

Trinity Church: Beyond Religious Use

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Trinity Church, originally constructed in the 1720s and rebuilt in the 1870s by Henry Richardson, it is often used for both religious and community purposes and occupies a central role in Boston and the Back Bay, both geographically and in significance. Trinity's Romanesque design and grand interior demands respect and awe, which draws large numbers of people, in contrast to the Old North church, which holds as much historical significance, but whose use is affected by the form and location. The division of the church into different spaces, from the pews to the preacher's stand, offer sharp lines between public (e.g. church-goers and tourist) and private (priest, choir, others affiliated with the church) use of the church. Accordingly, a variety of people use the church, from those seeking Sunday Service to a place for discussion about faith or a rally point for community action. Furthermore, Alcoholic Anonymous, the various Trinity choirs, and tourist, along with many others, take advantage of Trinity for their own religious and secular purposes. Thus, Trinity Church, while being an essential Episcopal Church in Boston, also serves many other functions beyond just the religious.

Trinity Church occupies a central place in Copley Square, serving religious, community, entertainment, and other purposes. These different uses owe to the history and architecture of the building in addition to the types of services offered and the composition of the population that uses the building. Morning Sunday service reflects the local Back Bay population while going on other days (or the evening service) you see people from all walks of life, presumably tourists. Further, looking at the weekday services, from discussions on religion to various activities for youth, along with Trinity's involvement in Dearborn School, it is evident that the church serves a wide variety of purposes. Because of this, Trinity Church stands as more than a religious institution, but one where people go as a social gathering, a rally point for community action, a spiritual place and a tourist destination.

Trinity Church was originally located on Summer Street, in the current Financial District (9). It was one of Boston's early Episcopal churches, originally established around 1735 as an Episcopal Low Church. Because its Sunday service integrates aspects of High (adhering to strict traditions and ceremonies) and Low church, it may be considered a Broad Church. It burnt down in the Great Fire and subsequently was rebuilt in the 1870s with Henry Hobson Richardson lending the design. It was the first bit of architecture in America of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, which centers around brown tiles and solid-walled faces and was the first American architectural style exported to Europe. During its history, several different styles of stained glass windows were installed, from those of John la Farge to Sarah Whitman. Due to the distinct architecture, the Trinity has consistently been a tourist draw to the Back Bay and normally attracts around 100,000 people a year (6).

Trinity sits in the middle of Boston, lording over Copley square. The central altar is decorated in gold and white, it has decorative flourishes on the front and several candles around it. There are paintings on the walls near the top and the interior pillars are red and green. Above the altar is a cross suspended from wires and artificial lights point downward at an angle, attempting to simulate sunlight shining in. Facing the altar, there is a preacher's stand that is just high enough that you need to strain your neck to see,

which is likely intentional as you should be looking to God during the sermon. There is a place for coffee and other snacks downstairs, this often occurs after services and serves as a social, rather than religious area. Externally the building is shades of brown with the spires tiled in red and dark brown, which is slightly drab. However, when contrasted with the surrounding buildings, most more modern, it stands out and is a great tourist draw. Stained glass windows have been installed on all four faces of the church.

The stained glass windows are of varying styles, from the baroque ones on the south-side to the more traditional ones above the altar and on the west windows. They are brightly colored and depict many different scenes, such as *The Resurrection* (6). The pews are nothing spectacular, but they each contain kneelers, which all appear to be donated by various people over the years. The kneelers are of varying colors and contrast with the more drab nature of Old North Church's pews (5). This may play a role in the non-religious aspects of the church, as a decorative item that tourists enjoy, or as a method to raise funds for the church, giving those in the parish who donate a way to be recognized. The layout of the church helps inspire its use and the people who congregate there.

The composition of people at Trinity Church changes depending on the day and time, as does their movement through and around the church. On visits to the church during Sunday morning service, the population is mainly composed of older Caucasians with younger people and other races sprinkled throughout. Considering that Back Bay is about 78% Caucasian (4), this is not surprising, but stands in contrast to Boston Public Library, which during visits is much more mixed. However, Trinity Church serves a much different purpose; although, it aims to be egalitarian in its community activities. The dress was general formal, women wore dresses with men wearing slacks and dress shirts. This formality was absent during non-religious uses of the church, such as my wear when visiting or those of the various tourists. However, going to an evening Sunday service, the composition is much different, with more young people and the dress less formal.

