figure 24*). One can see the geometric patterns in these three projects – the Pinner Synagogue in England, St Michaels at Hildesheim, Germany, and the

⁴⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 386

⁴⁸ Shelby, et. al, *Gothic Design Techniques*

⁴⁹ El-Said, *Geometric Concepts*

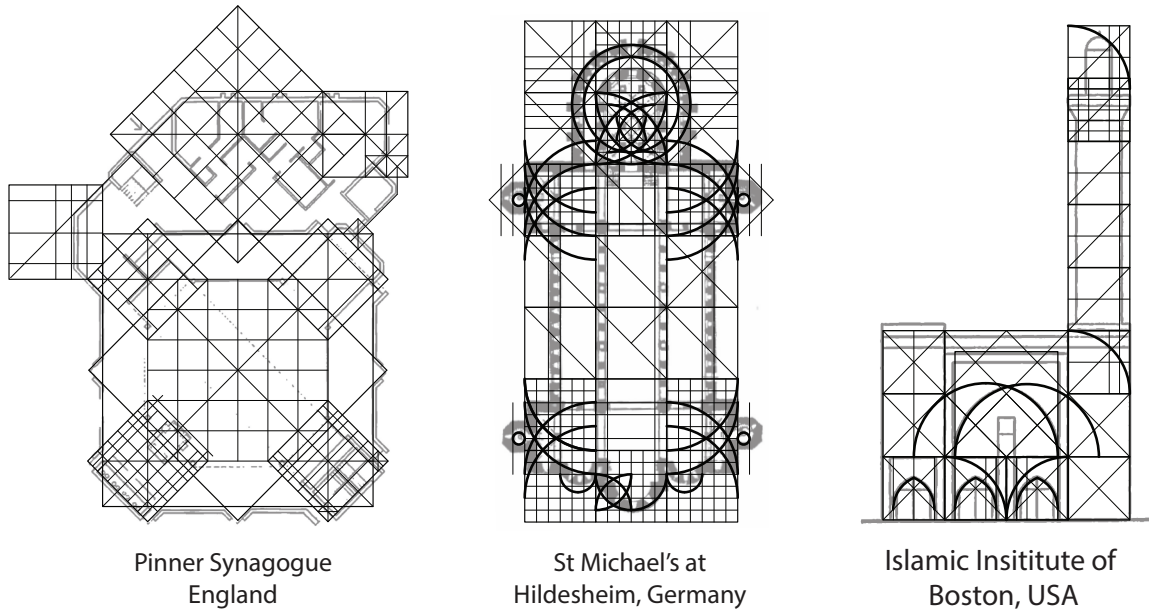


FIGURE 25 - Geometric Patterns in Religious Buildings

Islamic Institute of Boston, USA (*Figure 25*).

The House for the Family of God uses a combination of orientation and geometry to place the building on the site and guide the building layout. The geometric patterns, when combined and overlaid on the prayer directions creates three specific areas – the worship area, the community area, and the outreach area (*Figure 26*). The worship area is placed in the smallest section because it is

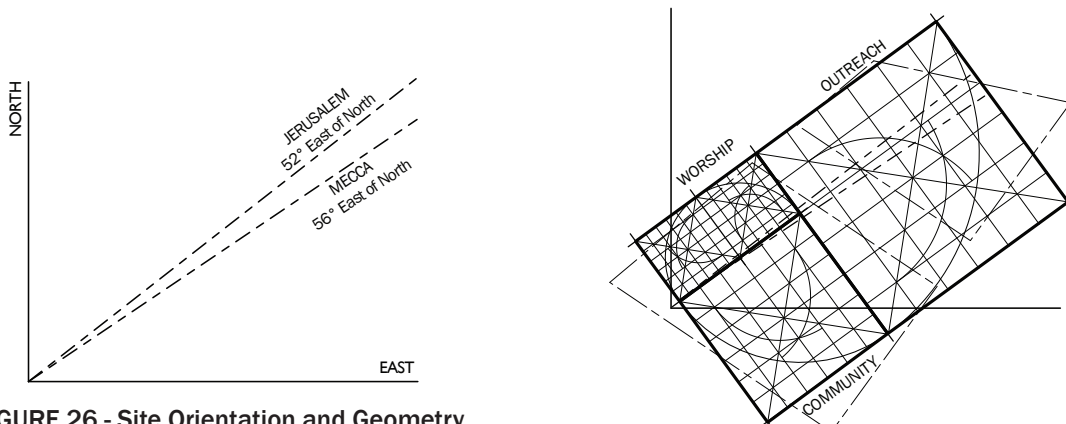


FIGURE 26 - Site Orientation and Geometry

something that each religion does separately. Expanding outward from the worship space is the community space. This is where all three religions can gather and learn from each other. The largest space is the outreach space. The outreach programs could be multi-faith activities that expand out into the community.

The prayer direction plays another important role as well. Arrayed across the site, the prayer directions become gridlines. All the walls are either parallel or perpendicular to the prayer lines, guaranteeing that each wall is either facing or pointing towards either Jerusalem or Mecca.

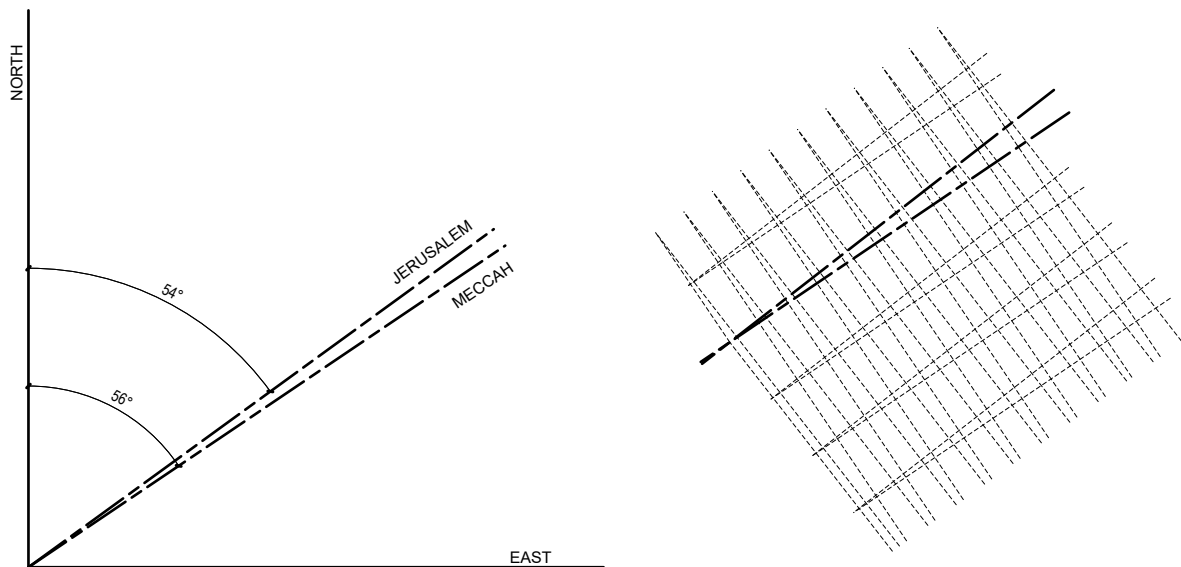
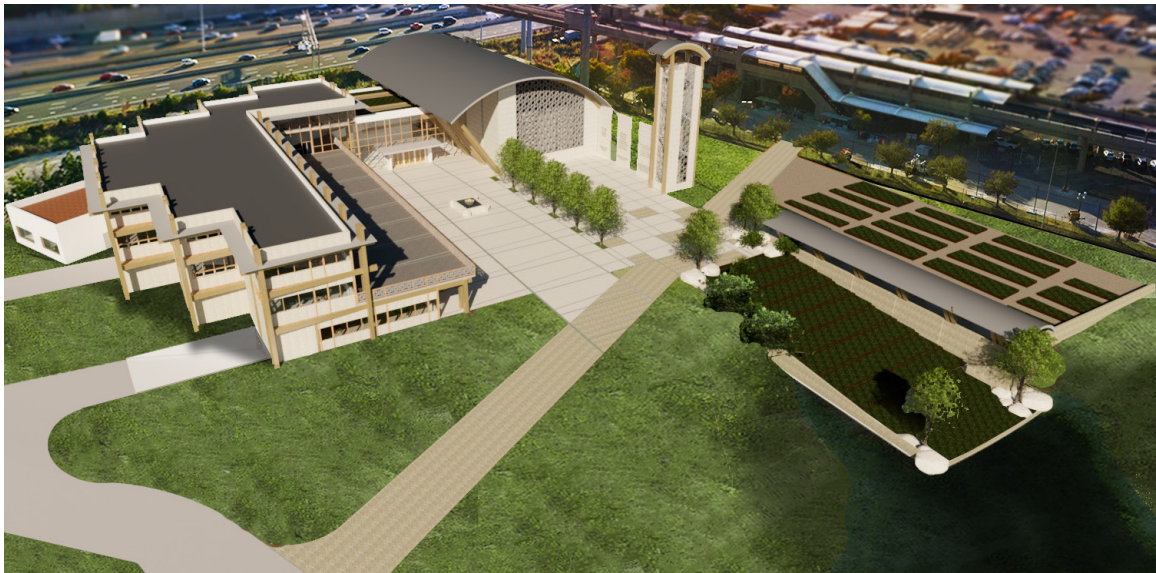


FIGURE 27 - PRAYER DIRECTION

A House for the Families of Abraham in the Washington DC Metro Area

Now that we have all the parts and pieces for a multi-faith community center, we have to assemble the pieces together, but the design of the building is just as important as having all the correct pieces. As mentioned before, the building should be an inviting place for people to gather and visit. It should give visitors first impressions of what the community will be like.⁵⁰



⁵⁰ Donald Schell, "Rending the Temple Veil: Holy Space in Holy Community," in *Searching for Sacred Space*, p 152



The first thing someone comes across when approaching the building from Eisenhower Avenue Metro is the community garden. This creates a buffer zone between the building and the hustle and bustle of the city.



Moving from the garden and past the outdoor amphitheater, the entrance of the building beckons. The outdoor courtyard in front of the building draws people towards the entrance. Because there is one main entrance and exit, this space starts to bring people together as they come and go from the building.



Upon entering the building, a waterfall signals that this is a pure, clean, and holy place. This waterfall is a gathering point for meeting friends, a waiting area, and even can be used as a space for public purification rituals. Behind the waterfall is the wudu and mikvah.



Turning right from the entrance brings one to the worship space. The floor is a diagram of prayer lines – blue lines perpendicular to Jerusalem for Judaism and green lines perpendicular to Mecca for Islam in a sea of red carpet signifying Christianity. In the front of the sanctuary are three walls, each perpendicular to their respective prayer directions with a nook holding that religion's holy book.

Leaving the worship space, one again intermingles with people of different faiths coming and going from the building. Moving to the other side of the building and into the community space, one finds different events taking place. Here, weddings, presentations, and community suppers are held. At the end of the community space is a kid's room that can hold youth groups and keep children entertained.



Moving to the second floor reveals classrooms for religious education and an upper balcony in the community space. The third floor has classrooms and a rooftop garden that collects rainwater for the purification rituals below.

