



# Bricks and Mortals

— Presentation at the Arlington County Civic  
Federation Housing Committee, 07.30.24 —

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# OVERVIEW

Why Bricks and Mortals?

Bricks and Mortals' community and membership

How Bricks and Mortals helps congregations



# THE WHY: Role of Faith-Based Organizations

The average urban sacred site generates **\$1.7 million** in economic impact annually

**87%** of the beneficiaries are not members of the congregation

A 2017 study shows that faith-based organizations provide **58%** of emergency shelter beds in the 11 cities surveyed across the nation

Faith-based organizations deliver **40%** of vital human services in cities

# THE WHY: National Context

**Attendance down:** The percentage of Americans holding membership in a house of worship dropped below 50% for the first time in history, with the median church size halving. Attendance and participation is closely tied to congregational budget size. Most congregations are small, with 46% maintaining budgets less than \$100,000 and 75% with \$250,000 or less.

**Declining religiosity:** There is an increasingly non-religious population growing in numbers. Often referred to as the “nones”, fewer than half (47%) of Americans say they belong to a church, synagogue or mosque. This is down from more than 70% in 2000.

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** Houses of faith closings have accelerated since the pandemic. Protestant pastors reported that typical church attendance is only 85% of pre-pandemic levels, and research found that attendance was down to 67% weekly, versus 75% before the pandemic. With the advent of virtual and hybrid worship, houses of worship no longer need to be neighborhood based and services no longer need to be attended in person.

# THE WHY: National Context

What does this all mean?

For the first time, more Protestant churches **closed** in 2019 than opened

75 to 150 congregations per week **closed** between 2010-2020 in the US

**100,000 properties** are expected to be sold or repurposed by 2030 - billions of dollars in church-owned property

**Unsustainable costs:** Church property costs \$7 to \$10 per square foot annually to operate - \$70,000 to \$100,000 for a 10,000-square-foot property

# THE WHY: NYC Context

**Scale:** +5,600 religious properties in NYC

92 million square feet of land (2.5x the size of Central Park!)

86 million square feet of available FAR would yield approximately 98,000 homes

Membership (income) **decreasing**

**Cost** to maintain property rising

Often in **landmarked** buildings

NYC is **expensive**

# HOW DOES BRICKS AND MORTALS COME IN?

Our core purpose is to ensure that faith-based organizations have the knowledge, connections, access to resources, and advocacy they need to:

- Manage their real properties in service of their missions and communities;
- Understand and address new realities that affect faith communities and their real estate;
- Build resilience; and
- Take charge of their own destinies and legacies.

# HOW DOES BRICKS AND MORTALS COME IN?

Nonprofit, multi-faith, membership organization

Faith-based and the real-estate community

Focused on NYC, but works nationally

We never charge for our services

Impartial

Unbiased



[Biannual Report 2021-23](#)



