

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES HOUSING

ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

# DESIGN GUIDE

**CATHOLIC  
CHARITIES  
HOUSING**

**IDG**  
INTEGRATION DESIGN GROUP

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## JUSTIN'S STORY

Catholic Charities Housing has been around since 1968. We've built or acquired thousands of affordable homes—serving families across Colorado. Like most in our space, we've operated under the well-worn government mantra: "safe, decent, sanitary housing."

And sure, that's better than the alternative. But for me—especially in light of our Catholic mission—it always felt like aiming too low.

We're not just a landlord. We're Catholic Charities—the charitable arm of the Archdiocese of Denver—called to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ to the poor and those in need. We're called to serve the people Jesus would serve, in the way He would serve them.

Not long after I stepped into this role in 2015, the Archbishop visited one of our legacy properties. As we walked the halls, he asked one question that floored me: "What makes this place any different from every other affordable housing project in town?"

I had no answer.

We were doing a "good job" by government standards. But were we doing good in God's eyes? What was distinctly Catholic about what we built?

That question lit a fire in me.

I started imagining what our work would look like if Jesus was Chairman of the Board and St. Peter was Executive Director. The words that kept coming up were "heal" and "transform." That's what Jesus did. That's what the Church has always done.

We wanted to love our residents not just with services, but with sacred spaces—through architecture, beauty, and the built environment. Because beauty is not fluff—it moves people. It reminds them of dignity. It stirs the soul.

Even non-believers can walk into the Duomo in Florence or the Sistine Chapel and be brought to tears—not because they understand the theology, but because they feel the glory. Beauty has that kind of power. And our residents deserve to feel it too.

That's where this guide was born.

We partnered with Integration Design Group—experts in sacred architecture with a deep love for the Church—to build a design guide rooted in theology, beauty, and Catholic social teaching. It's not a style manual. It's a compass.

This guide is for anyone building housing that seeks to be more than functional. It's for those who want to build places that reflect God's love, move the human heart, and remind every resident:

You matter. You're made in God's image. And you are worthy of beautiful things.

To the IDG team—thank you. To Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila—thanks for challenging me. To those reading—we hope this inspires you. Whether you're Catholic or not, this guide is meant to spark ideas and serve your mission. Let's stop settling for "safe and decent." Let's build homes that heal and transform.

With Gratitude,



Justin Raddatz  
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## ADAM'S STORY

As a teenager in 1993, I found myself among a sea of joyful young people welcoming Pope John Paul II to Denver. Although more than three decades have passed, the encounter with the worldwide Church and its charismatic shepherd left a tremendous impression on me, and has shaped my life and work as an Architect.

I have been blessed to commit my professional life to developing Catholic architecture - whether focused on the sacred spaces that provide rich context for our celebration of the holy liturgy, or the many buildings and spaces that support the educational, social, and communal life of the parish, school, monastery, or ministry. Our work has been to discover and implement the design principles that help persons connect with God and with others; to connect with their origins and ultimate ends; to understand their deep identity as children of God made in His image; and be truly connected to one another as brothers and sisters.

This guidebook is the result of a rich collaboration; bringing together the expertise of the staff of the Housing division of Catholic Charities of Denver and the unique perspective of the architectural team at Integration Design Group. We have addressed the fundamental questions of mission and vision, but also distilled principles, strategies, tactics, and implementation, in a manner that would be practical and useful to project teams that are entrusted with projects which offer shelter and home to those most in need.

Our hope is that the big-picture questions at the beginning of this guidebook will help to frame the entire visioning, design, and construction process. We want to encourage leaders and stakeholders to set very high goals and to hold their teams accountable to the mission of housing when carried forward under the auspices and mission of the Church - to bring healing to those in need, and to introduce every person to the saving encounter with Jesus Christ. How can architecture encourage this? Can our facilities truly facilitate human flourishing? These have been the questions that we hope to have answered in the following pages.

I am thankful for the opportunity to help produce this guide and trust that it will bear great fruit. There is tremendous need for real authentic support and healing for those in difficult housing situations! And this guide should help us meet that need with meaningful buildings, well crafted, shaped with care that is rooted in love.

Our buildings must inspire the highest and best ends of the life of the human person. Despite difficulties, limitations, and uncertainties we recall the simple and profound words of St John Paul II, echoing the words of Jesus in the Gospels, to be not afraid!

*"The challenge is to make the Church's 'yes' to Life concrete and effective. The struggle will be long, and it needs each one of you. Place your intelligence, your talents, your enthusiasm, your compassion and your fortitude at the service of life! Have no fear. The outcome of the battle for Life is already decided, even though the struggle goes on against great odds and with much suffering. Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places, like the first Apostles who preached Christ and the Good News of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is the time to preach it from the rooftops!"*

- Saint Pope John Paul II  
World Youth Day, 1993  
Farewell Address

Onward,



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## READ ME

This Design Guide is intended to support Catholic Charities Housing project teams – developers, project managers, architects, designers, contractors, and other decision-makers – as they conceive and begin new projects. It is to help orient efforts and keep players and partners focused on critical common goals. It can be used as a reference to establish baseline criteria or as an authority for team accountability. But perhaps most of all, it should help to create a unity, or common approach, around Catholic Charities Housing project strategies and best practices; not just locally, but nationally.

This document aims to approach the problem of Catholic housing holistically. While much time, effort, research, and consideration has been invested in the development of this document, we still consider it living and evolving. It should engender further discussion and development. This is perhaps a Version 1.0, and we believe it can and should expand. It is not exhaustive.

We offer this as an optimistic act – a catalyst. To achieve everything in this document in one single project would be a dream. We understand there are constraints that set the guardrails for every project, especially limited financial resources. It's possible that a given project might only achieve a small portion of what's covered in this document and that might be considered a "win" depending on the context and constraints. But it is our responsibility to reach. The project team must believe that these things are possible, before they can ever be realized. For without a renewed vision, aspirational goals, and sincere efforts by all stakeholders, how will we accomplish and advance the mission that the Lord has placed in front of us?

Lastly, the Design Guide provides principles, foundation, and framework from which to build a project from the bottom-up, as opposed to top-down. However, that doesn't mean that the look of a housing project doesn't have a final aesthetic goal. As an extension of the Church, the physical result, the visible built outcome, should communicate Catholic identity in a recognizable way, while still looking like a home – a place in which people can dwell and flourish in community, and would love to be a part of.



## PROJECT STARTER CHEAT SHEET

If you only have five minutes and want to know the bare minimum required to impact a project, this is where to look. Don't stop here. Use this as part of your project kickoff meeting agenda.

### MISSION

**To create recognizably Catholic housing that reflects the dignity of every person and fosters healing, transformation, community, and encounter with Jesus Christ. Rooted in the Church's mission, we aim to build spaces where people can truly dwell and flourish.**

### HOW?

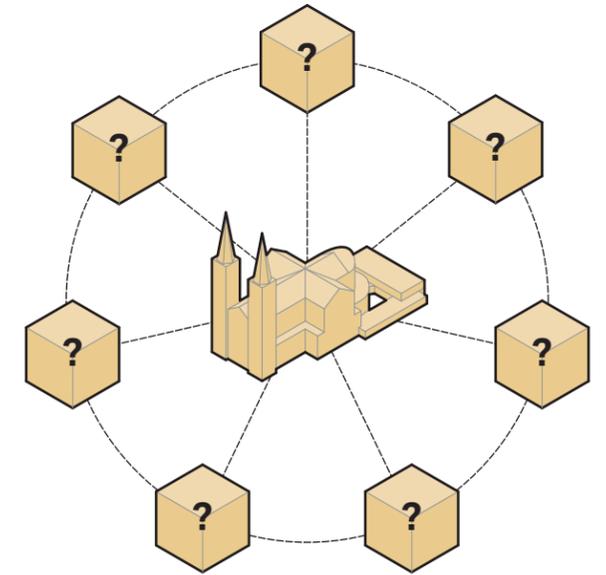
**Maximize community, communion, and connection to God, Creation, Ourselves, and Others through the crafting and integration of space & program, order & arrangement, form & substance, and identity.**

### BASELINE CATHOLIC HOUSING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- 1 Indoor communal eating and gathering space
- 2 Outdoor communal eating and gathering space with shared activity
- 3 A dedicated, occupiable, immersive, nature-based, outdoor space (i.e. garden)
- 4 Space for prayer and contemplation, personal and communal reflection

### PRIMARY CATHOLIC DIFFERENTIATORS IN TYPICAL HOUSING

- 1 Pilgrimage and procession concept (pathways, thresholds, order, hierarchy, repetition, etc.)
- 2 Verticality concept (both spatial volume, i.e. double-height lobby, and elevated privileged places, i.e. rooftop patio), including exterior form and roofline (i.e. tower, spire, gable, dormer)
- 3 Connecting materiality and architectural expression to the local cathedral. The cathedral as the hub, and each project connected as spokes on a wheel (figure above)
- 4 Identity and artwork integration (clear connections to the history and tradition of the Church)



# INTRODUCTION

To build Catholic housing, we have to start with the truth about the human person.

Each of us is made by God, in His image. We reflect the Holy Trinity—a communion of persons. We're created to love, to serve, and to live forever with God. That's the foundation upon which we build. Without it, we risk reducing housing to just shelter, and forgetting the Church's deeper mission: to **bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ**.

So what's the need?

Urbanization is exploding. The U.S. population in cities more than doubled between 1900 and 2000—and it's still rising. That puts serious pressure on housing. The poor and vulnerable are being pushed out and priced out. The need for affordable, transitional, supportive, and emergency housing is urgent—and growing.

The Church can't ignore this. We're called to meet this need—not just by providing buildings, but by **restoring people**. That's the deeper goal: **healing, transformation, and renewal in Christ**.

Housing is about more than physical shelter. It's about giving people a home—a place where they can belong, grow, and reconnect. A place where the person and the community can flourish together. That's the heart of the Church's mission of mercy.

There's already great work being done—especially around trauma-informed design and supportive housing. But Catholic housing brings a fuller vision. We're not just responding to social issues. We're answering the question: **How should we build if we really believe what the Church teaches about the human person?**

That question changes everything.

Because our goal isn't just to keep people off the streets. It's to build spaces where community can grow, where nature is celebrated, and where people can encounter Christ—whether they know His name yet or not.

We also can't ignore reality: every person is wounded. Sin has torn through the world, leaving isolation, violence, and despair in its wake. Sin cuts us off—from God, from ourselves, from others, and from creation. That's the fourfold alienation we're all dealing with. But Jesus came to restore what has been broken.

Catholic housing should help heal these relationships.

How? By **designing for reconnection**. With oneself. With neighbors. With beauty. With hope. With God.

That's the work. And it's holy work.

Our task is to take the goods of this world—land, money, materials, talent—and arrange them in a way that blesses others. Especially the vulnerable. With a spirit of **generosity and gratitude**, each project should be a gift to those in need. And the resources that are committed in making each place meaningful and unique are worth careful consideration, because **we are called to give our very best to Christ and His people**. Serving others is at the heart of what makes Catholic housing truly Catholic.

So we ask:

How do we plan, design, and build with this vision in mind?

Who needs to be at the table from day one?

What principles must guide each step?

How do we **stay faithful** to the truth about the human person? The wounded but wonderful reality behind each person's story?

How do we keep the end in mind—healing, transformation, and evangelization?

How do we proceed with **authentic hospitality** and the spirit of giving our best to others, to ensure that our resources are allocated toward creating a meaningful place for community?

We've been invited to join in the work the Holy Spirit is already doing—**redeeming lives, rebuilding community, and renewing the face of the earth**. Our role is to make space for that work to happen.

We're not just designing units. We're building places where people can dwell. Where they can heal. Where they can belong. Where they might come to know the love of Jesus.

The need is great. The mission is clear.

Let's build accordingly.





## THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

From beginning to end, Scripture tells a story of community.

God Himself is a communion—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God, three persons, united in love. That's our blueprint.

Jesus was born into the Holy Family. Joseph led and protected. Mary nurtured and loved. Together, they show us what a family rooted in faith looks like.

As an adult, Jesus formed another kind of family—His disciples. He lived with them, taught them, healed with them, challenged them. Their life together wasn't just spiritual—it was deeply communal. That's the beginning of the Church. And it's still how the Church is meant to live today.

**Jesus constantly drew others into this community—especially the ones no one else wanted.** Sinners. Lepers. Tax collectors. He didn't keep His distance. He healed them. He ate with them. He restored their dignity.

That mission didn't stop with Jesus. For 2,000 years, His followers—martyrs, missionaries, parents, priests—have poured out their lives to serve those in need. Catholic community is never closed in on itself. Love overflows.

Think of Abraham, welcoming three strangers into his tent. Or the Good Samaritan, stopping for a wounded man, paying for his care out of his own pocket. These aren't just nice stories—they're models for us.

**To be human is to be made for others. We were never meant to go it alone.** Community is our calling. It's also the place where we become who we are—sons and daughters of God, made in His image.

That's the kind of community Catholic housing should support: A place where people care for one another. A place where strangers become neighbors. A place where the wounded are seen and healed. **A place where we can all become more fully human—and more like Christ.**



**For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

**- 1 Cor 3:11**

## THE HOLY TRINITY

The Holy Trinity is the original community. **One God. Three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—united in perfect, self-giving love.** This isn't abstract philosophy. It's a living relationship. A communion where each person pours Himself out for the others. That's the model for every human relationship.

## HUMAN IDENTITY

We're made in the image of this God. That means **we're made for communion—not isolation.** We're built to live in love, in connection, in mutual giving.

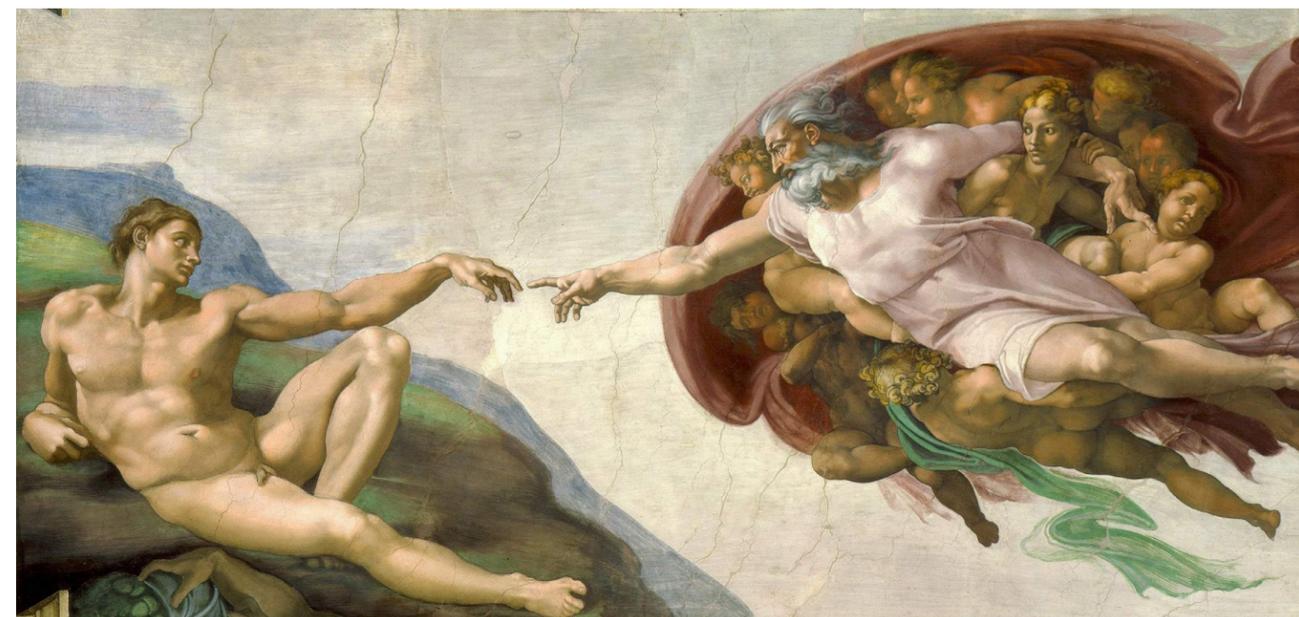
This isn't just theology. It's **the foundation for how we build families, neighborhoods, and housing that truly honors the human person.** Real communities where love, sacrifice, and cooperation aren't just nice—they're essential.

We're not just bodies. We're not just minds. We're persons, embodied souls—with reason, creativity, moral freedom, and a deep desire to connect.

And because every person is made for this kind of communion, **every person has innate dignity. No one is disposable. Everyone is created to belong.**



**Create housing that honors the dignity of the human person as a reflection of God**



## HOLY FAMILY & NATIVITY

The Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—is the model for every family. They lived with trust, simplicity, and generosity. They listened to God. They loved one another. They worked hard. They made a home where Christ was at the center.

That’s not just a nice story—it’s the blueprint.

**God didn’t send His Son into a palace or a political machine. He sent Him into a home. A family.** That tells us something deep: real transformation starts in the ordinary. In the ways we live together. In how we love.

St. John Paul II called the family the “vital environment” where every child should be welcomed with tenderness, and where each person grows in freedom, faith, and dignity.

The Church calls the family a “domestic church.” That means it’s not just a private unit—it’s a holy space meant to shine with the Gospel.

