

Preservation Profile: Iglesia Pentecostal La Luz Del Mund (Light of the World Pentecostal Church)



Figure 1: Iglesia Pentecostal: La Luz del Mundo
Photo: Stephen Seigo

Our church, Iglesia Pentecostal: La Luz Del Mundo, is a Spanish-speaking Assemblies of God congregation founded in 1944 to serve the spiritual needs of the large Hispanic population in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. In 1955 we bought our present building on South Ninth Street from a Lutheran congregation. This building was exactly what an active and growing congregation with a dynamic program of worship and ministry needed. We had an average Sunday attendance of about 500, and we conducted a number of programs and activities, including a large Sunday school, prayer services, bible study groups, the Royal Rangers (an Assemblies of God version of the Boy Scouts), and the Missionettes (an Assemblies of God version of the Girl Scouts). Our new building contained a spacious sanctuary and many secondary spaces, including a social hall, chapel, and numerous Sunday school rooms, and provided more than enough space to meet our needs.

Our new building was actually quite old when we bought it. Constructed of brownstone and brick, it had been built for the New England Congregational Church between 1851 and 1852. The early history of that congregation is illustrious. The pastor at the time the church was built was Thomas K. Beecher, brother of the famous Henry Ward Beecher, whose own congregation was nearby in Brooklyn Heights, and who, with his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, was prominent in the history of the abolition. The New England Congregational Church also played an active role in the movement. The Reverend Beecher's fiery sermons railing against the scourge of slavery galvanized many in the congregation to work for its abolition, and many church members supported this work, harboring fugitive slaves on their way to Canada.

The church building itself is an excellent example of Italianate architecture. With a brownstone facade that echoes the scale and ornament of the surrounding row houses and tenements, the church is emphatically part of its neighborhood. A large tracery window emphasizes its presence and prominence as an important structure in the area. The interior of the church was built as an open, gallery hall suited to a congregation for whom preaching played so important a part of worship. In 1894 a fire destroyed the church interior, and it was rebuilt to a new design that incorporated the Sunday school rooms and galleries that we found so attractive when we purchased the building. Because of its architectural and historic importance the church was designated a New York City landmark in 1982.

By the early twentieth century, the neighborhood around the church had changed and the original congregation had gone into decline. At some point the building was sold to a German Lutheran congregation. The Lutheran congregation, in its turn falling victim to the changing nature of the neighborhood eventually followed its members to Queens, and in 1955 we purchased the building.

Membership in our church remained strong through the 1960s and into the 1970s. During the late 1970s, members of the congregation began to notice cracks in the ceiling over the main sanctuary. As these cracks became larger and pieces of plaster fell, two church members climbed into the long-abandoned attic to examine the problem. They discovered that the roof trusses, which had been constructed of iron and wood, had been damaged by water coming in through the leaking roof and had failed completely. Instead of supporting the roof they were hanging from it and could fall into the sanctuary at any time. Immediately shoring was erected to brace the roof and the congregation moved into the chapel near the main entrance for Sunday worship.

Closing the main sanctuary had a devastating effect. Programs had to be discontinued because most of the building was unsafe and could not be used. Membership fell, partially because the neighborhood had again begun to change and many families were displaced, but also because of the condition of the building. It is an extremely discouraging sight for a newcomer to walk into a church and see the main sanctuary filled with a forest of shoring, and then be taken into a small and crowded room for worship. It is also hard to retain members when the programs and services that attracted them to the church in the first place could no longer be operated.

The congregation's first reaction to the condition of the trusses was to stay in the building, not to give up or abandon what seemed to be an insurmountable problem. There were some practical reasons for this decision. First, as a local church with our membership drawn from the neighborhood, there were no other suitable meeting places available nearby. Also, despite the building's precarious condition, we needed the ample and flexible space that it provided for programs and activities. We could still use much of the building for the immediate future while we raised money to repair the structural damage. If we sold it, we would lose the space and resources that the building provided forever. Buying a new building would require selling our present temple first, and then looking for new quarters within our price range. Because of its condition, the building would have been difficult to sell, and it is unlikely we would have been able to command a price that would cover the down payment on a new building. We could have ended up being completely homeless for months, even years, while we looked for a new home and then raised the money to pay for it. We doubted that we could survive such a traumatic blow to our stability.

We also had occupied the church for twenty years. Many members of the congregation were very attached to the old building

and felt strongly that we should not give up this symbol of our congregation and our presence in Williamsburg so easily. It was and always will be our home.

Restoration

Despite our commitment to staying in the building and reopening the sanctuary, our early fundraising efforts were not tremendously successful. A low-interest loan program had been available from our denomination's central offices, but was discontinued just as we were about to apply. We received some small donations from neighboring churches, but, while these helped in the long run, they did not provide enough money to execute any repairs. We tried selling candies and chocolates door-to-door. Again, we raised money, but not enough to make significant headway. We also applied for grants from the New York State Environmental Quality Bond Act program several times. However, our applications were not funded. Finally, we sold the church parsonage, which provided us with significant capital, although depriving us of a valuable asset.

