Architectural Profile
Living Water Community Church

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Living Water Community Church (LWCC) is currently located at 6808 North Ashland Avenue in Rogers Park. The building was constructed in 1944 as a commercial space. There are presently no old photos of the building or a record of what it was used for in the time between when it was built and when the church bought it in 2003. LWCC first took notice of the mini-mall in 2001 after a shooting nearby at Pratt and Ashland drew the community there for prayer. Prior to church ownership, it had been a store of dubious legitimacy. The church purchased it two years later and began to renovate it for community use. The congregation started meeting there officially in 2005. However, slightly less than half of the 12,200-square-foot building is occupied by a laundromat that predates LWCC ownership. The church took up the lease when the building was sold. The surrounding area is primarily residential— apartment buildings face the church on all sides. The back of the church rests only a few feet away from the apartment behind it. (Figures 1-4)

Although it has been adapted to meet the needs of the congregation, the appearance of the building remains obviously commercial. It is a square, single-story structure with a flat roof and wide windows that look into the rooms at the front of the building, which include the primary worship space and an additional worship space for small groups. The exterior of the building is composed of concrete blocks, while the interior of the building contains both finished drywall and exposed industrial components such as the steel-beam ceiling. The main entrance was moved from the southeast corner to the eastern wall so as to not open directly into the front of the worship area. (Figure 5)

The windows that look into the worship space are covered by cardboard cutouts depicting different scenes in the life of Jesus Christ. Collaborative art is a large part of the LWCC and how the congregation worships. The congregation wrote bible verses on the cardboard before they were cut into shapes depicting the stories written on them. Not only does their location in the most public-facing windows demonstrate the building's function as a worship space, but it also shows how the congregation chooses to worship as well. (Figure 6)

The church has worked hard to make the nontraditional space suit its needs. Almost all of the renovations were done by members of the community. Their work has held up for nearly twenty years and it remains well-maintains and structurally sound. The division of the building into many separate spaces has created an eclectic collection of rooms. The path through the church is winding. Although there is one main hallway, it does not circle the entire building and several rooms must be accessed through others. (Figures 7 & 8)

The entrance leads the visitor to what the church has turned into the narthex between the offices and the worship area. The front half of the building contains the main worship space and an

additional area that the church used to run as a second-hand store. There are several superficial components that the congregation has used to make its mark on the building. The floor of the narthex is inlaid with a mosaic of different colored rocks. Members of the congregation were instructed to find a rock that had been smoothed by the water (in homage to the church's name) in order to create this community mosaic. The walls are decorated with artwork made and/or donated by members of the congregation, including banners, mosaics, and paintings. (Figures 9 & 10)

The worship area is wide open. This is where the visitor can see the cardboard cutouts that were first visible from outside the building. Scenes include the shepherds outside of Bethlehem, the Crucifixion, and Jesus' ascension into heaven. There are no fixed pews, so the room can be adapted for many uses. The ceiling remains industrial. This is by far the largest open space in the building. The congregation begins services in this area before splitting up into language-specific groups. (Figures 11-14)

On the other side of the front of the building is the old second-hand store, which was later converted into another worship space for language-specific services. Additionally, members of the congregation have added two sound-proof practice rooms. Music is a large part of their community, and they often hold music nights. (Figures 15 & 16)

The back half of the building is home to spaces with a myriad of purposes— the pastors' offices, prayer room, Sunday School room, worship space, daycare, kitchen, meeting room, after-school program area, etc. Some quirks of the original construction remain out of necessity but lack convenience. The ladder for roof access is located in the daycare and must remain vigilantly covered. (Figures 17-21)

The building and its renovations showcase the flexibility and versatility of the LWCC not just as a religious institution but a helpful neighbor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church opened a food pantry, and the After School Program meets at the church regularly. These programs provide necessary services not only for their congregation but also for families that otherwise may be unable to afford them. LWCC's adaptation of the space enables them to turn their attention toward how they feel they can best apply their particular talents.

Although this space is not a typical "church" space, the Living Water congregation has created an environment that suits their specific needs and values: adaptability, community outreach, and creativity.

The congregation has grown rapidly since it began worshipping in this space almost twenty years ago. Rooms have been repurposed and space is used economically. Although it can get a little tight, the congregation does not plan to move and continues to adapt the building as they see fit.



Figure 1. East side of the building and new entrance (far right).



Figure 2. Surrounding area.

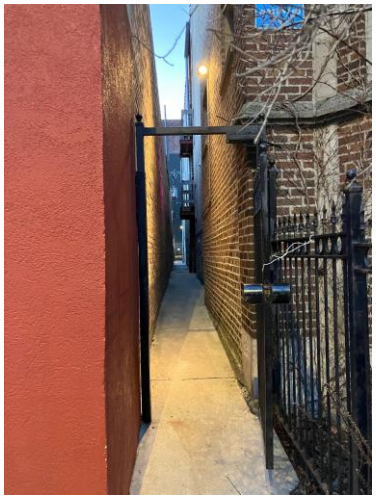


Figure 3. North side of building.



Figure 4. South side of building.