The grandiose and open nature of the public sections of the church, as opposed to the more functional and enclosed spaces in Boston Public Library, lend towards different attitudes and uses. Even if one feels that they do not belong in the library, they can still

hide away in a small public space and have their privacy, the same is not the case in the more open public spaces of the church.

There are also the priest, preacher, choir members and others who are part of Trinity's staff. Before the Sunday service the choir comes and begins practicing to sing, in stark contrast to the people still milling about and talking. The preacher before the services moved about greeting people and preparing. Afterwards he was at the main entrance to the church, greeting people as they left. The staff all wore full robe and other garb, which is an easy way to signify their slightly different use of the building. The choir wore white robes, an allusion to their angelic nature that is reflected in their singing and positioning closer to the altar. The varying uses of Trinity are clearly separated by the physical layout of the public and private areas.

The church is divided into several areas: the pew, the choir stand, the preacher's altar and various other places. These serve both public, semi-public and private uses. The entrance and pew are the most public; it is possible to enter at nearly all times and the glass doors at the entrance lend a transparency not associated with other parts of the church but that are necessary for a public welcoming area. It is fitting that these areas, in addition to the exterior, are the most decorated: the pew looks upon a gold rotund with an orate cross hanging from the ceiling and stained glass windows at the back. These windows depict particular scenes from the Bible, further serving a public function to educate and evoke a feeling of respect key to the function of the building; as a place of worship and prayer, the grandiose, yet not flamboyant, air surrounding the building induces piety and awe. During service people are less likely to use the space to chat or perform other functions because there is a higher level of respect, which was observed upon visits. This contrast with the Old North Church, where upon visiting more people entered talking and continued talking during the service. The use was slightly different owing to how the public space was designed, perceived and thus used.

In addition, there are semi-public and private spaces. The choir, altar and preacher's stand are all semi-public. While they are in view, they are physically and socially separated from the pews, hinting at a different use of the space. This is primarily indicated by their

elevated location with respect to the pews and in the case of the altar and preacher's stand, they are more ornate than the other parts of the building. The preacher's stand even including a small roof, which given the interior location is unnecessary, but lends a certain importance to the location, in accordance with the centrality of the sermon to the services. The private places, some administrative and others for business unrelated to the public, are hidden from view and behind closed doors. This intentional sequestration of these locations is paramount to how they are used, preparation for morning services and other rituals would be affected if they occurred in full public view.

Through the Sunday Service at Trinity we can see its many uses come together. Trinity has Sunday morning services, at 9 and 11 a.m. and an evening service (Holy Eucharist) at 6 p.m. Before the start of the 11 a.m. service, people moved about Trinity and were greeting one another and catching-up, their movement about the space devoted mainly to social activities. However, once the service started, people immediately settled down and talking ceased, indicating the transition to religious. The 11 a.m. service starts with the Hymn in Procession during which the choir and priest enter. Several times the congregation was asked to join in singing the hymns, Psalms and other prayers. From a purely secular stand-point, these activities raise ones mood and, in conjunction with the Peace, it is a great way to start off the day in good spirits. In contrast, there were the choir only parts, which had a different feel. For example, during the Suffrages, the Cantor's, who you would be strained to understand, haunting voice induces the feeling of listening to an old preacher giving down a command. Thus positioning of people and who participates yield different results throughout the ceremony. The sermon was on sin, not just on the various types, but on how talking about sin has left the religious and wider social dialogue. The sermon was more a highlighting of a social issue that may have left the conscious, which is a useful endeavor. A small architectural detail, dividing the pews along the center by a solid board, allows the offering to proceed quicker. Further hymns and other prayers occurred before the service finished.

After the service, there was once again general milling about and a more social air took over. An older lady sitting next to me asked if we were new to the parish and I

said yes. She then mentioned that there was coffee and snacks served after the service, which served to promote more social mingling between churchgoers. While some people immediately got up and left or starting milling about, there were several who stayed at their pews, kneeling or praying. It might be inferred then that those people are at the service more for the religious experience rather than the social one. While it may not be intentional, having some pews that are a bit back, behind pillars or in more private corners might facilitate this type of activity. In addition, there are multiple public entrances to the church, allowing those who want to attend the service but are late to do so, as someone did during the time I was there.

