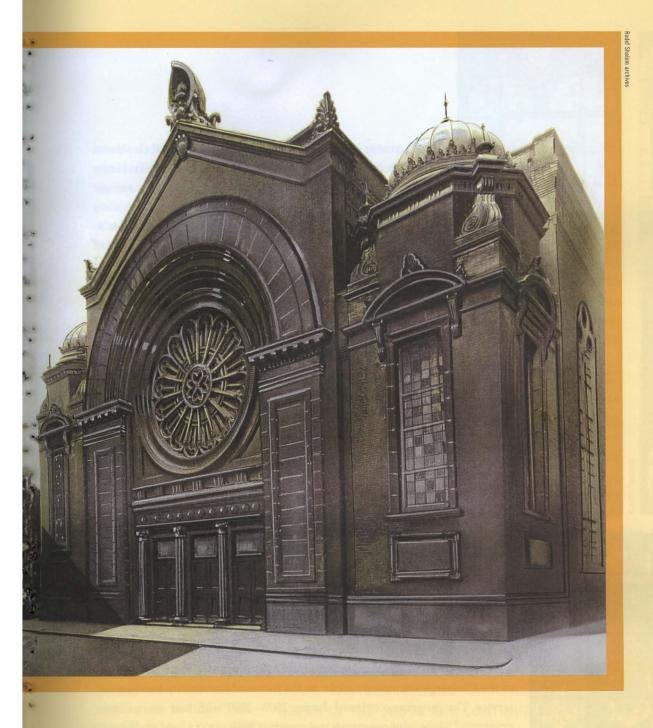


CALVARY EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND RODEF SHALOM CONGREGATION



# By Richard L. Rosenzweig and Douglas Camp Chaffey

ell-known Pittsburgh artisans William and Anne Lee Willet started their stained glass studio in Pittsburgh in 1898 at 6736 Penn Avenue, near industrialist Henry Clay Frick's home, Clayton. In making their windows, they followed the antique method and used glass of pure transparent color. Ralph Adams Cram, the leading American neo-Gothic architect of the same period, declared their work a "revival of the most fundamental principles of the art of stained glass as they were understood in France at the highest point of the development of medieval art." In 1906, at the request of Cram, architect for Calvary Episcopal Church's new building on Shady Avenue, the Willets created the remarkable medallion windows which still hang above the high altar, and the windows in the Lady Chapel. The same year Henry Hornbostel, the architect for Rodef Shalom Congregation's new sanctuary on Fifth Avenue, adapted the four Willet windows commissioned in 1901 to its new structure.

It is not surprising that the Calvary and Rodef Shalom<sup>2</sup> stained glass windows came from the same studio. Beyond the coincidence of construction in the same year, in the same neighborhood, of what was for each congregation its third home, are remarkable similarities of evolution and change that began in the 1850s and continue in these two nationally prominent religious institutions. Such a comparison gives historical dimension to both a changing Pittsburgh community and to crossdenominational trends in two different but generally liberal religious institutions.

Their parallel history, crossing denominational lines, provides evidence of: 1) the relationship of architecture to religious emotion and ideology; 2) the influence of demographics and changing neighborhoods; 3) the forces of democratization and diversity; and 4) the reciprocal influences between each

> congregation and the larger community in which it located and between each congregation and the larger religious movement to which it is affiliated.

In fall 1999, Dr. Harold Lewis, rector of Calvary Episcopal Church, and Dr. Mark Staitman, rabbi of Rodef Shalom Temple, collaborated to create the "Calvary-Rodef Shalom Community Forum." Each congregation hosted two dinners during the winter and spring of 1999 - 2000. Before each dinner, host guides gave historical and architectural tours through their respective facilities for the guests from the other congregation. After dinner, a prominent member of the Pittsburgh community spoke on the theme of community building and service. The program continued during 2000-2001 with four more dinner programs.<sup>3</sup> These joint congregational meetings built upon a long tradition of interaction between Rodef Shalom and Calvary.