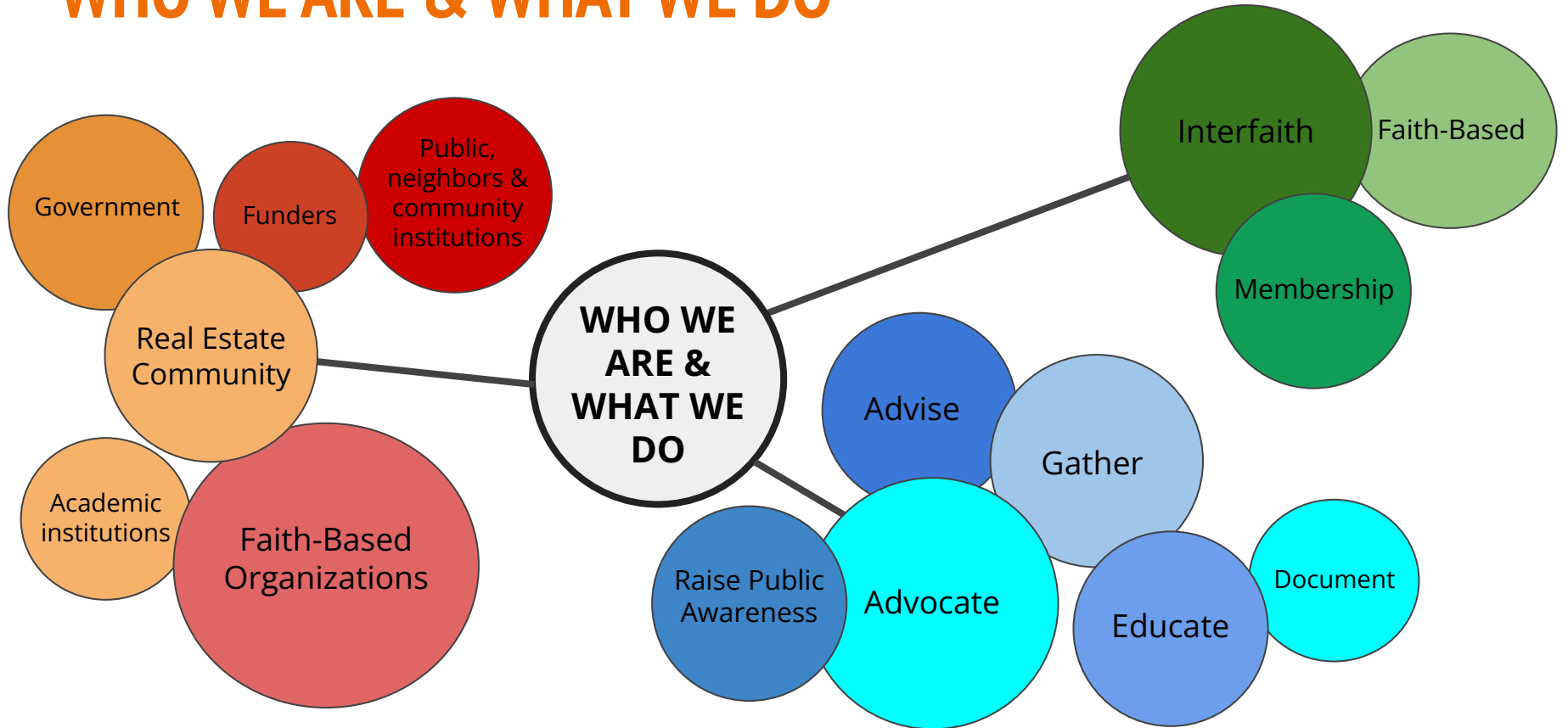
# OUR MISSION

**Target population:** faith-based organizations and houses of worship that are located in New York City and own, use, or control real properties in their current state or future plans.

**Secondary population:** entities within the larger real estate and development fields, including but not limited to:

Developers, contractors, real estate professionals, nonprofit partners, City agencies, and faith-based organizations outside of NYC.

# WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO



# BRICKS AND MORTALS' WORK

Knowledge

Connections/Network

Access to resources

Advocacy



# THE HOW: Knowledge

- **Advise** faith-based organizations, including via one-on-one consultation
- **Case studies** that highlight different issues and aspects relate to managing real properties
- **Mapping** faith-based organizations at risk
- **Public events**
- **Document strategies** for faith-based organizations to sustain themselves + continue to provide their essential services
- **Develop resources** including 101s, how-tos and assessment tools
- **Disseminate** external resources

# Knowledge: Research

Collaboration with academic institutions

Hunter College Graduate School, Urban Policy and Planning Program (*faith real estate*)

Pratt Graduate School of Architecture (*proposals for 3 churches, Bahá'í temple, and synagogue*)

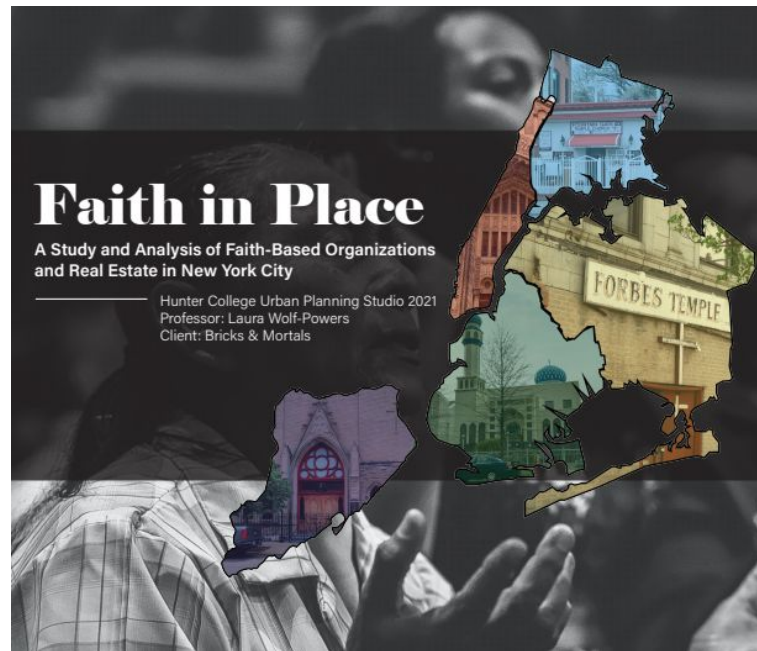
NYU Wagner School of Public Service, Capstone (*Venuely, Bricks and Mortals space sharing service*)

