

12.0 Religion/Ecclesiastical Groups

12.1 Introduction

Since its early days as a settlement, the City of Cleveland and its surrounding areas in Cuyahoga County have included numerous religious groups. As more people settled throughout Cuyahoga County, these groups grew in variety and membership. Cleveland's early religious communities reflected that of New England. Many of the settlers traveled from Connecticut and Massachusetts arrived as established Christians. The first organized religious group in Cleveland built the Trinity Episcopal Church in 1816, later becoming the Trinity Cathedral (ECH 2017ss). Early German immigrant communities had a variety of religions, such as Lutheran, German Reformed, and Roman Catholic. Congregationalists and Presbyterians were the most visible in the early nineteenth century (Knepper 2002:4). Episcopalians and Universalists' presence gradually grew in the Cleveland area. Methodist and Baptist congregations rapidly spread throughout Ohio, and in 1850 they were the largest religious group in the state (Knepper 2002:6).

Catholicism prospered with many immigrant groups, who arrived in Cleveland during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; although, some disagreed with the restrictions to practice their traditions. "Since its formation in 1847, the Cleveland Diocese, under the direction of Bishop Louis Amadeus Rappe, sought to Americanize its people, resisting a call for nationally related parishes" (Knepper 2002:12). In defiance of the Church's call for Americanization, some immigrants from the Roman Catholic Church, including the Polish, Italians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Czechs, among others formed nationality churches. These churches typically held at least some masses in the congregation's native tongue and retained events commonly celebrated in the "old world." Other nationalities, like the Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, and Romanian, created national-

based Orthodox churches where native languages and traditions prevailed. By the early twentieth century, Cleveland included dozens of national-based parishes, which accounted for approximately half of the overall Roman Catholic congregations (Knepper 2012:12). Nationality churches secured ethnic traditions that may have otherwise been forgotten. The prominence of Catholics continued to flourish in Cleveland, and in the early 1900s, they outnumbered Protestants as more immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe arrived in the City (ECH 2017ss). Following World War II, the city experienced an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe. By the 1950s, the Orthodox religions had a substantial presence in Cuyahoga County, which included 23 Orthodox churches. Of these, five were Russian, five were Greek, four were Ukrainian, two each were Serbian and Romanian, and one was Albanian (ECH 2017ss).

The Jewish community was established early in the Cleveland area. Jewish residents in Cleveland increased from approximately 3,500 in 1880 to roughly 85,000 in 1925; an increase of over 24-fold. Much of the increase, as with the growth of Catholicism, was due to immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe, including Russia, Poland, and Romania. Between 1870 and 1910, a large Jewish community was established on the east side of the city with synagogues and temples constructed in the area. As the Jewish population continued to grow, the neighborhoods expanded farther east into the Woodland and Central areas. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at least 25 Orthodox Jewish congregations were established in the city to accommodate the growth. The Jewish community then began integrating farther east into the Glenville and Kinsman neighborhoods. The relocation resulted in a decrease of the Jewish population in the Woodland area in the 1920s by approximately half – from 35,000 to 17,000.

The Kinsman's neighborhood Jewish population also decreased during this period, with many residents relocating north to Glenville, where the Jewish population was ultimately double that of Kinsman in the early twentieth century (ECH 2017tt).

The City of Shaker Heights was named after the religious sect United Society of the Second Coming of Christ, which is more commonly known as the Shakers. The Shaker religion was introduced to the area which is now Shaker Heights when local farmer, Ralph Russell, visited Union Village in 1821. At that date, Union Village near Lebanon, Ohio in the southwest corner of the state consisted of a community of Shakers. Russell's experience at Union Village was so enlightening he brought the beliefs back to his community and the North Union Colony was founded in 1822. The Shakers farmed and operated a mill in the area until disbanding in 1889 (Rich 1996: 64).

The influx of immigrants created a diverse population in Cleveland's urban area. Religious organizations and parochial schools from each community shaped the built landscape. During the twentieth century, the variety of religious groups continued to grow. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Muslim population increased in Cleveland (Ohio Memory 2017). Cleveland is now home to the largest mosque in Ohio, the Islamic Center of Greater Cleveland, which was constructed in 1988 (ECH 2017ss). The rise in Southern African American immigrants in Cleveland seeking work post World War II increased the population of Baptists (Ohio Memory 2017). Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, and Buddhists were among other religions that were introduced with the growing diverse population (ECH 2017ss).

12.2 Religion in Suburbia

The growth of the suburban landscape in Cuyahoga County, including changes in transportation and living options lead to changes in religion throughout the county. Personal vehicles made it possible to live

outside the city, and therefore new churches were built to accommodate residents of these new neighborhoods. As with urban living, religious sectors established their own consolidated communities.