At the first Community Forum held at Calvary on October 11, 1999, Calvary tour guide Phil Maye pointed out the pillars that surround the central crossing

and support the octagonal spire, the richly carved rood (crucifix) screen, and the high altar with oak reredos framed within it. As Maye led his group down the central aisle, he pointed to the intensely brilliant Willet stained glass windows above the high altar. His charges admired the colorful parishioner-created needlepoint rugs and cushions which soften the altar area and adjoining chapels.

On December 6, 1999, before the dinner forum at Rodef Shalom, Beatrice Schlesinger led a group of congregants from Calvary into the main sanctuary of Rodef Shalom where they encountered the

The Annunciation, a window in the Lady Chapel of Calvary Episcopal Church, made by William and Anne Lee Willet.



Previous page, left, Ralph Cram's 1907 rendering for Calvary's Shady Ave. church; right, the second Rodef Shalom on Eighth St., downtown, 1901.

double-arched dome, broken at the top to allow a central stained glass skylight. A wainscot of dark stained oak surrounds the room, surmounted by the cream-colored walls of the double dome. On each of the side walls, Schlesinger pointed out the Willet windows which depict events from the Book of Ruth, the Book of Isaiah, Proverbs 31—Woman of Valor, and Moses pleading for the Children of Israel. Towering above the ark is the 1907 Kimball organ with its trumpet-like horns.

The present grandeur of Calvary and Rodef Shalom gives no hint of their very modest beginnings. Calvary was incorporated and held its first service in January 1855 in space rented from the German Lutheran Church; it was located in an alley between Collins and Sheridan avenues in the Village of East Liberty. Rodef Shalom, formed in 1853 and chartered in November 1856 as the first Jewish congregation in Pittsburgh, held services downtown over the Vigilant Engine House on Third Avenue, then in a larger rented hall on St. Clair Street in Allegheny City, later Pittsburgh's North Side.<sup>4</sup>

East Liberty is four miles east of downtown Pittsburgh. The nearest Episcopal parishes were Trinity, downtown, and St. John's in Lawrenceville. Mrs. Mathilda Dallas Wilkins, a prominent resident of East Liberty and wife of Judge William Wilkins, made an unsuccessful request to Pennsylvania's Episcopal Bishop Potter

during his visit to Pittsburgh in 1854 that a parish be set up in East Liberty. Undeterred, Mrs. Wilkins convened a meeting in Louis Castner's drug store in January 1855, attended by the Rev. William

Paddock, who agreed to lead regular services if an appropriate place could be secured. Arrangements were made to rent space in the "little church behind the mill" located at Plum Street and

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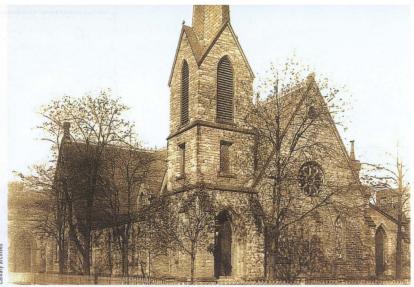
Mill Alley behind David Rittenhouse Kuhn's flour mill. Paddock and 13 others incorporated Calvary Episcopal Church, and adopted a charter and by-laws. The first building was described by early member T.S. Hartley as "built of brick with a small wooden belfry on the roof, sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, perfectly plain inside with the hardest of wooden seats." 5

In 1862, Rodef Shalom constructed its first congregational home downtown on Eighth Street between Penn Avenue and Duquesne Way. The three-story brick structure with an imposing facade was dedicated March 20, 1862. William Armhold, the first rabbi of the congregation, presided. Twenty-one-year-old Josiah Cohen, an immigrant from England who had been engaged to teach English in



Rodef Shalom Willet Windows: Book of Isaiah (left), Book of Ruth (right).





Left, the first Calvary
Church, 1855–61, leased
from German Lutheran
Church and known as
"The Little Church Behind
the Mill." It was destroyed
by fire in 1870. Right, the
second Calvary Church,
Penn Avenue, East Liberty,
1861–1901.