Hunter College Urban Policy (*faith-owned landmarks*)

# Knowledge: Research

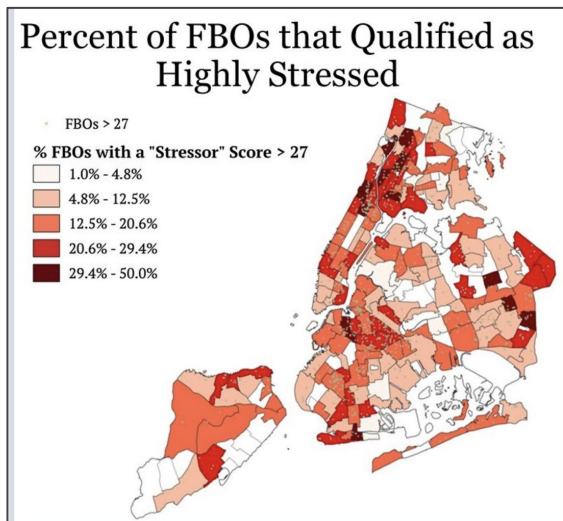
Hunter College Urban Policy and Planning Graduate Studio Team explores faith-based real estate in NYC:

[Faith in Place Report](#)



# Knowledge: Research

Study created **Stressor Index** that quantifies the financial health of congregations by aggregating information on tax liens, building violations, risk of gentrification, and whether the building is landmarked or in a landmarked neighborhood.



# Knowledge: “Questions to ask a Vendor” Guidance

- Are they a Member of Bricks and Mortals?
- Have they worked with faith-based organizations before?
  - Have they worked with non-profits or other mission-based organizations?
- How do they structure their fees?
  - Monthly or flat rate? Are they tied to deliverables?
  - If needed, can these payments be paid after closing?
  - If “free”, from where are their fees derived? E.g. from the developer’s fee?
- How will they work with you to provide you with information and advice and facilitate the decision making process?
- Is a license required, and are you licensed?
- How long have you been practicing?
- What specifically is your scope of work, and what is your expected timeline?
- What is NOT included? What other services or professionals will I need?
- Specific concerns or challenges they foresee with your project.
- Do they have any or foresee any conflicts of interest with your project?



# THE HOW: Connections/Networks

- Gather faith-based and real estate communities
- Bimonthly membership meetings
- Networking events
- Annual Citywide Conferences: Faith-Based Affordable Housing, and Faith Owned Real Estate
- Member directory of faith and general members:
  - Find a match for your needs
  - Signed Ethics Pledge
  - References from Faith organizations

# THE HOW: Access to Resources

- “Annual Wellness Assessment” for faith members to assess property and finances, and offer next steps
- Trainings and events
- Real estate listings
  - *Long-term*: Monthly “Faith-Based Property List” - FBOs searching for and offering space
  - *Short-term*: Bricks and Mortals’ space sharing website - [Venuely.org](https://www.venuely.org)
- Connections to resources
  - *Funding* (e.g. organizations offering pre-development funding)
  - *Knowledge* (government agencies, academic partnerships)

# Access to Resources: Membership Meeting Resources 2021-23

- Applying for [FEMA Aid](#)
- Information and Guidance on [Lien Sales](#)
- [Tax Exemptions](#) for Houses of Faith
- Tax Exemption [Renewal](#) for Faith Organizations
- Covid [Space Use](#) Analysis
- Introduction to and Guidance on [Local Law 97](#) environmental upgrades
- Houses of Faith Applying for [City Council Discretionary Funding](#)
- Understanding [Islam and the Muslim Experience](#) in NYC
- [Office of the Attorney General](#), with Assistant Attorneys General Linda Heinberg and Sharon Sash