The family is the first community. The first place we learn to give, forgive, and belong. That’s why **Catholic housing must take the family seriously. It’s where human flourishing begins.**



**“The humble dwelling place in Nazareth is an authentic school of the Gospel. Here we admire, put into practice, the divine plan to make the family an intimate community of life and love.”**  
- Saint Pope John Paul II



**Create housing that welcomes children, enhances multigenerational living and family life**



## ABRAHAM'S HOSPITALITY: WELCOMING THE STRANGER

In Genesis 18, Abraham sees three strangers and rushes to welcome them. He offers water, washes their feet, gives them shade, and prepares a meal. He doesn't know who they are—but **he treats them like family.**

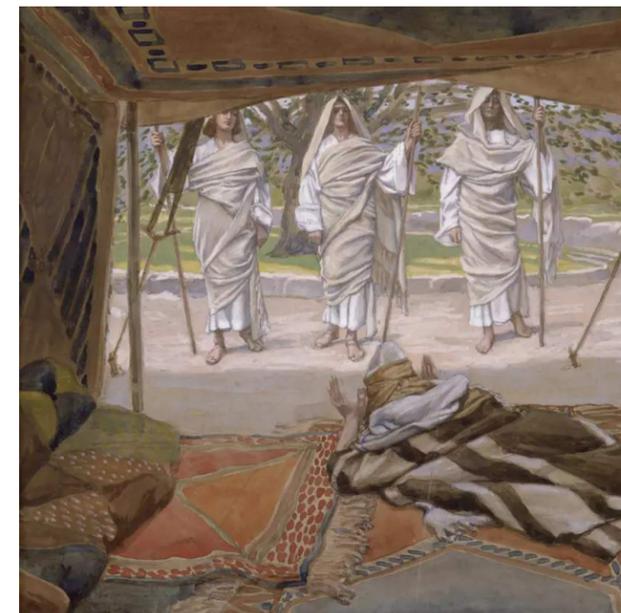
That moment changes everything.

The Church Fathers, like St. Cyril, saw these three visitors as a sign of the Holy Trinity. God Himself shows up at Abraham's tent—and Abraham responds with **radical hospitality.** The result? God blesses him and Sarah with a son, Isaac. From that promise, an entire nation is born.

This story shows that hospitality isn't just polite. It's sacred. When we welcome others, especially strangers, **we open the door to grace. We make space for God to act.**

Abraham's tent becomes a meeting place between heaven and earth. A simple human gesture becomes the turning point in salvation history.

That's the power of community. That's the power of making space for others—even when we don't fully understand what's at stake. God has blessed us with resources—tent, shelter, shade, home—into which we welcome those in need.



## THE GOOD SAMARITAN: ENCOUNTERING SUFFERING

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, and **redefines what it means to be a neighbor.**

A man is beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. Two respected religious figures walk past. But a Samaritan—considered an outsider—stops. He treats the man's wounds, lifts him up, pays for his care, and promises to return.

This isn't just a story about kindness. It's a blueprint for mercy. A charity that reaches out.

True community happens when we cross boundaries, reject indifference, and **enter into the suffering of others.** The Samaritan doesn't ask who the man is or where he's from. He just acts—with compassion, generosity, and courage.

Pope Francis taught that this parable shows how society can be rebuilt—by people who identify with the vulnerable, who refuse to exclude, and who live as neighbors. He reminds us we belong to **one human family.**

When we respond to suffering with love, we live out our deepest identity—made for communion, relationship, and life-giving community.





## JESUS MEETS THE LEPERS: EMBRACING THE UNTOUCHABLE

In Luke 17, Jesus heals ten lepers—outcasts, cut off from society because of their disease. Leprosy in biblical times wasn't just a medical issue—it meant total isolation from family, community, and worship. These men were physically suffering and socially ostracized.

Jesus doesn't avoid them. He moves toward them. With a word, **He restores not just their bodies but their place in the community.** He sees what others overlook: their inherent dignity.

This moment speaks volumes about how Jesus defines community. It's not closed or curated—it expands to welcome the hurting, the unclean, the forgotten. Healing isn't only personal. It's social and spiritual.

St. Francis of Assisi understood this deeply. As a young man, he was repulsed by lepers. But after encountering Christ, everything changed. He wrote:

"The Lord led me among them, and I showed mercy to them. What had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body."

That encounter transformed Francis—from fear to love, from pride to mercy. It restored not only the leper, but Francis himself. This is life in Christ.

**This is the power of radical community: it heals both the one who receives and the one who gives.**



**For the Son of Man has come  
to seek and to save  
what was lost.  
- Luke 19:10**

## EATING WITH TAX COLLECTORS: FELLOWSHIP WITH OUTCASTS

When Jesus dines with tax collectors—like Matthew (Matt 9) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19)—He **breaks every social rule** in the book.

Tax collectors were seen as traitors. They worked for Rome and got rich by squeezing their own people. Spiritually and socially, they were outcasts.

**But Jesus walks right into their homes. He eats with them. He calls them by name.**

This isn't just about being polite. It's a bold declaration: **No one is too far gone for grace.**

Jesus doesn't wait for them to clean up their lives before offering friendship. His presence is what leads to their change. Zacchaeus makes reparations and gives away half his wealth. Matthew drops everything to follow Him.

These stories flip the script on what real community looks like. It's not about who deserves a seat at the table. It's about **who needs to be invited, Building a bigger table.**

Jesus is calling us to do the same: to expand our circle, to reach beyond comfort and custom, and to **build spaces where even the most unlikely people find belonging.**



**Create housing that is warm  
and welcoming—an invitation  
to enter into community**





# A HISTORY OF CHARITY

For 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has taken Jesus' commandment seriously: love God, and love your neighbor (Matt 22:37–39).

That love has always shown up in concrete ways.

Monasteries. Hospitals. Schools. Orphanages. Shelters. Food banks. Refugee support. Hospice care.

Where there was human need, the Church stepped in—not just with charity, but with community.

These weren't just services. They were signs of a deeper truth: God is near. He has made his dwelling among us. And **His people are called to make His love visible through works of mercy.**

This is our inheritance—and our mission.

## ORPHANAGES & SHELTERS: PROVIDING HOME FOR THE HOMELESS

St. Basil the Great was one of the first to organize real, structured care for the poor and orphaned. Around the year 365 in present-day Turkey, he built Basiliada—a full-scale complex offering food, shelter, and medical care. It set the tone for what Christian charity could look like.

Since then, in every era—Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, modern times—religious orders have followed that lead. They built orphanages, homes for the elderly, shelters for the poor. But **they didn't stop at basic needs.** These places offered education, job training, and a path back into society. **They helped people rebuild their lives and reconnect with their families.**

The list of saints who lived this out is long: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Martin de Porres, St. Angela Merici, St. Frances of Rome, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Jeanne Jugan, St. Mother Teresa, and St. Frances Cabrini—who alone founded 67 homes for orphans in her lifetime.

**Catholic care isn't about handouts. It's about restoring dignity. Rebuilding family. Giving people a future.**

Left: Orphans at West Park, NY, established 1890. Right: Santa Maria della Scala, Europe's longest-lasting hospital, Sienna, Italy, served from roughly 1090 to 1995. Far Right: Georgetown University, oldest Catholic university in the US, founded 1789.

## HOSPITAL SYSTEM: TENDING TO THE SICK AND WOUNDED

The Church has always heeded Jesus' call to heal the sick. Today, it's the largest non-government provider of healthcare in the world—running about a quarter of all healthcare facilities globally.

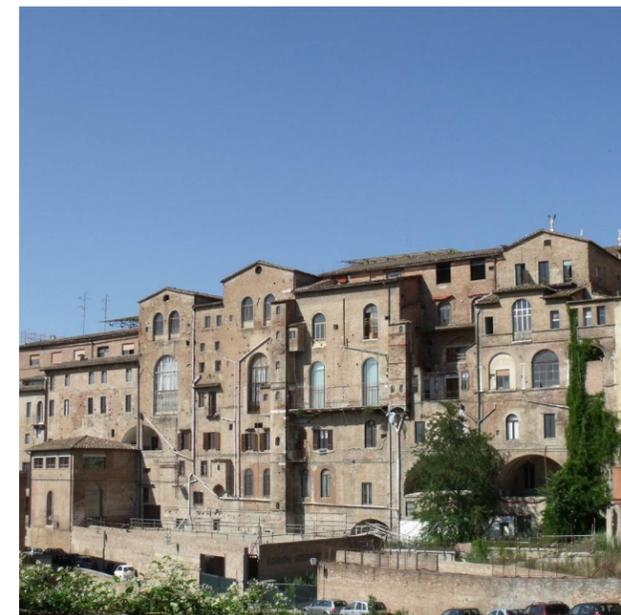
This isn't new. The Church was building hospitals long before governments stepped in. One of the first was founded in Rome around the year 400 by St. Fabiola. Over time, hospitals sprang up across Europe—usually right next to and operated by churches, monasteries, or convents. **They weren't just treating broken bodies. They cared for the soul.**

Even important modern institutions have Catholic roots. The Mayo Clinic started as St. Mary's Hospital, founded by the Sisters of Saint Francis in Rochester, Minnesota.

**Catholic care has always been holistic: physical, emotional, spiritual. It starts in the mother's womb and continues through natural death. That's the legacy we carry forward.**



**Create housing that treats the whole person, not just keeps them warm at night**



**Create housing with purpose: true, good, and beautiful**



## UNIVERSITIES & SCHOOLS: FOSTERING INTELLECTUAL LIFE

In a world where most people couldn't read, the Church built schools—first in monasteries, then in cities. Places like Paris, Bologna, and Oxford became the first universities. They weren't side projects. They were mission work. **The Church saw learning as a path to truth—and truth as a path to God.**

Priests and monks preserved ancient texts. But they didn't just guard old knowledge—they asked new questions. They believed faith and reason weren't enemies, but partners.

Theology was at the center, not the edge. It shaped how other subjects were studied—law, science, philosophy. Thinkers like Thomas Aquinas used logic and faith side by side. He showed that **truth doesn't contradict itself**, and that reason can lead us closer to God.

The Church didn't just teach people the truths of our existence. It taught them **how to think—with clarity, discipline, and purpose.** Today, that mindset still shapes education, which is another component of human dignity.

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Church's social teaching is a powerful guide for how we can live out the Gospel in our communities. It's all about responding to the real-world struggles and opportunities people face. **The Church helps us understand how to live in a just, charitable, merciful, and Christ-like way**—because we're made for relationships. Our lives are intertwined with others, and the Church shows us how to navigate those relationships.

The Church's social doctrine comes in many forms. Here are a few key documents that provide these teachings:

- **Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labor):** Pope Leo XIII - May 15, 1891
- **Quadragesimo Anno (After Forty Years) - On Reconstruction of the Social Order:** Pope Pius XI - May 15, 1931 - the 40th anniversary of Rerum Novarum
- **Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress):** Pope John XXIII - May 15, 1961 - the 60th anniversary of Rerum Novarum
- **Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth):** Pope John XXIII - Apr 11, 1963 - on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty
- **Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples):** Pope Paul VI - Mar 27, 1967
- **Laborem Exercens (On Human Work):** Pope John Paul II - Sep 14, 1981 - the 90th anniversary of Rerum Novarum
- **Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (20th Anniversary of Populorum Progressio):** Pope John Paul II - Dec 30, 1987
- **Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year):** Pope John Paul II - May 1, 1991 - the 100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum
- **Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life):** Pope John Paul II - Mar 25, 1995
- **Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love):** Pope Benedict XVI - Dec 15, 2005
- **Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth):** Pope Benedict XVI - Jun 29, 2009
- **Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home):** Pope Francis - May 24, 2015
- **Fratelli Tutti (On Fraternity and Social Friendship):** Pope Francis - Oct 3, 2020

The Vatican's Charter on the Rights of the Family (1983) also affirms **the right of families to decent housing**. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, emphasizes loving the poor (particularly sections 2447-2449). Religious orders like the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Vincentians have been leaders in serving the marginalized—whether homeless, elderly, or poor.



For I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
a stranger and you welcomed me,  
naked and you clothed me,  
ill and you cared for me,  
in prison and you visited me...  
whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,  
you did for me.  
- Matthew 25:31-46

Catholic Charities carries this mission forward, providing services for the most vulnerable—homeless, immigrants, children, families—living out Christ's call to love and serve others.

Bottom: "Homeless Jesus"  
Sculpture by Timothy Schmalz

The figure in the sculpture appears like any homeless person until one notices nail holes in the feet.





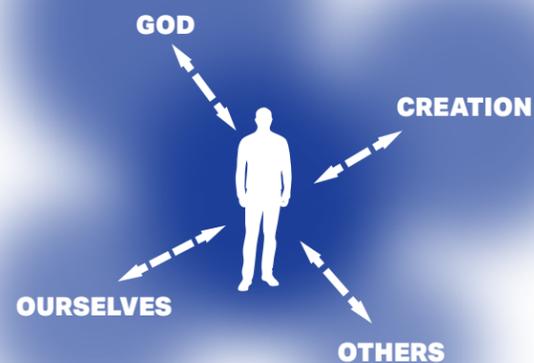
# CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

When we look at the foundation laid by Jesus and how the Church has built on it throughout history, how should we approach planning and building supportive and transitional housing today? It's not enough to just provide shelter. Yes, a roof over someone's head is important, but housing must do more. It must honor the dignity of every person—made for relationship and made in God's image. From the beginning, housing should support a person's journey of hope, healing, transformation, and ultimately, encounter with God.

**Affordable housing should lift people up—toward God. We are His children, meant to live in right relationship with Him and each other.**

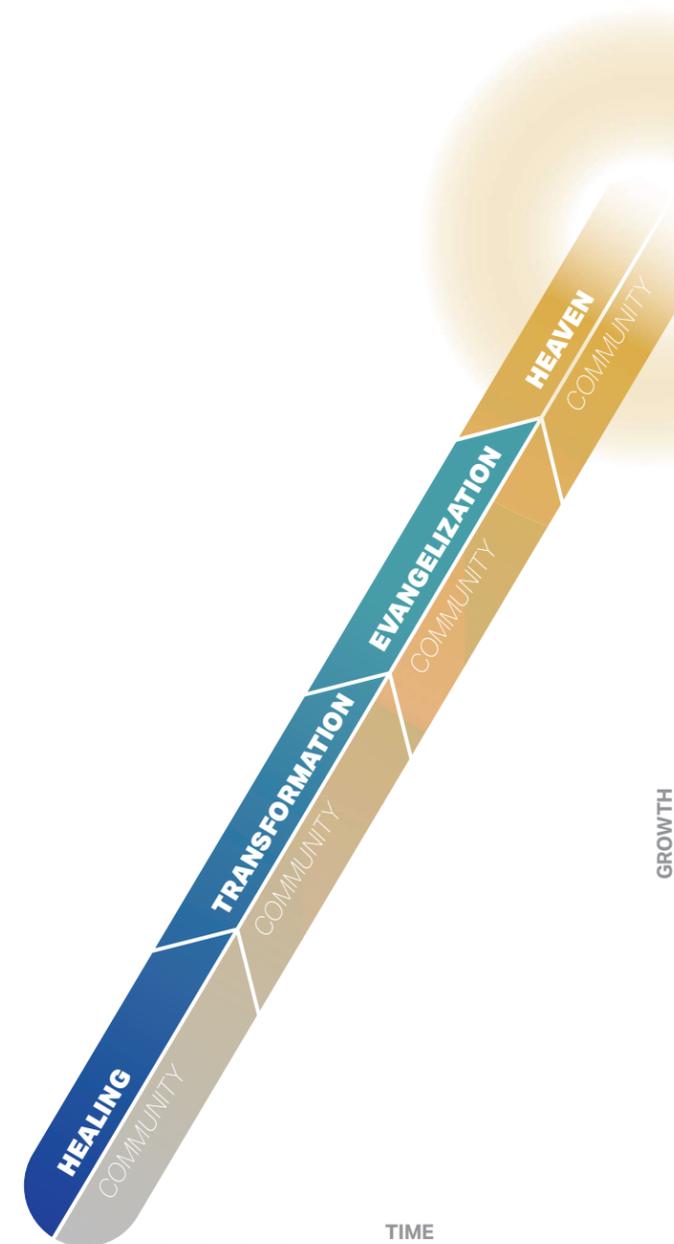
Our final goal is eternal life with God. But sin stops us from reaching that goal. It separates us from God, creation, ourselves, and others. Can housing help fix this? Yes. To build places of healing and hope, we must reverse those divisions. **We need to strengthen connections—to God, creation, ourselves, and others.** If we can do that, we restore communion and community, giving each resident the chance to move from healing to heaven.

## MAXIMIZE RESIDENT CONNECTIVITY



# A RESIDENT'S JOURNEY

No matter where a resident comes from or what challenges they've faced, everyone needs healing. The Gospels show us that—rich or poor, healthy or sick, pious or prideful—Jesus came for all. Catholic housing should aim for something more. **Over time, every resident should move from Healing to Transformation, to Evangelization, and ultimately to Heaven.** The deeper the community connection, the further they can progress on that path. Each person's relationships within the community provide opportunities for true communion.



Create housing that brings people together

# BUILDING COMMUNITY

Before we dive into Part Two: Defining Environment, we need to look more closely at the four types of connection that make community possible. These will shape how we plan, design, and build Catholic housing that does more than shelter—it forms people.

We're not just spirits or bodies. We're both—embodied souls. That means **we connect to the world and to each other through our senses**: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

The more our senses are activated in healthy, meaningful ways, the more alive and connected we feel. **When our environment engages our body, it can stir the heart and awaken the soul.**

But the opposite is also true. Numbing our senses—through addiction, distraction, entertainment, or scrolling on screens—isolates us. It shrinks our world, impedes our wonder, and stifles our humanity.

Good design can help reverse that. Housing should aim to reawaken the senses. It should **draw people out of isolation and back into relationship—with God, with creation, with themselves, and with others.**

That's the goal: to build spaces where all four of these connections can grow. That's how we begin to heal the damage of sin. That's how we move people toward real, lasting community.

Let's break down what each of these connections looks like.