Despite the increase of suburban churches, some of the churches established in urban Cleveland remained. Churches within the city, however, struggled to address urban issues, such as poverty and racial tensions. Some congregations strove to combat injustices. For example, the Congregational Christian and the Evangelical and Reformed churches merged to form the United Church of Christ (UCC) in Cleveland in 1957 (Ohio Memory 2017). The UCC played an active part in the civil rights movement during the mid-twentieth century, regularly attending peaceful protests and speaking openly on equality. The Commission for Racial Justice was created by the UCC and served as an organization striving for racial equality.

Catholic churches became a fixture in the suburbs. Some of the suburban churches were established to accommodate the movement of parishioners to these growing residential areas, others were founded as nationality-based churches that continued to hold traditional events and masses in native tongues, and still others relocated to the suburbs due to the loss of church buildings within the city because of highway construction and other urban renewal projects. In 1947, Catholic suburban parishes in Cuyahoga County numbered around 90; by the early 1960s, that number grew to almost 125. The growth of the suburbs throughout Cuyahoga County also resulted in the founding of many parochial schools, which were primarily Catholic (ECH 2017 uu). As the population expanded in the suburbs, the enrollment in urban parochial schools diminished. The Cleveland Central Catholic School was founded in 1969 when inner city parochial schools consolidated due to decreasing enrollments. The decline continued into the 1970s and 1980s (ECH 2017vv).

After World War II, Jews continued the eastern migration into the Heights from the Glenville and Kinsman neighborhoods. In 1923 the Orthodox community established the Heights Orthodox Congregation in Cleveland Heights to support the large Jewish population in the eastern suburbs. The Heights Orthodox Congregation later became the Heights Jewish Center in 1937. In 1925, hostility towards the Jewish residents in the Heights rose due to court cases regarding building rights for Jewish organizations (ECH 2017tt).

The large population of Jews in the Cleveland area became more consolidated within neighborhoods. The divide between the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox branches lessened because of the need to unite to keep the faith alive (ECH 2017ss). After the migration from the urban area to the eastern suburbs, the Jewish community, particularly Orthodox congregations, were in areas such as Cleveland Heights and Glenville neighborhoods. In the 1950s, Cleveland Heights became a center for the Jewish faith. Within Cleveland Heights the community was consolidated primarily with Taylor Road, which included the Jewish Community Center, Park Synagogue, Montefiore Home, Council Gardens, Taylor Road Synagogue, Bureau of Jewish Education, Hebrew Academy, Jewish Family Services Association, and other related resources. Taylor Road Synagogue, Heights Jewish Center and Warrensville Center Synagogue were created when the Jewish Community Federation merged with the Orthodox Community in attempt to increase membership and attract followers (ECH 2017tt). Continuing moving east meant leaving the established Jewish institutions in the Heights. Establishing and building a new Jewish community would be extremely costly. Observing the dilemma, the Jewish Community Federation stepped in to prevent the relocation. In 1969, "the federation extracted promises from all major Jewish institutions to remain in the Heights" (ECH 2017tt). The Jewish institutions agreed to remain in the Heights, with the exception of Temple of the Heights. The

Heights Area Project was created out of the comradery to stay in the Heights.



Figure 12-1. Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, now St. Casimir on Neff Rd. (Cleveland Press Collection, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University).

12.3 Modern Architecture & Religion

Suburbia created the demand for religious organizations to build new places of worship, schools, and associated structures. A variety of contrasting elements exist between traditional religious and modern architecture, with the use of light as one common trait. As with other building projects of the mid-twentieth century, modern architects utilized new construction methods and materials. Finnish architect Eliel Saar designed the first major modern church in Columbus, Ohio. Completed in 1942, the First Christian Church highlighted modern design in form and material. Unlike traditional church architecture, the First Christian Church had a geometric form. Concrete, ribbon windows, glass, and steel are all commonly seen in modern architecture. Unlike the traditional

ornate religious buildings that often followed European styles and traditions, modern churches were void of ornamentation and focused on simplicity. The Bauhaus movement and International style inspired the use of shapes and spacious interiors. The traditional steeple was no longer present, but instead had transformed into a bell tower or an open triangular form (Wager 1962:19). The traditional altar was now freestanding and was no longer expected to be built against the back wall, “[i]nstead of an elevated object festooned with sculpture, the new altar could be a large, simple block or actual table out of stone or wood, evoking an almost Calvinist sense of the mass’s roots in an actual meal” (Price 2013:154). Church-organized programs were previously conducted within the sanctuary, but mid-century churches were oftentimes designed with a one- or two-story wing to house Sunday school and other activities (Wager 1962:19). On the interior, seats or pews were arranged in a curve or V-shape to better utilize space and create a community feeling. The church-in-the-round concept was a popular design for architects during the mid-century. Like the interior seating, the church-in-the-round concept created an approachable and less intimidating experience. “In sharp contrast to the claims of 1950s advertisements where the ringing of church bells was supposed to draw the faithful, the idea here was to make the building as familiar and unthreatening as any auditorium of mall” (Price 2013:178).