In 1988 we received a matching grant of \$5,000 from the New York Landmarks Conservancy's Sacred Sites and Properties Fund to conduct a conditions survey of the building. The staff of the Conservancy's Technical Preservation Services Center

assisted us in conducting that work. This proved to be a crucial step in dealing with our building's structural problems. While we knew that the roof trusses required major work, we were looking at them in isolation, and not within the context of a comprehensive evaluation of the entire building. The condition survey gave us a perspective that we had not had before and assisted our fundraising efforts. Now we could explain to potential funders not only what repairs we planned to execute, but also why they were needed, what the result would be, and how much they would eventually cost.

Shortly thereafter, we called a new pastor, the Reverend Victor Reyes. His positive attitude and assertive style renewed congregation's hope and galvanized our fundraising efforts. He was not afraid to ask for money for a purpose about which he felt strongly. Reverend Reyes believed in the continued existence of our congregation and the restoration of our temple. As a result, our fundraising techniques changed. We became assertive-more confident-and we began to organize our efforts into a concerted and coordinated campaign rather than a series of unrelated activities.

Under the direction of the new pastor, a fundraising committee was formed. This committee was divided into four teams of eight to twelve people and each one took on a rotating series of fundraising tasks. For example, one team was responsible for preparing Sunday luncheons for purchase by members of the congregation. These meals served multiple purposes. They provided a hot lunch between the morning and afternoon worship services so that people did not need to return home, prepare a meal, and then come back again. In addition, they provided a time of fellowship within the congregation and helped build up the quality of our congregational life, and they raised money for the restoration of the sanctuary. Of course not everyone paid for these meals. Needy people who attended our Sunday services were given lunch for free. Thus we followed Jesus' command to "feed the least of these my brethren" without any expectation of gain.

The fundraising teams also solicited contributions door-to-door, held flea markets and bazaars, and organized a concert series. The concert series proved to be one of our most successful ventures. Overlooking the sanctuary is a large gallery that opens into the main sanctuary by means of shutters (Figure 4). When the shutters are closed, they define a spacious and impressive space for worship and concerts. We repaired and cleaned up this area and built a concert stage, inviting members of neighborhood churches and others to join us for performances of Christian music. Before and after the concerts, which were very well attended, we would give a fundraising pitch, and then we would open the shutters, exposing the main sanctuary so that people could see exactly why we needed the money. This technique was dramatic and extremely effective. We also held concerts and worship services at neighboring churches, where offerings were taken up to benefit our building campaign.

As a result of all these efforts, we raised in excess of \$160,000 over the course of six years. We did not use a fundraising consultant, mainly because we were unaware that fundraising specialists existed. Nevertheless we made significant progress towards our goal. Although this was not all the money we needed, it was enough to begin soliciting bids from contractors.

Our architect, Albert Smith 111, compiled the specifications needed to solicit bids from contractors. The scope of work outlined in the specifications was intensive and thorough. It called for removing the damaged roof trusses and replacing them with new trusses. Stabilizing an existing truss, which was damaged but salvageable; replacing the sanctuary's severely damaged plaster ceiling; restoring and re-glazing the glass dome within the sanctuary; repairing exterior masonry damaged by the truss movement; repointing the brick side and rear walls of the building; replacing the existing tin roof; installing new gutters and leaders; and patching the damaged sanctuary floor. Completion of all this work would make the sanctuary usable, although much would still be left to be done. The brownstone facade of the church would still require restoration, and the interior of the sanctuary would still need to be permanently furnished.

Our architect estimated that this work would cost approximately \$430,000--far more than we had already raised. However, our inability to use the sanctuary and other spaces in the building had damaged our church's ministry, and we felt we had to make a decision. After discussion and prayer we decided to put the contract out for bid, trusting that the necessary funds would become available when we needed them. Our contractor understood this situation and offered financing. We have also applied for a low-interest loan from the New York City Historic Properties Fund to cover any shortfall.

During the bidding process we discovered that very few of the contractors who submitted bids were qualified to execute the entire scope of work. We decided to hire two contractors, AFDF Community Builders, Inc. and Ferot Builders Ltd., to work as a partnership with one another. The work required addressing a number of formidable structural problems, and we needed to be sure that the contractors doing that work had engineers on staff who was able to ensure that the work was executed safely. The interior work demanded another set of skills, and we chose a contractor experienced with interior and cosmetic work. Both portions of the project had to be executed simultaneously, since we wanted the scaffolding to serve for both the roof repair project and the plastering work.

The restoration program has had a powerful effect on our congregation. The community now sees us as an active and dynamic presence in the neighborhood, and not as a decaying congregation in a ruinous building. Membership is climbing and typical Sunday attendance has increased to about 150. We are holding services and Sunday school classes in both English and Spanish in order to accommodate the new English-speaking members of the congregation. We have become a distribution center for a government food program. We provide a free breakfast for neighborhood children, and every weekend people

come through our doors for physical and spiritual nourishment. We have re-activated the Royal Rangers and, as soon as personnel are available, we will do the same with the Missionettes. Our concert series continues and ministers not just to our own members but the members of neighboring churches and the community at large. People in the neighborhood now realize that La Luz Del Mundo is alive and well.

