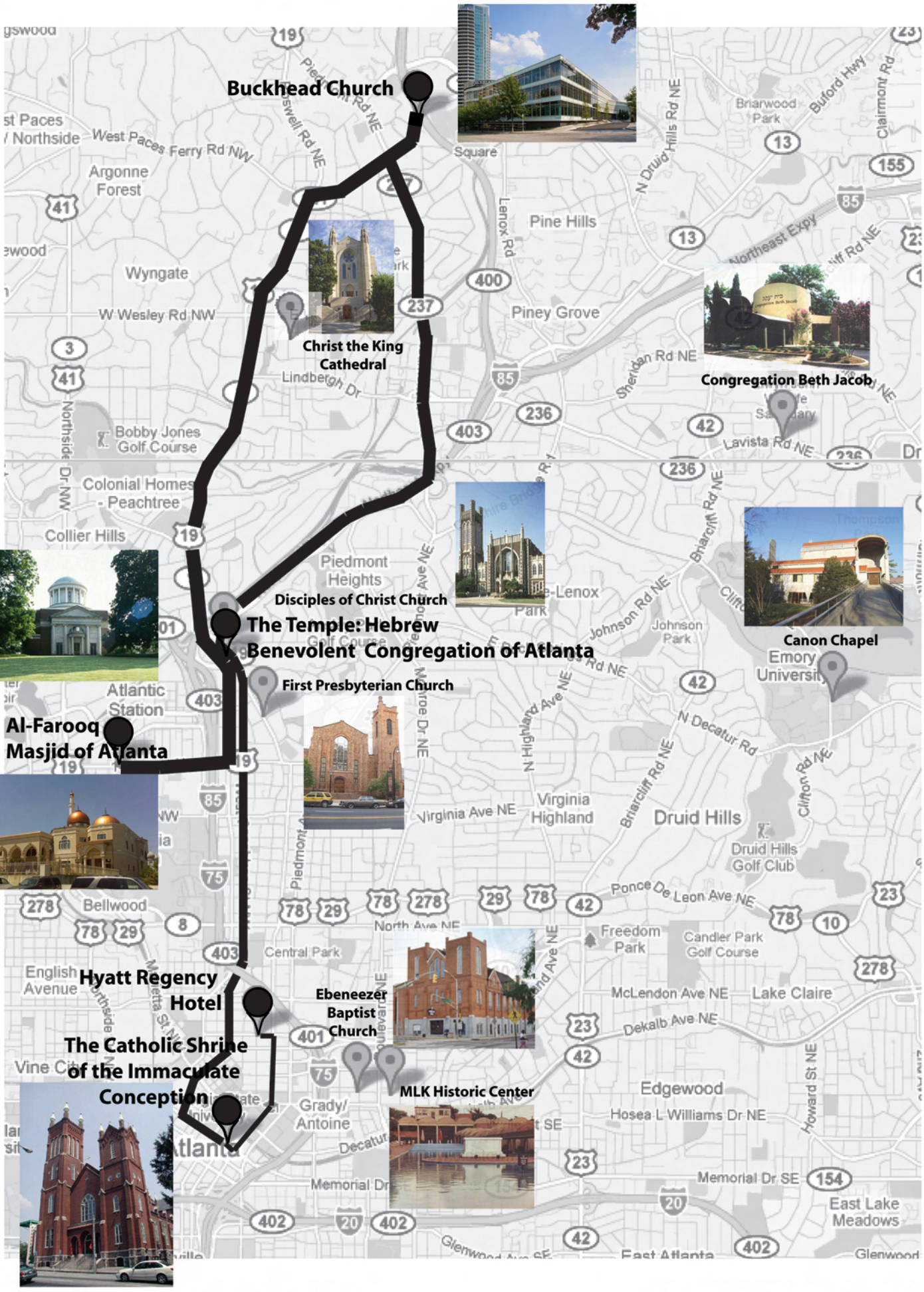


SACRED SITES OF ATLANTA TOUR
AAR-Atlanta / Nov. 1st, 2010

Space, Place, and Religious Meaning Consultation

AAR 2010
Sacred Sites Tour: Atlanta Old and New
Monday, November 1, 2010

Tour Schedule

A. Tour gathering @ 12:55pm at **The Hyatt Regency Hotel** (Baker Street exit);
You are strongly encouraged to arrive a few minutes early
265 Peachtree Center Avenue Northeast
Atlanta, GA 30303
Leave Marriott: 1:05pm

B. Arrive inside **The Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception** @ 1:20 pm
http://www.catholicshrineatlanta.org/
48 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd SW
Leave The Shrine @ 1:55pm