During the service community announcements included activities by the church, people who had passed-away and other community updates. It is thus likely that many who attend also want to get updates and see what Trinity Church doing, since pledges by those attending support the place. Further, by highlighting discussions at the Forum, the lecture series and other events, the announcement serves to provide information about social and community activities.

Beyond the religious uses of the building, like many such institutions Trinity Church plays a central role in the community. Just listening to the community announcements during morning and evening services gives a small sampling: they are helping Dearborn School become a STEM school, volunteer services at the Rosie's Catering, lecture series, and other activities. During a Sunday service it was said, "We should go beyond saying good and perform it." The Dearborn School initiative is an effort to turn a troubled school into one focused on science and technology, thereby focusing the students toward successful futures. Rather than just helping with the initial burst of activity, the church is reaching out to its members to join in recent sessions to evaluate progress and assess methods of improving the program going forward.

This, along with volunteer activities both in Boston and abroad in Honduras illustrate the church's role in the wider community. The lecture series is an interesting blend of religion and a way to bring people together. Community discussion is further enhanced with the Golden Sticker program, in which Trinity has a specific book that is promoting

at the time and by wearing this sticker, it lets people know that you are also reading this book and as the preacher said, "will hopefully promote discussion with people you might not otherwise talk to." This is valuable to the community, as the more people in know one another, the more close-knit the community will become, which has endless benefits (2). By facilitating use of the church beyond a religious one, it improves people lives and also help it retain its self-funded nature.

A majority of Trinity Church's annual revenue came from annual pledges and the Trinity Boston Foundation. Using the church beyond religious purposes helps the church support itself through people who pledge larger sums, 38% of revenue, due to approval of the community activities (or due to the tithe, exact reasons can't be determined in all cases). This contrast to the only about one percent of the revenue comes from plate offerings. Around 17% of the budget goes toward programs and community support, service that extend the religious aspect (1). In addition, a portion of the budget is given toward facilities, with the recognition that upkeep of the form facilitate proper use, be it services or tourism. If the church was drabby and worn down, it is unlikely that it would have the same level of attendance, especially with other churches in the Back Bay. In addition to the community and religious uses, the church also serves other functions.

The church has a hall where an alcohol anonymous group meets each day. During the Sunday evening sermon, it was mentioned how the church helped those alcoholics whose habits had become destructive to those around them. Services like this offer a blend of religious and community service, as they also try to teach the alcoholics that through Jesus they can be saved. Thus, such a service can be seem both as good-will and an effort to bring more members into the parish.

Trinity Church contains some well-known choirs, such as Trinity Choir and Trinity Chamber Choir. Leif Gigstad, a friend who was formerly in the Trinity Choir, mentioned that beyond the volunteers in the choir, there are several members of the choir that are professionals from Berkeley and other music schools in the area. He joined primarily for religious reasons, but it seems that due to the choirs reputation and because they have to learn around three songs each week and perform, that this would be a place for aspiring

singers to join. The Trinity Choir has toured around the country and the Trinity Choristers is a group for children to train and hone their musical skills. The choir serves as a bullet point for reasons to visit the church on purely tourist grounds.

There are many people who visit Trinity only as tourist, seeking to delight in the beautiful stained glass windows and other aspects of the building. It is telling that Richardson knew that a rich interior and decorative exterior were essential for Trinity, both as a religious and tourist destination (9). Although tours after Sunday 11 a.m. service are free, other tours are charged, indicating that providing an attractive tourist destination is a secondary use that can help pay for the primary uses. Further, free events like Candlelight Carols help popularize the choir and the church, spreading good will (10).

Trinity Church has many uses beyond the religious, ranging from community service and announcements to a tourist destination. These many uses owe in part to its distinct location and architecture along with its pledge as a church to help its wider community. The clear delineation of different areas of the church helps divide their different uses, whether it be public praying at the pews, the sermon by the preacher at the raised stand or the choir singing on the elevated seating. Sunday services consists of both religious prayer and singing along with community announcements and the congregation's composition reflects the Back Bay population as a whole. During other times of the day, tourist from many different backgrounds can be seen in and around the building. The Romanesque architecture, beautiful stained glass windows and golden altar serve a dual purpose: for those in the parish, it serves to raise God's word and promote piety while tourist will marvel in the aesthetic beauty on display. This also allows the church to raise funds from various sources and continue providing the essential services that promote such a variety of uses from one building.

References

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