



God's doors are open to all!

The Economic Halo Effect of Sacred Places

Gobin Memorial UMC

Greencastle, Indiana



AT THE INTERSECTION OF
HERITAGE, FAITH, & COMMUNITY

Table of Contents

Methodology	3
Summary of Findings	5
How to Use This Information	9
About Partners for Sacred Places	10



The sanctuary of Gobin Memorial UMC.

METHODOLOGY

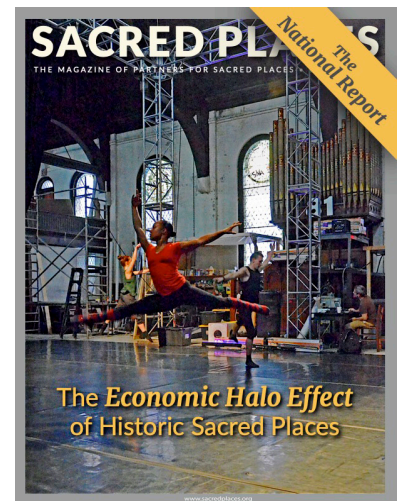
In 1996, with the support of Lilly Endowment, Inc. and other funders, Partners for Sacred Places conducted the first scientific study quantifying the value of space and other resources that congregations provide to outreach programs housed in their historic and older buildings. Conducted in partnership with Dr. Ram Cnaan and the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice, this study, *Sacred Places at Risk*, found that an average urban congregation generates over \$140,000 per year in value by providing space and other resources to outreach programs, including volunteer time; building space rented at less than market rates; and cash and in-kind donations to support community-serving programs. The study also found that four out of five individuals who are served by programs hosted by a sacred place come from outside the congregation.

Sacred Places at Risk established a new methodology for documenting a portion of the public value of congregations and led to a new course of study, marked by Dr. Cnaan's book, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership*, and further validated with the publication of *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* and *The Other Philadelphia Story: How Local Congregations Support Quality of Life in Urban America*.

Though groundbreaking, *Sacred Places at Risk* and subsequent works did not attempt to quantify the full range of economic impacts that congregations have on their communities. The Economic Halo Effect of Sacred Places does.

In 2010, Partners was funded by the William Penn Foundation to test the concept of an expanded methodology. Partners again collaborated with Dr. Cnaan and the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice to craft a comprehensive approach to quantifying the public value of congregations. The pilot, conducted in Philadelphia, sought to take into consideration factors such as: local spending and support for area businesses; building maintenance and repair costs; visitor spending; activities that promote community economic development; impact on the lives of community members; and the value of green space and recreation space.

Based on an extensive review of available, academically vetted methodologies, the team identified nearly two dozen quantifiable measures of economic impact relevant to congregations stewarding historic and older sacred places and assembled a singular methodology to pilot in Philadelphia. The results of this pilot were published in 2013 in the scholarly, peer-reviewed *Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion*.



The Economic Halo Effect of Historic Sacred Places National Report

With funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc., the McCormick Foundation, and others, Partners built upon the pilot by undertaking a larger study. This study differed from the first in that congregations were selected at random from three large cities (Chicago, Philadelphia, and Fort Worth). The results were published in November of 2016.

Partners found that that the average historic sacred place in an urban environment generates over \$1.7 million annually in economic impact. With over 700 active historic houses of worship each in Chicago and Philadelphia, and close to 350 in Fort Worth, this translates into over \$3 billion in annual impact for the three cities combined.

Congregations employ, on average, 5 full-time and 6 part-time staff, and purchase goods and services from a network of local small businesses and individual vendors, sustaining an important community economic ecosystem. Each sacred place is also a magnet for visitors, attracting 780 visits on average each week into its neighborhood or locale. These visits, whether for worship services, life events such as weddings and funerals, concerts and recitals, outreach programs, and other activities, generate spending that boosts the local economy. People spend on travel to and from the sacred place and often patronize local stores nearby. And most importantly, perhaps, we found that 87% of the beneficiaries of the community programs and events housed in sacred places are not members of the religious congregation. They are members of the community at large.