C. Arrive inside **The Temple (Hebrew Benevolent Congregation)** @ 2:10 pm
http://www.the-temple.org/
1589 Peachtree St NE
Leave The Temple @ 2:55 pm

D. Arrive inside **The Buckhead Church** @ 3:10 pm C. Buckhead Church
http://www.buckheadchurch.org/
3336 Peachtree Road
Atlanta, GA 30326
Leave The Buckhead Church @ 3:50pm

E. Arrive inside **Al-Farooq Masjid** @ 4:15 pm
http://www.alfarooqmasjid.org
442 14th St NW
Leave Al-Farooq Masjid @ 4:45 pm

F. Arrive back at **The Hyatt Regency Hotel** @ 5:00 pm

Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

48 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive SW
www.catholicshrineatlanta.org/

Constructed: 1869-1873
Architect: William H. Parkins

History and Place in the City: Serving the city's oldest Catholic parish, this shrine is among Atlanta's most enduring landmarks. Railroads gave birth to Atlanta with the first train leaving the city in 1842. Six years later its first Catholic church was erected on this site. It was dedicated in 1849 to the Virgin Mary under the title, the Immaculate Conception, by which she had recently been named patroness of the United States.

During the Civil War, when Union forces destroyed most of the city lest it be used by the Confederate army, Father Thomas O'Reilly reportedly interceded with Union commanders to spare the building. By this action he also saved the surrounding neighborhood including the city hall and four Protestant churches.

After the war as the city once again became a major commercial center, Catholics replaced their modest frame church with the present brick and granite structure. O'Reilly died before the church was completed and was buried in its crypt in 1872. Thomas Francis Cleary, another young priest was also interred there upon his death in 1884. Their exact resting place, however, was forgotten until the crypt was rediscovered after a major fire in 1982. Today the restored crypt is open for guided tours.

In 1945 a monument was erected at city hall honoring O'Reilly for saving the five churches. Immaculate Conception was the first of these to erect a new building after the Civil War. In time it became known as the city's oldest complete building of any kind. Two of the other churches remain downtown. Central Presbyterian is on its original site, behind the shrine, facing the capitol. Its 1885 Gothic Revival structure replaced an 1860 Greek Revival building. Trinity Methodist built its 1911 sanctuary a block southwest of its original site. The Baptist and Episcopal churches, however, left for prominent locations in suburban Buckhead. Second Baptist merged to become Second Ponce de Leon in 1932. St. Philip's Cathedral relocated in 1933.

Somewhat similarly, in 1937, Christ the King, a new church in Buckhead, was named co-cathedral of the newly renamed Catholic Diocese of Savannah-Atlanta. (Atlanta became a separate diocese in 1956.) Immaculate Conception, the city's mother church, was passed over and even its long-serving pastor was moved to the new church. By this time, the church had declined from prominence to serving a small downtown congregation in a dilapidated building. After World War II closing the parish was seriously considered, but instead the building was restored and designated as a shrine in time for the 100th anniversary of the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1954. Franciscan priests charged with developing the church as a Marian shrine staffed the parish from 1958 to 1987. The downtown location continued to affect the church's life, however. Its parish school was closed in 1970.

In 1982 an electrical short sparked a fire that engulfed the church. After extensive reconstruction supervised by Architect Henry Howard Smith it reopened in1984.

Worshipers come to the shrine from throughout the metropolitan area attracted by its architecture, liturgy, and ministries. Given its location one block from the capitol and city hall, it regularly hosts liturgies that minister or witness to the government. For example, it the archbishop of Atlanta presides at the annual Mass for the Unborn and the liturgy honoring the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

The parish defines itself as a welcoming community. African Americans have worshiped at the church since the 1950s and at one time made up as much as 40% of worshipers. In the 1980s the shrine emerged as a leader in ministering to those afflicted by AIDS. Its

current work includes caring for the homeless. Gay and lesbian members are welcomed into its ministries.

Architecture: The shrine is one of the earliest of many notable buildings by William H. Parkins (1836-1894), Georgia's most significant architect of the post-Civil War period. With an asymmetrical façade, a clerestory, cruciform plan, and many finials and buttresses, this Gothic revival building evokes a sense of Christian tradition, organic development, and reverence. It combines French elements, such as rose windows and the tripartite entrance with the brick walls and pinnacled square towers popular in the nineteenth-century English Gothic-revival.

It fully utilizes its urban site. The taller corner tower claims the church's place on the street and the side aisles are extended almost to the width of the transepts to utilize the entire lot. An elevated basement provides space for church activities.

