

GROUNDING OUR WORSHIP

The site of St. Clare of Assisi Episcopal Church has a long and active history. The property was part of the land that the local Anishinaabeg tribes were forced to cede to the United States under the 1807 Treaty of Detroit. In 1824, the site was part of a 640-acre parcel that became incorporated as part of the City of Ann Arbor and the seat of Washtenaw County in the State of Michigan. In 1853 William Anderson, the first Washtenaw County Sheriff, built a Greek Revival style farmhouse on the property, suspiciously similar to one built the same year downtown by his rival, Postmaster Henry Bennett, now the Kempf House Museum on Division St.



In 1937 Dr. Inez Wisdom purchased the property to use as a residence and medical office that she shared with her partner Gertrude Griffith, a professional nurse. The women were known as outspoken proponents of Margaret Sanger, an early advocate of birth control, and are believed to have been the only medical providers of contraceptives in Ann Arbor at the time. In 1940, Dr. Wisdom built a private chapel, dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, in part constructed by her patients in lieu of payments for medical services. The chapel was used for private worship and available for local weddings.



In 1953, the two women, now co-owners of the property, donated the chapel and the land surrounding it to the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan for a Mission Church, to be named St. Clare of Assisi. The first Mission service was held in the chapel on Whitsunday, May 24, 1953. Following a summer of services held in the garden, the congregation of about 40 moved into Stone School for several years while a proper church was built next to the chapel.



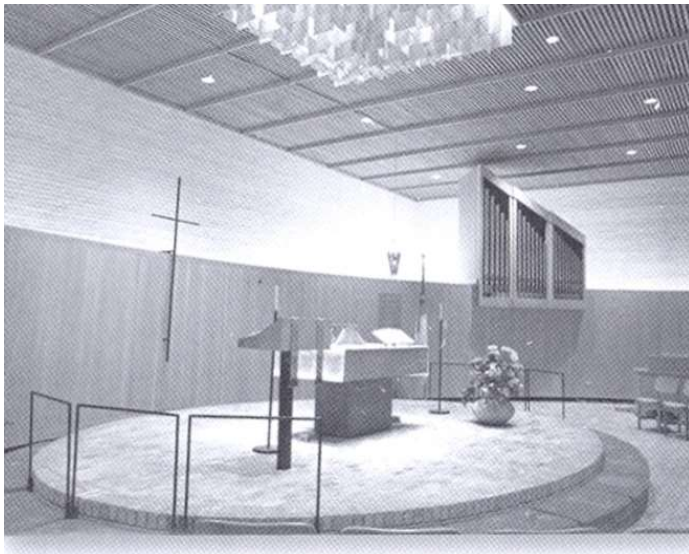
With a Sanctuary above and classrooms and offices below, the first service in the (unfinished) building was held on Feb. 1956 with an altar, pews, vestments and hymnals donated by other area churches and an organ from the Salvation Army. The wooden ceiling of the original Sanctuary is still visible in the current building above the church offices on the second floor.



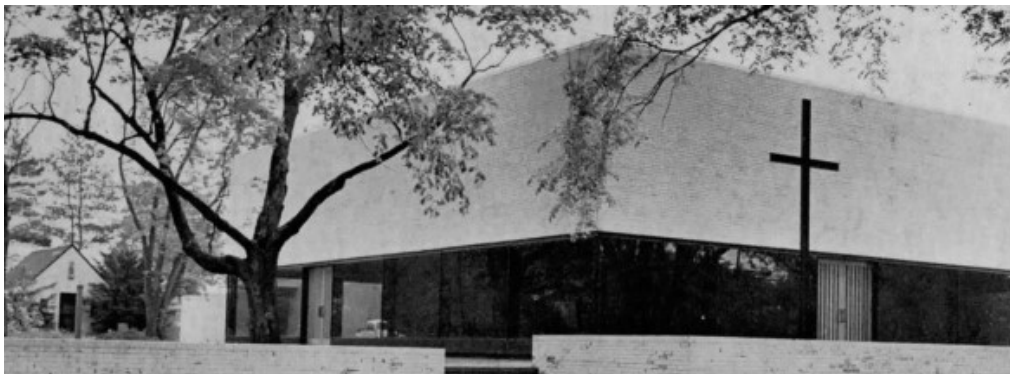
In 1966, having become a Parish Church and rapidly outgrowing its space (church school enrollment was 101 children!), St. Clare's begins planning for the construction of a larger facility, to include a new Sanctuary, office space and additional classrooms. David Osler is selected as the architect for the project and ground is broken in October 1967.



The addition featured a Sanctuary-in-the-round where the first service was held on September 29, 1969 at the altar is still in use today.