The first Rodef Shalom on Eighth Street, Downtown, dedicated March 20, 1862.



both the congregation's day school and Sunday school, spoke eloquently of the future prospects for the congregation. In an 1863 article in the *Israelite*, Isaac Mayer Wise reported that the congregation was made up of two factions, one from Germany and one from Poland that "had united in peace and harmony." Dr. Wise quoted from the text of Josiah Cohen's dedication speech, which had made grim reference to the American Civil War then raging, and called for the congregants to "prove by our liberality here this evening that the Jewish heart beats as strongly in favor of the restoration of the Union as any of America's other sons."

By 1885, Rodef Shalom had become nationally prominent in the Reform Jewish movement. Under the gracious leadership of Dr. Lippman Mayer, Rodef Shalom hosted the national Reform rabbinical conference held in Pittsburgh on November 16-18, 1885. From this conference emerged a "Declaration Of Principles" known as "The Pittsburgh Platform," which set the guidelines for the practice of American Reform Judaism for more than a century.

Rodef Shalom's Eighth Street building was extensively remodeled in 1888; a rededication ceremony was held that September 2. Lippman Mayer, the second rabbi of the congregation presided, and Josiah Cohen, by then a prominent lawyer, gave the rededication address. The neighborhood still provided what appeared to be the ideal location for the congregation. The North Side was home to many of its members as well as the location of the social club founded in 1874 known as the Concordia Club, the site of the rabbinical conference of 1885. Eighth Street between Penn Avenue and Duquesne Way had evolved into a block of churches, educational institutions, and the remodeled Rodef Shalom. Adjacent to Rodef Shalom was the Second Presbyterian Church. Directly across Eighth from Rodef Shalom was the Pittsburgh Female College. At the corner of Penn stood the massive Christ Methodist Church. However, the neighborhood was poised for change with the building of a railroad line along Duquesne Way.

During the same 40 years to the turn of the 20th century, Calvary built and rebuilt its own church facilities in East Liberty. The church purchased a lot a few blocks east of its first home, at the corner of Penn Avenue and Station Street. There Calvary built a Gothic revival church with intricate ribbed vaulting in its sanctuary and a steeply pitched Victorian-style roof. The first service in the new building was held in 1861. Major additions were constructed between 1870 and 1895.

Calvary Episcopal experienced financial difficulties in this second home, as well as difficulty in retaining clergy: by 1866, the first two rectors had resigned. After the third rector, Joseph Wilson, resigned, a turning point for Calvary occurred with the selection of Boyd Vincent as the fourth rector in 1874. The Calvary parish grew rapidly under Vincent's leadership and began new missions that

continued long after his rectorship. By 1900, Calvary Episcopal Church was the largest and most influential parish in its diocese. Calvary continued the creation of new missions in the greater community begun by Rector Vincent by helping to establish Episcopal parishes in Wilkinsburg (St. Stephen's), Oakland (Ascension), Mt. Lebanon (St. Paul's), and Fox Chapel (Fox Chapel Episcopal Church); and providing crucial support in the creation of such institutions as Kingsley House, Harmarville Rehabilitation Center, East End Cooperative Ministries, and the Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute. Like Calvary, Rodef Shalom influenced the greater Pittsburgh community by helping to establish other Reform Jewish congregations: Temple Sinai in Squirrel Hill, Temple Emanuel in Mt. Lebanon, and Temple David in Monroeville.

t the turn of the 20th century, the impact of changing demographics and neighborhood decline caused both congregations to consider a move. In December 1904, the Calvary Episcopal Vestry met to consider the sale of the Penn Avenue church and the construction of a new and larger structure. Traffic noise on Penn Avenue and from the Pennsylvania Railroad trains to the rear made the East Liberty location less desirable; however, the parishioners had great attachment to the existing church. As Calvary's long-time secretary, Edwin Edsall, recalled, the congregation