Today light colored walls and windows make the church as bright and open a space as it has ever been. The traditional basilican arrangement of a tall nave with clerestory windows and lower side-aisles defines the processional path to the altar. Early descriptions of the church made special note of the relatively narrow iron columns supporting the roof. The continuous arcade along the nave makes the transepts more a feature of the exterior than the interior. It also centralizes the focus on the altar and ambo.

Liturgical Arrangement: The current interior arrangement reflects the emphasis on active participation prominent since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Installed in 1996, the **baptistery** at the entrance, shows that baptism is the means of initiation into the church. The raised basin provides a convenient place for worshipers to touch the water to remind themselves of their baptism. The larger lower pool permits the abundant use of water providing a richer sign of spiritual cleansing and rebirth. Cascading from the basin to the pool, the water of baptism is an auditory part of the space.

The **altar** platform is extended into the nave to involve people more fully in the liturgy. The altar itself is now a freestanding table. Its reredos survived the fire with the help of substantial restoration.

Iconography: In the nave ceiling are paintings on canvas of the **twelve apostles** by Georgia artist Henry Barnes. These were a major new feature of the 1984 restoration, since similar frescos in the original church had been replaced by a metal ceiling long before the fire. Paintings marking the **stations of the cross** line the walls of the church. These were originally hung in the Franciscan Novitiate House in New Jersey and were donated to the shrine after the fire.

The **stained-glass windows** date from the 1984 restoration and were designed by Robert Pinart of Nyack, N.Y. and produced by Cummings Studios of North Adams, Mass. The iconography reflecting the shrines Marian dedication was developed by Professor Virginia Raugin of the College of the Holy Cross. The windows of roses over the entrance to the church represent the sorrowful, joyful, and glorious mysteries of the Rosary. The medallions in the **aisle windows** represent biblical titles for Mary drawn from the Song of Songs, while the **transept windows** represent the lineage of Jesus.

Mary is depicted in two windows. The one above the altar echoes the style of the fifteenth-century when the idea of Mary being conceived without sin was developing strongly in Catholicism. The window above the choir loft in the rear of the church depicts the coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven. In 1984 a Möller **organ** of 2,947 pipes was installed in the rear gallery.

The Italian reproduction of Michelangelo's **Pieta** is the only major work of art to survive the fire. It now serves not only as a devotional sculpture but a reminder of the church's history. In addition to the Pieta, the side altars also survived the 1982 fire, the main altar required substantial restoration.

Sources: Colley, Van Buren. *The Diocesan Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*. Atlanta, 1955. ● *Georgia Bulletin*, August 19, 1982, May 17, 1984 www.georgiabulletin.org ● Lyon, Elizabeth Anne Mack. *Atlanta Architecture: The Victorian Heritage, 1837-1918*. Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1986. ● Scharen, Christian Batalden. *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004. ● "William H. Parkins." In *New Georgia Encyclopedia*: www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/

The Temple
Hebrew Benevolent Congregation of Atlanta

1589 Peachtree St., NE
http://www.the-temple.org/
Building Constructed: 1931
Architect: Philip Trammell Shutze

Congregation: In 1844, German Jewish settlers arrived in Atlanta, a still-tiny settlement that had been slowly growing since the mid-1830s when the terminus of the new Western and Atlantic railroad was located there. In the next decades, a small Jewish population (numbering about 50 at the start of the Civil War) pursued a variety of mercantile endeavors and professional occupations. When still quite small, the community organized the Hebrew Benevolent Society (1860) to provide for burials and poor relief; seven years later, there were sufficient adult men (ten) to regularly form a minyan, and the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation was chartered (1867), thus establishing the first Jewish congregation in the city. This Orthodox congregation originally met in the homes of its members, moving into its first building in 1877. The congregation wavered between Orthodox and Reform Judaism for several years, but in 1895, with the hiring of Rabbi David Marx, who had trained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, it officially adopted Reform Judaism. During this period, the congregation also adopted the term "temple" rather than "synagogue" for their meeting place, a strategy used by Reform congregations throughout the U.S. at the time to indicate the view that the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was no longer a goal to be pursued as Jews in diaspora were establishing the "temple" across the globe.

Currently led by Senior Rabbi Peter S. Berg, the congregation is actively involved in on-going worship programs, education for all ages, and a variety of social and political advocacy programs. In April 2009, the congregation was named by *Newsweek* magazine as "one of the nation's most vibrant Jewish congregations."