## CONNECTION TO GOD

Turning toward God, accepting His love and guidance. Living in harmony with the source of life and salvation. Understanding our identity as God's child, brother, sister, and friend, created out of love and meant for good. Engaging in prayer, sacrifice, and seeking to know and do His will.



## CONNECTION TO CREATION

Called to care for creation, understanding ourselves as creatures gifted with life by the Creator. Experiencing creation through our senses as a beautiful, joyful gift. Everything in creation has value in God's eyes. We're called to live in harmony with creation, serving as good stewards.



## CONNECTION TO OURSELVES

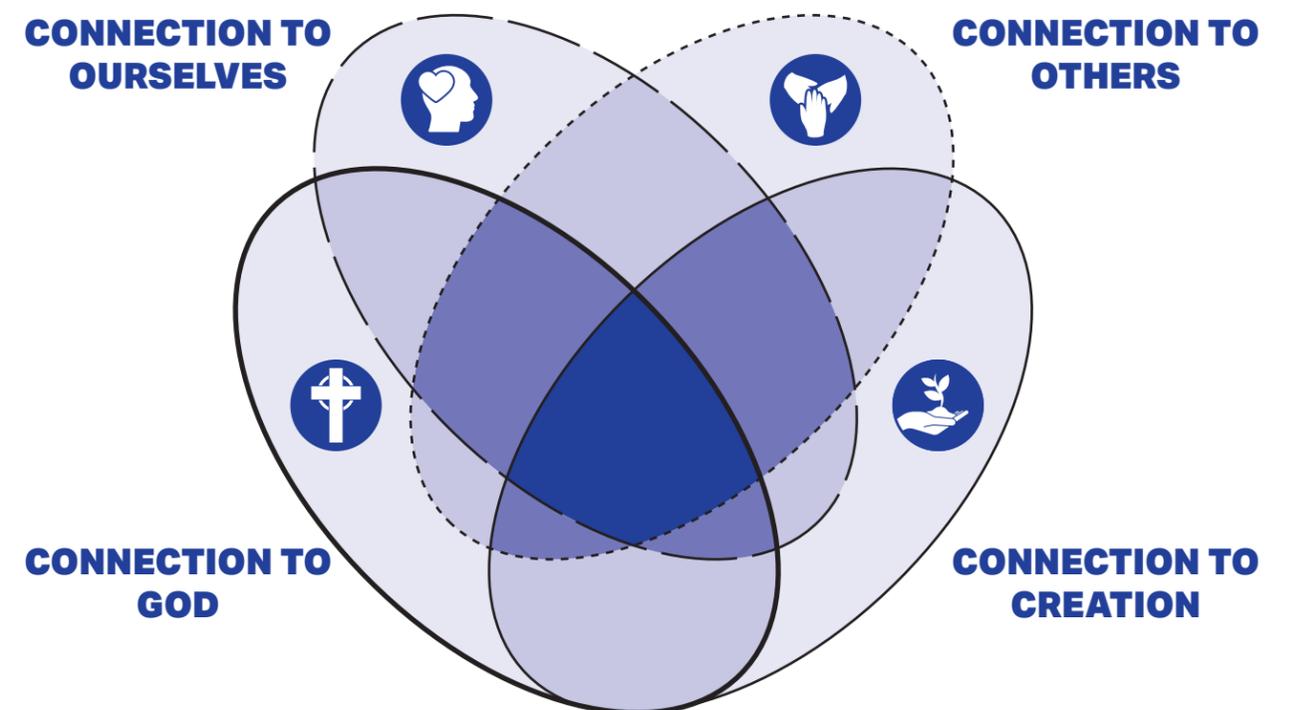
Recognizing and celebrating the unity of body and soul in the image of God. Our true identity comes from self-awareness and living in truth. We overcome disintegration caused by broken relationships, misuse of media and technology, and trauma. These forces disrupt our sense of purpose and harmony, preventing us from truly understanding who we are.



## CONNECTION TO OTHERS

Living in love and communion with others—unity, peace, and cooperation. Seeing others as brothers and sisters in Christ, each a unique image of God to be respected, honored, and loved. This is shown through kindness, understanding, and charity—desiring what is best for others. Sin divides us, but healing is needed to restore unity and overcome the wounds that cause alienation.

An environment that facilitates connections to God, Creation, Ourselves, and Others gives residents the greatest opportunity to grow in community and in communion. The overlap of all four represents the ideal environmental condition.



# PT. II

## DEFINING ENVIRONMENT



## THE RIGHT ELEMENTS

Part Two is your toolbox.

This is a menu of ingredients—programs, spaces, and visual cues—that can shape a housing project into a place where people encounter healing, transformation, and faith. Everything here is designed to support the four key connections from Pt. I: to God, Creation, Ourselves, and Others.

These aren't just abstract ideas. This is where they show up in real ways. **Physical space changes how people think, behave, and grow.** A hallway can isolate. A courtyard can connect. Light, texture, and layout all speak—so we need to design with intention.

### FULL IMMERSION

When you're thinking about program, don't forget about the human experience of that space. We already established that we connect to the world—and to each other—through our senses, and the more our environment engages them in healthy, meaningful ways, the more alive we feel. When our bodies are awake, our hearts can open.

So here's the challenge: Can a housing project be so rich, so sensory, so real—that it starts pulling people away from their screens? Can beauty, texture, scent, and sound help people **become more present** to God and to each other? Design that grabs the senses and gives people something better than scrolling.

Think big—but don't overlook the small stuff. **Sound matters. Smell matters.** So does the feel of a doorknob or the scent of a garden.

Could a quiet room play soft Gregorian chant? Could doorbells sound like chapel chimes? What if there were a piano in the lobby for anyone to play? Could seasonal incense mark liturgical time with scent instead of signage? What if a courtyard smelled like rosemary or basil instead of mulch? What if the air felt sacred—without saying a word?

The right design choices don't just decorate a space. **They wake people up.** And that's when connection starts.

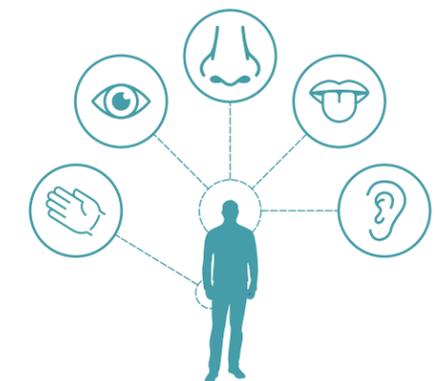
## A WORD ON SITE MAXIMIZATION & GREEN SPACE

In most housing projects, the instinct is to max out the site—pack in as many units as possible, go as tall and dense as the code allows. But that often leaves no real green space. No room to breathe. That's a problem.

As we've already seen, connection to **nature isn't a luxury—it's essential.** People need to feel grass underfoot, sun on their skin, and wind in the trees. Children need to dig in the dirt. These things heal, ground, and humanize.

Maximizing density might look good on paper. But it can work against building a true community. It's worth answering this question at the outset: **Are we designing for numbers—or for people?**

Plan from the start to carve out space for nature. Not just a patch of lawn, but a real, immersive, engaging, outdoor place people can walk through, rest in, and return to. It's not wasted space. It's soul space. It connects and communicates.



**MAXIMIZE SENSORY ACTIVATION**

# SPACE & PROGRAM

This first section uses tables that act like a heat map, indicating intensity and opportunity. Each element is rated based on how strongly it supports each of those four core connections. The darker the shade, the more impact. These aren't hard data points—they're conversation starters. Use them to compare, prioritize, and make choices as a team.

As you explore each item, ask simple but essential questions: Does this program element help people connect—with others, with nature, with themselves? Does it encourage play, conversation, stillness, or creativity?

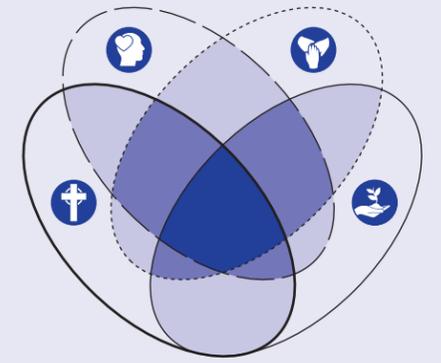
Can someone breathe deeply here? Can they be seen here? Can they be alone here?

Life shifts. Moods change. People and families grow. **A good housing project adapts, doesn't stifle, and gives residents room to make choices.**

Lastly, the images in this section aren't specifically Catholic in form or symbolism. They're simply **strong examples of how space and program can work well.** The next sections will show how to layer Catholic meaning—through order, form, and identity—onto these foundational elements.



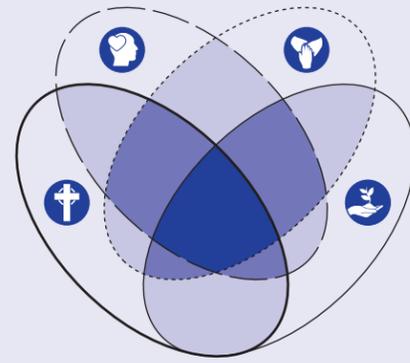
SUPPORTING RESIDENTS' HEALING, TRANSFORMATION & EVANGELIZATION IN COMMUNITY



 CONNECTION TO GOD	 CONNECTION TO CREATION	 CONNECTION TO OURSELVES	 CONNECTION TO OTHERS
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PROGRAMMING	CONNECTION TO GOD	CONNECTION TO CREATION	CONNECTION TO OURSELVES	CONNECTION TO OTHERS
A. EXT. EATING / GATHERING				
A1. GAZEBO / PAVILION				
A2. GRILLING / PICNIC AREA				
A3. OUTDOOR KITCHEN				
A4. PLAZA / COURTYARD				
A5. PORCH / PATIO				
A6. ROOF TERRACE				
B. EXT. PLAY / RECREATION				
B1. BASKETBALL COURT				
B2. BICYCLE STORAGE				
B3. CLUBHOUSE LOUNGE				
B4. DOG PARK / DOG RUN				
B5. HOT TUB / SPA				
B6. LAWN GAMES				
B7. OUTDOOR FITNESS				
B8. PICKLEBALL COURT				
B9. PLAYGROUND				
B10. PLAYING FIELD				
B11. PROJECTION WALL				
B12. SPLASH PAD				
B13. SWIMMING POOL				
B14. TRAIL / WALKING PATH				
B15. YARD				

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS' HEALING, TRANSFORMATION & EVANGELIZATION IN COMMUNITY



CONNECTION TO GOD



CONNECTION TO CREATION



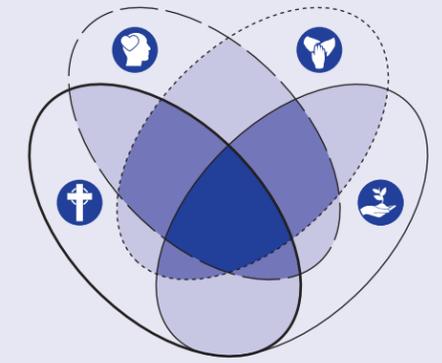
CONNECTION TO OURSELVES



CONNECTION TO OTHERS

	CONNECTION TO GOD	CONNECTION TO CREATION	CONNECTION TO OURSELVES	CONNECTION TO OTHERS
<b>C. EXT. NATURE / GARDENS</b>				
C1. COMPOSTING AREA				
C2. COMMUNITY GARDEN				
C3. FIRE PITS				
C4. GREEN ROOF				
C5. GREENHOUSE				
C6. LAWN				
C7. OBSERVATION DECK				
C8. OPEN SPACE				
C9. ORNAMENTAL GARDEN				
C10. POND / FOUNTAIN				
C11. REFLECTING POOL				
C12. RAIN GARDEN				
C13. SCULPTURE GARDEN				
C14. TREE GROVE				
<b>D. INT. COMMON AREAS</b>				
D1. ADVISEMENT / COUNSEL.				
D2. ART STUDIO / CRAFT				
D3. CHAPEL				
D4. CLASSROOM				
D5. COMPUTER LAB				
D6. EVENT / MEETING				
D7. FITNESS / WELLNESS				
D8. GAME ROOM				

SUPPORTING RESIDENTS' HEALING, TRANSFORMATION & EVANGELIZATION IN COMMUNITY



CONNECTION TO GOD



CONNECTION TO CREATION



CONNECTION TO OURSELVES



CONNECTION TO OTHERS

	CONNECTION TO GOD	CONNECTION TO CREATION	CONNECTION TO OURSELVES	CONNECTION TO OTHERS
<b>D. INT. COMMON AREAS</b>				
D9. HEALTH CLINIC				
D10. INDOOR PLAY AREA				
D11. LAUNDRY W/ LOUNGE				
D12. LIBRARY / READING				
D13. LOBBY / ENTRANCE				
D14. MAIL / PACKAGE ROOM				
D15. MEDIA ROOM / THEATER				
D16. MUSIC ROOM				
D17. PRAYER ROOMS				
D18. RE & UPCYCLING				
D19. STUDY / WORKSPACE				
D20. SUN ROOM				
<b>E. INT. EATING / GATHERING</b>				
E1. COFFEE BAR				
E2. COMMUNITY KITCHEN				
E3. COMMUNITY LOUNGE				
E4. GRAB 'N' GO				
E5. RESTAURANT / CAFE				
<b>F. UNITS</b>				
F1. BALCONIES				
F2. CORRIDOR NOOKS				
F3. HOME ALTAR NICHE				
F4. UNIT DINING TABLE				

## A. EXTERIOR EATING / GATHERING

Sharing a meal is one of the most powerful ways people connect—with each other and with God. It's everywhere in Catholic tradition:

Jesus at the wedding feast.

Dinner with sinners and outsiders.

The father welcoming the prodigal son with a feast.

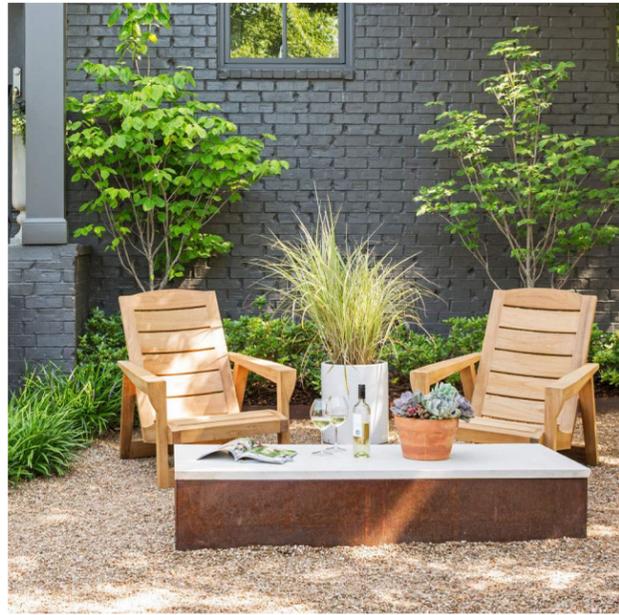
The Last Supper.

And today, the Eucharist—the heart of every Catholic Mass—is sacrifice and a meal.

Even outside of worship, meals matter. From holiday gatherings to everyday dinners, breaking bread brings people together. It's prayer. It's support. **It's love made visible.** (See CCC 1657–1658.)

That's why housing design must make room for it. Create space for people to gather, cook, and eat together—comfortably and often. Think big tables. Covered patios. Spaces that work for two people or twenty. Spaces that work year-round.

**A good meal starts with a good welcome. And a good community often starts around a shared table.**



## B. PLAY / RECREATION

Rest, play, and joy aren't extra. They're essential.

Scripture makes it clear:

"There is a time to weep and a time to laugh... a time to mourn and a time to dance." (Eccl 3:4)

"To rejoice, eat, drink, and enjoy the fruit of your work—that's a gift from God." (Eccl 3:12–13)

Pope John Paul II, a lifelong outdoorsman and skier, saw **play and sport as real pathways to holiness.** They build virtue. They strengthen community. They help people become more fully human.

So in housing projects, recreation isn't a luxury. It's **part of the plan for human flourishing.** Even on tight sites or budgets, something should be set aside for play. A basketball hoop. A swing. A walkable loop. A garden. Something that lets people move, breathe, and enjoy being alive. And if the project is near a park, trail, or walkable neighborhood—lean into that. It's a major asset.

**Design for joy and even wonder.** They matter more than we often realize.



## C. NATURE / GARDENS

Gardens aren't optional. They're sacred.

The story of **humanity starts in a garden**. Eden was the original paradise—where humanity lived in harmony with God, creation, and each other. That's what we're meant to rediscover.

Jesus chose a garden to begin His Passion. In Gethsemane, He wrestled with suffering—and surrendered to God's will. **It was a garden that marked the turning point in salvation.**

For centuries, Catholic monasteries have used gardens as places to grow food and grow in faith. They're restorative places of beauty, quiet, healing, and encounter.

Gardens show up again and again in Catholic life: Lourdes. Monasteries. Grottoes. Scripture. They're not just background—they're cultivated **spaces of transformation.**

So when building housing, don't stop at trees for privacy or shrubs for curb appeal. Go deeper. Design a real garden. A place to walk, pray, breathe, and be. **A space that says: this ground is set apart.** If possible, shield it from streets, cars, and mechanical equipment. Connect it to communal indoor gathering spaces like lounges or kitchens. Make it pedestrian-friendly and immersive. Let people come alone or gather in twos or threes.

Green space isn't just "nice to have." It's part of the soul of a Catholic community.



## D. INTERIOR - COMMON AREAS

Interior common areas should do more than meet a need. They should **lift the spirit.**

A great space can change someone's day. Even shift their mindset. The right design can gently open people up—to one another and to something greater.