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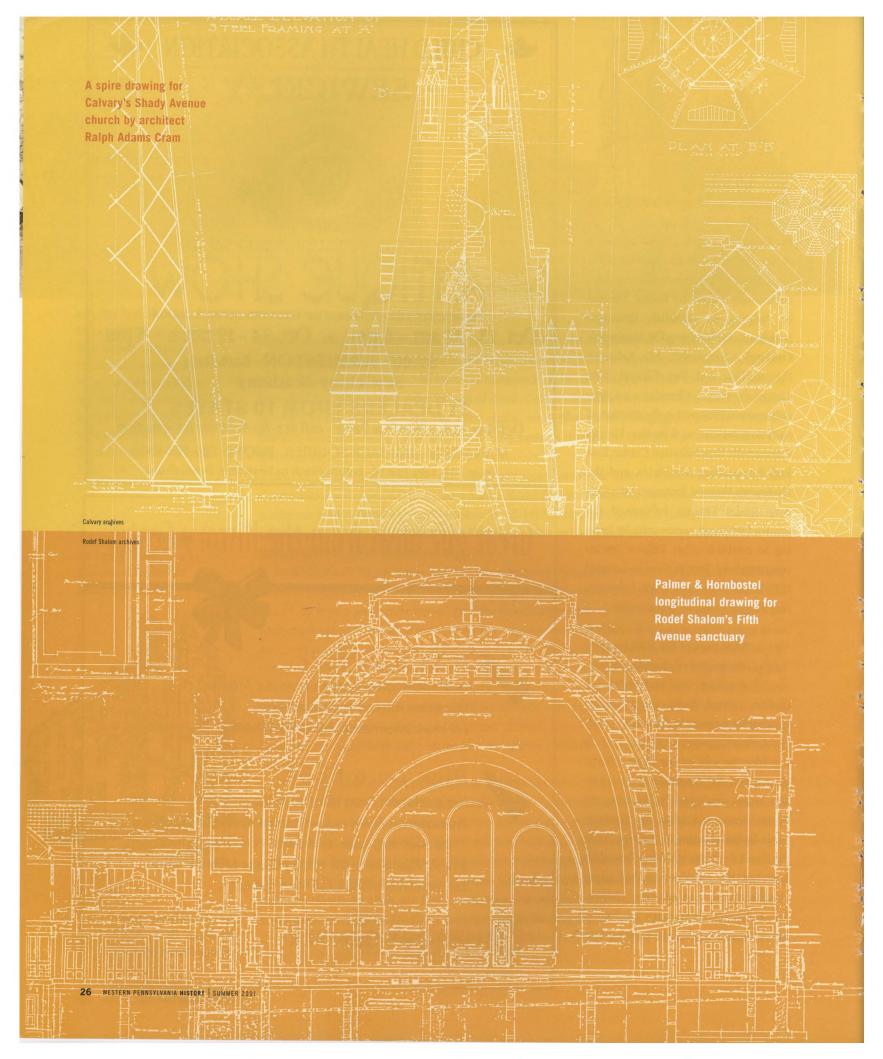


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agonized over the decision: in early 1905, "as by the hand of God, the clouds of doubt and misgivings regarding the proposed new church broke and cleared away." The parishioners agreed to sell the existing property and authorized the purchase of the property of George Washington Hailman on the northeast corner of Shady Avenue and Walnut Street as the site for the new church.

Eighth Street downtown had also changed in the years since Rodef Shalom had built its first building there. The needs of turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh industry appeared paramount. The Christ Methodist Church at the corner of Eighth and Penn had been demolished to accommodate three industrial buildings, and the Pittsburgh Female College was razed to construct Fire Station No. 18. The North Side members had gradually moved to the East End. Although Rodef Shalom's membership had remained static between 1860 and 1900 at 150 families, the great wave of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in the 1890s, and their quick assimilation and economic progress, provided a fertile source for growth in congregational membership.

The Board of Rodef Shalom decided in 1900 to appoint Rabbi J. Leonard Levy of Philadelphia as the successor to retiring Rabbi Lippman Mayer, and to build a new sanctuary on the Eighth Street site, a serious misjudgment that was to be rectified within a few years. The new building was dedicated September 6, 1901, and contained the four Willet stained glass windows which would in five years be reinstalled in an even grander sanctuary. The sale of pews for \$122,000 retired the building debt.

As its new Eighth Street building was being built, Rodef Shalom doubled its membership to 300 families, and by 1905, to 450 families. Many credited this three-fold growth to the appeal of Rabbi Levy, an outgoing and articulate Englishman who impressed the entire Pittsburgh community. After only three years, the congregation decided to sell the Eighth Street building to its neighbor, the Second Presbyterian Church. The Oakland and Shadyside neighborhood of 1904 was the most desirable cultural and residential area of Pittsburgh, with large homes and an electric trolley line along Fifth Avenue. The congregation acquired an unoccupied lot in the middle of the block of Fifth between Devonshire and Morewood.