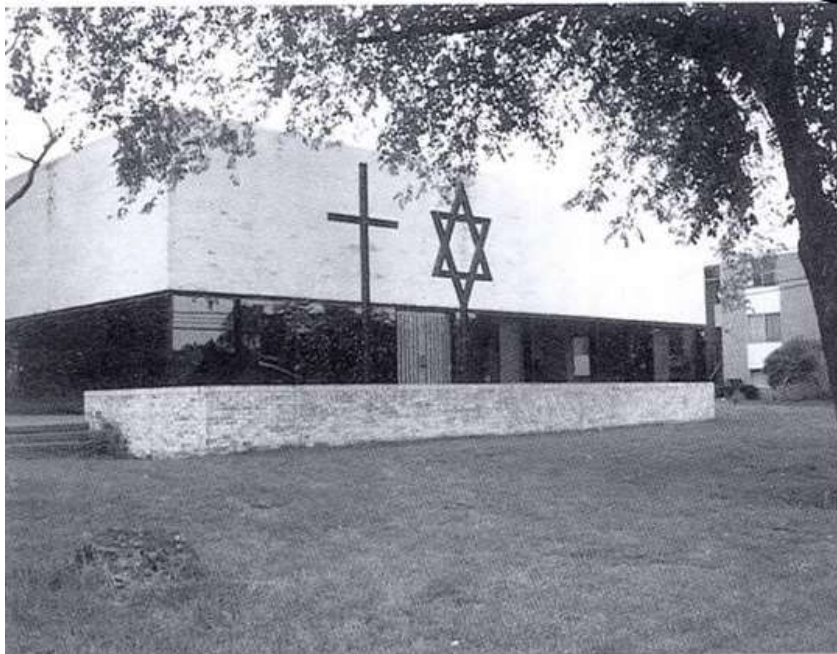


In 1970 David Osler wins an Award of Honor from the Michigan Society of Architects for St. Clare's modern new building.



That year also saw Rabbi Bruce Warshal of the Temple Beth Emeth, a local reform Jewish congregation, approach St. Clare's about renting the Sanctuary on Wednesday and Friday nights. With the approval of the Vestry and Rector Colin Campbell, TBE holds its first Sabbath Eve service on July 17, 1970.

Following 4 years as tenant and informal discussions between Rabbi Warshal and Rector Douglas Evett, the temple board proposes a "joint study of the feasibility of joint-ownership of the existing building and a potential classroom-social hall facility addition". Following approval by the church Vestry and the temple Board, on December 17 an agreement is signed creating Genesis of Ann Arbor, Inc. a corporation consisting of the two congregations to own and manage the property. On May 28, 1975 the Star of David is raised next to the Cross in front of the Sanctuary on Packard Street.

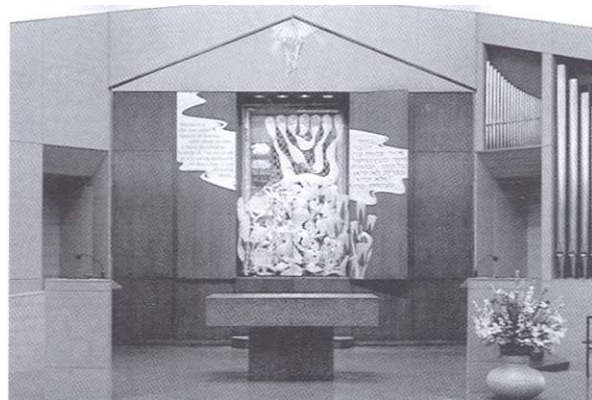
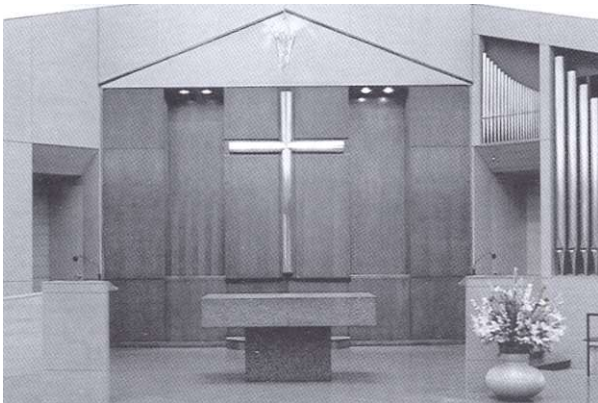


In 1977 and 1978, an expansion on the east end of the original building is constructed for additional offices on the upper floor as well as a Social Hall with a modernized kitchen and more classrooms on the lower level.

By 1988 the needs of the two growing congregations result in the creation of Space Planning Committee consider another expansion of the facility to add 18 more classrooms, a 400-600 seating sanctuary and a social hall with a capacity of 250. Many months of meetings are held to consider how best to meet and finance these requirements. In February 1990 Phil Bowen proposes to the committee that a new sanctuary be built and the Osler sanctuary be remodeled as a social hall. In August 1991 the church and temple form a Joint Building Committee and a Joint Capital Campaign is launched in 1992. A ground breaking ceremony is held for the new building on October 7, 1993 and the new sanctuary is dedicated on September 11, 1994.



The worship space in this sanctuary is configured so that it can be transformed from CHURCH to TEMPLE and back with the change of a few wooden doors behind the altar.



In the intervening 20 years, the facility has undergone other (less dramatic) changes:

- In 2007 the first floor of the Anderson-Wisdom House became home to the Back Door Food Pantry, “Providing Hunger Relief With Dignity”



- In the St. Francis Chapel, the lighting and HVAC were upgraded and the old altar was replaced by a carved wooden one in memory of the Rev. Douglas Evett (2013)



- In 2020 160 Solar panels were installed on the flat portions of the building roof, reducing our carbon footprint and the Genesis electrical costs. In 2025, the solar array was expanded further along the north side of the office wing.



The St. Clare's community also had to adapt our worship in inventive ways during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Like many congregations, we learned to worship on zoom, including “coffee hour” breakouts. Committees, cell groups, the vestry – our community learned to stay in touch and get work done with this new technology. Zoom continues to be a useful tool in our worship and gathering practices today.



Outdoor worship at the local school yard and gatherings in backyards and driveways across the city meant we could safely gather in person.



As the understanding of how COVID-19 spread, congregants had the option to worship under a tent just outside of the sanctuary. The tent was also used for book clubs, children's activities, and more.

St. Clare's rests on property which has supported the worship of God for over 85 years.
Our current Genesis campus enables us to fulfill our mission to:

WORSHIP WITH JOY



Mark & Jeremy's Wedding

GROW IN FAITH



Youth Group meets in St. Francis chapel

ACT FOR JUSTICE



Humanitarian Supplies for Haiti