Location: The Jewish population of Atlanta at the end of the nineteenth century resided in two main areas, southwest of the city center and northeast of it. The Temple, originally located at the corner of Garnett and Forsyth Street, was in the heart of the Southwest neighborhood. The move five miles north to the current location on Peachtree St., NE, in 1931, was one to a growing middle class area bordering two wealthy suburban neighborhoods.

Architecture, Space, and Iconography: Designed by one of Atlanta's foremost classicists of the early 20th century, Philip Trammel Shutze, The Temple is a six-sided brick building with stone detailing, pedimented entry, and surmounting drum. Shutze, who trained at the Georgia School of Technology and studied extensively in Italy, was at the time the newest partner in the firm of Hentz, Adler and Shutze. For The Temple project, he initially submitted a Venetian baroque design. Deemed too expensive, the plan was scuttled for a scheme incorporating a more American, even Jeffersonian, aesthetic with the red brick and drum. True to his neoclassical training, Shutze sited the building at the top of the hill and intended a multi-staged stairway to lead from the street to the building, fifteen feet above. Although the stairway was never built, the building nevertheless makes a commanding presence at the apex of the long expanse of lawn that stretches between it and Peachtree Street.

The neoclassicism of The Temple fit well with progressive architecture in Atlanta during the 1920s, when Shutze and other architects employed classicism in many residential buildings in the growing northern suburbs of Ansley Park, Buckhead, and Druid Hills. Atlanta's neoclassicism would become a signature feature of the growing city, echoing not just City Beautiful efforts throughout the U.S., which deployed classicism to create a sense of urban elegance and order, but also harking back to antebellum architecture in the South and to European architecture. The adoption of neoclassicism for temples or synagogues was common among Jewish congregations, which historically had adopted architectural styles prevalent within their localities. Neoclassicism also echoed the ancient roots of Judaism and the architecture of the Temple in Jerusalem. Further, the building the congregation moved out to relocate to Peachtree was also a neoclassical centrally-planned building with a pedimented portico and dome. (Their previous, 1877, building was of "Moorish" design, created by W.H. Parkins, architect of Immaculate Conception.)

The Temple physical plant includes the main sanctuary and an education wing. The sanctuary features an auditorium plan with a

shallow domed ceiling with the center dome. This type of auditorium space was fairly common in Reform and Conservative Jewish buildings of the period, as both groups opted for family seating arrangements (as opposed to the gender separation in Orthodox congregations) and thus required good sightlines and acoustics.

The sanctuary features the liturgical elements found in all synagogues. The **bema**, or raised platform on which the reading desk sits, is located in a shallow apse and is embraced by curving stairs on both sides, leading up to the gilded wooden cabinet or **ark,** which holds the **Torah scrolls** (the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses). Positioned above the Ark is a depiction of the **Ten Commandments** in Hebrew. In front of and above the Ark hangs the **Eternal Light**, a symbol which carries a variety of meanings in Judaism, from compliance with God's command to keep a flame burning (Exodus 27:20-22), to a reference to the menorah in the Temple in Jerusalem, to the flame of faith.

Side windows with small colored glass inserts flood the room with light, and, with the off-white walls, project a sense of starkness. Nevertheless, the room is replete with iconography, particularly in the canopy-like ceiling and the frieze that it springs from. Here the twelve tribes of Israel are referenced in Hebrew and in symbols rendered in plaster relief. Around the frieze parade the harp, the lamp, the hand gesture for the Hebrew letter "Shin," which is the symbol for the name of God, and other symbols, all selected by Shutze in consultation with Rabbi David Marx. The bema houses matching planters in the form of shofars terminating in rams' heads. A cloth curtain surrounds the apse wall, suggesting the linen of the Tabernacle.

Historical Significance: The Temple congregation traces its roots back to the first organized Jewish congregation in Atlanta and that in itself lends significance to this site. The building gained a different type of historical significance, however, when it was thrust into the public struggle over Civil Rights in the 1950s. Early in the morning of Sunday, October 12, 1958, a bomb went off next to the education wing, destroying part of the wall and much of the adjacent interior space and furnishings. On the one hand, the attack by segregationists was against The Temple congregation itself, likely in retaliation for the work of The Temple's senior rabbi, Jacob Rothschild, a leader in Atlanta civic and interfaith efforts to achieve equal rights for African Americans. On the other hand, the attack was one in a series of eight bombings of Jewish institutions in six states within a twelve month period beginning in November of 1957. These bombings demonstrated that for white segregationist organizations such as the prominent National States' Rights Party (NSRP), racism and anti-Semitism went hand in hand in their efforts to "purify" America. Credit for the bombing was immediately claimed by the "Confederate Underground," which released a statement stating "Negros and Jews are hereby declared aliens."