The prayer lines and geometry are present in the floorplans as patterns in the worship space, community space, and the outdoor courtyards, but they also guide where the structure goes and where the columns are placed. They even guide the placement of windows, walls, and mullions.

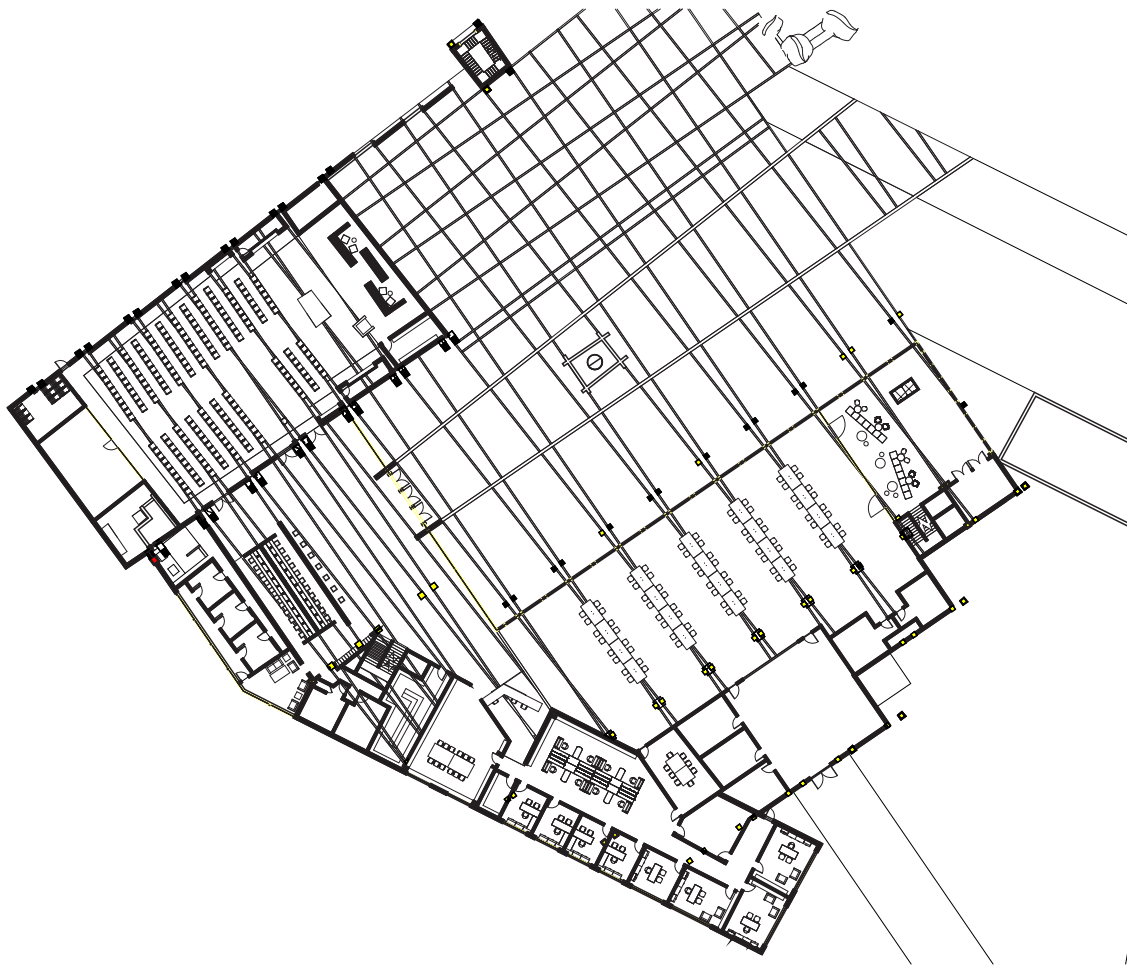


FIGURE 28 - Prayer Lines and Geometry in Floor Plans

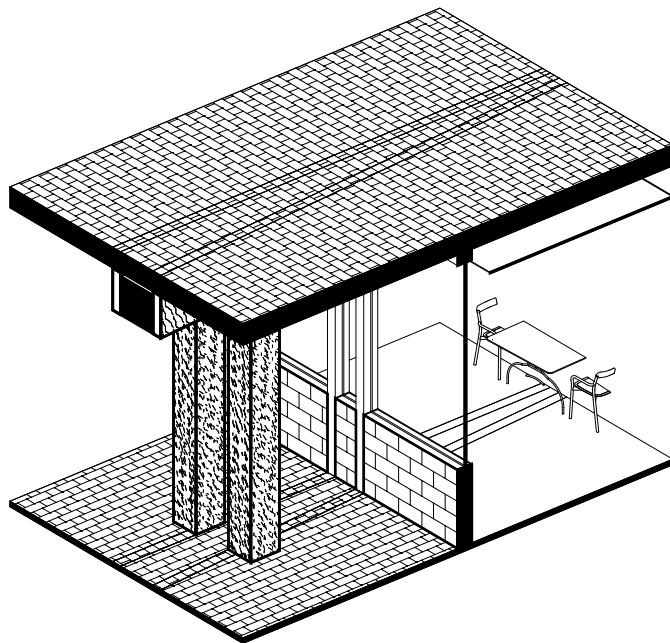
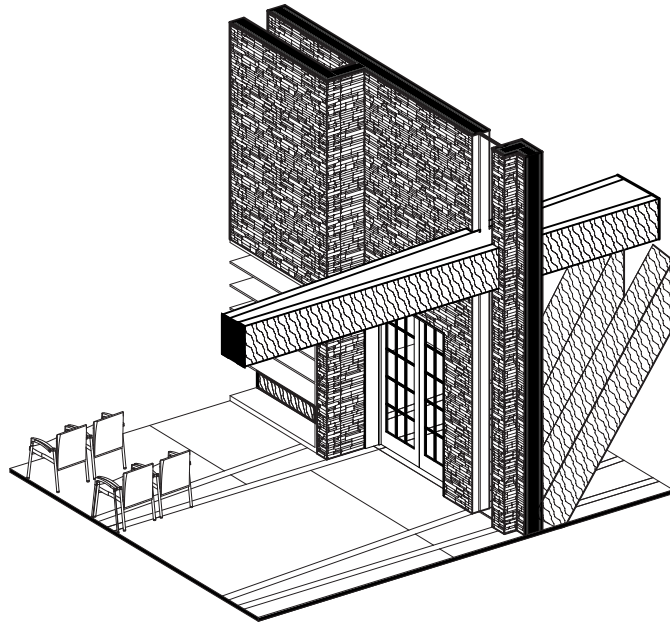


FIGURE 29 - 3D Views of Prayer Lines and Geometry

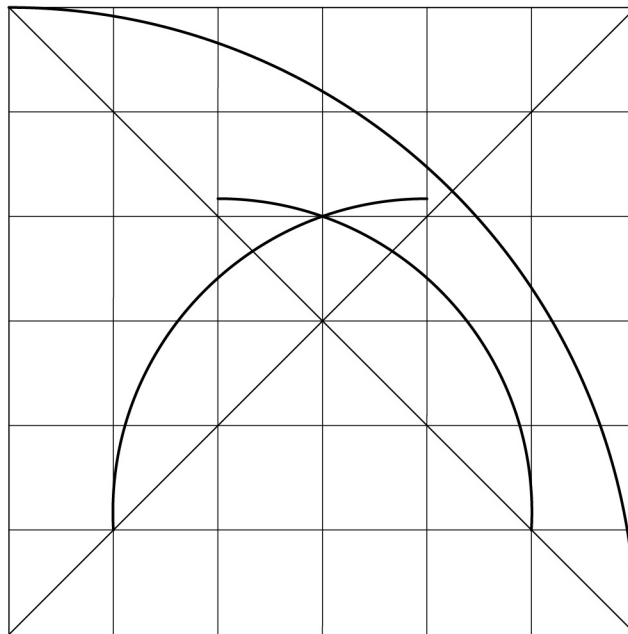
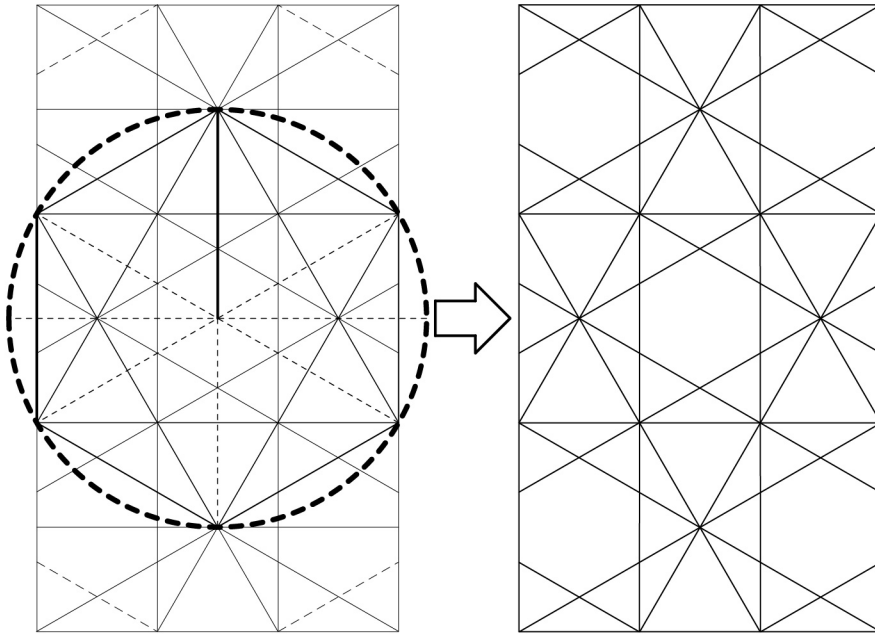


FIGURE 30 - Geometric Patterns

Prayer lines and geometry also affect the elevation. The geometric pattern is rotated 54° from horizontal to bisect the prayer lines angles (52° E of N, and 56° E of N) as well as included in a large window on both the front of the sanctuary and the bell tower.