## Access to Resources: Membership Meeting Resources 2021-23

- Overview on [License Agreements](#)
- [Commissioner for NYC Department of Youth and Community Development \(DYCD\)](#), Programs and Opportunities
- [Department for Environmental Protection \(DEP\) Amnesty Program](#)
- Overview on the [Action Plan](#) from the Mayor's Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing and Community Development
- Research on the [Pandemic's Real Impact](#) on Clergy and Congregations
- Pastor Gil Monrose, Executive Director of Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships, [The Importance and Role of Faith Organizations and Properties in NYC](#)
- Resources on [Hybrid Worship](#)

# Access to Resources: Membership Meeting Case Studies 2021-23

Hybrid worship (Broadway UCC)

Sale and redevelopment (Avenue Church NYC)

Affordable housing development (St. James Church, Fordham)

Financing for development (Cornerstone Fund)

Considering affordable housing and options on a large multi-property site  
(Riverside Church)

Full redevelopment (The Community Church of New York)

# THE HOW: Advocacy

**Educate** the public, government, and others about the collective issues and challenges that faith-based organizations face, and about possible solutions and supports

Develop **policy** related to faith-owned real estate

**Advocate** for needs of FBOs in NYC on real property, mission, and community service, and educating the public and local officials

**Raise public awareness** of the resources faith-based organizations provide, regardless of faith, including social services, housing, social justice advocacy, cultural programming, arts space, after-school programs, and community meeting space

# Advocacy: Policy

- B&M Membership developed [Policy Platform for NYC's Next Mayor](#) in 2021
  - [Bricks And Mortals Garner Strong Support From NYC Mayoral Candidates](#)
- Chair of the [Mayor's Working Group on Faith-Based Affordable Housing and Community](#), resulting in:
  - An Action Plan with +40 proposals
  - Two Citywide Summits 12/22 and 03/24
- New York State Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act

# BRICKS AND MORTALS' MEMBERSHIP

Benefits

How

Who

Board of Directors





# BRICKS AND MORTALS MEMBERSHIP: Why?

To **engage** faith-based organizations in meaningful ways

To **magnify** a collective voice and influence

Directly **elect** Board of Directors who direct the organization's activities

“Faith Members” – Faith-based organizations in the target population

“General Members” – Generally those in the “secondary” population

# MEMBERSHIP: Faith Member Benefits

## Examples

“Annual Wellness Assessment” for members to assess property and finances, and offer next steps

Access to B&M lists of **experts** (eg, contractors, developers)

**Benefit from resources** that are developed in response to the faith community and members' specific needs, as they arise

**Events** throughout the year relevant to faith-based organizations and the real estate community

Participate in **advocacy** for the faith community and faith-owned real estate, and opportunity to provide input on B&M's **policy platforms**

Join a citywide, interfaith community of houses of faith **confronting the same issues**

# MEMBERSHIP: Faith Member Benefits

## Examples

Receive a **weekly update** on news and media relevant to faith communities work

Access to a **library** of critical information and **up-to-the-minute information** to stay in compliance with new local laws and ordinances affecting the community

Receive information on opportunities for **grant funding**

Access to intensive “**consultation**” on specific real property issues)

**Connect to a network** of NYC's faith and real estate community

A forum to **highlight successes and share lessons** learned

Access to **businesses providing discount** to members

**Listserv** for discussion, questions, and to share your organization's updates and events

# MEMBERSHIP: General Member Benefits

## Examples

Access to a **library** of the most critical information that FBOs may need (eg, one-pagers on specific topics; “101” workshops and videos; basic checklists and how-tos)

Access to **events** or meetings (eg, specific speaker event; policy briefing; opportunities to build relationships with Faith members)