The bombing, memorably related in Alfred Uhry's play, *Driving Miss Daisy*, is seen by several historians as a turning point in Atlanta's efforts to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and in federal efforts to investigate racial hate crimes. For The Temple congregation it also resulted in an outpouring of sympathy and support from Atlantans, which was as unexpected (given the history of anti-Semitism in the city) as it was welcome. In a show of energy distinctly different from the law enforcement lethargy that greeted such attacks against African American homes and churches, the Atlanta police quickly arrested five men, all NSRP members. The suspects were put on trial in December 1958, but the jury deadlocked and a mistrial was declared. In January one of the men was retried and acquitted by jury. No one was ever convicted of the crime.

Sources:

Dowling, Elizabeth Meredith. *American Classicist: The Architecture of Philip Trammell Shutze*. New York: Rizzoli, 1989.

Greene, Melissa Fay. *The Temple Bombing*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1996.

Hertzberg, Steven. *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845 – 1915.* Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978.

"Jewish Community of Atlanta" and "Philip Trammell Shutze (1890-1982)" in *The New Georgia* Encyclopedia. http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Home.jsp.

Webb, Clive. "Counterblast: How the Atlanta Temple Bombing Strengthened the Civil Rights Cause," *Southern Spaces*, June 22, 2009. http://www.southernspaces.org/2009/counterblast-how-atlanta-temple-bombing-strengthened-civil-rights-cause.

Buckhead Church, Atlanta GA
Buckhead Atlanta, Georgia.

Architect: Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates, Inc., Atlanta GA
Building opened: 2007
Overall Campus Area: a 2.4 acres site; including 188,000 square feet in four stories, atop a three-storey parking deck.
Auditorium capacity: between 3,000 – 4,000 congregants.
Other facilities: a production studio, bookstore, administrative offices, and classroom space.

Architecture and Urban Context As one approaches the Buckhead Church, one can hardly discern the presence of a religious edifice. The building is clad with a curtain wall which resembles many an office building and, from a distance, may be mistaken for a plinth to a nearby tower. No crosses, symbols or spire adorn the exterior; and there are none of the traditional architectural motifs which connote church architecture. Even the drop-off area evokes the *porte cochere* of an exclusive hotel. Within its urban context, the Buckhead Church blends in a deft act of camouflage. Only the script adorning the circular parapet stating "Buckhead Church" gives it away. This chameleon-like tendency, to acquire attributes of its surroundings while effacing conventional church symbols, extends to the building's interior. An aesthetic reminiscent of a convention hall may catch one off-guard as one enters; the "foyer" outside the main prayer auditorium is commanded by what seems like a bookstore and coffeeshop. Space-names extend the impression even further: the prayer hall is an "auditorium"; the church building is a "campus"; while affiliate churches around the nation (but mostly in the Southeast) are "strategic partners".

All this establishes purposeful intentionality on the part of the Buckhead Church rectors and designers, while, at the same time, it may lead one to question how the Buckhead Church is a scared space at all. However, to understand the theological and architectural intentions of the Buckhead Church, it is necessary to question one's own assumptions about the nature of religious space and one's expectations of its role in contemporary society.

Particularly, it is useful to think of the Buckhead Church as a transitional space rather than a destination in its own right. The Buckhead Church addresses a large, expanding and ethnically-diverse demographical cross-section: those who have grown uneasy with institutionalized religion, whether due to alienation from dogma, discomfort with ritual strictures, or the perception that religion has grown increasingly estranged from everyday life, its causes and its tribulations. The Buckhead Church offers this demographic, made up of largely but not exclusively young professionals, a *threshold*: from a state of skepticism (or mere unfamiliarity) to a more committed religious life. Institutionally and architecturally, the Buckhead Church should not be construed alike other congregations: as a stand-alone institution which works in parallel to similar entities from the same denomination at some geographical distance. Rather, one should view it as integrally entwined with a web of socio-religious spaces extending from, and converging onto, it – including other churches, especially North Point Community Church (Alpharetta, GA), as well as domestic environments where one socializes with other church members. Indeed, and as formulated by the church's principal pastor, Andy Stanley, this web may be characterized in terms of a three-staged strategy. Drawing on familiar domestic environments as metaphorical reference, the Buckhead Church organizes one's gradual journey into religious commitment through the following sequence: the *foyer environment*, the *living-room environment* and the *kitchen environment*. In the foyer, one is a *guest* introduced to the community; one is expected to enjoy one's presence but not necessarily commit. Besides the main experience of participating in Sunday services, the foyer-environment also includes several annual events focused on strengthening married life. As one advances from the foyer into the living-room environment, one becomes a *friend* with regular involvement in more specialized groups. Hence, for example, "Strategic Service Teams" collaborate on the mammoth production and support of the Sunday service: from orienting guests to supervising children in separate rooms to advising on marriage and finances. Some 2,000 volunteers contribute to realizing the multiple Sunday services, according to the Buckhead Church website. Other friend activities include global collaborations with churches across the world, as well as getting involved in small-knit local groups as a foundation for the third and final environment: the kitchen. Here, one comes to nest within a small group with which one has developed and confirmed confidence, comfort and commitment. Much of this phase unfolds away form church