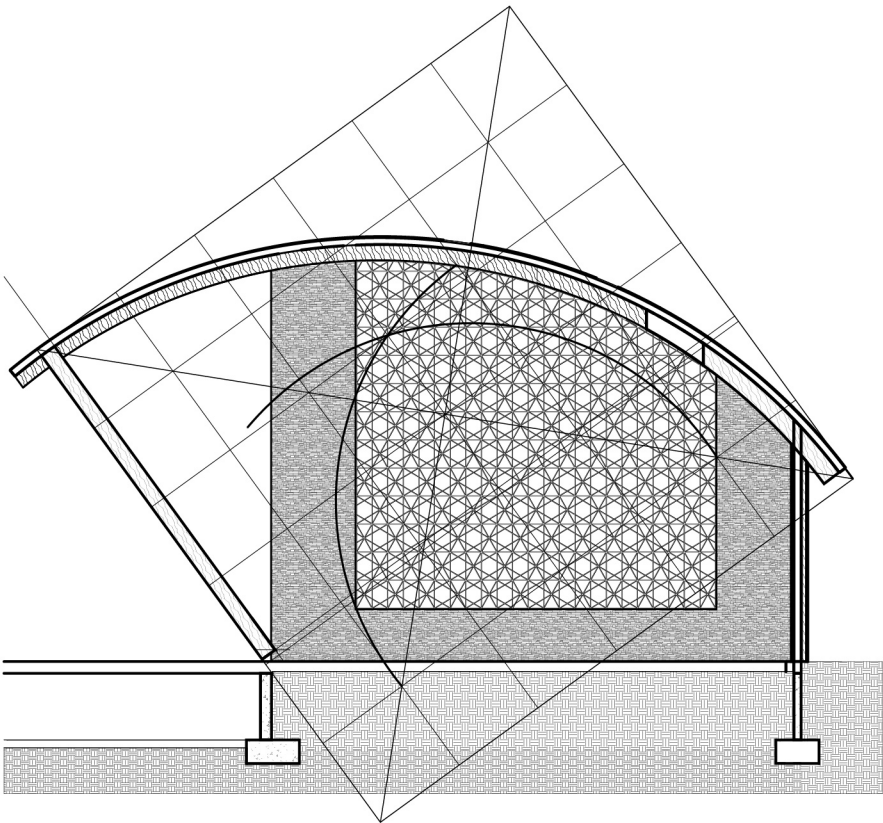


FIGURE 31 - Sanctuary Wall Geometry

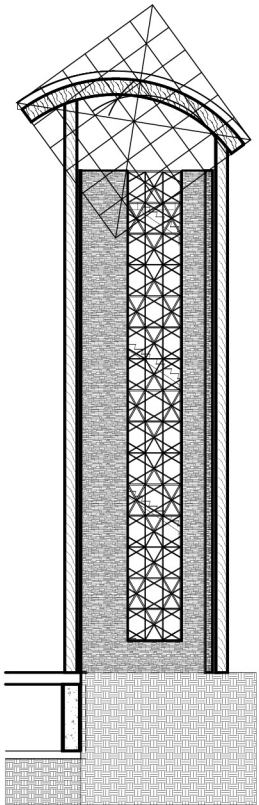


FIGURE 32 - Bell Tower Geometry

The structure itself even emphasizes the connections between the Abrahamic faiths by using traditional wood joinery.

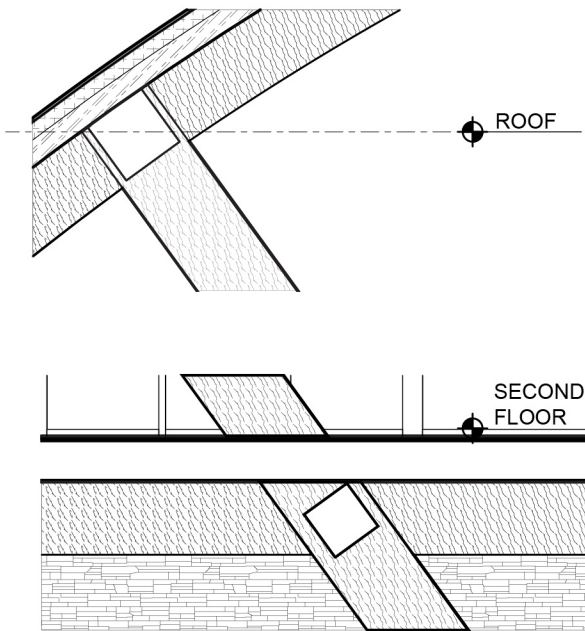


FIGURE 33 - Angled Column Details

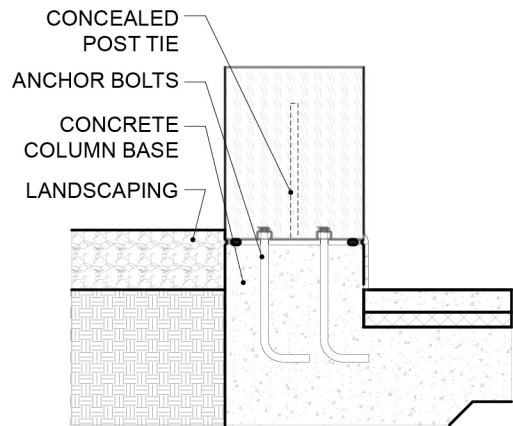


FIGURE 34 - Column Connection at Exterior Wall

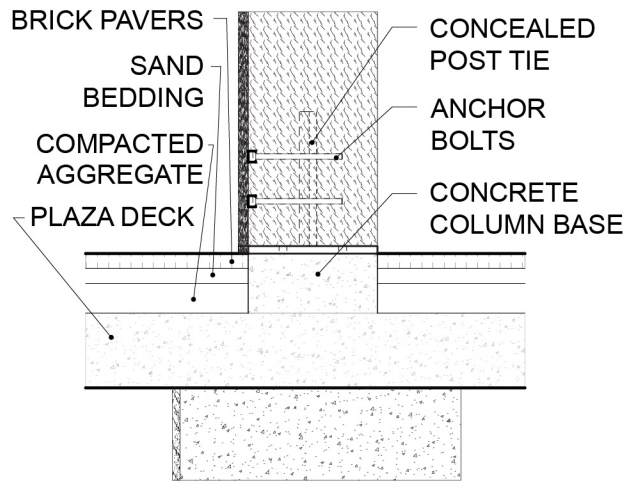


FIGURE 35 - Column Connection at Plaza

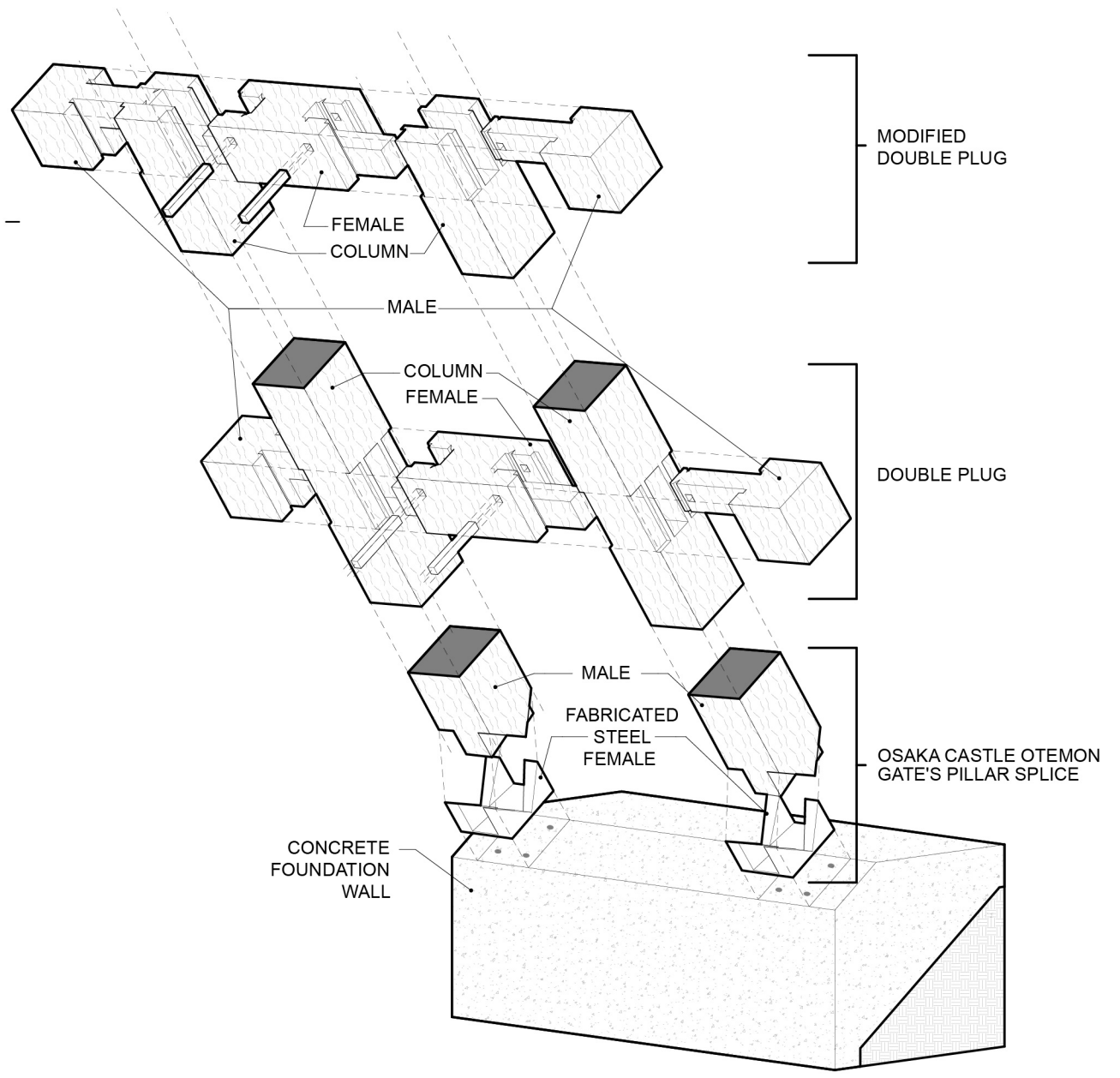
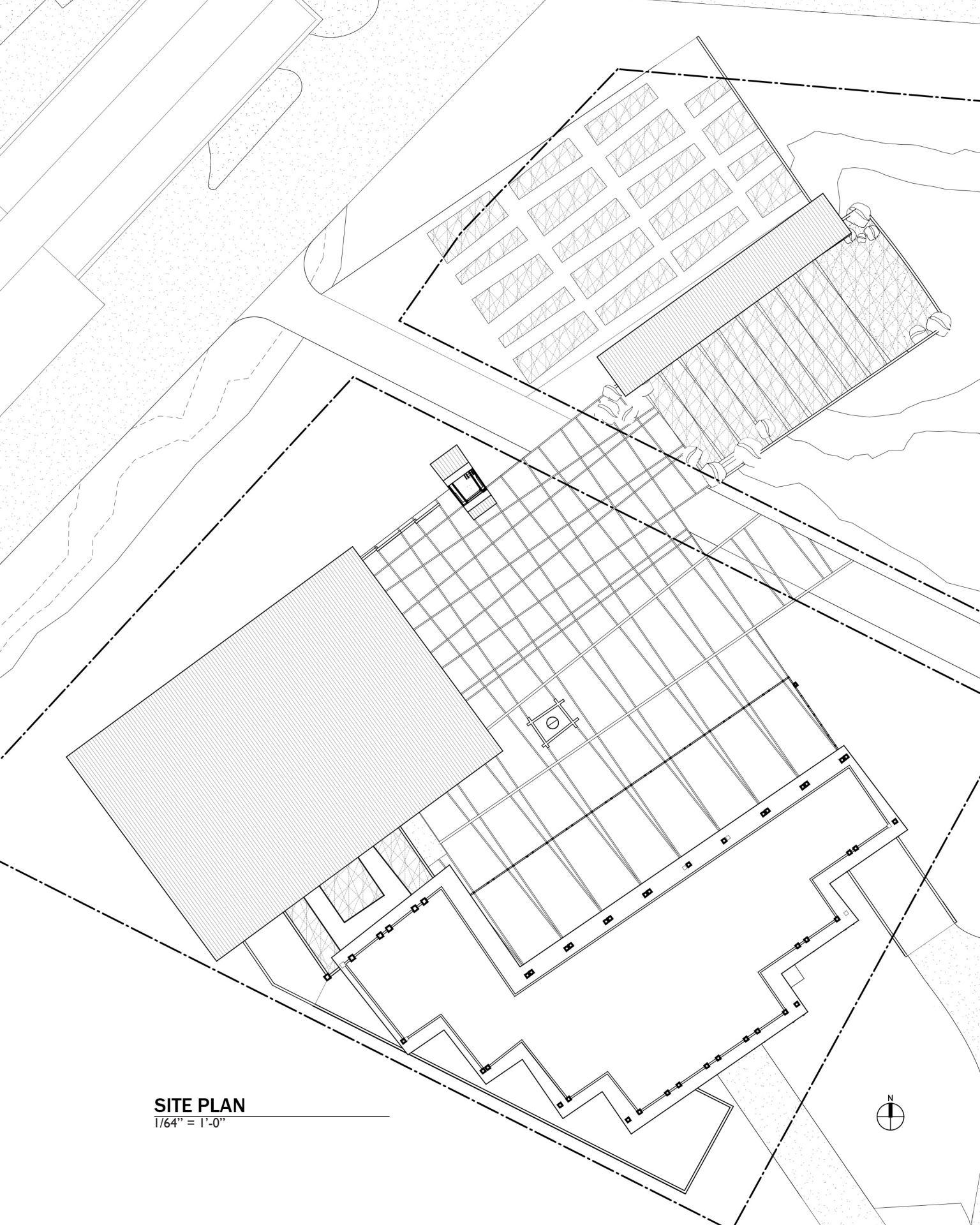