Start with this question: Can this space lift minds and hearts **beyond the ordinary**? If the housing is next to a church, lean on it. You may not need to include a dedicated prayer room if the sacred space is steps away. Let the parish carry the spiritual weight when it can—but when it can't, design accordingly.

Always aim to offer a range of common areas that work for individuals and groups. Spaces where people can retreat—or connect. **Where spontaneous encounters feel natural.** Small design moves matter.

What if the mailroom opens to a garden? What if a welcome desk is nearby, where a neighbor or staff member offers a kind word or just a smile? What if grabbing your mail turns into a chat in the sunshine?

That's how culture begins—in little moments. But here's the truth: **no building can build community alone. People do that.** If you want these spaces to come alive, they need someone to own them. Not just manage them—**animate them.** Plan events. Notice who's missing. Invite people in.

Common areas are just walls waiting for hospitality. But with the right care? They make space for the **heart of the community.**



## E. INTERIOR - EATING / GATHERING

Interior kitchens and gathering areas carry the same weight—and potential—as outdoor spaces. They're not just about meals. They're about **love, welcome, and connection**.

The kitchen is the heart of any home. **Feeding someone isn't just hospitality or sustenance—it's a spiritual act.**

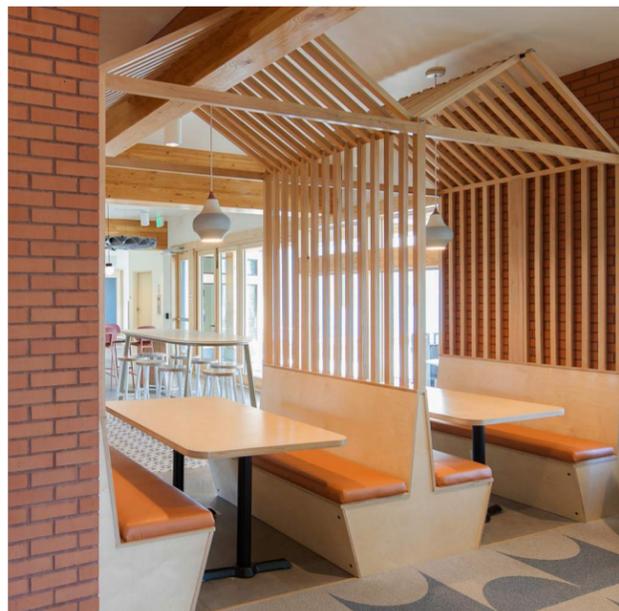
Mother Teresa said: "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one."

St. John Chrysostom: "Let no one go away from your house hungry. If you can't give food, give love."

St. John Paul II taught that cooking and sharing meals expresses unity, care, and human dignity.

These are not just practical tasks. They're sacred ones. So design accordingly. Make sure the kitchen connects to spaces for gathering and eating—indoors and out. Let those areas flow into each other, so people can move freely depending on the weather, group size, or occasion.

The goal is simple: Create spaces where relationships form naturally, where **people feel seen, fed, and at home**. Let every layout preach welcome. Let every shared meal point to communion.



## F. UNITS

Apartment units are where housing projects fulfill or fail.

They're the spaces people actually live in—where healing, dignity, and transformation have to take root. Yes, good design matters. Units should be efficient and cost-effective. But that's just the baseline. A great unit doesn't just work—it uplifts. It **invites a person to be at peace, to feel seen, and to belong**.

That means going beyond the checklist: 9-foot ceilings, natural light, views, walk-in closets, in-unit laundry, pantry—those are basics. What else makes a unit feel like home?

Start with agency. The unit is often the only part of the project that truly belongs to the resident. **It becomes a reflection of who they are—their hopes, routines, beliefs, and relationships**. So give them space to express that.

Add a small nook outside each door. A spot to place a flowerpot, a piece of art, an icon or statue. It's simple, but it says: "This is yours." And when people see a little bit of each other's lives and values on display, it builds community, recognition, and identity.

Include a niche for a home altar. A small recessed wall space—just a few inches deep—can become a sacred place for prayer, sacramentals, and reflection. It reminds residents **they're not alone**. God is near. And they've connected to a larger faith community.

Prioritize a dining table over a kitchen island. Islands are efficient, but they tend to promote rushed mornings and isolation. Dining tables **slow things down**. They encourage shared meals, conversations, board games—real connection. They help **transform survival into communion**.

These are small moves, for both individuals and families. But they speak volumes. They tell the resident: You matter. **You're not just housed—you're home.**





# ORDER & ARRANGEMENT

It's in the universe. It's in nature. It's in God Himself. **As Catholics, we live by rhythms that reflect that order:**

Morning prayer. Grace before meals. The Rosary. Sunday Mass. The liturgical calendar. There's a structure to the day, the week, the year. Even the Mass has a precise flow.

Tradition carries an internal logic. Order helps us make sense of life. It forms us. It grounds us. It **reminds us of what's true.**

Disorder—whether in a person or a place—pulls us away from that truth. It amplifies confusion, stress, and detachment.

**This Design Guide is the antithesis of randomness.** It's about building spaces that reflect the deeper order of reality—so residents can step into peace, stability, and purpose.

## COHERENCE

Order has a companion: coherence. It is the expression or evidence of order.

Coherence means **everything fits together.** The parts match the whole. The form reflects the purpose. God is coherent—unchanging, eternal, and timeless. His truth doesn't shift with trends or bend to popular opinion. So our architecture should reflect that.

A Catholic housing project is not just another piece of cultural production. It's **an extension of the Church.** It should feel like it belongs to something bigger, deeper, and older than the moment. Contemporary design often chases the appearance of novelty. **Catholic design should point to eternity.**

So what does concrete coherence look like? A consistent design language that repeats and reinforces—across buildings, spaces, and details. Visual harmony between materials, forms, and functions. **A layout that aligns with a deeper logic**—not just what looks sleek, but rhythm and hierarchy that anticipates, builds, and fulfills. Symbols and elements that echo the Church's identity—not mimic it, but clearly resonate with it.

**Coherence is what allows a place to feel intentional, rooted, and whole.** It's not about copying the past—it's about joining a living tradition with clarity and conviction.

## ORIENTATION & SYMMETRY

**Architecture should point somewhere.** In a church, everything orients toward the altar—the heart of sacrificial worship. Walls, aisles, arches, and light all guide the body, eye, and mind toward Christ in the Eucharist. The building itself even orients towards the east, anticipating the second coming of Christ. This same principle of orientation applies to Catholic housing. The center of attention is different but the tools are the same. Use symmetry, axis, procession, and flow to create focus. Draw people toward what matters. **What's the anchor of the project?** A shared kitchen? A garden? A chapel or welcome area? Define it. Then let the design revolve around it. **Spaces that lead somewhere form people who do the same.**



## HIERARCHY & HARMONY

Hierarchy shows what matters. It **makes priorities visible.** It communicates, without words, what's most important—what to focus on, what to trust, where to go.

A **strong design has a clear hierarchy.** It doesn't leave people guessing. It feels intentional, rooted, and confident. Hierarchy works hand-in-hand with rhythm and balance. Together, they create order, harmony, and a sense of home. They help people feel grounded—like they belong somewhere stable, timeless, and whole.





## FORM & SUBSTANCE

Form and substance are what people actually see, touch, and feel. They're the materials, shapes, textures, colors, and surfaces that **bring ideas to life**. If order is the blueprint, form is the build. Form makes visible what we believe. It communicates without words. It can welcome or intimidate, inspire or isolate. In Catholic housing, form matters because it's what **makes faith, charity, and mercy visible**. Does the building feel rooted, human, and dignified? Does it suggest beauty, mystery, reverence? Could someone look at the silhouette and know—this place means something deeper? The challenge is this: **how can form show the love that inspired the project, its Catholic roots, without needing a sign to say it?**

## VERTICALITY

Verticality is a hallmark of Catholic design. Tall, soaring spaces reach toward heaven, showing our deep desire to connect with God. High ceilings **lift the eyes and spirit**, inviting reflection and awe. Big, open interiors can remind us how vast and majestic God is, making us feel part of something greater. Vertical shapes also **set buildings apart from everyday life, signaling importance and presence** in the community.

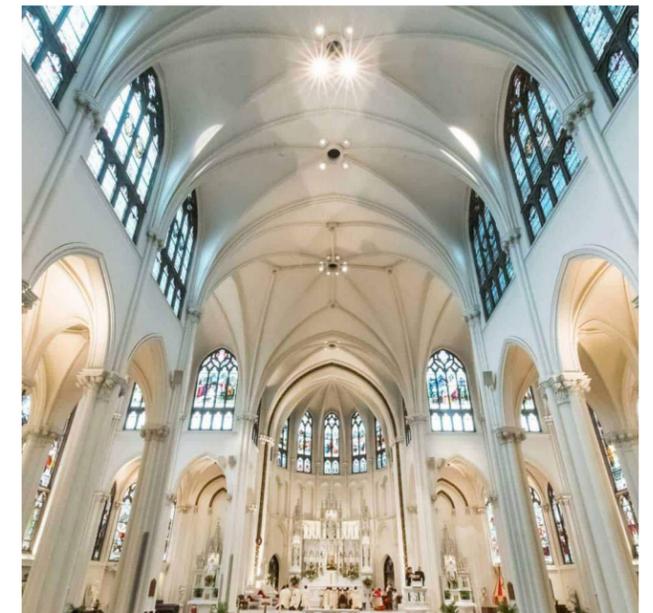
Housing often goes the opposite way—low ceilings to save money create “pancake” buildings that feel cramped and flat. But adding vertical moments changes everything. Think double-height lobbies, central atriums, or skylights that bring a slice of sunlight through corridors. Tall common areas or creatively designed stairs can bring height without wasting space. Top-floor lofts, rooftop patios, or varied rooflines break flat, characterless, expression and are opportunities for experience. **High up spaces are privileged places to be, elevating the human person.**

Every effort toward verticality adds dignity to housing. It helps people feel seen, valued, and connected. It opens space for healing and community. **Elevation isn't just design—it's a path to transformation.**



Create housing that elevates  
body, mind, and spirit

Below: The dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City offers panoramic views of Rome and is open to all visitors.



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE

## MATERIALITY

The Church has lasted 2,000 years because it's built on an eternal foundation. We are "living stones" and our buildings should reflect that. Materials matter. They are crafted, shaped, formed, and placed to **tell the world what we believe**.

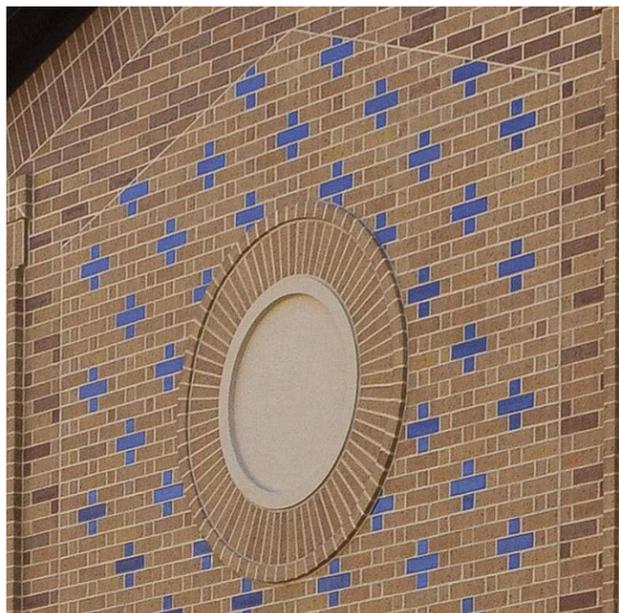
If Catholic housing is an extension of the Church, it should feel solid, lasting, and worthy. That means using materials that **age with grace**—brick, stone, copper, timber. These don't just last; they grow more beautiful over time. Painted fiber cement siding? It's cheap, artificial, common, and forgettable. Avoid it if possible.



Even with a tight budget, we can be strategic. Using higher-end materials in key places—the entry, corners, or shared spaces—where they'll make the biggest **impact**.

Inside, go for wood, tile, or stone over carpet, paint, or exposed concrete. These finishes have a solidarity, authenticity, and texture that **ground people in beauty and dignity**. They quietly say: "This was built by human hands, for you. You matter. This place matters."

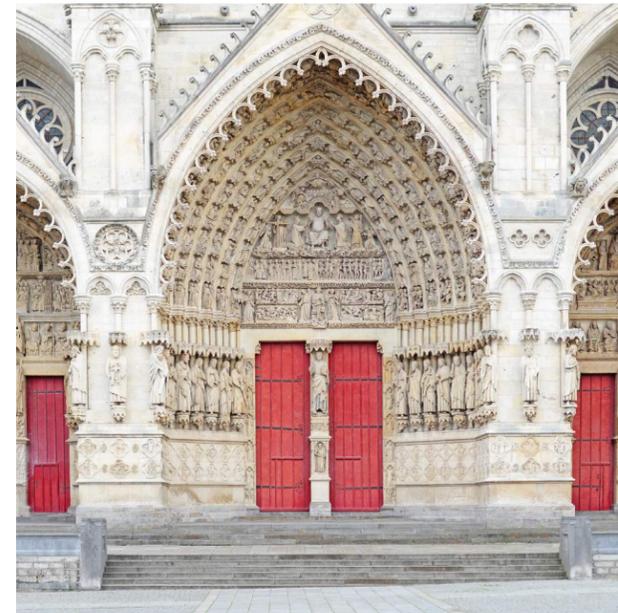
**More permanence** in materials means more stability, more endurance, deeper identity, more connection to a God who created the world and called it "good".



## ORNAMENTATION

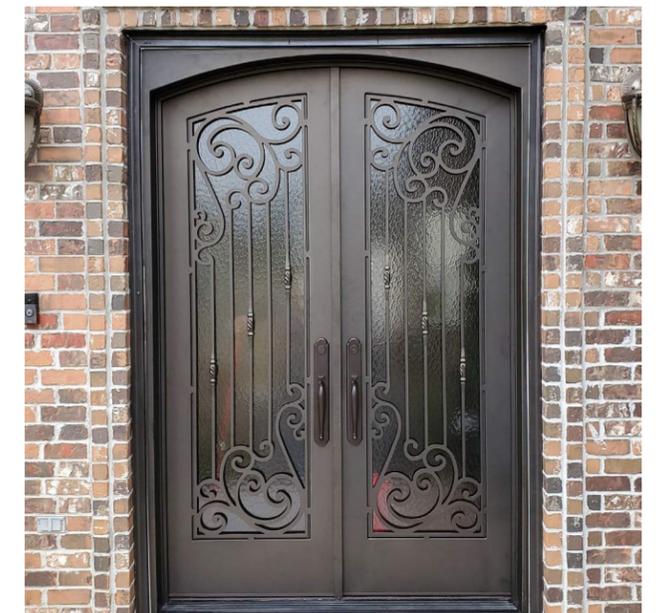
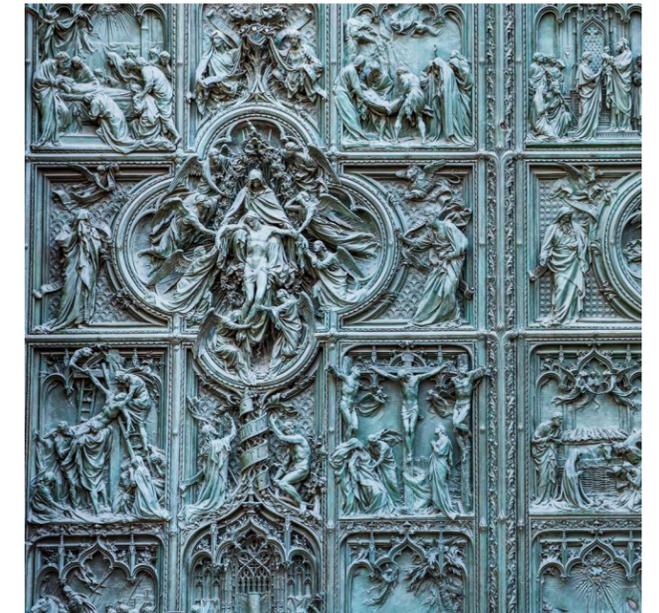
Similarly, a Church with deep roots can't be stripped down to bare bones minimalism. We offer our best to God—building something that **lifts us beyond the ordinary and points to heaven**. Ornament matters because buildings speak. They are rich with meaning. Details like trims, textures, colors, patterns, and unique surfaces are opportunities for richness and artistry.

In Catholic housing, ornamentation should be focused where it counts most—the main entry. This is the place to make a bold, welcoming statement that connects back to the building's Christian mission and identity.



Like material choices and verticality, ornament must be integrated into the building facade, rhythm, and hierarchy. It must also be smart and budget-wise. **Use it where it will make the biggest impact and tell the story best**. This is how Catholic housing can stand out and speak with dignity.

This ornament connects the building to the Church's rich tradition of beauty, art, and architecture. It's not just decoration—it **deepens identity**, helps people feel rooted, known, and called to **something greater**.



# IDENTITY

Iconography and art bring us closer to God. Unlike subtle material or design choices, these are **clear, unmistakable expressions of Catholic identity**. They tell the story, celebrate our faith, our saints, and the wisdom that shapes us. These pieces don't just decorate—they lift our minds and hearts toward God.