In 2021, Partners for Sacred Places, in partnership with the Duke Endowment and UNC Charlotte Urban (Institute), conducted a study to better understand the local economic impact of rural churches, specifically examining the impact of United Methodist Church (UMC) congregations in North Carolina. Through a random sampling of 87 rural UMC churches in the state, Partners and UNC Charlotte found that each congregation contributed just over \$735,000 into the local economy annually. Additionally, Partners found that similarly to the three-city urban study, about 80% of the beneficiaries of the congregations' community programs are nonmembers. These findings were reported in Partners' publication *The Economic Halo Effect of Rural United Methodist Churches in North Carolina*.



The Community Room, used by many of their space sharers for events that benefit the wider community.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Gobin Memorial UMC has had a large impact in their small town for almost 100 years. Located just outside Indianapolis in the city of Greencastle, this Gothic Revival church has cemented itself as a welcoming congregation to all. Only a year after the cornerstone was laid for the construction of the building, the crash of the stock market made funding difficult to secure. Major support came from DePauw University, the Methodist Church, and most notably from Josiah K. Lilly, who funded the pipe organ in memory of his parents, Eli and Emily Lilly. Today, Gobin Memorial continues to serve the wider community by sharing their spaces with mission-aligned groups, and hosting their own programming like the Summer Enrichment Program, Women’s Jail Ministry, and Getting Ahead, a program aimed at providing support and resources to individuals in need.

This Economic Halo Effect report was conducted as one of the technical assistance services provided to congregations in the National Fund for Sacred Places grant program. The National Fund program is a national grantmaking program which is a program of Partners for Sacred Places (Partners) in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This report is a celebration of all the work that is being done at Gobin Memorial. It provides an estimation of the church’s annual economic impact by considering dozens of factors, which are organized into categories listed below. It is based on a survey conducted in March of 2026 with Rev. Bryan Langdoc, Scott Harris, and Marianne Savage, all of whom are familiar with the church’s operations and finances. Partners for Sacred Places found that in a typical year, Gobin Memorial UMC has an economic impact of \$3,015,982.

Benefit Type	Description	Calculation
Direct Spending	Spending on operations and building maintenance is funneled into the local economy.	\$631,534
Education	If a congregation operates an early childhood education program or school, it benefits the local economy by freeing parents to work and lowering the cost to taxpayer.	\$184,060
Open Space	Green space and recreation space improve our environment and lower energy costs.	\$2,259
Magnet Effect	Hosting events and operating programs catalyzes visitor spending.	\$340,029
Individual Impact	Intervening in individuals' lives enables people to work and reduces governmental spending.	\$1,306,586
Invisible Safety Net	Operating and hosting community oriented programs supplements the activity of the local government and social service agencies, adding value to the community.	\$551,514
TOTAL		\$3,015,982

Direct Spending

Sacred places drive their local and regional economies through purchasing goods and services, and by employing area residents. In fact, studies have demonstrated that upwards of 80% of a given congregation's budget is spent in the region – often with small, locally owned businesses and vendors. In Partners' three-city study, we found that on average, a historic sacred place spends \$549,073 in its community and employs about 12 people. In an average year, Gobin Memorial spends \$631,534 in the region and employs 1 full time and 5 part time staff.

This total does not include spending with local businesses that are frequented by the staff and other members of the congregation, including, but not limited to, Marvin's, The Whisk, and Breadworks By Bridges, all of which are within walking distance from the church. What the total does include is the parish's annual operating expenses; non-routine spending on capital projects; unbudgeted financial support and offerings for community-serving programming; and benevolent giving.

Their Direct Spending total will also continue to grow in the coming years as the church prepares to undertake a six-figure capital project with the support of the National Fund for Sacred Places. Their National Fund project will focus on masonry repointing of the sanctuary to address water infiltration in multiple areas. This is part of a larger plan to repair the entire sanctuary using other grants, including one from Sacred Places Indiana. These kinds of support showcase the importance of preserving the physical building that Gobin Memorial occupies in order for them to continue serving their community.

