

The Center for Spirituality, Justice and the Arts at Middle Church
A Three-Phased Project to Heal Souls and the World with Just Love

Middle Church, one arm of the oldest consistently active Christian congregation in North America, dating back to 1628, is looking to build a landmark center for healing and repair in downtown Manhattan. Its inspirations include The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, founded by the Equal Justice Initiative, and the African American History Museum in Washington, DC.

We invite you to dream with us to design a site that we believe the City and Nation need most at this moment in history.

In 2028, Middle and the Collegiate Church will mark its 400th year on this soil our Lenape siblings called Manahatta. The Middle community believes this moment to be a spiritual turning point when the history of colonization and slavery must be repaired and healed; the theology that justified it must be dismantled and replaced with the practice of revolutionary love; and the work of justice, joy and beauty must have space to flourish.

Background

In December 2020, Middle Church lost our sanctuary to a catastrophic six-alarm fire. Out of the suffering and ashes, like a phoenix we rose. We trained over 12,000 adults in the work of racial/ethnic justice in two years through our Freedom Rising justice conference and special anti-racism salons. We made a worship movie every Sunday with new and archived sermons, dance, music and visual arts. Our community grew by 700 members in three years. We are in 48 states and 23 nations. Though it was devastating, we found new people, purpose, programs and partners in the fire.

Middle Church is Rising! We leaned into our VISION 2025 Strategic Plan, growing our Digital Church with intentional engagement on social media platforms and the generous use of arts in worship. We partnered with our sister non-profit—Freedom Rising—to enhance educational and justice programs like our annual conference, our Young Adult Leadership Lab, our Freedom Summer School and the JustArts training program for teens.

Now, in three phases, Middle Church and Freedom Rising are building **The Center for Spirituality, Justice, and the Arts, a physical and digital space for healing, leadership development, movement-building and the celebration of arts.** As we rebuild our space, we acknowledge our Dutch ecclesiastical ancestor ‘bought’ Manahatta from the Lenape; and the Collegiate Church built New York on this unceded land with the labor of stolen

African bodies. We must make reparations to Indigenous and Black people. This is our commitment; this drives our vision as we seek to also rebuild community, to repair unjust systems and to reclaim/reframe *Christian* as the “Love. Period” religion of Rabbi Jesus.

Phase One: Our Five Story Town House at 50 E 7th Street.

In this space, our cellar will include an industrial kitchen to support our hospitality and feeding programs, and a social hall for community connections. Floors one and two will be a two-level gathering space for worship, weddings, concerts and townhall meetings, and some office space for staff and podcasting! The third, fourth and fifth floors have meeting rooms for small groups, classes and trainings for all ages including our youngest little people and our teens. This space is for us and our New York neighbors, with state-of-the-art digital capacity so we can beam our just love all over the globe. We hope to be in this space for Easter in April 2025!

Phase Three: Building the Future at 112 2nd Avenue

Our Collegiate Church Consistory (Governing body) and the Middle Church Board voted to leverage our tragedy toward an audacious use of our precious space by finding a mission aligned partner who would help us dream big and build back better. We seek partnership(s) that allow us to provide something unique that our community needs and create an income stream that sustains our love and justice movement for generations to come. With support and guidance from the Mission Real Estate Development Group at Trinity Wall Street, the Majora Carter Group, and in conversations with our neighbors—we are discerning the best ways to use our land. We anticipate a large gathering space for art, convening and concerts AND something more. We can't wait to discover what this will be and hope to have a plan by the end of calendar year 2026. Part of this planning will include an open and creative search for an architect to guide our visioning.

Phase Two: In the Meantime-Green

An Oasis for Re-membering, Reparations, Renewal and Rising-Up

When we mourn our sanctuary site at 112 2nd Avenue, filled with debris from the fire that stole our beautiful worship space, we are inspired to pursue an interim project there.

We imagine how our empty lot might be used now, while we seek a mission-aligned partner for future more substantial development. We are inspired by our visits to the Holocaust Museum in Israel and the African American Museum in Washington DC; how the flow of the museum takes you on a journey from addressing the horrors of slavery and the holocaust to

the fight against such acts of inhumanity and evil, and to the triumph of the human spirit in working for justice and freedom.

Our questions are these:

How could Middle's sanctuary lot be transformed into an oasis that takes one on a journey, of remembrance/repair, spiritual renewal and a rising up of the human spirit?

What art, images or symbols could facilitate such a spiritual journey, and foster learning and repentance? What kind of temporary structures in such a space might encourage a Sankofa experience—a looking back, a picking-up of story and memory, a desire to make repair? What might inspire the renewal of spirit and the rising up of the soul?

Might this “third space” as an interim project teach us what to put permanently on the land? What might develop alongside an open-air urban oasis where people come to meditate, to listen, to be inspired by art, to ask critical questions, to learn and to be equipped to work for justice? We imagine this phase to be:

- A place where concerts/events/gatherings could be held for people to be spiritually renewed and equipped.
- A place that could generate new financial resources for organizations committed to the work of reparations and social justice, as well as for the Oasis.
- A place where communities can gather to network with other justice and art loving spirits, locally and globally.
- A place that belongs to and with all of humanity

Middle Church Vision Statement: God's Reign. Right Now.

Middle Church is a multicultural, multiethnic, intergenerational movement of Spirit and justice, powered by fierce, revolutionary Love, with room for all. Following in the Way of Jesus' radical love, and inspired by the prophets, Middle Church is called by God to do a bold new thing on the earth. We aim to heal souls and the world by dismantling racist, classist, sexist, ethnocentrist, ableist, cisheterosexist and other systems of oppression.

Because our God is still speaking in many languages, we work in interreligious partnerships to uproot injustice, eradicate poverty, care for the brokenhearted, nurture our planet, and build the Reign of God on earth. This activism is fueled by our faith; our faith is expressed in art; our art is an active prayer connecting us with the Holy Spirit. Middle Church affirms the transformative power of moral imagination, reclaiming and reframing Christianity inside our walls, on the street, and in virtual spaces around the globe.