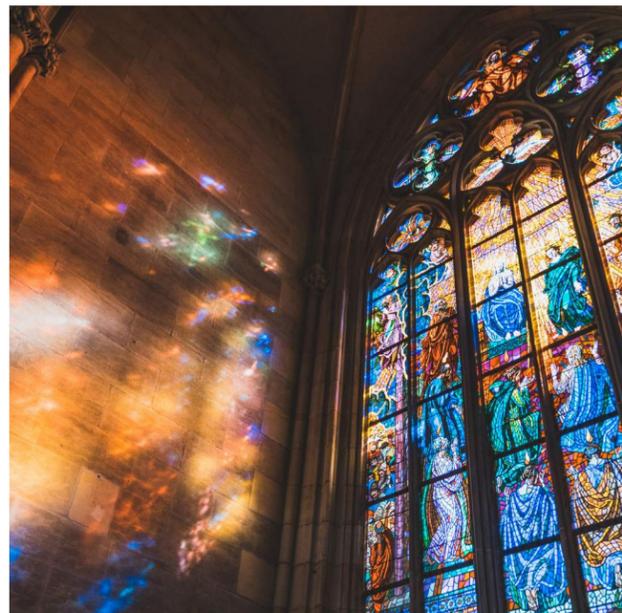
In housing, art can take many forms: a stained-glass door, a glowing painting at a hallway's end, mosaic in the lobby floor, or a prominent saint's statue in a garden. Each invites residents to connect with God and the Church community.

**The more these symbols are present, the stronger the**

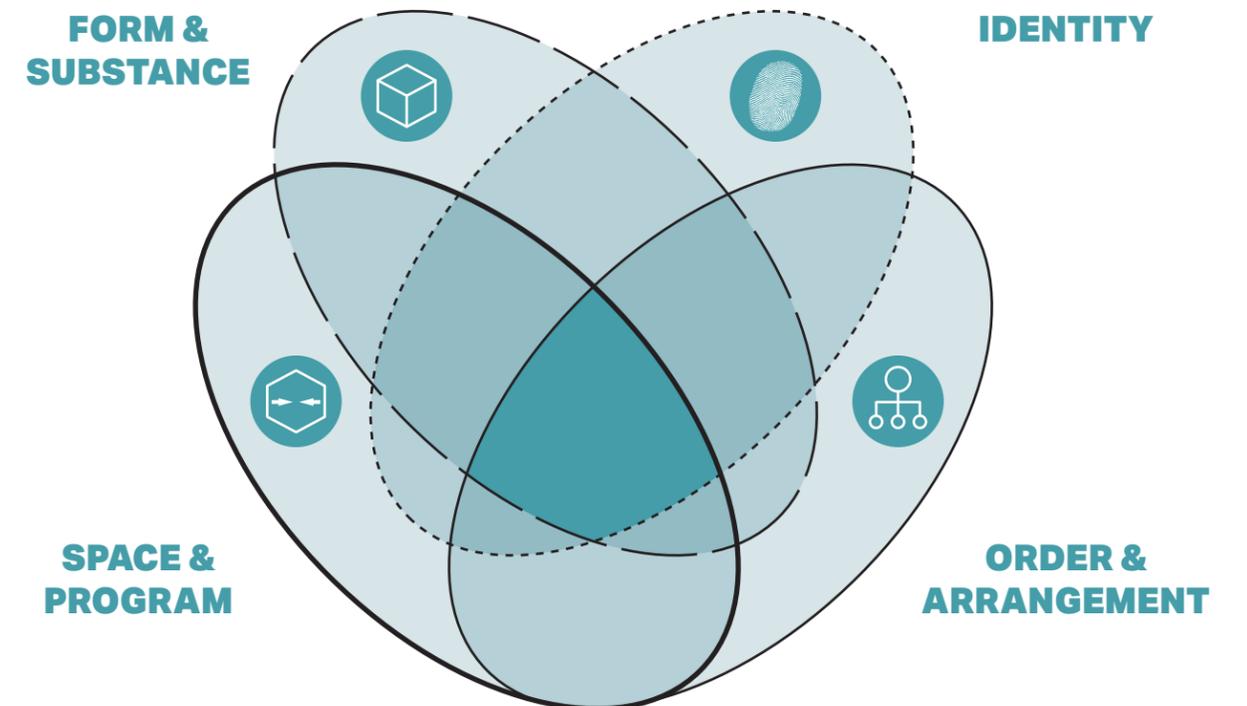
**bond residents feel—not just to their home, but to a living faith and shared purpose.** Catholic housing isn't just shelter; it's a space for spiritual belonging and growth.

And identity is more—it's also about history, tradition, and memory. A wall of remembrance can **ground a community in gratitude**. Photos, plaques, short notes. It's a way to honor those who've shaped the place—whether they've passed on or moved on.

These touches make a building more than just housing. They make it holy ground—connected to its Christian mission, shaped by history, open to God.



**Integrate Space, Order, Form, and Identity to maximize personal connection to God, Creation, Ourselves, and Others. Build layers and richness of experience to lift up people towards God, in community.**



## RECOGNIZABLY CATHOLIC

This guide presents principles, not prescriptions—but it does point toward a clear goal: **Catholic housing should look Catholic.** Not just in vague inspiration, but in a way that's recognizable, rooted in tradition, and still feels like home. A place people want to live. A place that invites community and dignity, and expresses its Christian mission and ultimate end.

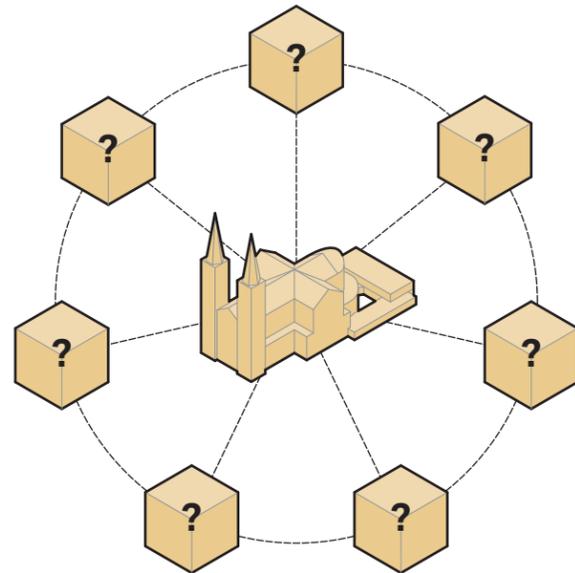
We're not designing a museum or a monument. We're designing home. But that **housing should still reflect its deeper identity—as an extension of the Church.** What's built should echo the sacred, while still serving daily life. That balance is where the beauty lies.

Think of it like this: the cathedral in a diocese is the hub. Housing, like parishes and ministries projects are the spokes extending outward. Over time, they form a visible network of places that belong together—a Catholic presence and outreach across the city. **It builds familiarity. It builds trust. It starts to form a kind of Catholic regionalism—a local style, rooted in faith, that people can see and recognize.**

Getting there takes skill. The goal isn't to handcuff creativity, but to push designers to consider the ingredients to succeed—so the final result doesn't feel like a mishmash of good intentions, but a unified, thoughtful whole, responsive to language, design elements, and to the Cathedral itself.

To help spark ideas, we've used generative tools to start imagining how these principles could show up in our housing. These aren't final products. They're sketches or gestures—conversation starters to push some thinking forward.

It's up to the design team to make it sing. Trust their craft. Let them develop the vision and bring it to life.



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE



GENERATIVE IMAGE

# PT. III INTEGRATION



## USE CASES

This is where it all comes together.

Part One set forth the **“why”**: Jesus, His Church, and His people in community.

Part Two gave us the **“what”**: the physical environment and the essential ingredients for Catholic housing.

Part Three is the **“how”**: practical applications that combine theology and design into housing that lives the faith.

**We’re moving from ideas to implementation.** This section applies integrated features to different project types—because no two projects are the same. Context matters. So do constraints.

A high-density urban apartment? That might call for a rooftop garden instead of a central lawn.

A townhouse community? Maybe a shared chapel at the heart makes more sense.

Renovating an old building? Your levers and opportunities are largely interior.

Building next to a church? That’s a huge opportunity for identity and integration. Use it.

The Church today faces tough decisions—shrinking congregations, aging buildings, and changing neighborhoods. Many of its properties are sitting underused, some empty. That’s where housing can come in, in a meaningful way. And if we’re building to bring people closer to God, what better place than right next to a church?

That’s why for the purposes of this Design Guide, we break projects into three basic use cases:

- Urban, Renovation, Church Adjacent
- Suburban, New Build, Church Adjacent
- Rural, New Build, Non-Church Adjacent

Each one comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities. And of course there are many other combinations as well.

The integrated features we show here aren’t a checklist or a master plan. **They’re sparks. Starting points.** Enough to lead toward a strong vision and help shape a project that feels **Catholic in its bones—not just in name.**

We encourage teams to use them to guide design, set priorities, evaluate costs, and most importantly—keep the focus on what really matters: **building places that connect people to Christ and each other.**



**URBAN  
RENOVATION  
CHURCH ADJACENT**

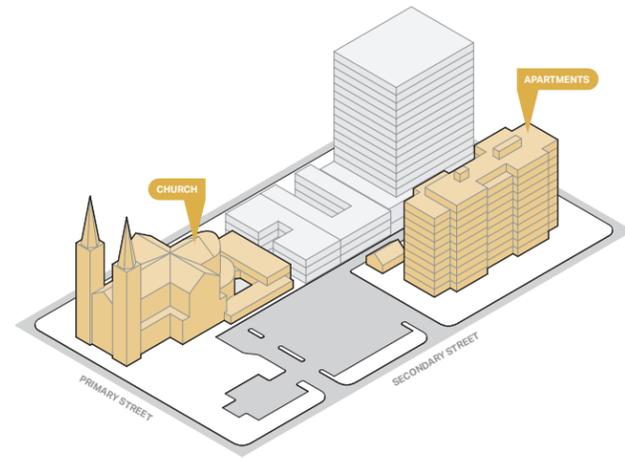


**SUBURBAN  
NEW BUILD  
CHURCH ADJACENT**



**RURAL  
NEW BUILD  
NON-CHURCH ADJACENT**

# URBAN RENOVATION CHURCH ADJACENT



## 01 SITE FEATURE CREATING A PLAZA

**Description:** A public area with a mixture of hardscape and softscape, designed for gatherings, events, socializing, relaxation, and recreational activities.

**Considerations:** This may require a process to merge the legal parcels and amend zone lots if the plaza spans between two properties. Furthermore, if parking currently exists, the loss of parking will need to be solved.

**Expected Outcome:** A plaza connecting housing to a church reinforces the role of the Church as a center for community, culture, and life while promoting engagement in daily mass and prayer, as well as social interaction.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

## 02 INTERIOR FEATURE SUNROOM WITH A VIEW

**Description:** A room that lets in abundant natural light, typically used for relaxation, reading, or enjoying views while sheltered from the elements.

**Considerations:** With a typical residential floor to floor height of ten feet, it would be ideal for this space to be double height. Structure will need to be analyzed. Furthermore, additional glass surface area can result in additional heat gain or heat loss.

**Expected Outcome:** Not all units are created equally, especially on different sides of a building and in different times of the year. This feature gives all residents an elevated place to soak up the sun and improve optimism and quiet contemplation.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



## PROBLEMS & OPPORTUNITIES

Urban sites come with real challenges—tight spaces, aging buildings, and layers of red tape. Structural upgrades are often costly, and changes may be limited by zoning rules or historic preservation. You can't just slap on a new surface and call it done. But the upsides are big. Cities offer visibility. Walkability. Access to transit, jobs, and services. And a well-designed project can do more than house people—it can signal hope. It can anchor a block. It can show the Church is still here, still active, still investing in the neighborhood as part of its mission.

## 03 EXTERIOR FEATURE ECHOING FACADES

**Description:** Facades of the housing take on aspects from that of the adjacent church, from form and order, to style, rhythm, scale, materiality, and ultimately identity.

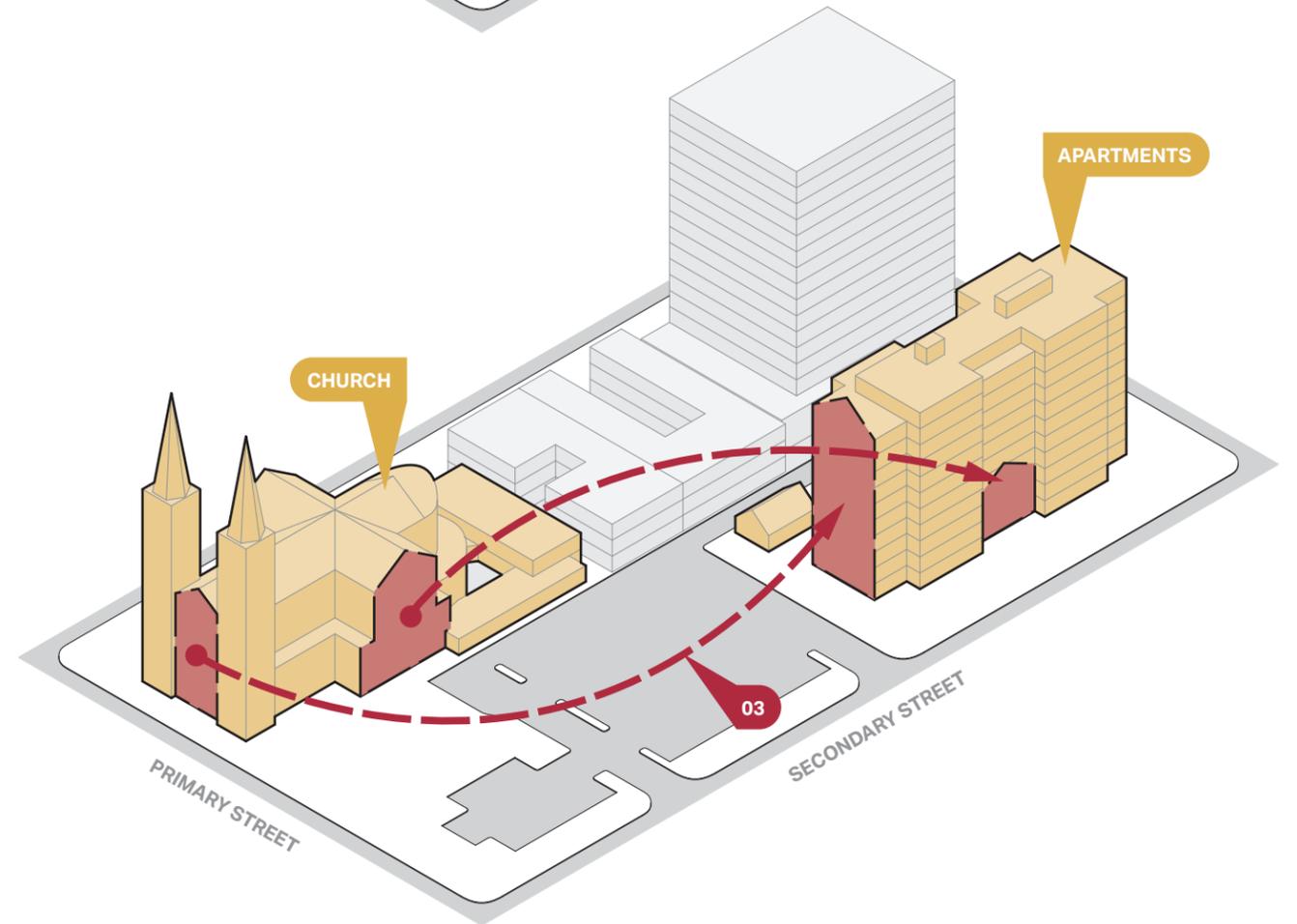
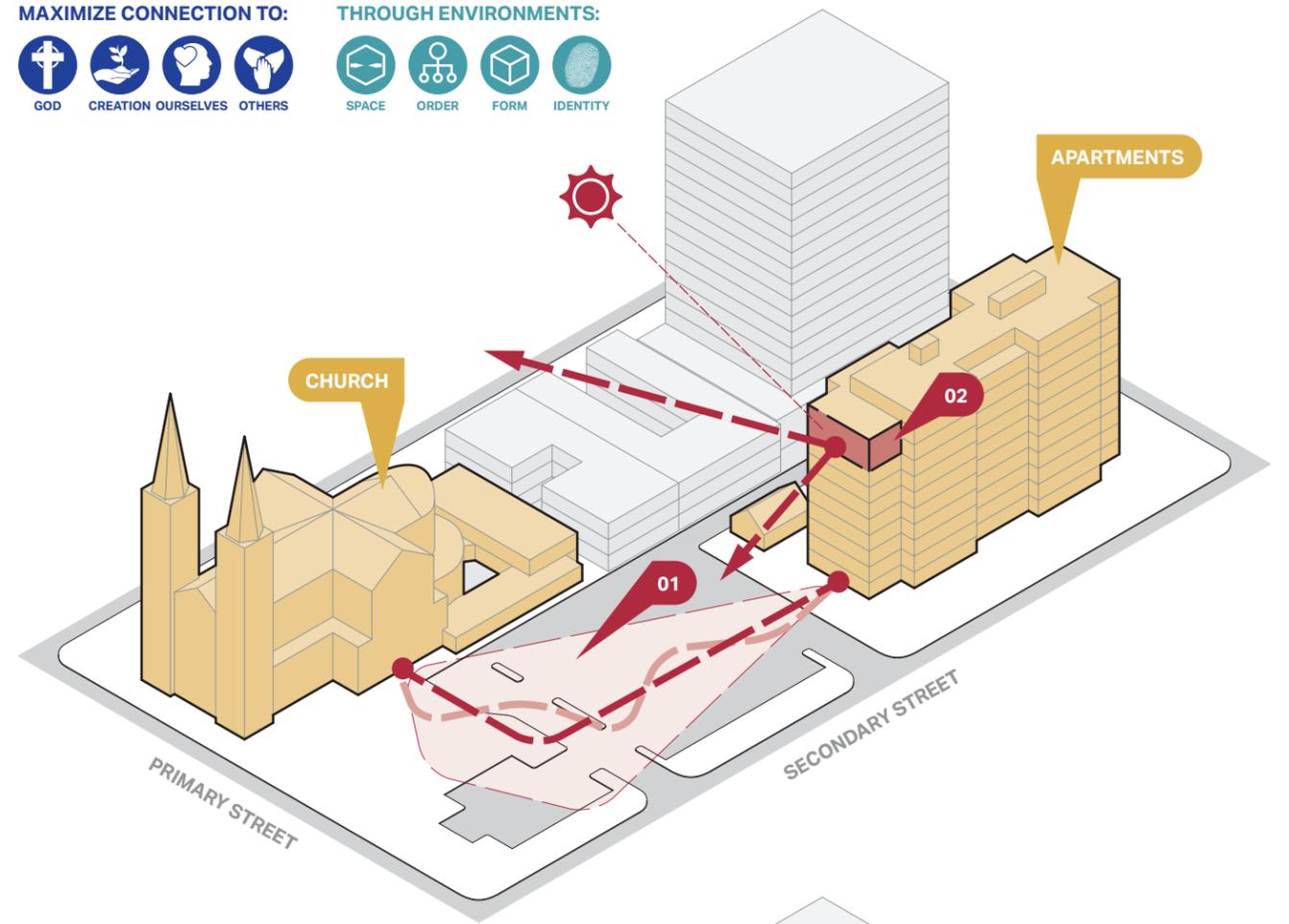
**Considerations:** If this design challenge is undertaken as a renovation, there will need to be careful analysis of which elements are most feasible to echo and how they will be applied to the housing as to best complement the unchanged elements.