premises, in homes and workplaces. It is with one's Community Group that one studies the Bible, discerns the challenges of everyday life and experiences mutual care in times of need, as when grieving for a loved one - or as Stanley presents it: where the group "do[es] life together".

Space and Ritual Thus, the Buckhead Church reaches out in a tentacle of spaces beyond its confines. Despite the transitional nature of its Buckhead location, the Church remains unambiguously Christian in creed and message. As a key architectural strategy, it addresses its constituency through, simultaneously downplaying Christian conventional symbols, rituals and settings, while infusing its spaces with hues of familiarity from everyday life and pop culture: from the music performance scene, from domestic environments as well as workspace aesthetic. This is particularly evident in the Church's main auditorium space where Sunday services convene – a space which constitutes the foyer-environment for many. Not unlike the exterior with which the Buckhead Church blends into its urban surroundings, the interior confronts one with a near-total symbolic silence. Most striking, the cross, in all its variations, is conspicuously absent from the interior - thus circumventing debates over theological distinctions between cross, crucifix, and the placement of either in relation to other artifacts as well as the congregation. Connotations of Christ, such as the fish symbol, are also absent; indeed, no iconography of any form adorns the space. Contestations of Christ's 'ethnic background' are also thereby evaded, addressing the church space to diverse identities. No altar holds the elements – even symbolically – or commands attentive center. No visible baptistery structures one's path within the auditorium into a procession. In fact, the baptistery is hidden and mechanically slides into view only when a baptism is performed. Religious symbols are ephemeral at best – a quality which extends to an even finer grain of symbols, artifacts and references. Besides the absence of candles, the Bible, as a physical volume, is neither provided in the pews nor scripted on building walls. Instead, the "word" makes its ritual presence when projected on a screen. Similarly, in the absence of hymnals, congregants may chant hymns when projected on-screen.

Instead of a lectern or pulpit per se, congregants face an elevated stage from which the sermon is delivered when not, occasionally, projected as a digital podcast on a screen lowered to the center of the stage. Service at the Buckhead Church is accompanied by a musical performance where popular tunes and lyrics, re-contextualized in this religious setting, redefine the Christian sermon in fusion with top 40s pop hits by bands alike Bryan Adams. True to its name, the "auditorium" evokes the experience of a concert hall familiar to most, if not all, attendees. As colorful and skillfully-designed light compositions wash the performers onstage, with cameras from various angles projecting closeups of individual performers or crowd faces onto multiple screens around the stage, lights dim in the main hall leaving each congregant in the isolation of near-total darkness. Among some 4,000 other congregants in that main hall, anonymity seems unavoidable – an anonymity which may open up one's mind for introversion and introspection. Unlike the desired gregariousness of many contemporary churches, the service at the Buckhead Church celebrates the norm of contemporary everyday life, its public solitude, recontextualized in some spiritual guise. As discussed above, community in the Buckhead Church happens elsewhere, and follows from a longer process of fusion.

The Buckhead Church poses numerous challenges to the making of contemporary religious space to meet current social changes. It raises questions about what role religious spaces play in everyday life as it draws on its popular aesthetic, but then returns spiritual practice back to domestic spaces. Yet it also seems to gesture that there is little that is sacred about space. As one founder of the church envisioned it, the current Buckhead Church facilities will one day become inadequate for the community's needs. As a building with state of the art facilities, a parking garage, and a workspace aesthetic it can easily be absorbed back into the real estate of the surrounding office spaces.

Sources

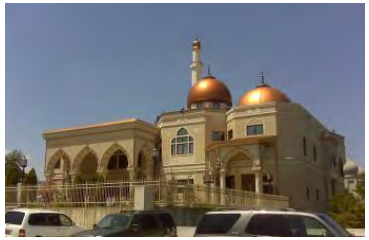
The Buckhead Church's website http://www.buckheadchurch.org/

Lori Johnston. "Tower Place Integrates Church into the Mix", *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, May 6, 2005 [accessed online 09/10/2010: http://atlanta.bizjournals.com/atlanta/stories/2005/05/09]

Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates, Inc., Atlanta GA (architects) http://www.srssa.com/project.php?subCatID=25 (last accessed 09/28/2010)

Interviews conducted by Emory's Candler Schools of Theology with participants and employees of the Buckhead Church.