FIGURE 36 - Structural Column Exploded Axon



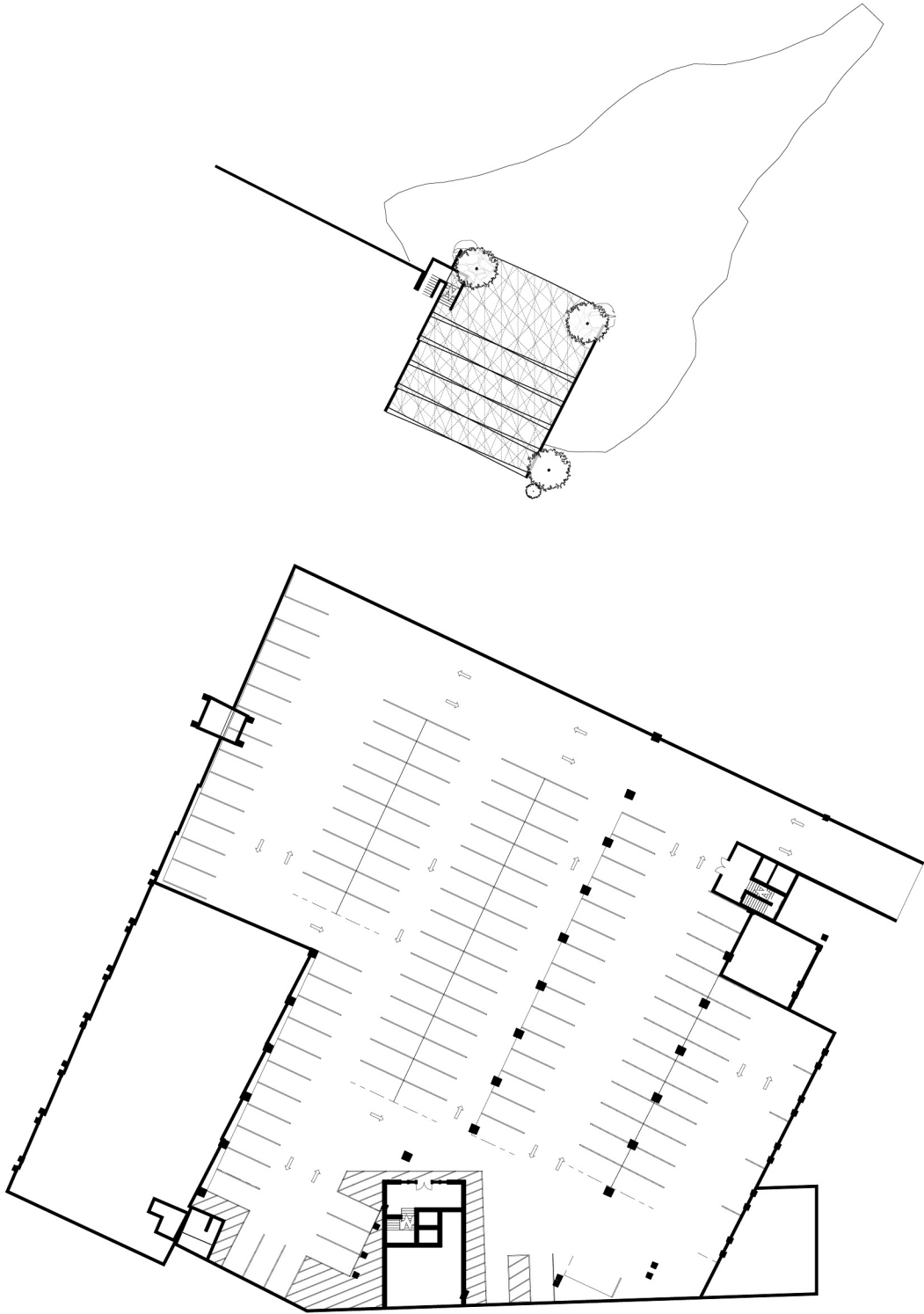
THE BUILDING:
PLANS, SECTIONS, AND DETAILS






SITE PLAN
1/64" = 1'-0"

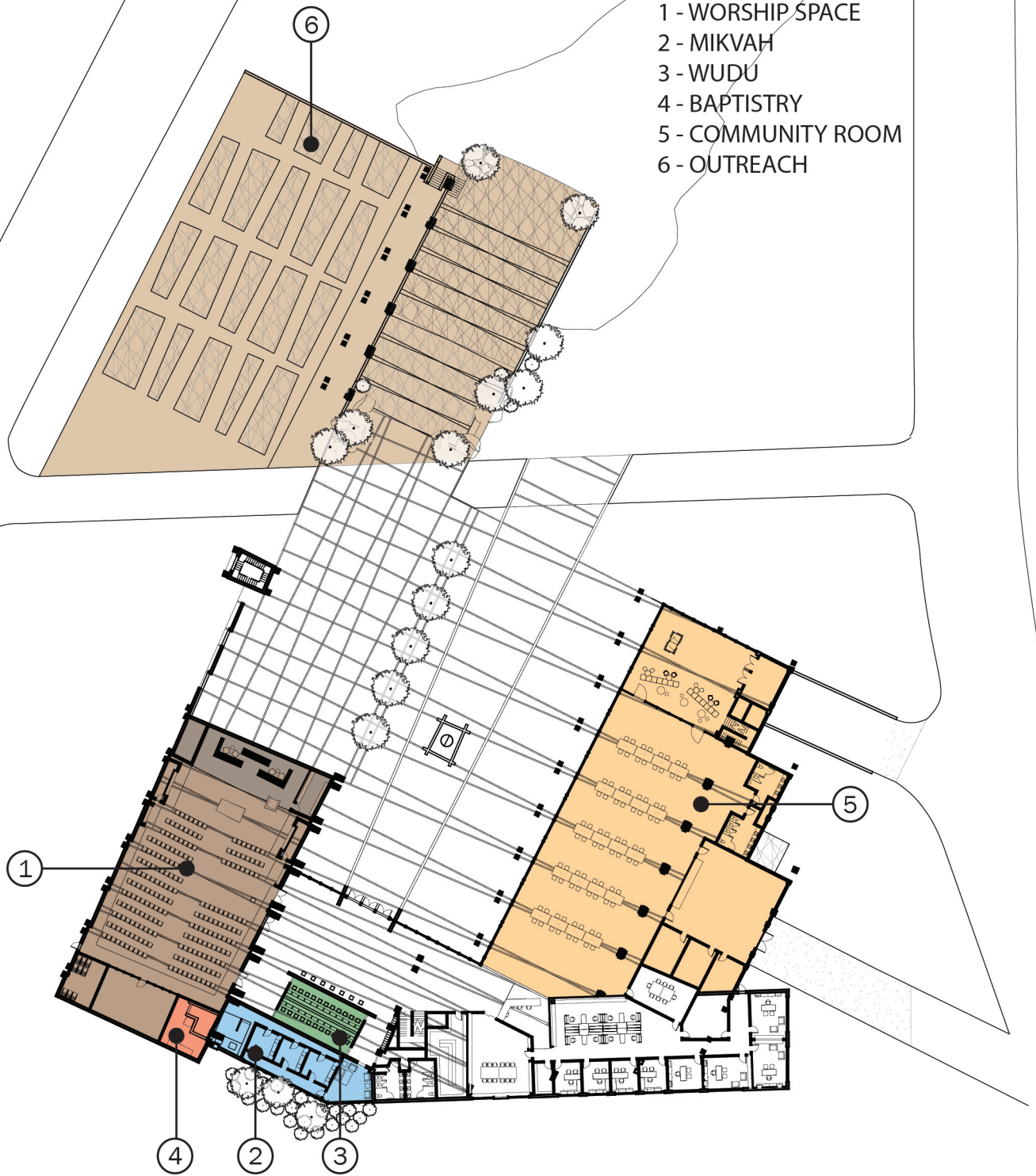




LOWER LEVEL

1/64" = 1'-0" 