**Expected Outcome:** Facades of the housing communicate an association with the Church – an extension of the Church – and solidarity in mission, ultimately leading the residents to appreciate and identify with the charity and mercy that support their community.

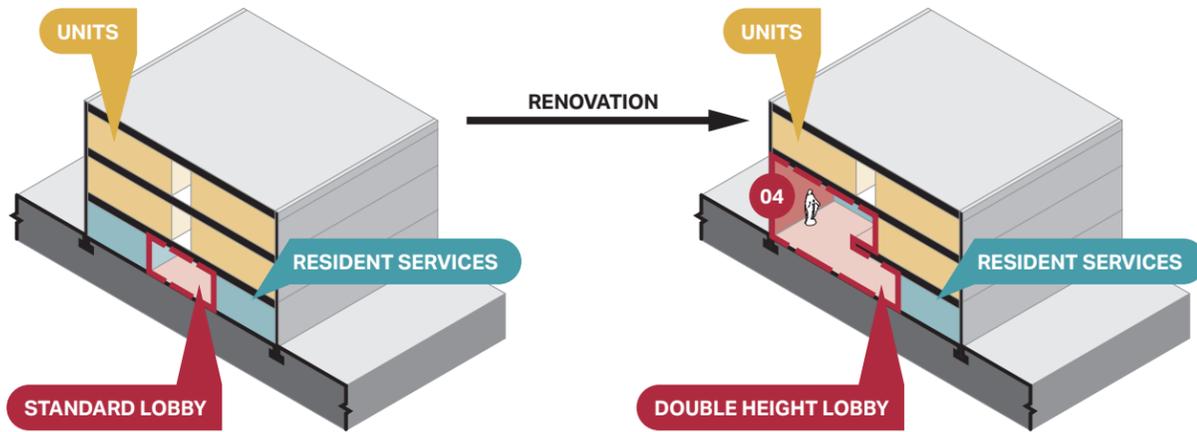
NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



Create housing where people are known, seen, and loved



# URBAN RENOVATION CHURCH ADJACENT



## 04 INTERIOR FEATURE DOUBLE HEIGHT LOBBY

**Description:** A building entry experience that offers a sense of verticality or expansiveness and connects physically and/or visually across levels.

**Considerations:** In a renovation project, structural considerations will be primary. The extent of feasible demolition and required structural reinforcement will need to be determined. Also consider if the building can afford to lose or move the existing program.

**Expected Outcome:** Openness in the entry experience can create a more impactful first impression, make people feel welcome, and improve sense of pride in one's home. The more expansive space can feature a large-scale integrated artwork to whom the building is dedicated.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

## 05 INTERIOR FEATURE CORRIDOR NOOKS

**Description:** Shallow nooks in the corridor that can display personal items with significance, or, larger scale artwork by the building operator.

**Considerations:** If this design feature is sought in a renovation, one will need to look for opportunities to create depth in the corridor wall and possibly take a small amount of square footage out of the units. One will also need to maintain continuity of fire-rated walls.

**Expected Outcome:** Residents will have an opportunity to share something about themselves with their neighbors, building community and relationships. The building will have the opportunity to display elements that emphasize mission and Catholic identity.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

## 06 INTERIOR FEATURE SAINT NEIGHBORHOODS

**Description:** Breaking down the building by floors (or wings) and assigning each a saint with whom it can be identified. This is a strategy for creating "neighborhoods".

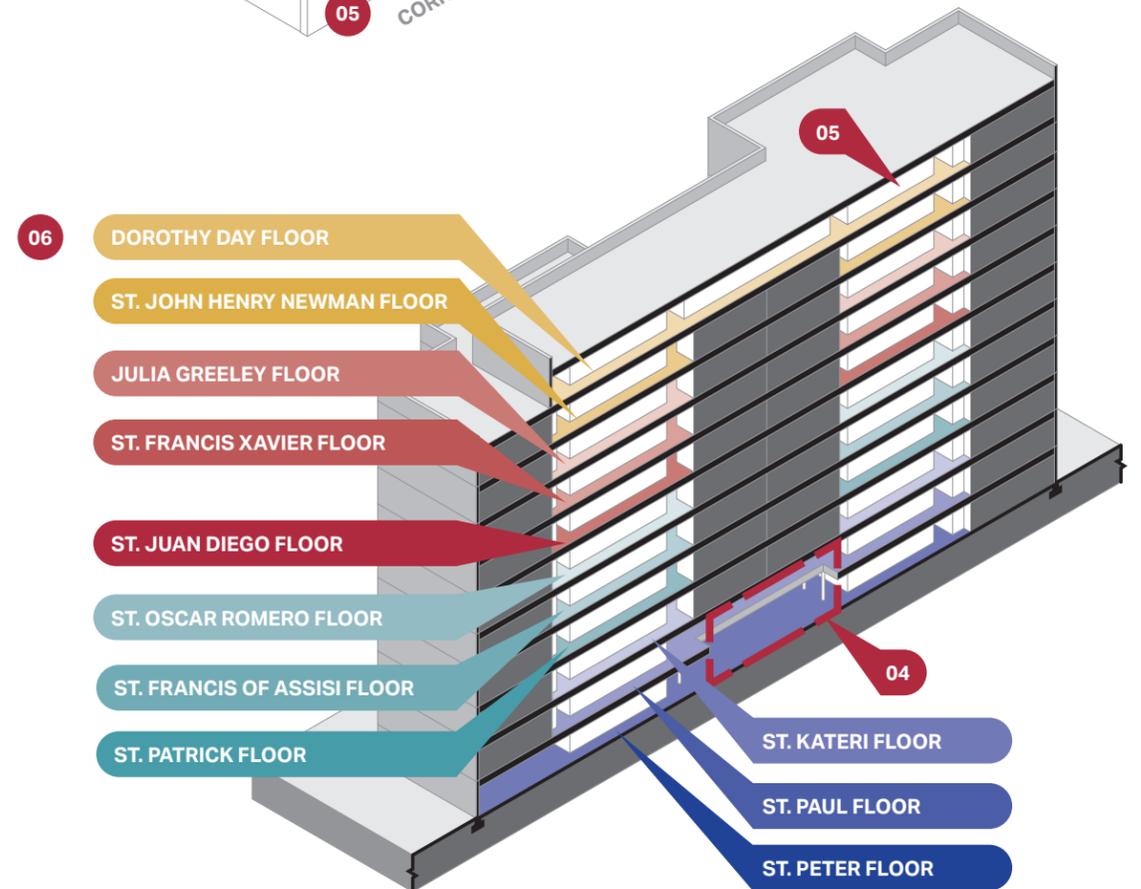
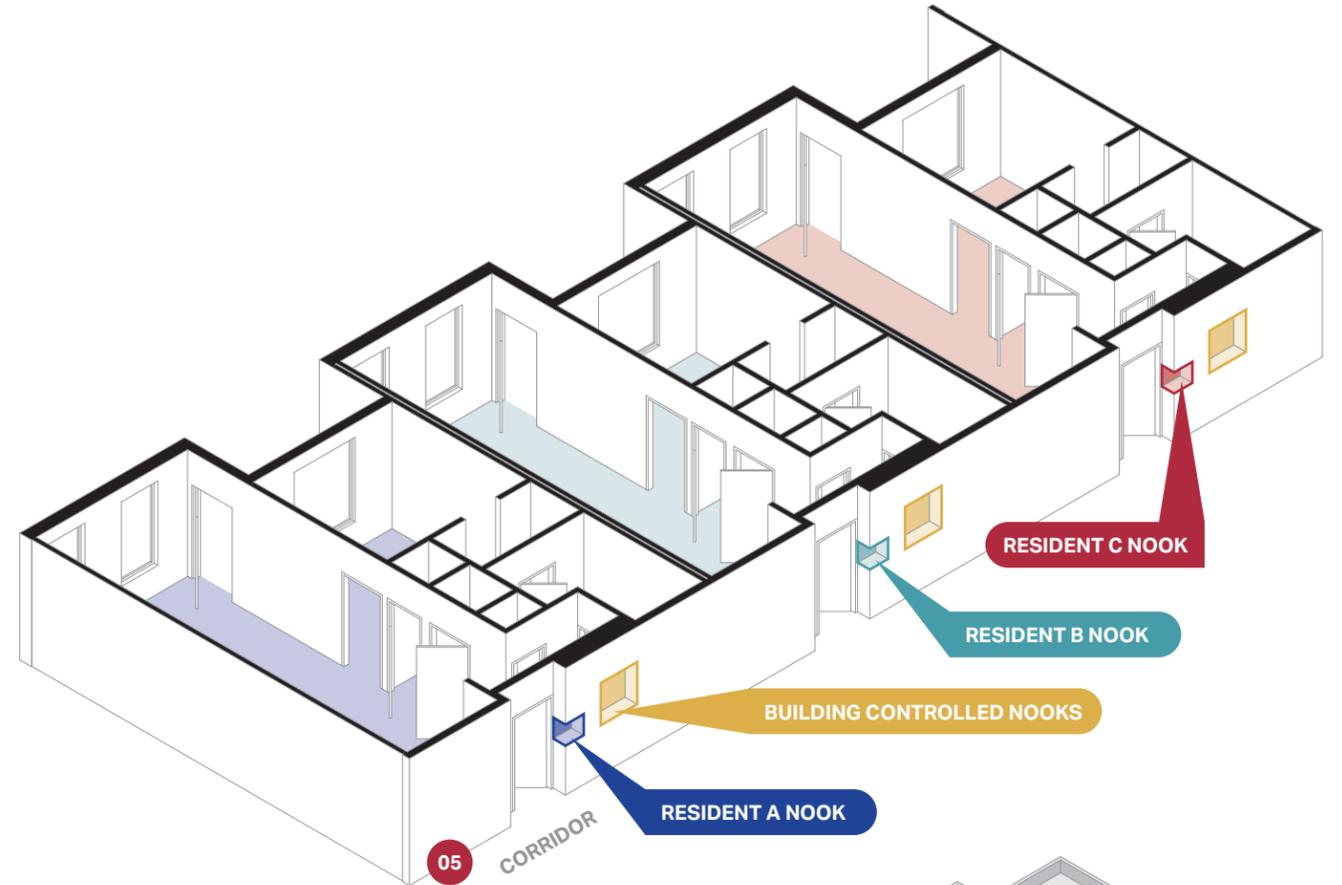
**Considerations:** This intervention can exist purely as a surface treatment, and can include paint colors, textures, patterns, icons, symbols, signage, inspirational quotes, graphic motifs, art, and statues that fit the theme of and depict each particular saint or historical figure.

**Expected Outcome:** Not only will it improve wayfinding and make an impression on residents' memories, but can create a sense of community, belonging, pride, and stewardship in one's own neighborhood. It's also a doorway to real relationship with the communion of saints.

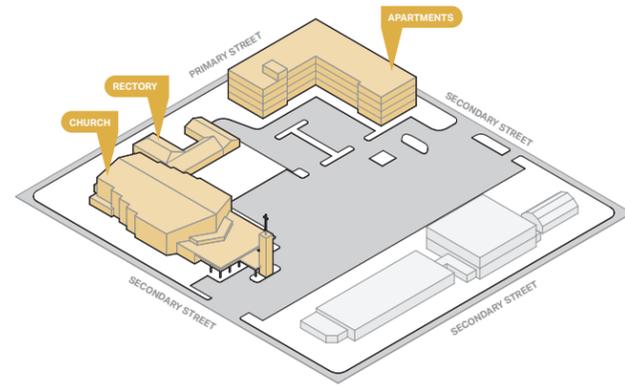
NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



Create housing that captures memories and gives recognition



# SUBURBAN NEW BUILD CHURCH ADJACENT



## 07 SITE FEATURE GARDEN PAVILION

**Description:** A freestanding, open-sided structure that features a roof to provide shelter from sun or rain while surrounded by nature.

**Considerations:** This is a feature that's easy to add almost anywhere and with little cost. The primary consideration is where to place it to create the relationships necessary to ensure its highest and best use.

**Expected Outcome:** By placing a pavilion, or gazebo, in a garden, it sets aside a dedicated space to enjoy God's creation comfortably, and with clear intent and purpose. The garden becomes a place to occupy and spend time, not just pass through.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

## 08 INTERIOR FEATURE INSPIRED ART STUDIO

**Description:** A ground level common space giving residents a dedicated place to be creative, get messy, produce arts and crafts, and use God's gifts.

**Considerations:** Adjacency to the outdoors, or a garden specifically, provides natural inspiration from The Creator. The room could have an exterior door to access the garden directly or a larger garage-style door to keep open during moderate weather.

**Expected Outcome:** Human creativity mirrors God, so it is necessary to provide a space where that connection can be nurtured. Most residents don't have enough unit space for this activity, so creativity and connection to self, creation, and The Creator is atrophied.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

## PROBLEMS & OPPORTUNITIES

Suburban sites offer space—but not always a warm welcome. New development can strain roads, schools, and utilities. Locals may push back. NIMBY is real. But there's upside. Land is cheaper. Units can be larger. There's room for gardens, playgrounds, chapels—real community space. It's quieter, too. **A strong design can offer beauty, peace, and purpose in a way the urban conditions often lack.** This is a chance to build something deeply human. Something that feels like a destination, an arrival, a homecoming.

## 09 INTERIOR / EXTERIOR FEATURE TRANSPARENT STAIR

**Description:** An egress or non-egress third stair that is glazed so the action of moving vertically through space is more enjoyable and more visible with color and illumination.

**Considerations:** A third stair which would alleviate fire rating and emergency egress requirements is often not affordable, so inevitably, this feature will be an egress stair. As an egress stair, all fire rating and emergency egress requirements will need to be observed.