Al-Farooq Masjid, Atlanta GA; New Prayer-Hall & Community Center
Midtown Atlanta, Georgia.



Architect: Medhat Elmesky, Panama City, Florida,
Building opened: June 2008
Al-Farooq's overall Campus Area: about 10 acres
New building and surroundings accommodate up to about 5,000 worshippers (during *Eid* prayers)

Al-Farooq Masjid etches its urban presence on Atlanta's skyline via traditional symbols of historic Islamic architecture. As one approaches the mosque, one sees framed against the horizon two bright bronze domes on octagonal drums: one large 65 ft-high dome crowns the main prayer-hall, while the other smaller dome sits atop the Library and Visitors Center. Accompanying the ensemble is a slim eclectic minaret, itself topped with a third miniature bronze dome. Al-Farooq reaches to the sky only with its brightest. It is with such finery that the mosque stares across 14th Street at Ikea's gigantic store and the New-Urbanist mixed-use development of Atlantic Station. Built concurrently, al-Farooq and Atlantic Station provoke many an ironic thought about American urbanism.

Institution and History As a religious institution, as well as an urban artifact and a work of architecture, Al-Farooq Masjid contributes further enriching elements and multifaceted issues to its context, to its growing Muslim congregation as well as to the history of mosque-building in North America. Founded in 1980, the institution which came to be known as Al-Farooq Masjid is a nonprofit, non-political, religious organization located in the Homepark neighborhood of Midtown Atlanta, Georgia. Unaffiliated with any entity either inside or outside the United States, Al-Farooq relies mainly on the generous donations of its community to fund its operations and services. Although its first and primary function remains to provide accommodation for prayers, Al-Farooq extended more services to the rapidly growing Muslim population of the city soon after its establishment - following the example of Islam's first masjid in Al-Medinah (b. 622 CE). In 1982, the masjid's board acquired land for a Muslim cemetery with a 2,000 burial-capacity. In 1990, the board established an academic religious school (Dar-un-Noor School), with 200 students in grades pre-K through 8th, learning academic subjects such as math, science, social studies, in addition to Islamic Studies and the Arabic language. In 1994, Atlanta Dar-ul-Uloom, a formal Quranic teaching facility (for *hifz*: memorizing and learning the Quran) was also founded along with a hostel facility for resident students. The two schools are housed on al-Farooq's 10-acres campus but outside the main domed building. In addition to such institutions, weekend educational activities and annual summer camps help bind the *masjid*'s core community together. To accommodate the rapidly growing Muslim population of Atlanta (estimated at 75,000 in 2010), and its distribution across Atlanta's sprawling suburbs, Al-Farooq Masjid established a satellite mosque, named Omar bin 'Abdul-'Aziz, in the Norcross area (northwest) of Atlanta. But perhaps the community's main effort was to replace the 1980 small prayer-hall and ablution facilities, with the current large complex which opened for use in the summer of 2008. Besides its new 5,000 worshippers capacity, the *masjd's* main building also comprises a library and visitors' center, multi-purpose halls in the basement which accommodate congregational overflow and house community gatherings, lectures and symposia.

Congregation and Urban Context Besides its symbolic presence against Atlanta's western sky, Al-Farooq's 30-years urban impact increasingly recalls the historical phenomenon of main city mosques in historically-Islamic cities: *mujawireen,* where, over time, Muslims' residences cluster the neighborhood around their mosque. Many Muslim families and Georgia Tech students live around the Masjid and its campus of schools. Locally, the masjid's 10-acres campus presents its almost-monumental aspect to the main arterial thoroughfare, 14th Street, yet without access. The manner with which it meets its two neighborhood side streets is more nuanced. To the west along Snyder Street, a small urban plaza (*housh* or *finaa'*) provides a wonderful off-street gathering space for Muslim congregants, especially after the weekly Friday and two annual *Eid* (feast) prayers. It is in such gatherings that the international diversity of this masjid's congregation best displays itself. Muslims from Africa, the Middle East, Central and East Asia, Europe and North America mix on this masjid's grounds. On *Eid* day and framed against Midtown Atlanta's skyline of towers to the east, a rich diversity of ethnic robes, colors and faces populates this space and spills over into neighboring streets. Towards Tumlin Street - the other side street to the east, and along the mosque's southern border, a small community park seems to buffer surrounding houses from al-Farooq's presence.