In 1992, we received a second Sacred Sites and Properties Fund grant for \$10,000 to help pay for the structural repairs. We are making repairs to the sanctuary now using talent and time volunteered by members of the congregation. Our goal is to complete the sanctuary of our temple in time for a re-dedication service just after the New Year in 1993. This will be an auspicious new beginning!

Project Management in Major Construction Projects

Part 2: Managing the Project

In the first part of this article we described how a religious institution could organize itself to administer a major construction project. This included setting up a project management team, preparing contract documents, and putting a project out for bid. In this issue we will describe what happens after you hire a contractor.

The Management Structure

Once a contractor has been chosen and is on the job, it is, of course, his or her obligation to perform the work according to specifications. This includes supplying the personnel and materials needed to perform the job. However, in order for the contractor to work effectively, you must have a management structure in place that will work well for both for the contractor and for you as the owner. Here are some suggestions for creating such a structure.

First, the lines of authority for the project must be established. The contractor must know who has the authority to approve or to disapprove of work, and how these decisions are made. The owner's representative, in the person of the architect or project director, is usually charged with actually approving work, along with any consultants hired to write the specifications for the work being executed. For example, if structural repairs are being made, the architect or project director will ask the consulting engineer to sign off on the work before approving it him or herself. This is necessary to protect everybody's liability should anything go wrong. In certain cases, such as decisions involving cosmetic work, such as paint colors, decoration, decorative objects, carpeting, and the like, the project director may ask the building committee to approve a sample of work before proceeding with the project. However, members of the building committee should not try to second-guess the decisions of the project director or deal directly with the contractor regarding the approval of the work, as this will undermine the authority of the project director and send conflicting messages to the contractor. If members of the building committee have any concerns that need to be addressed, these should be communicated directly to the project director who can then pass them along to the contractor.

The management structure you create should have a sufficient number of checks and balances built in as a way of dealing with and avoiding any appearance of impropriety. For example, the architect or project director should inspect and approve all work before you pay for it. However, approval for actual payment should come only from a representative of the institution, such as the chair of the building committee, after the work has been approved by the project director. Check requisitions should never be solely authorized or approved by anyone not having some official role in the governance of the institution.

While construction is ongoing, the architect or project director should meet with the contractor on site and check the work at least once a month—more often as circumstances warrant. Frequent inspection of the work ultimately benefits both the owner and the contractor because it is often easier and less costly to correct unacceptable work before the project has progressed too far. This saves money for both the contractor and the owner and helps maintain good relations.

It is also, of course, the responsibility of the owner to pay the contractor in a timely manner. Billing arrangements should be outlined in the contract and be tailored to the scope of the project and the length of time it will take to complete it. For example, if the project is to be executed over a relatively short period of time, it may be only necessary to make three or four progress payments over the course of the contract.

However, if the project is being executed over a period of several months or years, the contractor should be paid on a monthly basis. It is also standard procedure for the owner to withhold ten percent of the amount billed in each invoice, called the retainage, from the contractor until the entire contract is finished and all the work is approved. In large or lengthy projects, the retainage may be reduced to five percent at the midpoint of the job, if the contractor has performed well and in a timely manner. These payment arrangements, of course, should be agreed upon in advance and incorporated into the contract.

If the construction project will cover a period of six months or more, the project director should submit a detailed financial accounting to the building committee on a periodic basis. This financial statement should describe all the ongoing work being done, its total cost, the value of the work completed to date, the balance to be completed, and the retainage withheld to date. These financial statements should be

far more detailed than the accounting systems described in Part 1 of this article, and split out the cost of labor and materials for each segment of the project. This construction financial statement will not describe any of the administrative support or fundraising expenses that typically accompany a capital campaign. However, it is helpful if the project director's own accounting codes are based on those of the principal report so that any inconsistencies or problems will be immediately apparent and easily tracked down. The details of this arrangement can be worked out between the project director and your accountant or bookkeeper.

Scheduling

At the beginning of construction, scheduling is usually an issue of great concern. Unless you have a pressing need to have the work finished by a particular date, ask the contractor to submit an estimated schedule and incorporate these beginning and ending dates into the contract before signing it. This puts the onus on the contractor to meet his or her own schedule. Of course,

many factors may interfere with this schedule, such as bad weather or unexpected conditions encountered during construction, necessitating re-negotiation during the course of the contract. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to work on the basis of a well-thought-out timetable rather than just a vague idea of when the work will be completed. After the contract is signed, you may want to ask the contractor for a more detailed project timetable so that, as the owner, you will know what work is being done at each point in the contract. This will allow you to schedule services and other activities with as little interference from the construction work as possible. Many congregations also include clauses in the contract that permits the owner to order construction suspended at 24 hours notice for any special services or activities that cannot usually be foreseen in advance, such as funerals or memorial services.