**Expected Outcome:** Residents will feel increased safety and security in a stairwell flooded with daylight and with nothing to hide. It's also more impactful if that stair looks out to a garden so the experience of the interior is always connected outwardly to creation.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

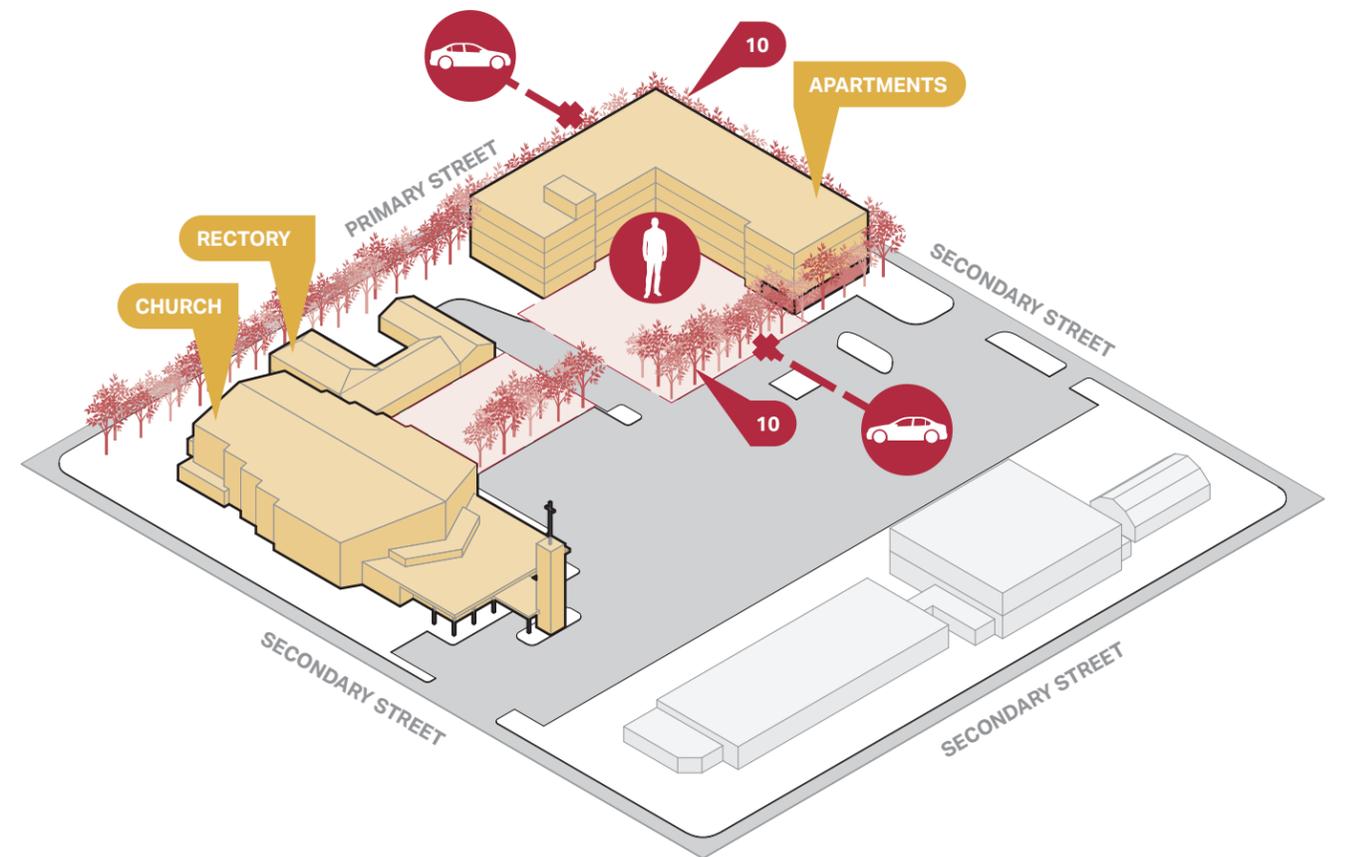
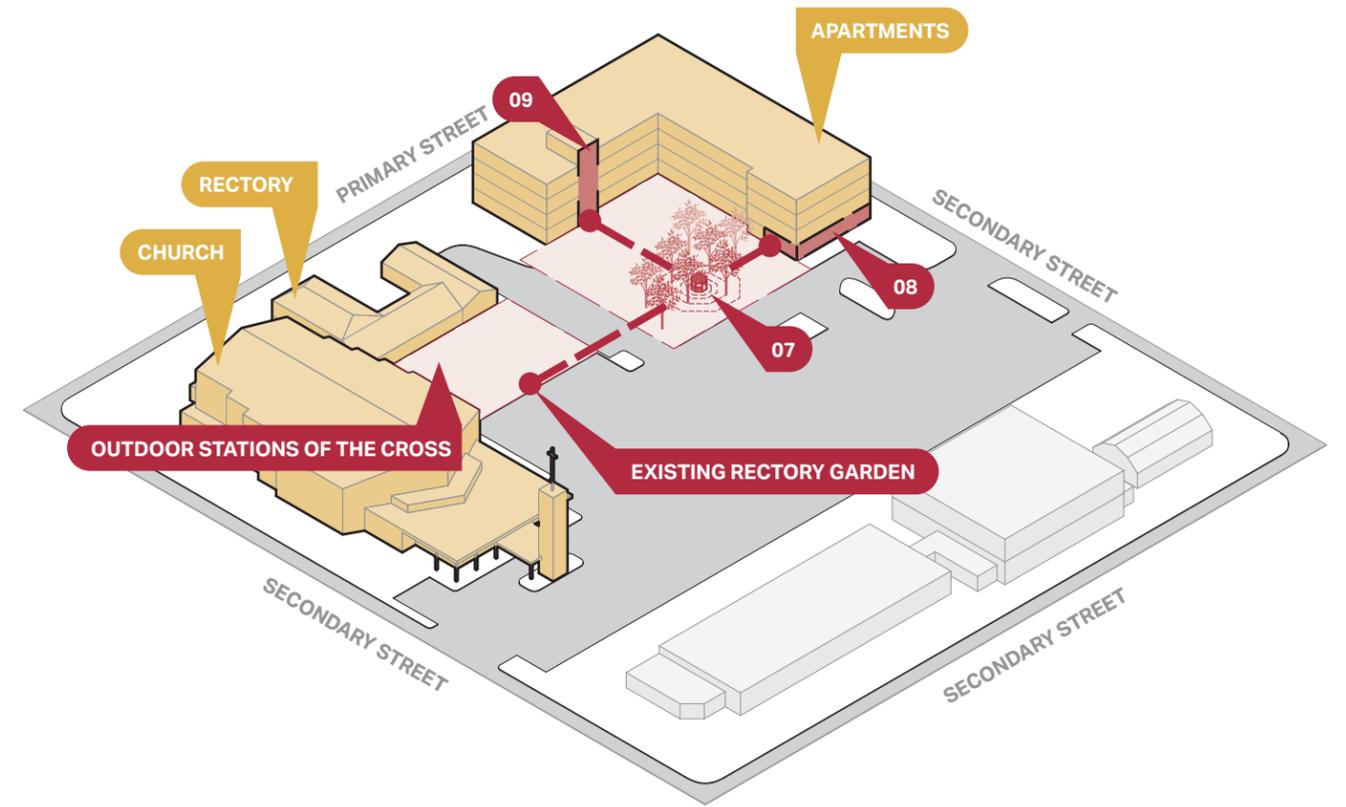
## 10 SITE FEATURE IMMERSED RESIDENT

**Description:** A pedestrian-only zone that is physically, visually, and (ideally) auditorily separated from that of the automobile and other undesirable machines.

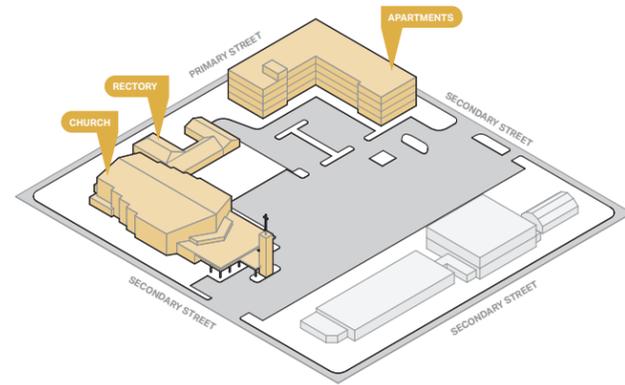
**Considerations:** It can be a challenge to assemble all the elements required to manipulate senses and perceptions, but this is what this feature aims for. In this case, a buffer of trees and vegetation creates a zone of immersion through a thickened natural screen.

**Expected Outcome:** Through structuring an environment that blocks out distractions, one can feel greater focus, comfort, control, and can carry out more intentional activities, such as prayer and contemplation. It creates a more human territory.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



# SUBURBAN NEW BUILD CHURCH ADJACENT



## 11 EXTERIOR FEATURE ENHANCED ENTRIES

**Description:** Building entries that relate to the adjacent church's form, order, and/or identity, and clearly communicate and celebrate these nodal points.

**Considerations:** In the context of tight-budget housing where repetition and stacking of units is critical, the expression of entry can be difficult without negatively impacting layout, windows, daylight, or views. The entry must be carefully integrated, not an afterthought.

**Expected Outcome:** With entries that are appropriately sized and expressed, using architectural cues from the adjacent church building, it can communicate that the housing is an extension of the Church, signaling the intent to set the experience within, apart.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



Create housing with character and identity

## 12 SITE / EXTERIOR FEATURE ORDERED COLONNADE

**Description:** An exterior covered walkway, providing shelter and defining space, characterized by a repetitive sequence of columns

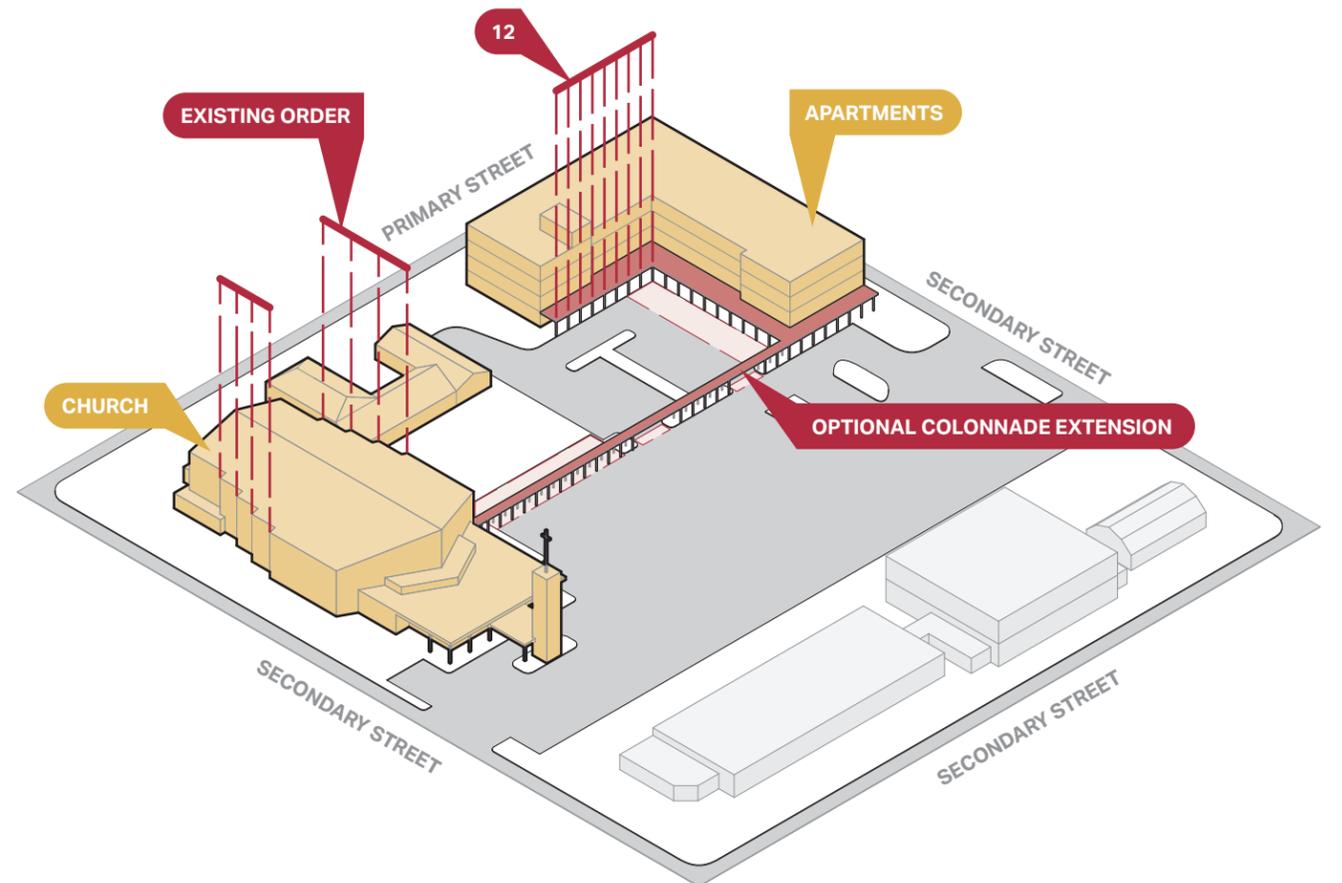
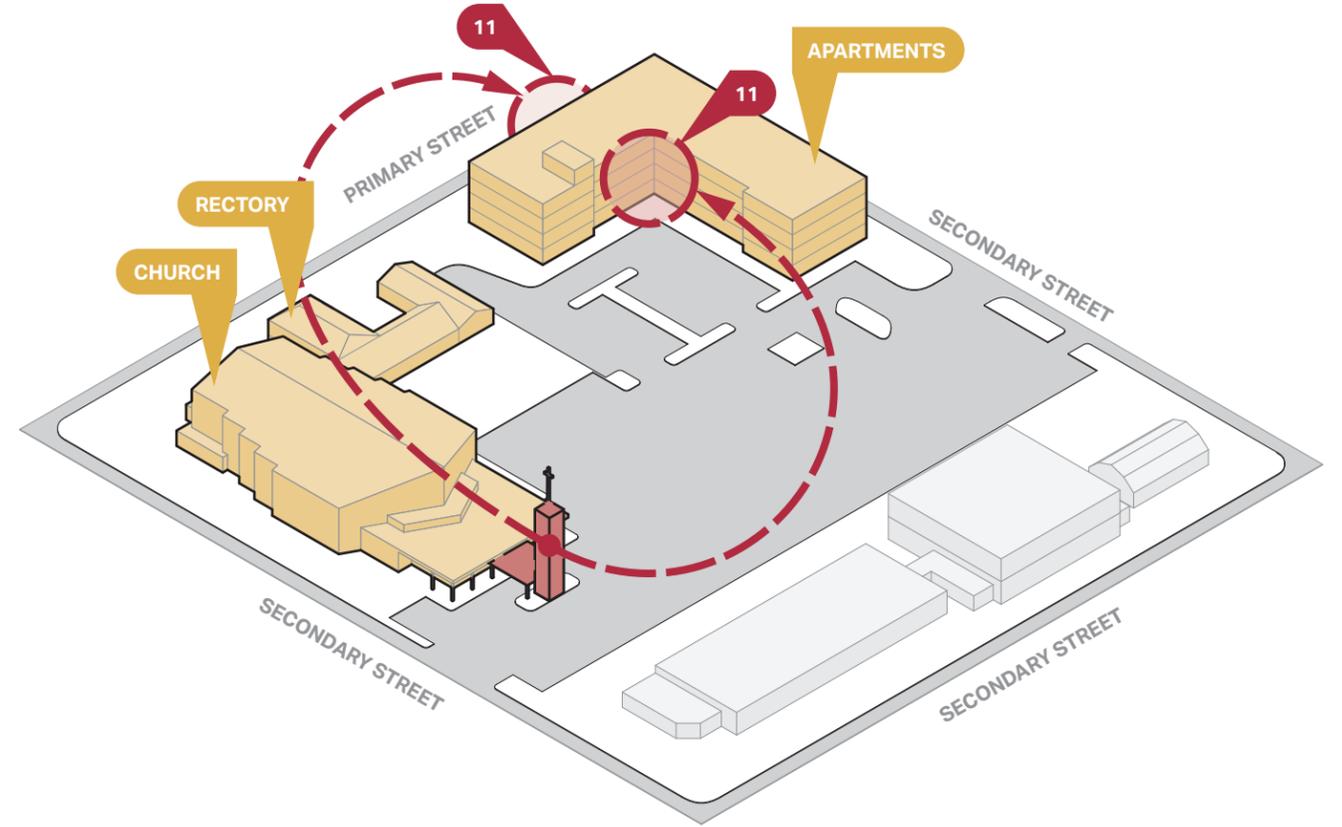
**Considerations:** This architectural element can be used to signal a path and entry point, emphasize a broader space by lining it, or another type of functional, programmatic, spatial, or experiential delineation. The repetition can associate with church design elements.

**Expected Outcome:** The colonnade mediates between vehicle and pedestrian, creating a more humane threshold experience, also providing a protected place to sit outside, enjoy the weather, wait for a ride, or if extended, have a direct connection to God's house.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



Create housing that leverages the local church and gives back

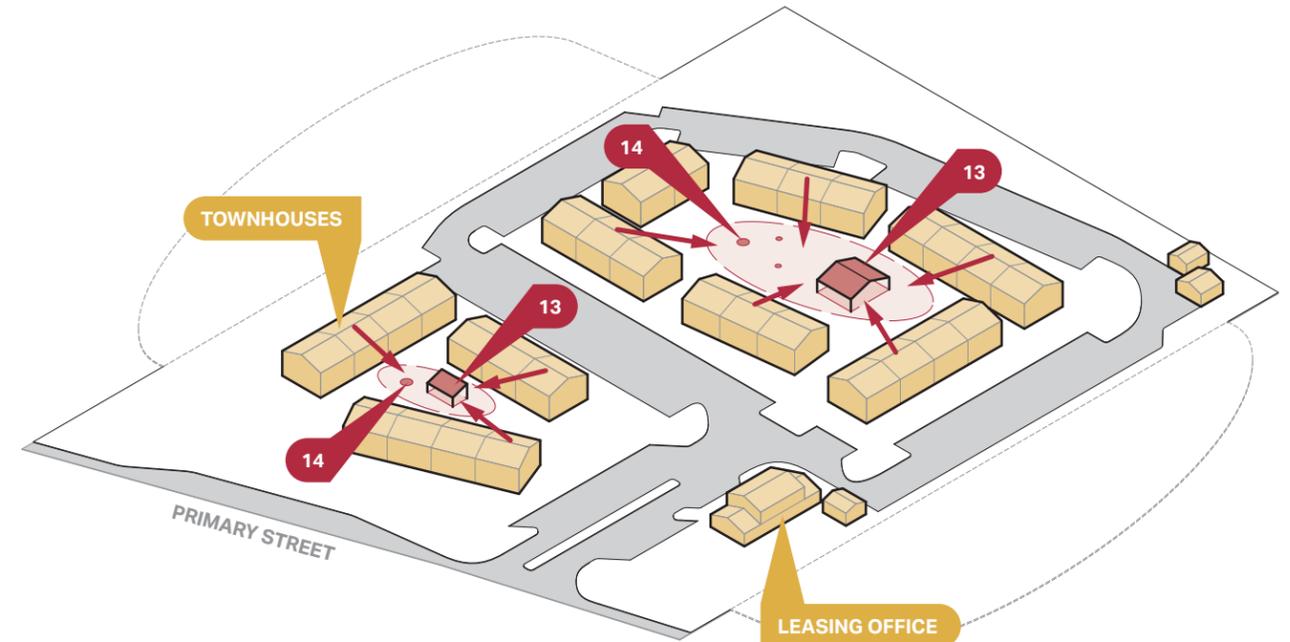
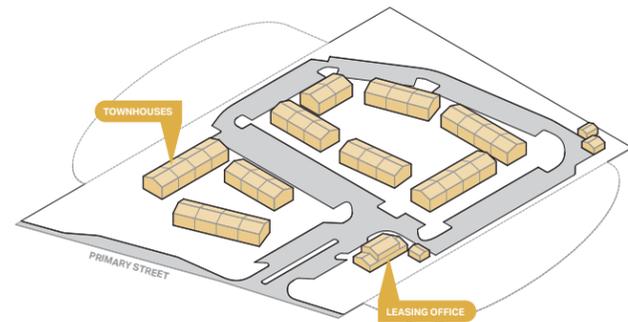


# RURAL NEW BUILD NON-CHURCH ADJACENT



## PROBLEMS & OPPORTUNITIES

Rural sites offer freedom—but demand more from the start. Roads, power, water—basic infrastructure may be missing. That means higher upfront costs. No walkability means more pressure to include amenities onsite. But here’s the upside: space. Quiet. Nature. A blank canvas. Without tight neighbors or dense zoning, you can dream big. A chapel, a garden, a workshop, a walking path—all possible. And in a rural setting, **the connection to God’s creation isn’t just a metaphor. It’s right outside.**



### 13 SITE FEATURE CENTRALIZED PICNIC

**Description:** An area with open air, covered seating and a dedicated grill or outdoor kitchen, equally accessible from most units.