Modern religious buildings were cohesive with suburban architecture. Churches utilized building materials that allowed for quick construction to meet the needs of the rapidly growing neighborhoods. The aesthetic change from traditional religious architecture focused on form and shape rather than ornamentation. Eric Mendelsohn’s design for the Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights created a sculptural place of worship in the Neo-Expressionist design. Richard Fleischman’s Holy Family Church in Parma (CUY 1140017) is another example of a monumental sculptural building. Modern religious buildings in the

suburbs were not limited by lack of land, which further contrasted the suburban buildings from urban religious buildings. Suburban religious buildings often had designed landscapes. The setting made it possible for the buildings to expand with growth. In the mid-1960s additions were constructed onto the Park Synagogue, including an art gallery and event spaces. Due to the sprawling residential neighborhoods, religious buildings were not typically within walking distance and parking lots were required for members.

St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church in Maple Heights (CUY 1103224) used the church-in-the-round design concept. The focal point is the large octagonal tower projecting from a one-story octagon base. The octagonal tower includes vertical sheets of colorful glass, creating a spectacular effect on the interior. Designed by the local architectural firm of Conrad & Fleischman, the church and accompanying school were architect Richard Fleischman’s first major project. Fleischman’s design of a centrally placed altar in the sanctuary permitted congregants to be closer to the mass, even those in the outermost pews. On the exterior it was a sprawling complex surrounded by fields, wooded area, large parking lot and a circular drive. Conrad & Fleischman designed several other churches in Ohio, such as the Church of the Redeemer (United Church of Christ) in Westlake (CUY 1150313) and Holy Family Church in Parma.

Architect Eugene S. Peddle designed the Divinity Lutheran Church in Parma Heights (CUY 1142417). Using the church-in-the-round concept, the building appears to be out of a science-fiction film rather than a house of worship. On the exterior, the building gradually meets in the center to create a large open tower. Although the building is located in the center of a densely populated residential neighborhood, it features a large parking lot and landscaped area. This striking building is still in use today.

Brith Emeth Temple in Shaker Heights (CUY 1134126) is an excellent example of mid-

century modernist architecture. Completed in 1967, Edward Durrell Stone designed the circular structure which took the name “temple in the round.” Durrell is a notable mid-century architect, having also designed the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, US Embassy in New Delhi, India and the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. In 1965 Durrell designed the former Jewish Federation of Cleveland on Euclid Avenue, now demolished. Stone’s aesthetic utilized modern construction materials such as concrete, steel and strip windows. The Brith Emeth Temple was dramatically different from surrounding temples because of its unusual shape, “The building’s circumferential portico contributes to its flying-saucer-like appearance from afar... The temple’s circular portico wraps around a series of concave exterior walls that create six points reminiscent of the Star of David. Builders erected an umbrella-like mast and trusses that supported the temple’s conical dome until it was completed” (Souther 2017) During the 1980s, due to a decrease in membership, the temple merged with Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights. Today, the former temple functions as the Lillian and Betty Ratner School.

Also located in Cleveland Heights, Anshe Emeth Beth Tefilo Synagogue, popularly known as Park Synagogue, was designed by Eric Mendelsohn with its character defining dome. Mendelsohn was a well-established architect, although Park Synagogue was his first American synagogue design. Park Synagogue was created during the migration to the suburbs. Completed in 1953, Park Synagogue’s oversized dome reflected traditional synagogue architecture, “[t]he complex’s centerpiece is its vast hemispheric temple dome: 125 feet high, 120 feet in diameter and weighing 680 tons. Reputed to be the third largest in the world at the time of construction, the dome required 180,000 feet

of lumber and took eleven weeks to assemble. Its outer layer is pre-formed copper, designed to blend through natural oxidation with the surrounding landscape” (Lanese 2017b). Mendelsohn received positive reviews after completion. When asked about the modern synagogue, the curator of the New York’s Jewish Museum replied, “I regard Park Synagogue as the most significant structure of its kind in our generation” (Lanese 2017b).

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a number of these suburban places of worship closed and/or were merged with other nearby congregations. Declining membership and dwindling available funds for property upkeep were the most common causes for these consolidations. The results of consolidations meant a number of parochial schools have closed during this period and some nationality churches have lost their original identities. The most obvious sign of a merged congregation is the original name of the parish, often carved above the entry or within the cornerstone, does not match current name at the property’s entrance. One example is the St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church in South Euclid. The cornerstone next to the main entry into the church notes St. Gregory the Great was erected in 1960, but the sign along Green Street is labeled Parish of Sacred Heart of Jesus. Research for this particular example revealed that the St. Gregory parish merged with the St. Margaret Mary parish, also in South Euclid, to form the new Sacred Heart of Jesus parish. In most cases, the governing body offered merged congregations a new name to promote unity among the members. As declining membership continues across many religious organizations, additional houses of worship are under threat of closure; therefore, recordation of these resources is paramount before they are lost.