Opportunity to access and inform B&M’s **public policy** platforms and positions

Opportunity to provide input on B&M’s **programs/services**

**Public alignment** with and inclusion in the B&M mission

Increased **visibility** with the Faith Members

Opportunity to be associated with and part of **exciting and important work**

# BRICKS AND MORTALS MEMBERSHIP: How?

Faith led! Designed for Faith-based members to maintain control

Everyone signs an Annual Ethics Statement

Annual approval

Members vote for Board Members

# BRICKS AND MORTALS MEMBERSHIP: Who?

Congregations, judicatories, industry, lenders, and other stakeholders

- 400 Foundation
- Taylor Aikin, Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects
- American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan NY
- Ariel Property Advisors
- The Avenue Church
- Board of Church Extension of Disciples of Christ, Inc. dba Disciples Church Extension Fund
- Born Brown / Nursha Project
- Braham Berg, BBB3RG LLC
- Bronx Clergy Task Force
- Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture
- Meta Brunzema,
- Collective for Community, Culture and Environment
- Capell Barnett Matalon & Schoenfeld
- The Center at West Park
- Church of the Ascension
- Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew
- Church of St. Edward the Martyr
- Church of God's Children
- City Seminary
- Clal
- The Delaine Companies
- Denham Wolf
- Ecclesiastical Realty Advisory Service
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
- Episcopal Diocese of New York
- First Presbyterian Church in the City of NY
- First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills NY
- Robert Foltz-Morrison, Former Executive  
Presbyter of the Presbytery of NYC
- Fort Washington Collegiate Church
- Fourth Universalist Society in the City of NY
- FX Collaborative
- Gateway Housing
- Goldstein Hall PLLC
- Grace Congregational Church of Harlem
- GWW Planning & Development, LLC
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hudson Yards Synagogue
- Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing
- The Jamaica Long Island Fund
- Judson Memorial Church
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation NYC
- Matter Real Estate
- Metropolitan New York Synod
- Muslim Community Network NY
- New York Board of Rabbis
- New York Disaster Interfaith Services
- New York Society for Ethical Culture
- New York State Council of Churches
- NYC Housing Partnership
- Park Avenue United Methodist Church
- Partners for Sacred Places
- Partnership for Faith-Based Affordable Housing and Community Development
- Presbytery of NYC
- PurposeFused
- RiseBoro Community Partnership
- The Riverside Church in NYC
- Savills
- Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper, former Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church
- Bill Shillady, Pastor and Affordable Housing Consultant
- Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of NYC
- St James Church, Fordham
- Tenant Wise
- Tomasz P Mlynarski, PC dba Narska Architects
- UCC Church Building & Loan Fund
- UCC Cornerstone Fund
- United Church of Christ, NY Conference
- United Methodist Church of the Village
- United Methodist City Society

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elected by B&M members

- **Taylor Aikin**, Partner, MBB Architecture
- **Dr. Debbie Almontaser**, President, Muslim Community Network
- **Meta Brunzema**, Architect and Urban Designer, Collective for Community, Culture & Environment
- **Joshua Burcham**, Managing Director & Creative Director, Radish Lab
- **Ellen Liu Chan**, Asset Manager, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
- **Nathaniel Christian III**, Trustee, Presbytery of New York City
- **Nell Derick Debevoise**, Partner, PurposeFused
- **Rev. Dr. Cheryl Dudley**, Regional Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan New York
- **Karen Falco**, Chief Operating Officer, Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- **Scott Hackenberg**, Chief Lending Officer, UCC Cornerstone Fund
- **Jason Labate**, Partner, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law
- **Matthew Murphy**, Executive Director, NYU Furman Center
- **Rev. Angela Redman**, Executive Director, United Methodist City Society
- **Bishop Angelo M. Rosario**, CEO, Bronx Clergy Task Force
- **Amy Schwach**, Executive Director, Temple Shaaray Tefila E
- **Rev. Dr. William Shillady**, Pastor and Affordable Housing Consultant
- **Alex Weis**, Principal, Matter Real Estate
- **Paul Wolf**, Chief Executive Officer and President, Denham Wolf Real Estate Services

## *Former Board Directors*

- **Rev. Dr. Patrick Duggan**, Executive Director, UCC Church Building & Loan Fund
- **Egbert Stolk**, Director of Diocesan Property Services, Episcopal Diocese of New York
- **Roger Leaf**, Trustee, Presbytery of New York City
- **Rabbi Joseph Potasnik**, Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis
- **Ira Schuman**, Vice Chairman, Director, Co-Branch Manager, New York, Savills
- **Rev. Mieke Vandersall**, Owner and Principal Consultant, Vandersall Collective
- Peter Cook, Executive Director, NYS Council of Churches
- **Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper**, former Senior Minister, Judson Memorial Church
- **Marc Greenberg**, Executive Director, Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness
- **Gianfranco Grande**, Executive Vice President, Partners for Sacred Places
- **Rev. Dr. Damaris Whitaker**, former Senior Minister, Fort Washington Collegiate Church
- **Canon Rev. Dr. Audley Donaldson**, Priest, St. Stephen and St. Martin's Episcopal Church
- **Pastor Gilford Monrose**, Faith Advisor, NYC Office of the Mayor
- **Rev Joseph H. Holland**, Director, 400 Foundation
- **Neil Steinkamp**, Managing Director, Stout

# CONTACT US

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Bricks & Mortals