**Considerations:** The space will need to be sized appropriately for the number of units on site, and multiple grilling locations may be needed to avoid overcrowding and to provide convenience. If wind is problematic, one or more walls can be added.

**Expected Outcome:** By providing a place to gather outside as a family or expanded community, cook, eat, and play together, it sets a stage for conversation and facilitates the building of relationships. This opens new possibilities not achievable within an individual unit.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

### 15 UNIT FEATURE UNIT OUTDOOR LIVING

**Description:** A combination of ground level porches or patios and upper-level balconies, extending living space to the outdoors.

**Considerations:** Critics of balconies will say they won’t be used and become places for people to store their junk. Advocates will say they provide a place for people to go outside, connect with nature, and grill food. Consider compromising by providing to half of units.

**Expected Outcome:** Porches, patios, and balconies become spaces to relax, socialize, engage with neighbors, and also are a symbol of welcoming home. They provide some relief from interior living space and offer a change of environment necessary for connection.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

### 14 SITE FEATURE FIRE PITS

**Description:** A low-walled structure designated for safely containing and enjoying a fire outdoors, typically made of stone, brick, concrete, or metal.

**Considerations:** Check local laws and ordinances to see what’s allowed. In lieu of natural wood, consider a propane fuel fire pit. These elements can pair well with centralized picnic areas. Try to locate fire pits away from units where smoke could be a nuisance.

**Expected Outcome:** Fire pits can foster social interaction and provide light, warmth and comfort. Naturally, fire becomes a central focal point, bringing people together, oriented towards one another, but can also be enjoyable alone in quiet contemplation. A symbol of the Holy Spirit.

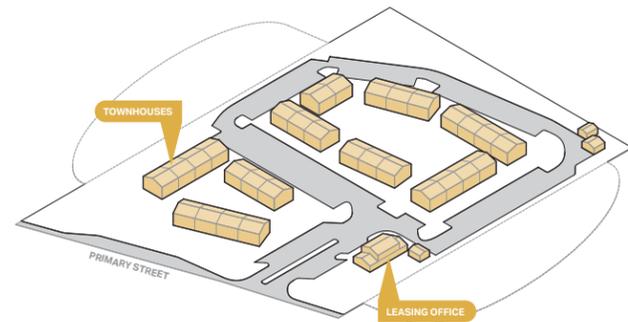
NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



Create housing that celebrates the joy of nature and activity



**RURAL  
NEW BUILD  
NON-CHURCH ADJACENT**



**16 SITE FEATURE  
BOUNDING TRAIL**

**Description:** A recreational trail that meanders around a new community, for walking, running, and biking, and can be sprinkled with other amenities.

**Considerations:** If space is available, a trail should be relatively easy to implement. It needs to be wheelchair accessible. Similarly to #10, Immersed Resident, aim to orient the trail and structure an environment around it to create a sense of “getting away”.

**Expected Outcome:** By providing a medium for exercise and recreation, residents can live a healthier, more balanced lifestyle, and have greater opportunity to connect with creation and The Creator. A properly ordered body can lead to a properly ordered mind.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

**17 SITE FEATURE  
PICKLEBALL COURTS**

**Description:** Courts designed for the sport of pickleball. The courts can include fencing to control loose balls and lighting for evening play.

**Considerations:** Pickleball has exploded in popularity due to its social nature, compact play, ease of learning, and friendliness to all ages. It gets people off the couch who are normally sedentary. The popularity has led to noise complaints in some communities.

**Expected Outcome:** Pickleball is a community building activity. People will play together outside for hours, friends or strangers. The housing will become overall healthier, mentally and physically, more tightknit, and have greater potential to grow in Jesus.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

**18 SITE FEATURE  
TREE GROVE & HAMMOCKS**

**Description:** A densely wooded zone for immersion in God’s creation with embedded hammocks for relaxation.

**Considerations:** Trees can of course take a long time to grow. If there is an existing tree grove on site, leverage it. Enhance it with new, diverse tree plantings, as mature as can be afforded. Form a collection of trees that display a unique quality for each season.

**Expected Outcome:** Having a nice, cool, tree-shaded environment to escape to and relax in would be very unique. It provides a place for quiet contemplation to connect to self, God and His creation. Access from a trail, creating a small journey from one’s unit is a bonus.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$

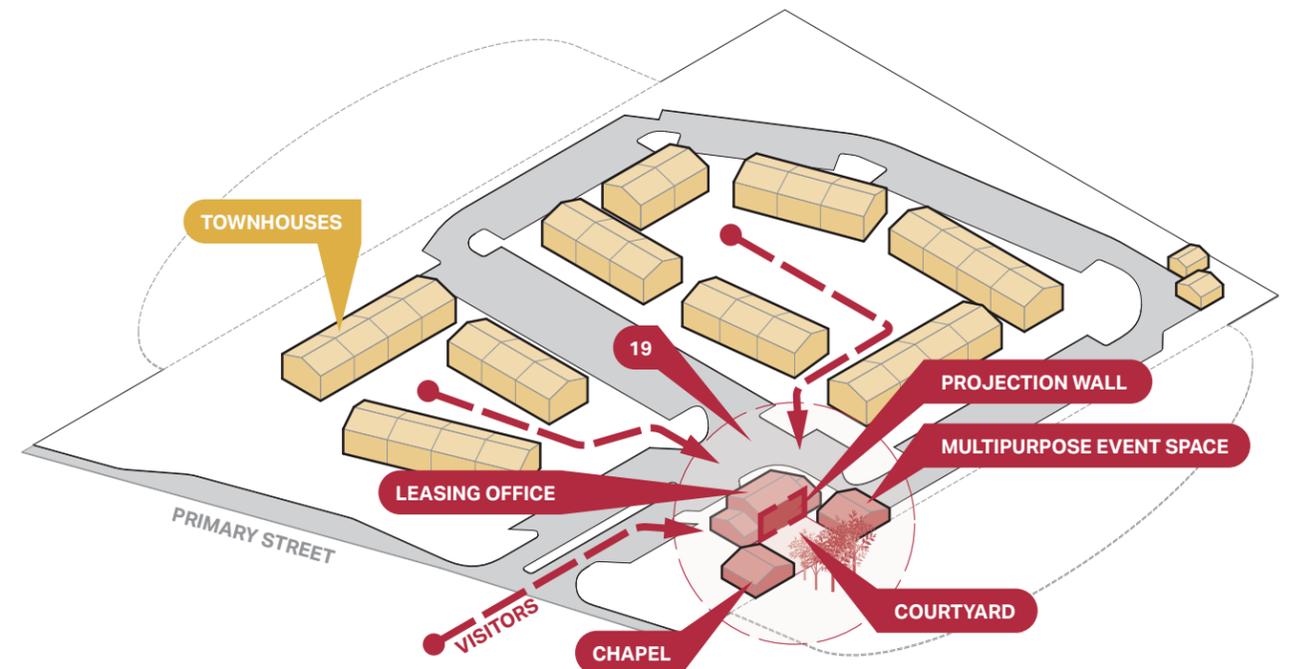
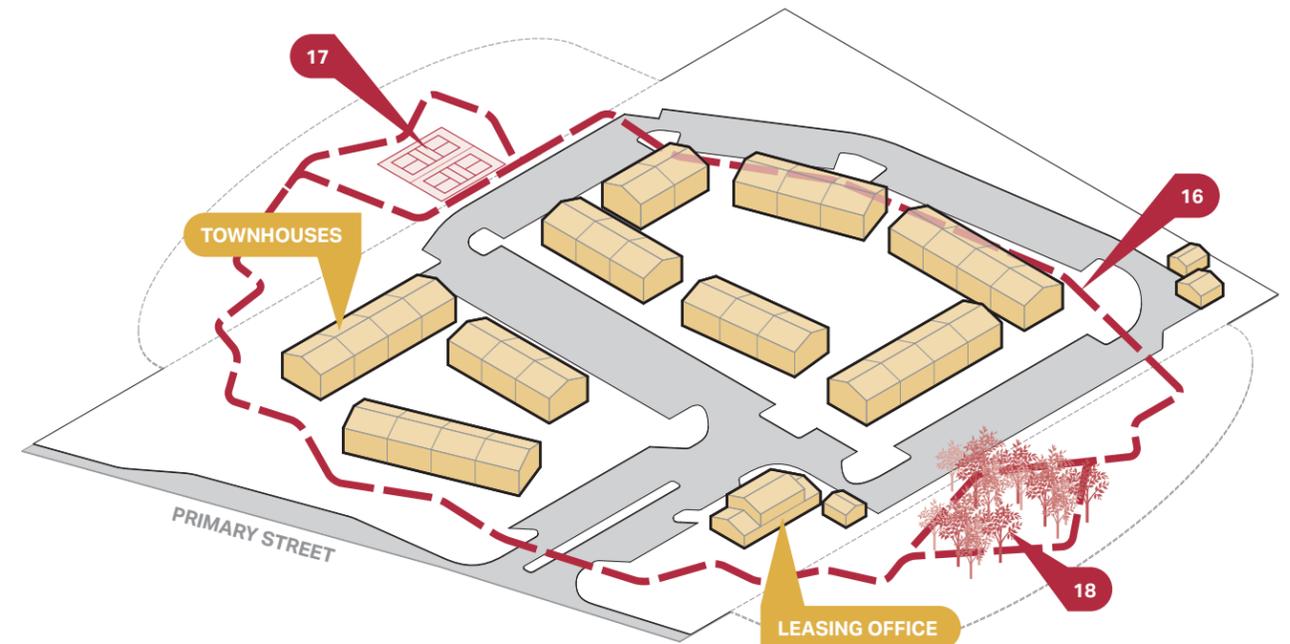
**19 SITE FEATURE  
COMMUNITY HUB**

**Description:** Developers would call this a clubhouse, but lets think of it as a collection of elements central to forming community, holistically.

**Considerations:** This is not just a place for staff to work with a lounge, empty gym, and a pool. Think about the face of the community, welcoming visitors, and creating a place for people to gather, grow closer together, and closer to Jesus.

**Expected Outcome:** By assembling the right pieces – community staff and operations, multipurpose event, and chapel (etc.) – and placing them around a public courtyard, the housing can gather a critical mass of people and activity and direct them towards God.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	GREAT-TO-HAVE	ASPIRATIONAL
\$	\$\$	\$\$\$



# CONCLUSION

We believe housing that is mission driven, developed, and operated by the Church must strive to lead people to heaven.

When homes are designed to connect us—to God, to creation, to ourselves, and to each other—we build more than shelter. **We build the conditions for communion, for healing, for mission, for sainthood.**

The right layout, the right materials, the right symbols—they all matter. But they're not the end goal. The people are. The families, the seniors, the homeless, those in transition, the immigrant, those suffering from trauma, or struggling with mental health. None of this matters if it is not oriented toward the human person as a brother, sister, and child of God.

Real community takes time, trust, and presence. The building is just the vessel. It creates space for lives to meet, to grow, to be transformed by grace.

There's still more to imagine. More to ask. More to try.

**This isn't the end—it's the launchpad.** The Church has a role to play in housing. Let's make sure it looks like Christ.

## THINKING BIG & OUTSIDE OF BOXES

These are the kinds of ideas that could reshape Catholic housing—authentic gamechangers. Use them to spark bold conversations.

### **Build on Church Land**

If housing can be placed next to a church, do it. Proximity creates the best shot at real connection—to God, the parish, the sacraments. Church buildings can also share space and programs, easing the load on housing resources.

### **Invite the Local Parish to Lead**

When a parish champions the housing project—welcoming residents, volunteering, organizing events—walls come down. Over time, the housing community and parish community can become one. This is the kingdom.

### **Bring in Religious Orders**

Imagine sisters or brothers living among residents—not as staff, but as neighbors. Their witness could transform the entire culture of the place. They've done it before—with hospitals, schools, orphanages. Why not housing?

### **Create a Catholic Regional Style**

Let the housing echo the architecture of the local cathedral. Over time, people will recognize the look. It says: this is Catholic. This is part of a bigger mission. A simple plaque with a QR code could link the building to the cathedral's website—prompting the connection.

### **Dedicate the Building to a Saint**

Name the project after a saint from day one. Let their story shape the design. Place a statue. Build a chapel. Pray for their intercession. Let the saint guide the team and give the community an identity from the start.

### **Capture the Spirit of a Dorm**

Dorms work. Strangers show up, connect, engage, grow. A housing project with a little of that energy—shared goals, healthy pride, neighborly support—can turn strangers into friends. Consider the academic house system too: small groups within the whole, building identity and connection.

### **Design for Community, Not Maximum Units**

What if we stopped designing to squeeze in as many units as possible? What if we designed for the healthiest size of community instead? Dunbar's Number says most people can only maintain about 150 real relationships but spend 40% of their time with 5 people and 60% of their time with about 15 people. Could those numbers reshape our thinking on units, capacity, and density?

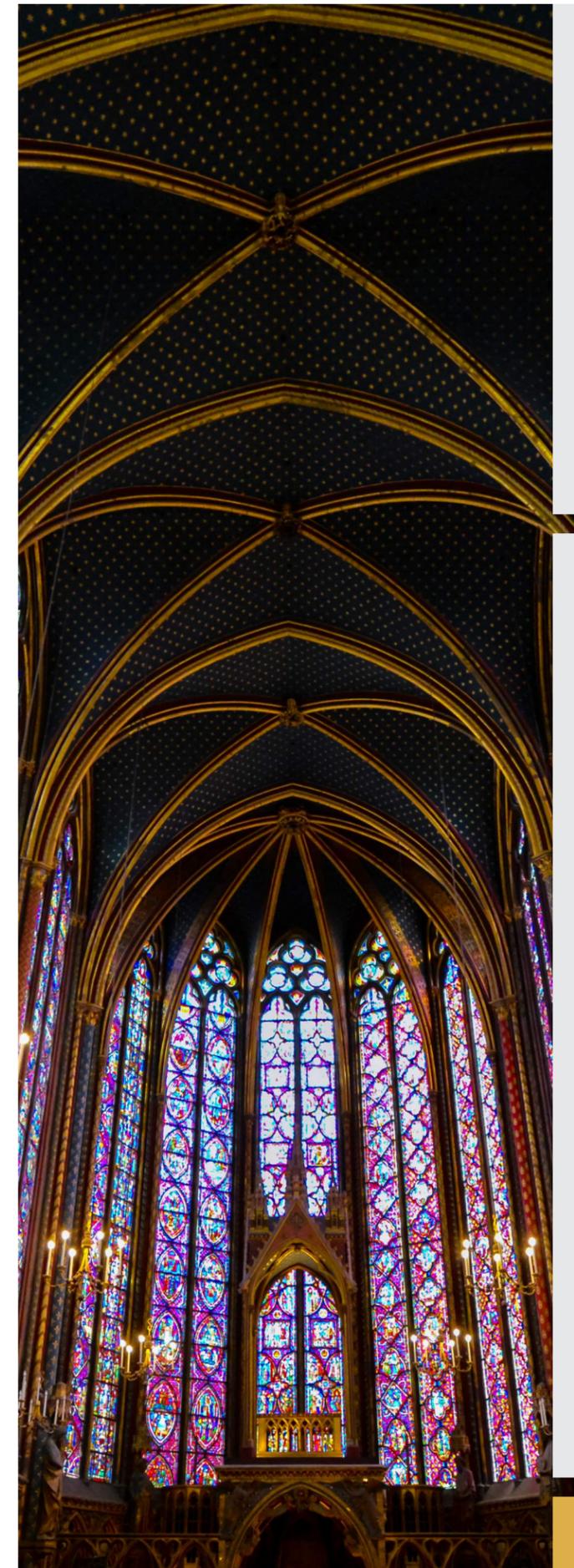
## DESIGNER REQUIREMENTS

As ideas coalesce, every team should **write a short thesis—a one-paragraph elevator pitch**. If you can't write it down, you probably don't know what you're trying to say. The thesis keeps everyone aligned on purpose. It's your north star.

Then, **draw a concept diagram**—what architects sometimes call a "parti." It's a simple sketch that captures the big idea or organizing principle. If you can't diagram it, you don't really know what's holding all the pieces in an ordered and harmonious relationship.

**Architecture always communicates. The goal is to make sure each Catholic housing project speaks clearly the message that is rooted in the work and mission of Jesus Christ.**

With Gratitude.



# APPENDIX

1. Agnew, John. "Deus Vult: The Geopolitics of Catholic Church." *Geopolitics* 15, no. 1 (February 12, 2010): 39–61.
2. Baron, J. H. "The Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 1090–1990." *BMJ* 301 (1990): 1449–1451.
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