- 1 - WORSHIP SPACE
- 2 - MIKVAH
- 3 - WUDU
- 4 - BAPTISTRY
- 5 - COMMUNITY ROOM
- 6 - OUTREACH

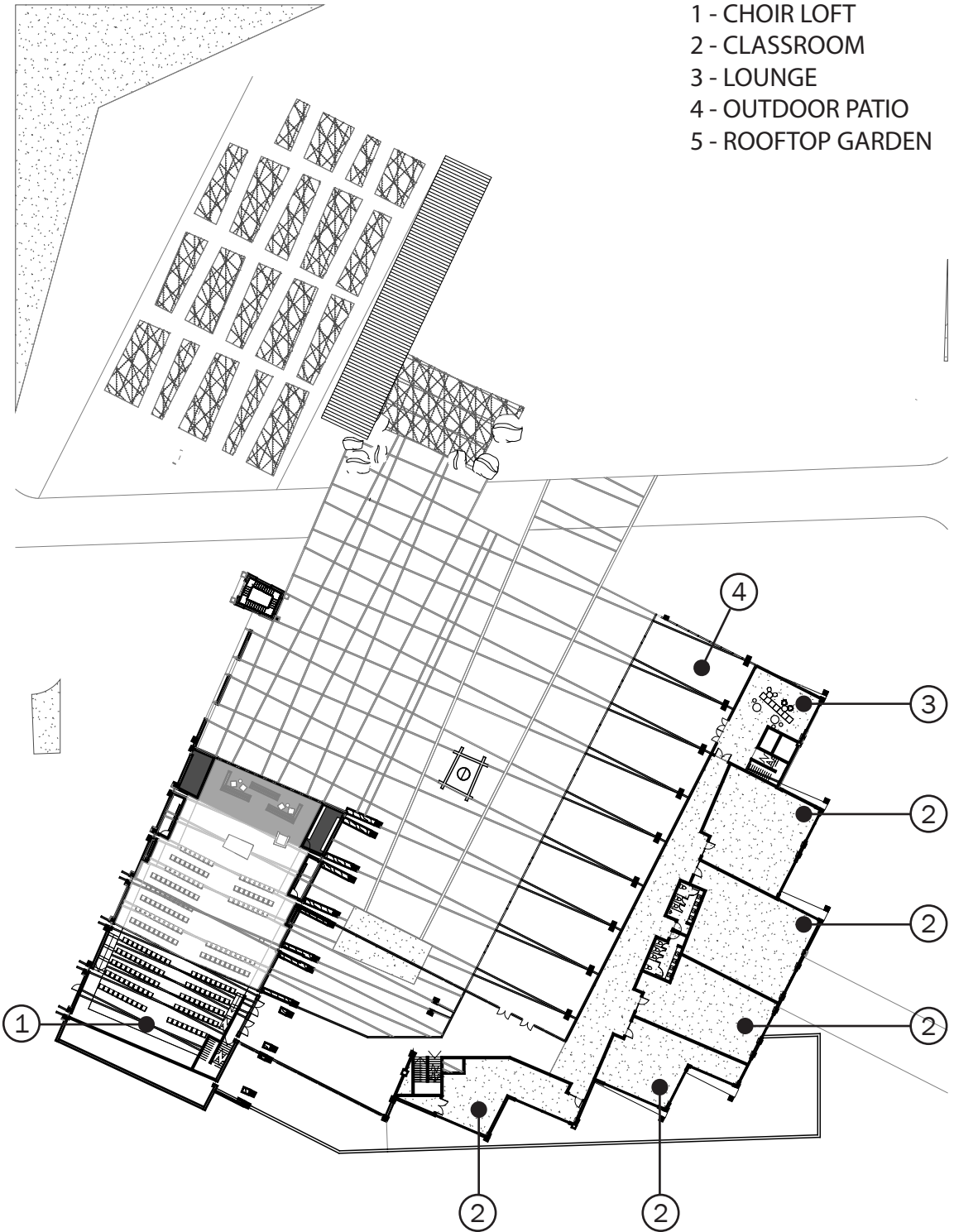


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1/64" = 1'-0"

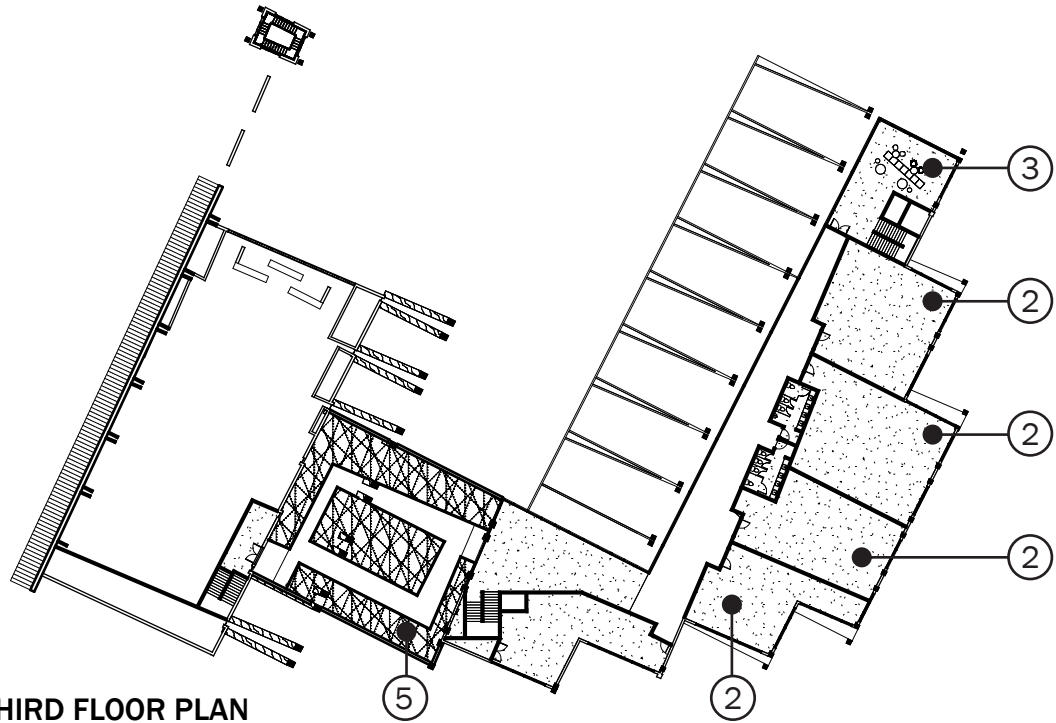


- 1 - CHOIR LOFT
- 2 - CLASSROOM
- 3 - LOUNGE
- 4 - OUTDOOR PATIO
- 5 - ROOFTOP GARDEN



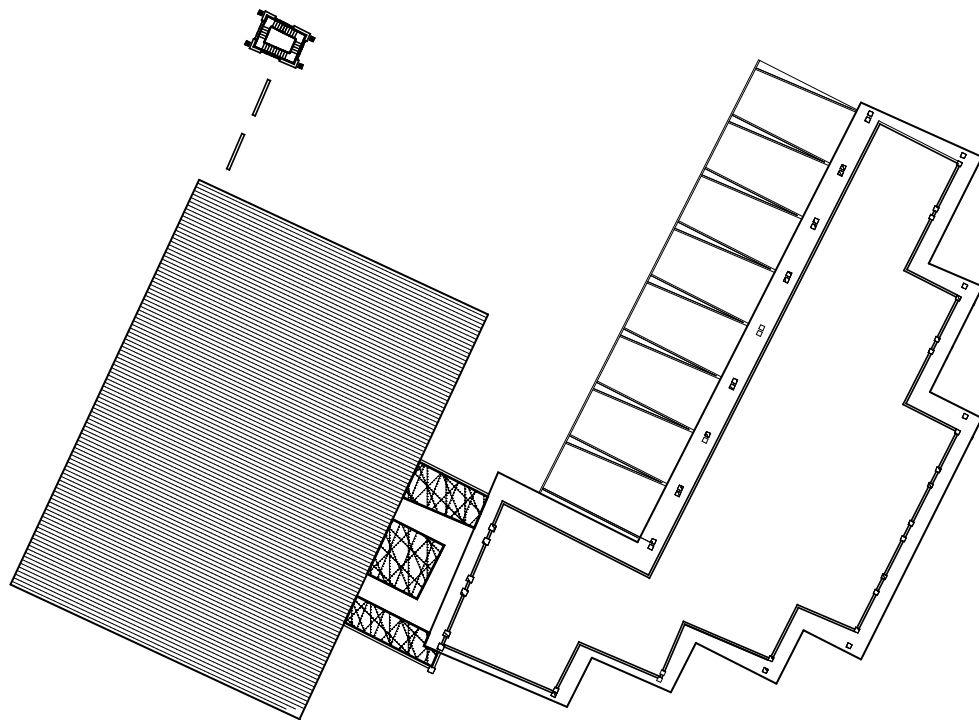
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

1/64" = 1'-0"



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

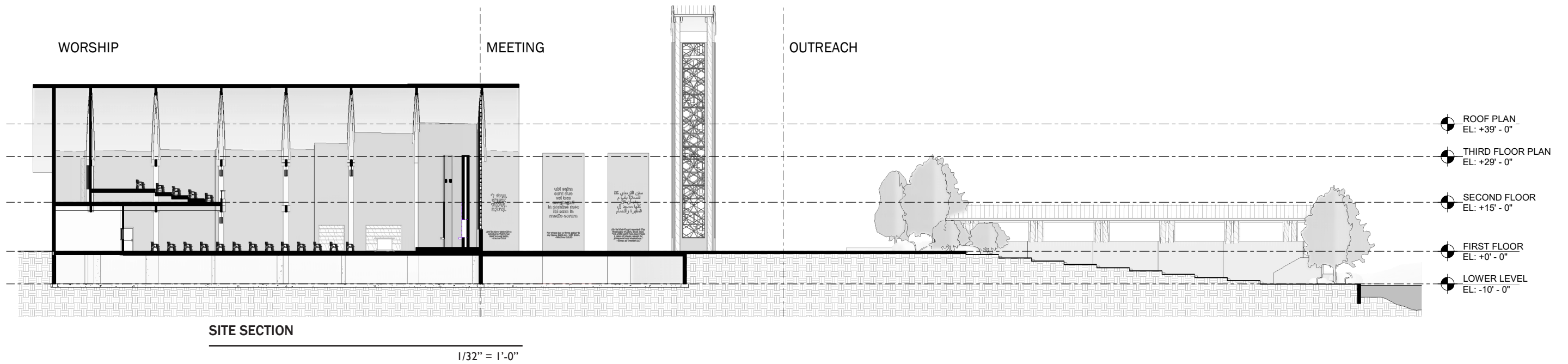
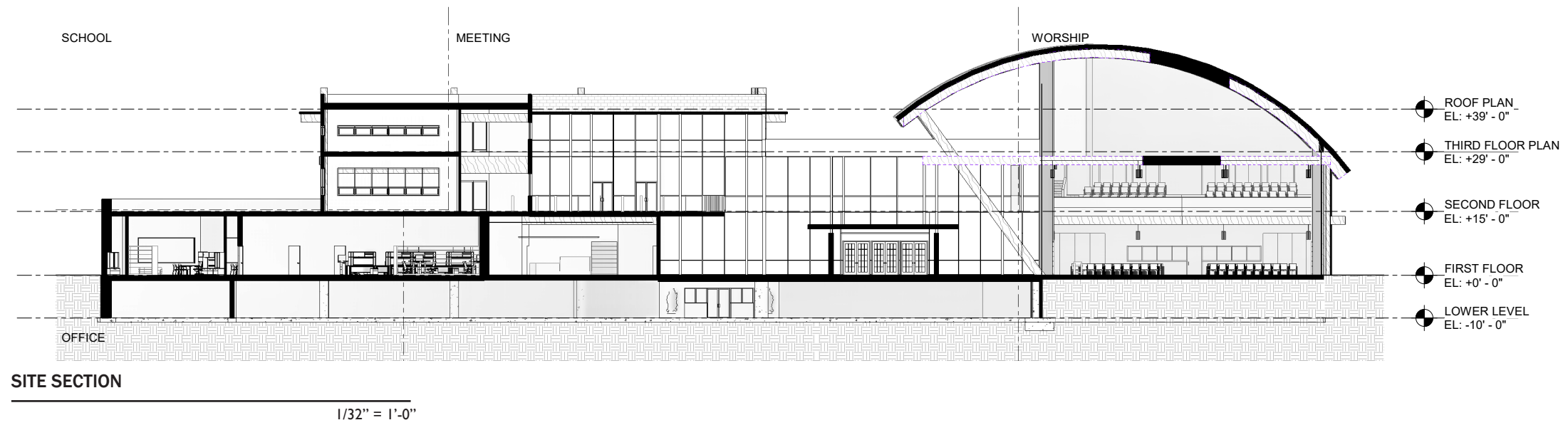
1/64" = 1'-0"