It is at the western plaza that congregants converge from the street and from the masjid's parking-deck, as they approach the main prayer-hall. Men and women enter the masjid from separate doors. While men

congregate in the main hall, women pray in a dedicated upper-story gallery overlooking the main hall. Large projection screens display the *imam* during the Friday *khutba* or *bayan* (lecture) for women upstairs as well as in overflow spaces for men in the basement. Upon entry (into the men's section where your visit will start), note the narthex-like space which has infused itself into many mosques in North America. Functionally, this space acts as a lobby negotiating between the shoe-racks and the ablution area on the left side, and the small hall to the right side, used for Friday-prayers overflow as well as for the five daily prayers on other days when less congregants are in attendance. Unlike churches, traditional *masjids* in historically Muslim societies negotiated these transitions using courtyards. As a measure of its novelty to congregants on the new masjid's opening day in 2008, many attendees were confused about whether they should take off their shoes in that space or not.

Architecture and Ritual The *masjid's* architecture, somewhat understated but firmly dignified, complements its community's diversity with unified octagonal motifs, which link outside spaces to the interior. The octagonal motif derives from the architect's foresight to provide the accurate northeast orientation towards Mecca essential for Muslim prayer, while preempting the creation of odd angles with surroundings streets. Negotiating this multiplicity of angles, the prayer-hall's octagonal plan establishes a generative theme for the rest of the edifice. Hence, from the two octagonal fountains in the plaza, pointed arches guide one to the interior all the way to the main prayer-hall topped by a dome rising from an octagonal drum. Thin decorative octagonal columns and simple octagonal surface-patterns surround the prayer hall. Its color palette of beige pastels, the soft carpet, and the highly restrained geometric and floral patterns which adorn the dome-interior (executed by volunteers) and the prayer-hall walls – all contribute to an experience of hushed spirituality: a pious introspection amidst a large congregation, humbled by the relatively large space. Calligraphy on the main hall's walls proclaims Allah's greatness as well as the name of Prophet Mohammed (*pbh*), but refrains from registering any other historical Islamic figures as some mosques are wont to do. This reflects a will to abide by the fundamental basics of the faith, especially for *Sunni* (orthodox) Muslims who constitute the masjid's congregation.

Since Muslim prayer unfolds as a bodily movement against the ground, no pews occupy the prayer hall. The movable seats to the side accommodate those who, while able to perform the attentive-standing position in Muslim prayer, remain physically unable to kneel or prostrate themselves on the ground. The *qiblah* wall (denoting the direction of Mecca, straight ahead as you enter the prayer-hall) boasts an unfamiliar arrangement of two quasi-*minbar* (pulpit) niches symmetrical around the main *mihrab* (the central deep niche). Yet currently, instead of using either of the two for the Arabic sermon (considered in this congregation as integral to the prayer itself), the *khateeb* delivers the Friday sermon from a small wooden stand.

It is interesting to note that al-Farooq Masjid's architecture employs a largely traditional palette of components and symbols: minaret, domes, pointed-arches, ...etc - unlike the interpretive modernist approach of other Islamic centers (e.g. the Islamic Cultural Center in New York City). However, al-Farooq Masjid deploys technology in services and in outreach. As mentioned above, screens project the *khutba* and prayers to those congregating outside the main prayer hall. In addition, al-Farooq has an increasingly active web presence, posting past lectures, providing online *fatwas* (religious rulings), coordinating volunteers and different kinds of donations as well as connecting to many of the thirty-five mosques in the Atlanta area.

Leaving the main building, one returns to al-Farooq Masjid's exterior colorful plaza which acts as a powerful complement to its interior's introspective spirituality. Amidst loud salutes, diverse accents, multihued ethnic attires, and against the background of the bright domes and Midtown Atlanta's distant towers, one experiences a vibrant and memorable sense of community.

Sources

Al-Farooq Masjid's website http://www.alfarooqmasjid.org/

Previous discussions with Dr. Khalid Siddiq, co-founder, current Member of the Council of Directors (Director of PR) and active community leader.

Goodman, Brenda. "In a Suburb of Atlanta, a Temple Stops Traffic." *New Your Times*, July 5, 2007, Art and Design Section, Online edition (last accessed 08/03/2010).

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, "Center Profile: Al-Farooq Masjid of Atlanta (2004)". The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, http://pluralism.org/profiles/view/70588 (accessed 08/03/2010).