Education

Sacred places also support their local economies through operating affordable, high quality early childhood education and K-12 schooling. Our methodology assumed that the former enables at least one parent per participating student to work – while the latter provides cost savings to the public school system. These impacts can be monetized on a per parent and per student basis, respectively.

In Partners' three-city study, Education accounted for a significant portion of the total impact made by historic sacred places: 39.8%. At Gobin Memorial UMC, they operate the Summer Enrichment Program, a 5-week program for about 65 elementary school children that provides educational lessons focused on fine arts, science, sports, and social skills. Students also receive daily breakfast and lunch as well as a weekend food package. This program has been serving the children of Putnam County for over three decades. The annual economic impact of this program is valued at \$184,060.



Gobin Memorial Sanctuary.

Open Space

In some communities, religious buildings may maintain the only green space or recreation space in the area. Access to green or recreation space can be monetized on a per use basis, depending on the quality and characteristics of the space. In the case of Gobin Memorial, they have a playground that is open to the public and which sees about 300 visitors per year. In a typical year, that playground accounted for over \$2,200 in public value. In addition to the economic benefits, this playground provides a safe recreational space where children can exercise and learn social skills with each other.

Magnet Effect

Congregations attract visitors for the purposes of worship, education, programming, and special events – and Gobin Memorial is no exception. In addition to regular worshippers, the church draws thousands of visitors each year. These visitors – whether tourists enjoying a peek into the building or an area resident attending a performance at the church – spend money in the vicinity of the building on food and drink, transportation, entertainment, and sometimes lodging.

In a typical year, visitors to Gobin Memorial spend about \$340,029 in the region, predominantly from attending funerals, family reunions, and dozens of artistic performances. This is a conservative estimate based on visitor data provided by the church as well as spending data collected by the General Services Administration. Partners takes into consideration where visitors are coming from, specifically whether they are overnight visitors, day visitors, or locals when calculating this total to ensure a baseline estimate that accurately reflects the church's impact on spending in the vicinity of the building.

Individual Impact

Partners recognizes that, outside of the programs offered by congregations, clergy, program staff, and lay volunteers, Gobin Memorial leadership provides one-on-one counseling to both members of the congregation and the community – changing peoples' lives for the better and strengthening families in the area. Congregations may help unemployed individuals find employment; help couples work through difficulties and intervene in abusive relationships; assist those struggling with substance use find and enter treatment; and sometimes provide support to immigrants and refugees. Congregations also function as a social safety net for people in society who are in need of connection and community – especially youth and older adults.

Of course, it is impossible to put a dollar value on human life. However, the interventions described above can be monetized on an individual basis in cases in which the congregation's intervention undoubtedly resulted in measurable change. At Gobin Memorial, Individual Impact accounted for \$1,306,586. This total is a testament to the dedication that their clergy have to their community.



Gobin Memorial provides space for a Jewish congregation.

Invisible Safety Net

Congregations create a ‘safety net’ for those most at risk within their communities – and this is not always visible to the public at large. Congregations do this by operating and hosting community-serving programming and sharing space with others at affordable, below-market rates. Historic sacred places are uniquely able to accommodate a variety of uses and users because they typically include spaces that range in size and purpose – from sanctuaries and parish halls designed to accommodate large gatherings, to education wings designed to accommodate Sunday School programming. Although originally conceived with specific types of activity in mind, these spaces are being used in new and creative ways throughout the United States.

In a typical year, Gobin Memorial’s impact in this area is estimated at \$551,514. Volunteer time, financial and in-kind resources, and space contributed by the congregation are factored into this category – regardless of whether the program occurs on site or elsewhere in the community (except in the case of the replacement value of space).

Gobin Memorial UMC is home to various programs and organizations that focus on social justice and the performing arts, including the Getting Ahead program and Greencastle Summer Music Festival. None of the external groups that use Gobin’s spaces are charged rent, which makes their spaces incredibly valuable, especially considering the limited rental options available in Greencastle. Groups like AA and NA save thousands of dollars each year by using Gobin’s Community Room free of charge. In fact, about half of all their space users depend on the Community Room for events that benefit the wider community. It’s an asset to have such a flexible space that members of the public can use, and Gobin Memorial understands this fully.