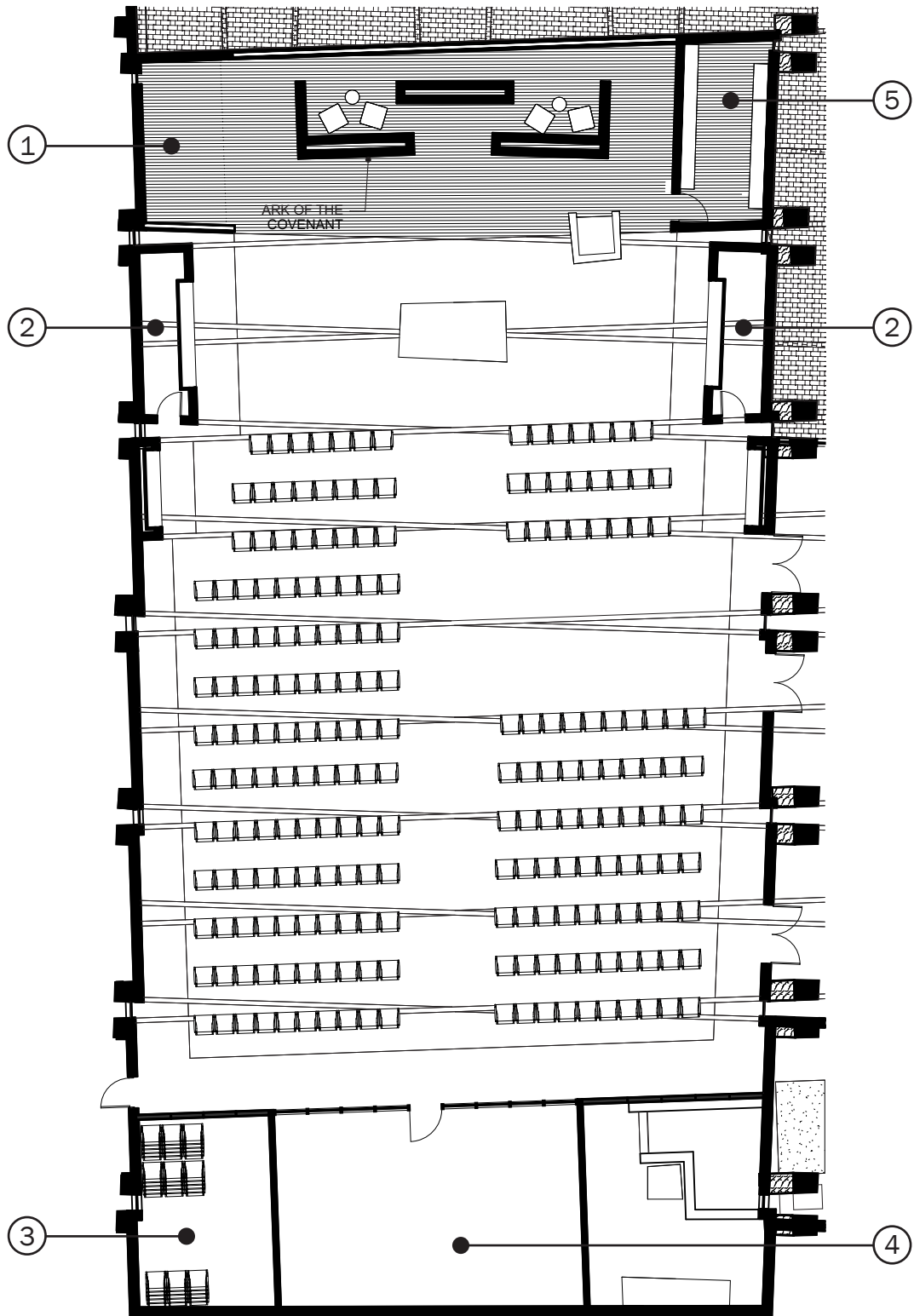


ROOF PLAN

1/64" = 1'-0"





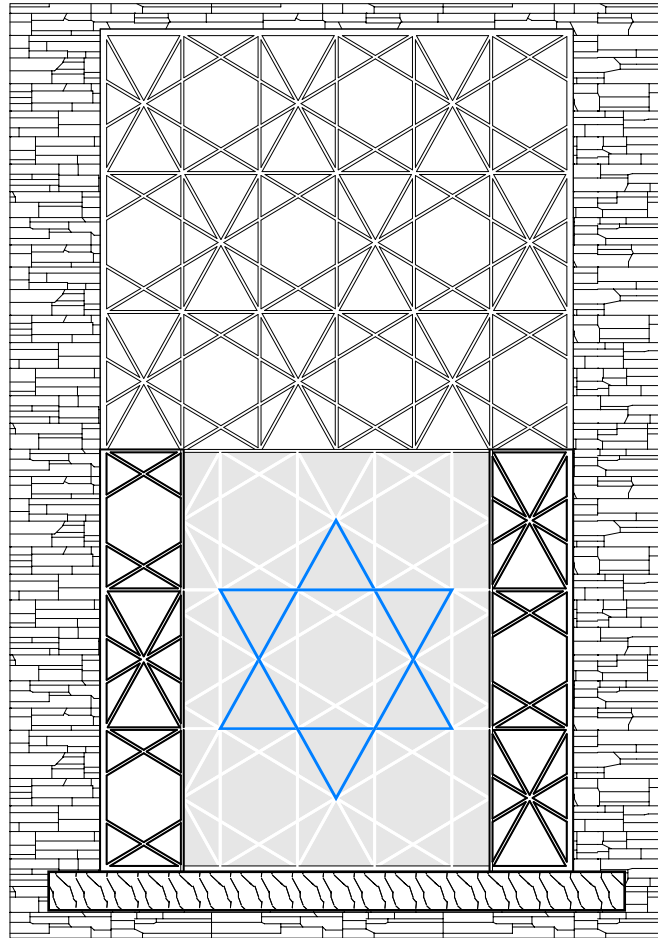


ARK OF THE COVENANT

WORSHIP - SYNAGOGUE

1/16" = 1'-0"

- 1 - MUSIC
- 2 - STORAGE
- 3 - CHAIR STORAGE
- 4 - NURSERY
- 5 - SACRISTY

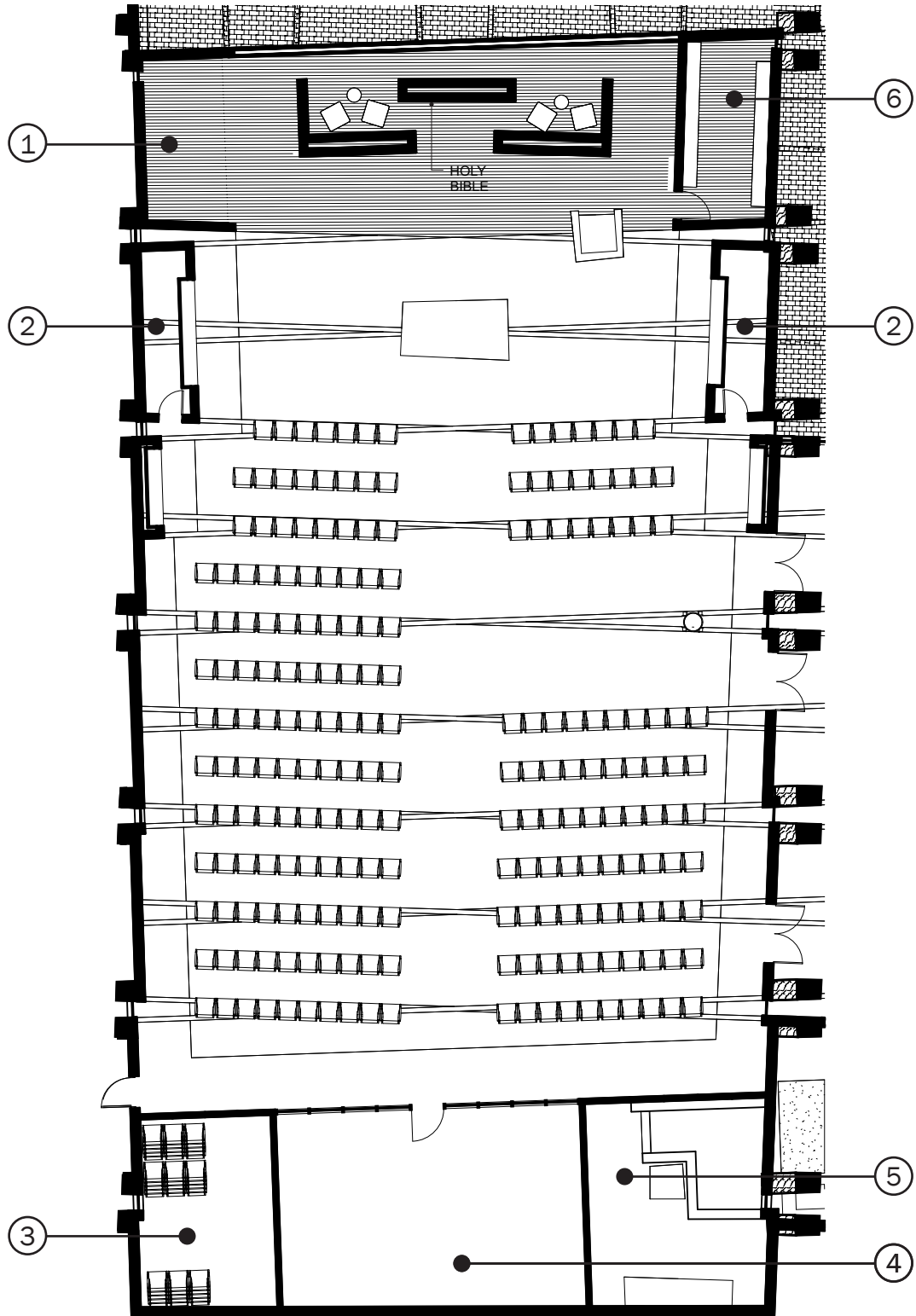


ARK OF THE COVENANT

3/8" = 1'-0"