As Rodef Shalom considered a new site in 1904, Calvary selected Ralph Adams Cram as architect for its new Shady Avenue church, a surprising choice because Cram's advocacy of Gothic architecture expressed "high church" values, and Calvary, from its inception, had been a "low church" parish. This characteristic was expressed, for example, by the fact that morning prayer was the most common form of Sunday worship, with the Eucharist celebrated only once a month. Cram's design, however, would, he said, be "strong, chaste, and uplifting." He related that he drew his inspiration for Calvary from Netley and Tintern abbeys in England. His vision included elements of Arthurian mysticism and Anglo-Catholicism. The spire and arches, according to Cram, "point us upward," the cross "everywhere crowns the whole," and "the one ornament everywhere visible on buttress and balustrade, on door and windows and wall, is the shield as a symbol of the power of faith." 6

Despite Cram's architecture, Calvary parish continued, until recent times, to be a "low church" congregation. The sheer grandeur and size of the new Calvary church, however, led to a greater use of pageantry, more formal vestments, a full procession with choir, clergy, and acolytes: attributes of a "high church" ritual. In this sense, the influence of the architecture had an effect.

While Calvary was choosing its architect for the new Shady Avenue church, Rodef Shalom prepared for construction on the Fifth Avenue property. Rodef Shalom's specifications set the objectives for the character of the physical spaces for the new sanctuary — a reflection of the relationship between architecture and the streamlined principles of Reform Judaism reflected in the 1885 "Pittsburgh Platform." The building was to be "neither Gothic nor Moorish .... the sanctuary must have a character of simplicity, depending for effect upon excellence of line and general proportion, with construction and finish to be inexpensive, but sound and in good taste; with external walls of brick and terra-cotta, the interior with hardwood trim, tinted plaster surfaces, and windows filled with leaded glass of simple pattern."

The project was awarded to Henry Hornbostel, who had designed the buildings for Carnegie Institute of Technology. The four Willet windows were to be preserved and "viewed from the new

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sanctuary in a setting suitable for the display of stained glass." Its sanctuary was to be square, arching to a 90 foot in diameter double dome 79 feet above the floor. The dome, supported by two intersecting barrel vaults with no structural steel, was to be joined at the corners by groins and broken at the top to allow for the central stained glass skylight.

As Hornbostel drew the plans for the new Rodef Shalom sanctuary, ground was broken in February 1906 for Calvary's new building. According to Suzanne Wolfe, Calvary's archivist, both the process leading up to the approval of the architectural plans and the construction itself led to a conflict between the architect and the building committee. Cram preferred New York, Boston, and London firms for the stained glass windows and wood carving within the church, while the more parochial building committee favored the use of local artists. However, in the decision to employ the new Willet firm of Pittsburgh, there was a meeting of the minds. According to Helene Weis, the Willet Stained Glass Studio's librarian, the Rodef Shalom and Calvary windows brought the Willet firm national attention.

On December 19, 1907, Calvary held its first service in its imposing new Gothic structure on Shady Avenue, which consisted of the church connected to a three-story parish house. The total cost was \$400,000, but by 1914, Calvary was free of debt, partly due to the generous assistance of Henry Clay Frick. Construction of Rodef Shalom's new Fifth Avenue building was also completed in 1907, and consisted of the sanctuary and a large building to the rear which contained the rabbi's study, classrooms, library, and recreational facilities including a gym and swimming pool. The design was consistent with the Beaux Arts movement then popular in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The cost of the new Rodef Shalom was \$250,000. Even with the sale of the debt-free Eighth Street temple, the expenditure placed the congregation in debt. Rabbi Levy requested that it not be formally dedicated until it was free of debt. Levy died in the 1917 influenza epidemic at age 52, three days after the final payment was made. The dedication on April 30, 1917, was at Levy's funeral service. The sanctuary was filled to its 1,400-seat capacity, with more people outside listening by way of a public address system, as Rabbi Stephen S. Wise of the Free Synagogue of New York dedicated the new temple to the memory of Rabbi Levy.