The Economic Halo Effect study reveals that Gobin Memorial UMC generates a remarkable annual economic impact of \$3,015,982, driven by significant contributions in direct spending, individual impact, and the invisible safety net. These findings transcend traditional religious values, providing a powerful empirical basis for the church to strengthen its advocacy, bolster fundraising campaigns, and deepen civic partnerships. Gobin holds a vital role as an economic and social anchor, which will ensure its continued success and legacy of service and justice in Greencastle, Indiana.



A beautiful floral painting inside Gobin Memorial UMC.

How to Use This Information

Understanding What the Data Is & Is Not

1. The Economic Halo Effect is about communicating impact in new terms – and speaking the language of economic impact, which resonates with a wide range of people (including those who aren't people of faith and those who aren't interested in older buildings). Leaders in philanthropy and government, for example, might be persuaded to support or collaborate with a church that has an important impact on the health and vitality of its community. Most people know that congregations are important community anchors that serve those who are most in need, but few know that congregations make a measurable economic impact.

2. The Halo cannot measure everything that congregations do.¹ It does measure the economic value of community-serving programming (from the volunteer time to the donated goods that fuel these programs); activities that generate economic activity in the area (such as hosting events of all kinds); and local spending. However, it does not measure the impact of a religious building's presence on adjacent property values; the value of being a unique, affordable place in the community where folks come together; or a congregation's long-term impact on the lives of members and neighbors.

3. Although the Halo is not a comprehensive measure of your value to your community, it can help you think of your congregation in new ways, elevate the way that civic leaders perceive you, and aid in both internal and external fundraising efforts.

Uses for the Halo Report

1. Share the results with your congregation. Congregants may be encouraged to hear that their faithful giving and work has a measurable impact in the larger community. It can potentially boost morale and may even boost giving to your church. Most people need to hear a message multiple times before truly absorbing it. Consider placing this information in newsletters and in announcements. You might want to build a sermon around it. Make this information available multiple times, and in multiple ways.

2. Share the results with the 10% of folks who do 90% of the work of the congregation and use it as an opportunity to thank them for what they do. Almost every church is indebted to a core group of dedicated congregants who are the first to step up and serve on a leadership team or donate time to an initiative. These folks do not always see the impact of their efforts.

3. Highlight the Halo findings to strengthen your annual stewardship campaign or capital campaign. Partners frequently support congregations through capital campaigns and projects, and in order to fundraise successfully, a congregation must be able to articulate why it matters and why its project matters. Halo data can bolster your case for support and make for a more successful campaign – especially if your campaign will be community-based. Community-based capital campaigns entail going beyond the congregation for support, and therefore require you to articulate your civic value.

4. Incorporate the results into grant applications. If your church is applying for a grant, use the Halo data to emphasize that you are a worthy candidate that is positioned to make the most of the gift. Halo data can be persuasive to donors

¹Each question asked during the interview is tied to a multiplier derived from an existing, peer reviewed scholarly study. Some issues have been thoroughly studied by scholars, and others less so.

About Partners for Sacred Places

Partners for Sacred Places, founded in 1989, is the only national, non-sectarian, nonprofit organization focused on building the capacity of congregations of historic sacred places so that they can better serve their communities as anchor institutions, nurture transformation, and shape vibrant, creative communities.

Partners for Sacred Places brings together a national network of expert professionals who understand the value of a congregation's architectural assets, its worth as a faith community, and the significance of its service to the community at large. With a national presence based in Philadelphia and Chicago, Partners fosters the active community use of historic sacred places – churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques – and builds the capability of their congregations through training programs and fundraising assistance. Partners has served thousands of congregations and related organizations over the past thirty years and represents the needs and concerns of over 100,000 older, community-serving sacred places across America.

For more information about Partners for Sacred Places, please visit us on the web at <https://www.sacredplaces.org>

For information on the National Fund for Sacred Places, please visit <https://www.fundforsacredplaces.org>

This report was prepared by Daniel Cruz, Technical Assistance Coordinator, dcruz@sacredplaces.org



Exterior view of Gobin Memorial UMC.