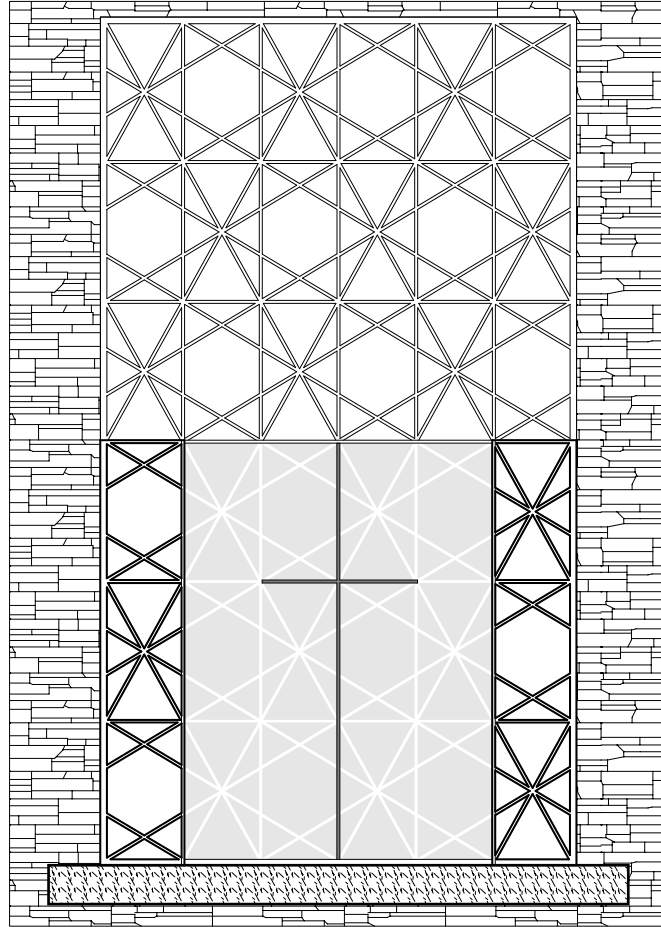
JEWISH SERVICE



WORSHIP - CHURCH

1/16" = 1'-0"

- 1 - MUSIC
- 2 - STORAGE
- 3 - CHAIR STORAGE
- 4 - NURSERY
- 5 - BAPTISTRY
- 6 - SACRISTY

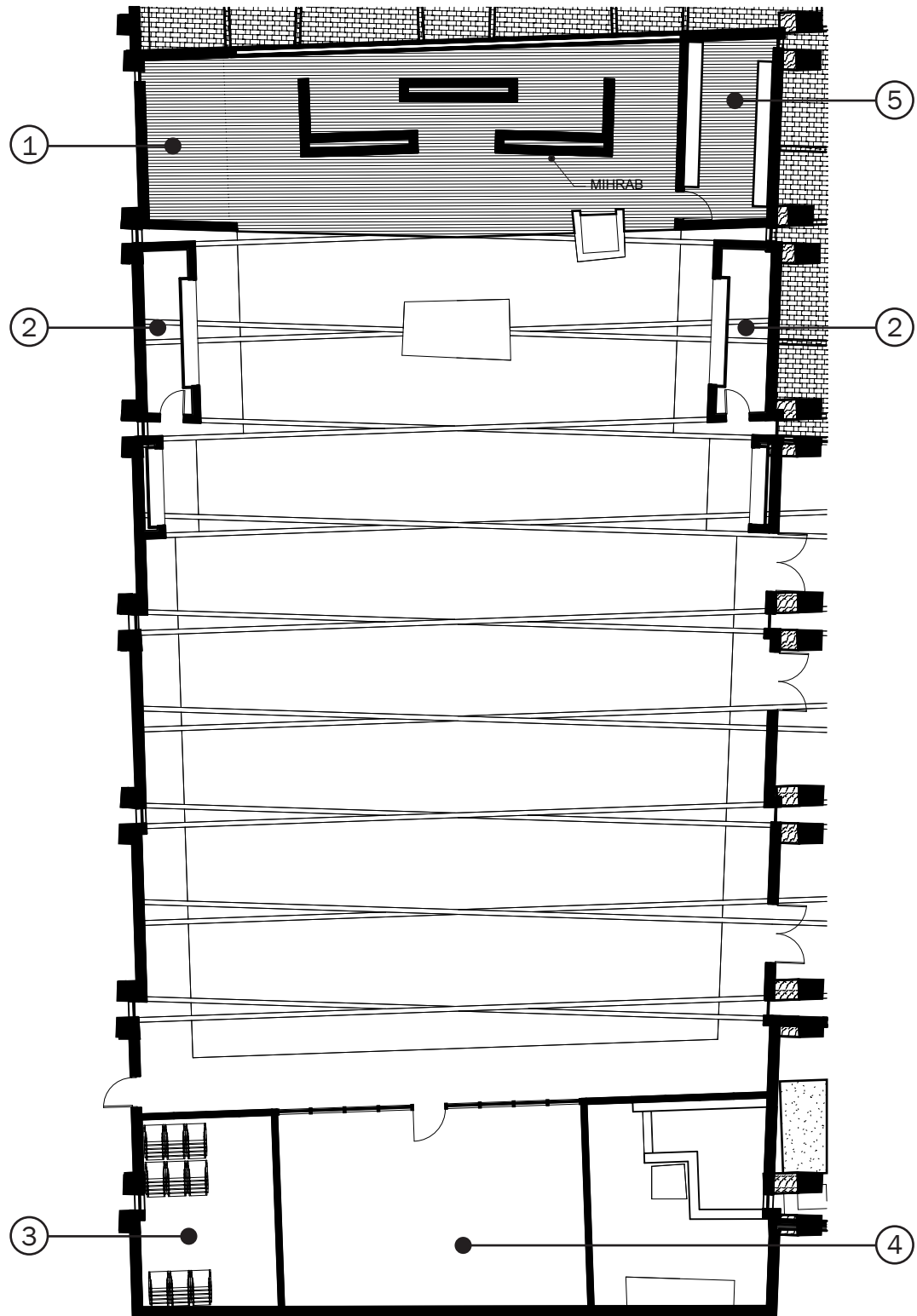


BIBLE NOOK

3/8" = 1'-0"



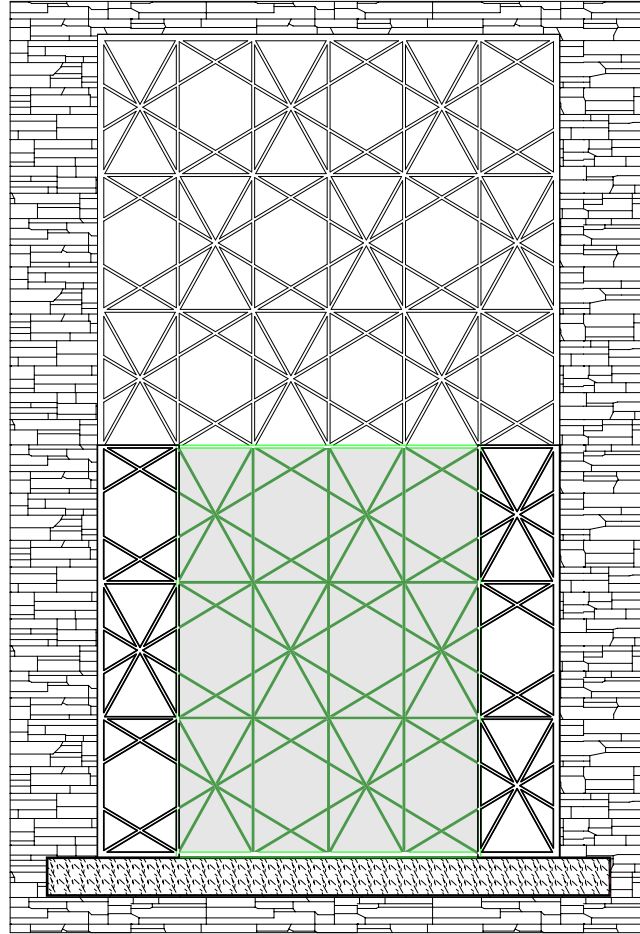
CHRISTIAN SERVICE



WORSHIP - MOSQUE

1/16" = 1'-0"

- 1 - MUSIC
- 2 - STORAGE
- 3 - CHAIR STORAGE
- 4 - NURSERY
- 5 - SACRISTY



MIHRAB

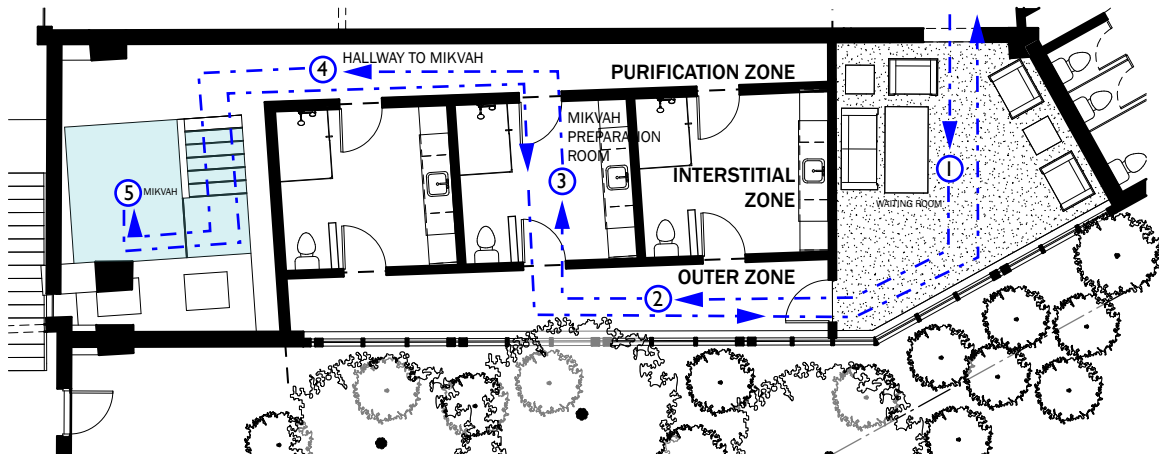
3/8" = 1'-0"



MUSLIM WORSHIP



MIKVAH



ENLARGED FLOORPLAN - MIKVAH

1/8" = 1'-0"

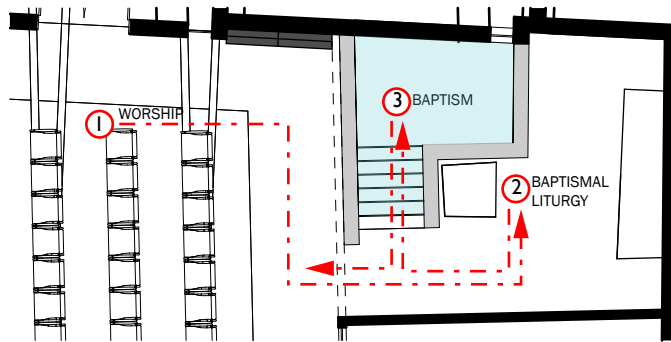


SECTION THROUGH MIKVAH

1/8" = 1'-0"

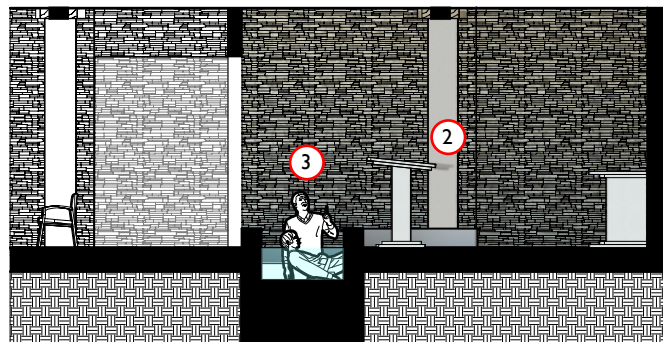


BAPTISTRY



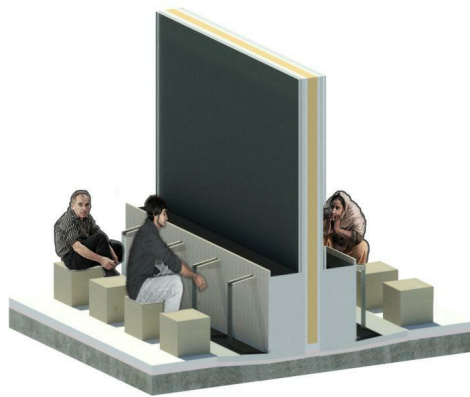
BAPTISTRY FLOORPLAN

1/8" = 1'-0"