Figure 12-2. Altar wall in St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church in South Euclid (Cleveland Press Collection, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University)

12.4 Survey Results

Religious architecture between 1940 and 1976 had a powerful impact on the Greater Cleveland region. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* ran a feature in its Sunday Magazine on March 11, 1962 titled, “The Revolution in Church Architecture.” Author Richard Wager opened his article by stating, “[e]ven the most unobserving citizen must have noticed how church architecture has been changing in the last few years. Some of the newest churches, indeed, are hardly recognizable as churches in the conventional sense” (Wager 1962:19).

Changes to conventional church architecture included bell towers replacing traditional steeples, Sunday school classroom spaces being moved from within the church space to one- or two-story attached wings, and circular or V-shaped interior seating that provided a more intimate experience during services. The region included so many unconventional religious buildings by the early 1960s that the

National Conference on Church Architecture held its annual meeting in Cleveland in 1962 (Wager 1962).

Architects working during this period noted it was not always easy to convince congregation members to accept new, innovative, and unfamiliar architectural designs when laying out plans. Architect Richard Fleischman, who worked with William Conrad on many of these new churches throughout the county, said that having support from the parish priest helped in swaying church authorities and parish members to accept modern concepts, especially when both parties were often financing the project. Some architects found that explaining that church buildings should act as “ecclesiastical working tools,” rather than stately monuments aided in winning over opinions. The “church-in-the-round” concept also convinced members as placing the altar in the center of the sanctuary, surrounded by pews or other seating meant worshippers could feel closer to the service by being able to clearly see the movements of the priest, rabbi, or other leader (Fleischman 2017).

The survey teams identified numerous religious buildings across Cuyahoga County from this period that were not previously recorded. Many architecturally stunning examples are recorded on OHI forms as part of the report. Examples of these are shown below, and include the octagonal St. Martins of Tour Church (CUY 1103224); the other worldly houses of worship like the Divinity Lutheran Church (CUY 1142417) and the former Brith Emeth Temple (CUY 1134126); and the highly ornate like the St. Elias Church (CUY 1146617). Other church types discovered during survey were smaller buildings, that although they are not as architecturally spectacular, still represent parish movement into the suburbs with buildings that include features of modern architectural styles. Examples of these are also below.



Plate 36. St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church (CUY 1103224), constructed in 1961, 14600 Turney Rd., Maple Heights.



Plate 37. Divinity Lutheran Church (CUY 1142417), constructed ca. 1964, 11877 Blossom Ave., Parma Heights.



Plate 38. St. Eugene Orthodox Church (CUY 1105724), constructed in 1962, 250 Center Rd., Bedford.



Plate 39. Holy Family Church of Parma (CUY 1140017), constructed in 1964, 7367 York Rd., Parma.



Plate 40. St. Elias Church (CUY 1146617), constructed in 1963, 8023 Memphis Ave., Brooklyn.



Plate 41. Former Calvary Baptist Church, now Slavic Full Gospel Church (CUY 1122020), constructed in 1966, 5851 E. Wallings Rd., Broadview Heights.



Plate 42. Former Brith Emeth Temple, now Lillian and Betty Ratner School (CUY 1134126), constructed in 1969, 27575 Shaker Blvd., Pepper Pike.



Plate 43. Kol Ami Suburban Temple (CUY1105823), constructed in 1954, 22311 Chagrin Blvd., Beachwood.

12.5 Survey Recommendations

Fieldwork identified 61 religious buildings for survey; however, in order to capture as many resource types as possible for this report, the survey teams did not photograph every house of worship they found in the field. Cuyahoga County, therefore, features many more churches built during the mid-century period that are worthy of inventory.

Furthermore, survey did not discover any religious buildings from this period outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Additional research is recommended to identify where other religions worshipped during this period, and these buildings should be inventoried.

After the completion of fieldwork, research efforts found that some churches, mostly within the Roman Catholic community, are facing closures and mergers as membership declines and the Cleveland Archdiocese is not able to financially support under-utilized buildings. Some religious buildings, therefore, are under threat of abandonment and/or demolition as these problems continue to grow. Threatened parish churches should be inventoried before they are closed.

Survey work was limited to exterior photographs, and while research discovered some historic interior photographs of the churches and temples, current interior photographs would be useful to document the architects' designs and artists' work in the buildings.