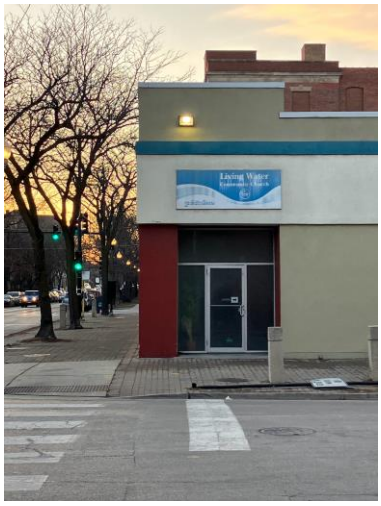


Figure 5. Original entrance.



Figure 6. Outside view of one of the window cutouts.



Figure 7. Connection to the laundromat half of the building.



Figure 8. Back hallway.



Figure 9. Narthex mosaic.

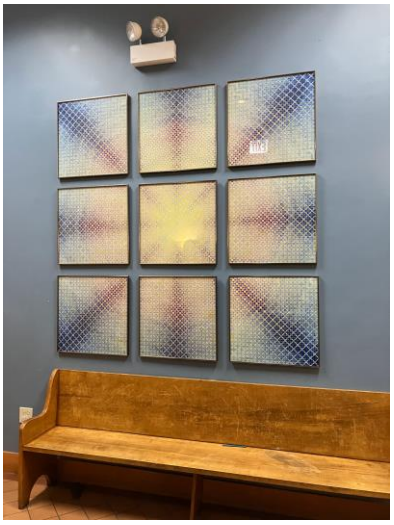


Figure 10. Narthex wall.

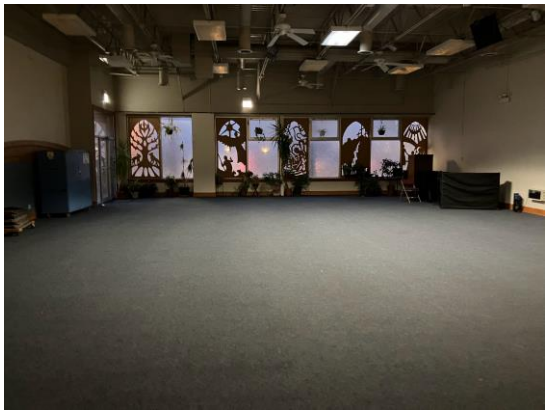


Figure 11. Main worship space.



Figure 12. Inside view of original entrance and window cutouts.



Figure 13. The ceiling of the main worship space.

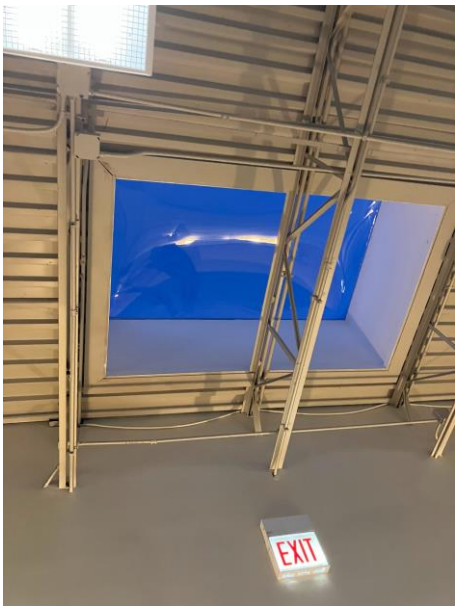


Figure 14. The skylight in the main worship space.



Figure 15. Old second-hand store/multipurpose room.

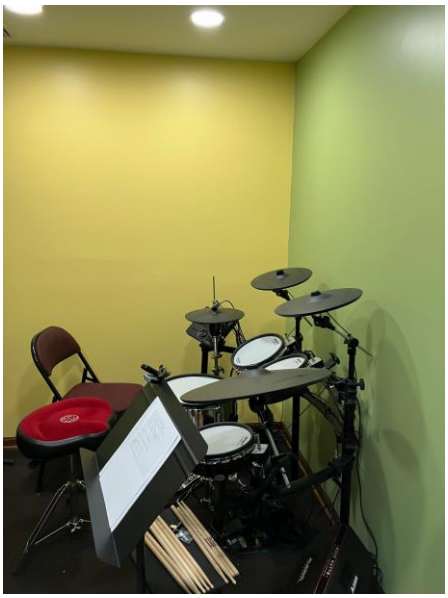


Figure 16. Practice room.



Figure 17. Prayer Room.

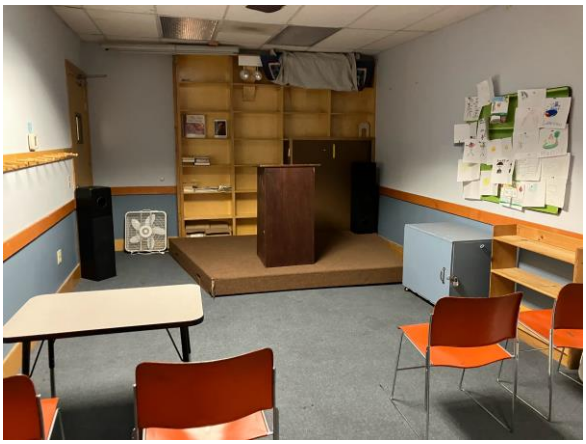


Figure 18. Multipurpose room.



Figure 19. Artwork in a multipurpose area.



Figure 20. The daycare.



Figure 21. Roof access in the daycare.