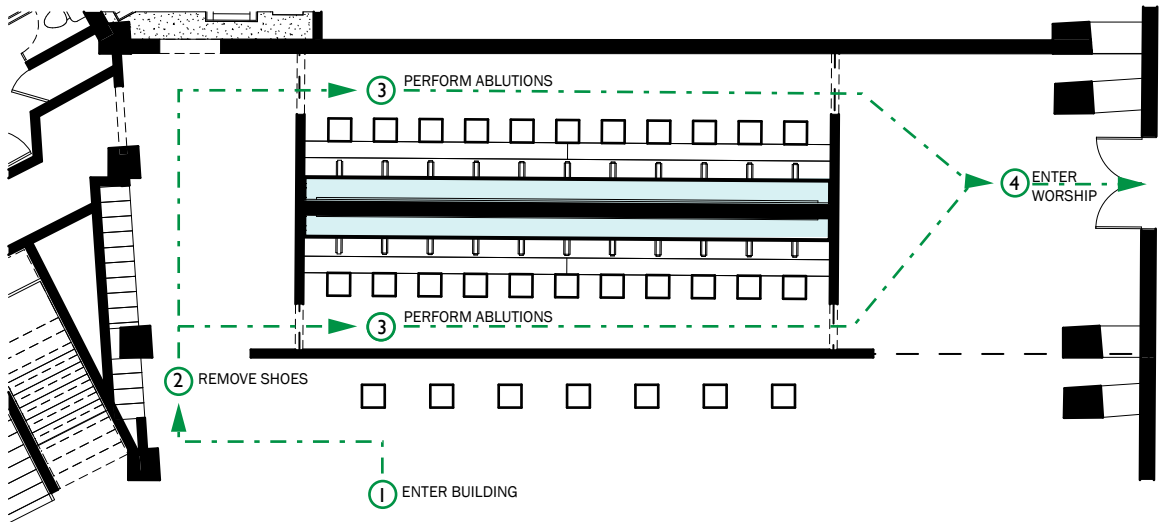


SECTION THROUGH BAPTISTRY

1/8" = 1'-0"

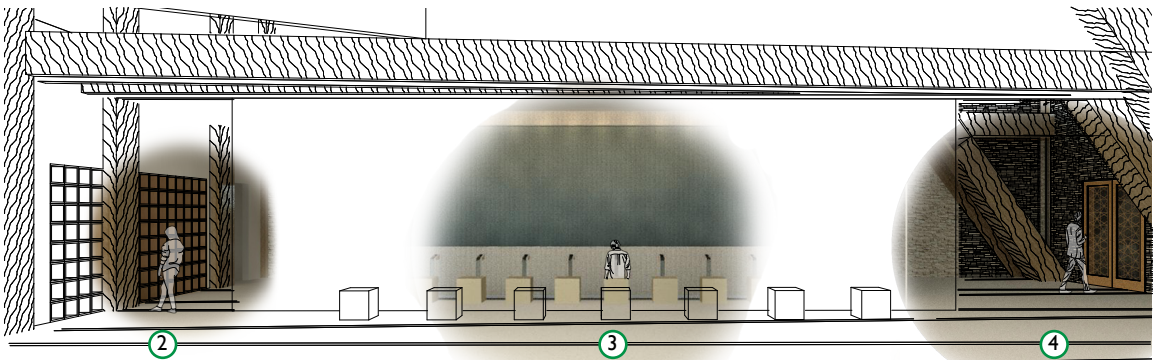


WUDU



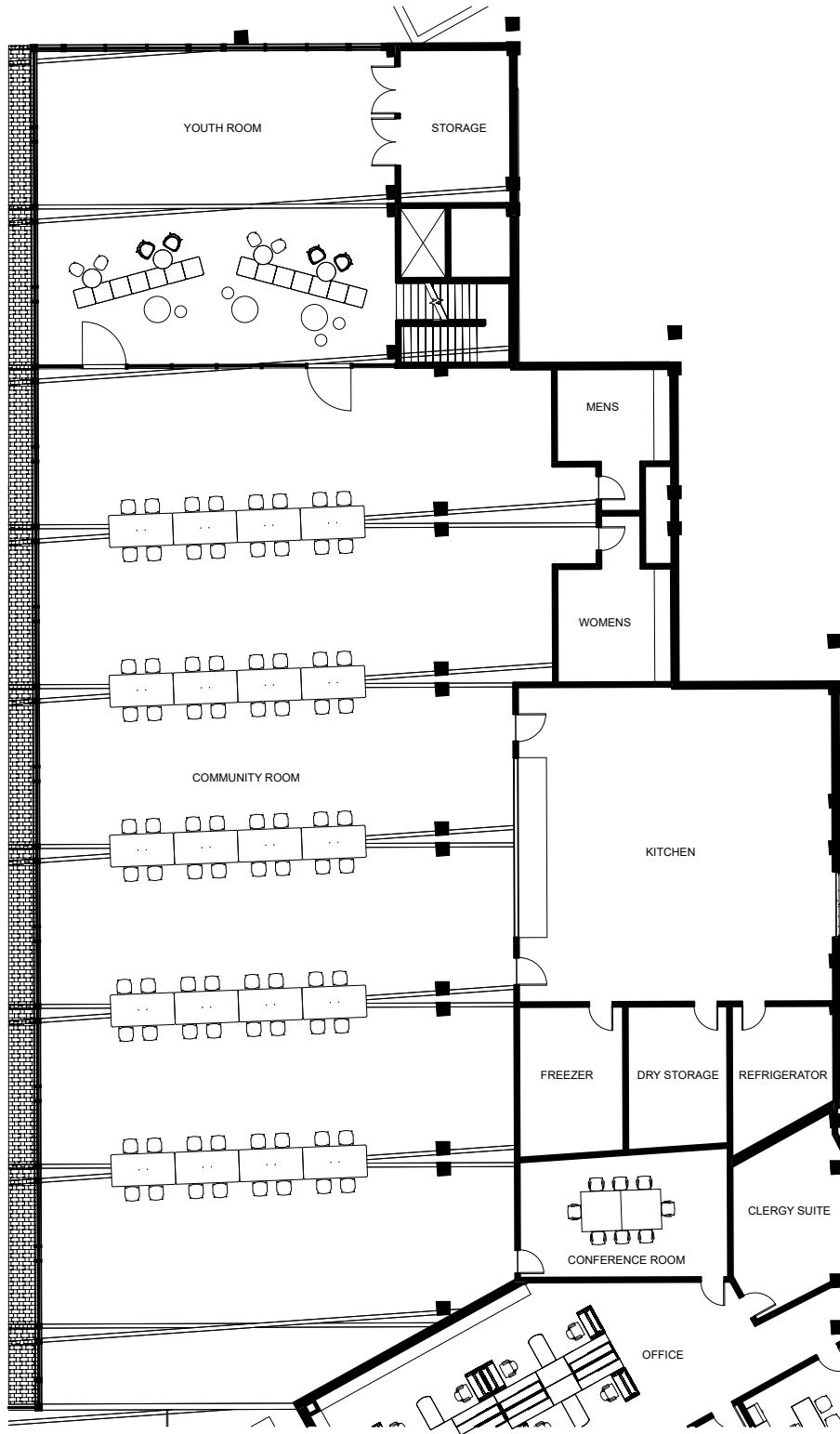
ENLARGED FLOORPLAN - WUDU

1/8" = 1'-0"

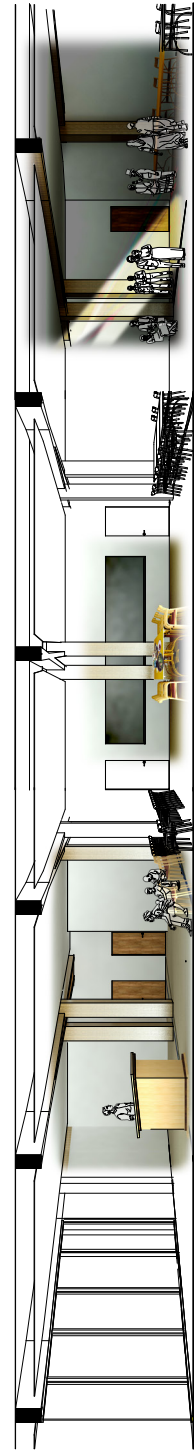


PERSPECTIVE SECTION - WUDU/ABLUTIONS

1/8" = 1'-0"



1/16" = 1'-0"



WEDDING

COMMUNITY DINNER

PRESENTATION

CONFIGURATIONS

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APPENDIX A: STATISTICS

FUTURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER

RELIGIOUS POPULATION OF THE WORLD				
FUTURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015				
	2010	%	2050	%
Judaism	13,860,000	0.2%	16,090,000	0.2%
Christianity	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	34.1%
Islam	1,599,700,000	23.2%	2,761,488,000	39.7%
Other	3,113,960,000	45.2%	3,611,550,000	38.7%

RELIGIOUS POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES				
FUTURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2015				
	2010	%	2050	%
Judaism	5,690,000	1.8%	5,360,000	1.4%
Christianity	243,060,000	78.3%	261,960,000	66.4%
Islam	2,793,420	0.9%	8,281,351	2.1%
Other	58,846,580	19.0%	118,748,350	30.1%

HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT RELIGIOUS GROUPS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER

APPROVAL/ACCEPTANCE OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE USA			
HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT RELIGIOUS GROUPS, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2014			
	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Jewish approval of religious group	89%	46%	35%
Jews who know someone within religious group	98%	70%	54%
Christian approval of religions	62%	67%	38%
Christians who know someone within religious group	55%	80%	32%
Overall approval of religions	63%	62%	40%
Overall knowledge of someone within religious group	61%	79%	38%

FBI HATE CRIME STATISTICS 2010-2017

FBI RELIGIOUS HATE CRIME STATISTICS 2010-2017								
HATE CRIME	YEAR							
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Overall	1322	1233	1099	1031	1014	1244	1273	1564
Anti-Jewish	887	771	674	625	609	664	684	938
Anti-Islamic (Muslim)	160	157	130	135	154	257	307	273
Anti-Christian	99	111	103	105	89	153	141	163
Anti-Catholic	58	67	70	70	64	53	62	73
Anti-Protestant	41	44	33	35	25	37	15	40
Anti-Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Other)						48	28	23
Anti-Other Christian						15	36	27
Anti-Other Religion	123	130	92	117	107	96	74	76
Anti-Multiple Religions, Group	48	60	88	42	44	51	34	47
Anti-Atheism/Agnosticism/etc.	5	4	12	7	11	2	6	6
Anti-Mormon						8	7	15
Anti-Jehovah's Witness						1	2	7
Anti-Buddhist						1	1	8
Anti-Hindu						5	10	11
Anti-Sikh						6	7	20



APPENDIX B:
RELIGIOUS FAMILY TREES