Both congregations had relied upon the sale of pews to raise money for construction and operating expenses, and a financial aristocracy of wealthy members occupied choice assigned pews. The assigned pew system, which had raised nearly all the funds for the construction of the 1901 Eighth Street Rodef Shalom building, was carried over to the Fifth Avenue building. But with a more diverse membership, such a financial aristocracy was becoming outmoded. The Third Report Of The Committee On The Unassigned Pew System, authored by Josiah Cohen and adopted on March 16, 1922, concluded: "We must unselfishly strike off the shackles of prejudice of habit, and instead of pew property rights, adopt permanently the free and unassigned pew system ... for the inculcation and dissemination of a religion knowing no distinctions except those based upon righteousness and justice."

As was the case with Rodef Shalom, pew rentals had served as the major financial support for Calvary church from its beginnings in 1855. Under its by-laws, only those who rented pews could vote

at annual parish meetings. By the 1940s, the parish membership had outgrown the availability of pews to rent, disenfranchising some members. At the urging of Rector William Lumpkin, the vestry passed a resolution at its 1950 annual meeting ending pew rentals. As noted in Calvary's Centennial History, "The Church, for the first time in ninety-five years, could theoretically be called

BOTH CALVARY AND RODEF SHALOM HAVE EXPERI-**ENCED A TREND SINCE THE 1970S TOWARD MORE** TRADITIONAL OBSERVANCE, BUT WITH THE USE OF CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE.

a free church." This transformation has encouraged a more diverse community of church members in terms of ethnicity, income, marital status, and sexual identity.

Both Calvary and Rodef Shalom have experienced a trend since the 1970s toward more traditional observance, but with the use of contemporary language. Calvary accepted the changes in the Book of Common Prayer in the 1970s with emphasis on the Eucharist and more contemporary and inclusive language. At Rodef Shalom, the Union Prayer Book had been the standard for worship. Rodef Shalom accepted the change to the Gates of Prayer in 1973, but retained the Union Prayer Book for evening services on the high holidays. As at Calvary, the transition at Rodef Shalom to more traditional observance, with gender-neutral and contemporary language, is still in process, trends that are characteristic of both the Episcopal and Reform Jewish movements.

The parallel developments at Calvary Episcopal Church and Rodef Shalom Congregation continue with regard to their influence within their respective movements. Both Calvary and Rodef Shalom reached a peak of influence in the 1950s, Calvary under the rectorate of Dr. Samuel Shoemaker, and Rodef Shalom under the rabbinate of Dr. Solomon B. Freehof. Pittsburgh demographics until the mid-1950s provided more members than either congregation could comfortably handle. Calvary was the dominant influence within its diocese and an important parish nationally. Both Rodef Shalom and Calvary have backed with action a concern for the needs of the poor and sick, an interest in ecumenical efforts with other denominations, and a spirit of openness and flexibility, carefully nurtured by its rabbis and rectors.

During the 1970s, Calvary maintained a socially liberal course, while the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh began a shift toward conservatism. This had a profound impact on Calvary's influence within the diocese and upon its ability to be heard ir the national governing bodies of the Episcopal Church. Similarly, Rodef Shalom, known for its adherence to liberal or classical Reform Judaism,

found that the forces of the more conservative elements in the movement were irresistible, at least in terms of ritual, particularly after the retirement of Dr. Freehof. Under the rabbinates of his successors, Dr. Walter Jacob and Dr. Mark Staitman, a movement toward more conservative practices has influenced the ritual, if not the overall liberal bent of its worship services.

While these changes in worship practices continue, both congregations have been committed to the enhancement and restoration of their physical structures. While in 1907 Calvary consisted of only the church and parish house, additions over the next decades included offices, a kitchen, a new 122-rank Cassavant organ, and a great hall. In 1991, Calvary undertook a major restoration of the church itself which included the installation of a central crossing platform in front of the rood screen and major work on the Cassavant organ. The stained glass windows have been removed, cleaned, and replaced. Calvary is currently planning an addition to the Parish House.

Rodef Shalom first added to the 1907 structure in 1937 with construction of a school building, auditorium, and chapel. A major addition followed in 1955 which included a social hall, kitchen, offices, library, and additional classrooms. The congregation undertook a complete restoration of the sanctuary in 1989. Hornbostel's original drawings were located in the Guastavino archives at Columbia University, and were used in the restoration. Painstaking efforts were made to replicate the building exactly as before. All the stained glass windows, including the dome and the Willet windows, were removed and restored to their original clarity. The decorative colored terra-cotta tiles were removed from the outer walls, repaired and replaced. In August 2000, Rodef Shalom began a two-year renovation project to include a new entrance from the parking lot and the modernization of the auditorium, classrooms, and libraries.

Such restorations and upgrades optimistically look to the continued viability of both congregations into the new century. These grand physical structures cannot, however, guarantee the future for these congregations. The challenges of the 21st century for both congregations derive from changing demographics, an ambiguous and non-uniform shift to more traditional ritual, and a need to forge an identity while maintaining a strong membership base. For Calvary, under the direction of Rector Arthur McNulty (1982 – 1994) and current Rector Dr. Harold Lewis, parish membership has stabilized. Calvary maintains its identity as a socially liberal congregation, in the face of the shift in its diocese and the divisions which have developed within the Anglican Communion.<sup>8</sup>

For Rodef Shalom, under the direction of Dr. Walter Jacob and now Dr. Mark Staitman, membership has also stabilized after a decline from the peak levels of the 1950s. Rodef Shalom also maintains its identity as a liberal Reform congregation, but with more traditional rituals in its service. To attract a new young membership, often characterized by inter-faith marriages, Rodef Shalom must hone an identity that accommodates its classical Reform past with the demands of a new generation.

The long and parallel histories of Rodef Shalom Congregation and Calvary Episcopal Church suggest that the challenge to maintain an identity and yet to be open to currents of change will continue to be met by both congregations, and further provide evidence that the forces, both local and national, that shape American religious institutions cross denominational boundaries. Similarities far exceed differences — a potent argument for the kind of cooperative efforts exemplified in the Calvary-Rodef Shalom Community Forum.

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- <sup>1</sup> "William Willet And His Work In Stained Glass," *American Magazine Of Art*, Vol. 12: 314-317, Spring 1921.
- 2 "Rodeph" or "Rodef" are English transliterations of the Hebrew word for "seek," as "Shalom" or "Scholem" is the transliteration for the Hebrew word for "peace."
- The speakers in 1999-2000 were Paul O'Neill, Chairman of Alcoa and recently appointed Secretary of the Treasury; John E. Murray, Jr., President of Duquesne University; Karen Wolk Feinstein, President of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation; and Leon E. Haynes, II, Executive Director of Hosanna House.

The speakers for 2000-2001 were Jim Roddy, Allegheny County Executive; Esther Bush, President and CEO of the Urban League of Pittsburgh; Christopher Hahn, Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh Opera; and John Thompson, Superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

4 "History of Rodeph Shalom, 1899," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1912, Vol. X: 64; articles in Jewish Criterion, 1901.

Also see *Rodef Shalom, Physical Spaces* 1860–1996, delivered by Richard L. Rosenzweig at the 140th congregation chartering anniversary, April 7, 1996.

- 5 Edsall, Edwin J., Three Generations: A History of Calvary Episcopal Church, 1855-1942, unpublished manuscript, 7.
- 6 Centennial History: Calvary Episcopal Church, 1855-1955, an unsigned manuscript which draws from Edsall and from another volume with numerous contributors, Calvary Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1908).

- 7 The American Architect, March 18, 1908.
- 8 The Pittsburgh Presbytery has experienced similar issues throughout its 50,000 member local community. On the advice of a consultant, resources are being shifted from maintaining buildings to amplifying the mission and establishing an identity for each member church. Ann Rodgers-Melnick, "Striving To Replenish A Thinning Flock." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 20, 2001.

Richard L. Rosenzweig is a third-generation member of Rodef Shalom Congregation and a lawyer. His last contribution to Western Pennsylvania History was "Lon H. Colborn And The Century of Science."

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