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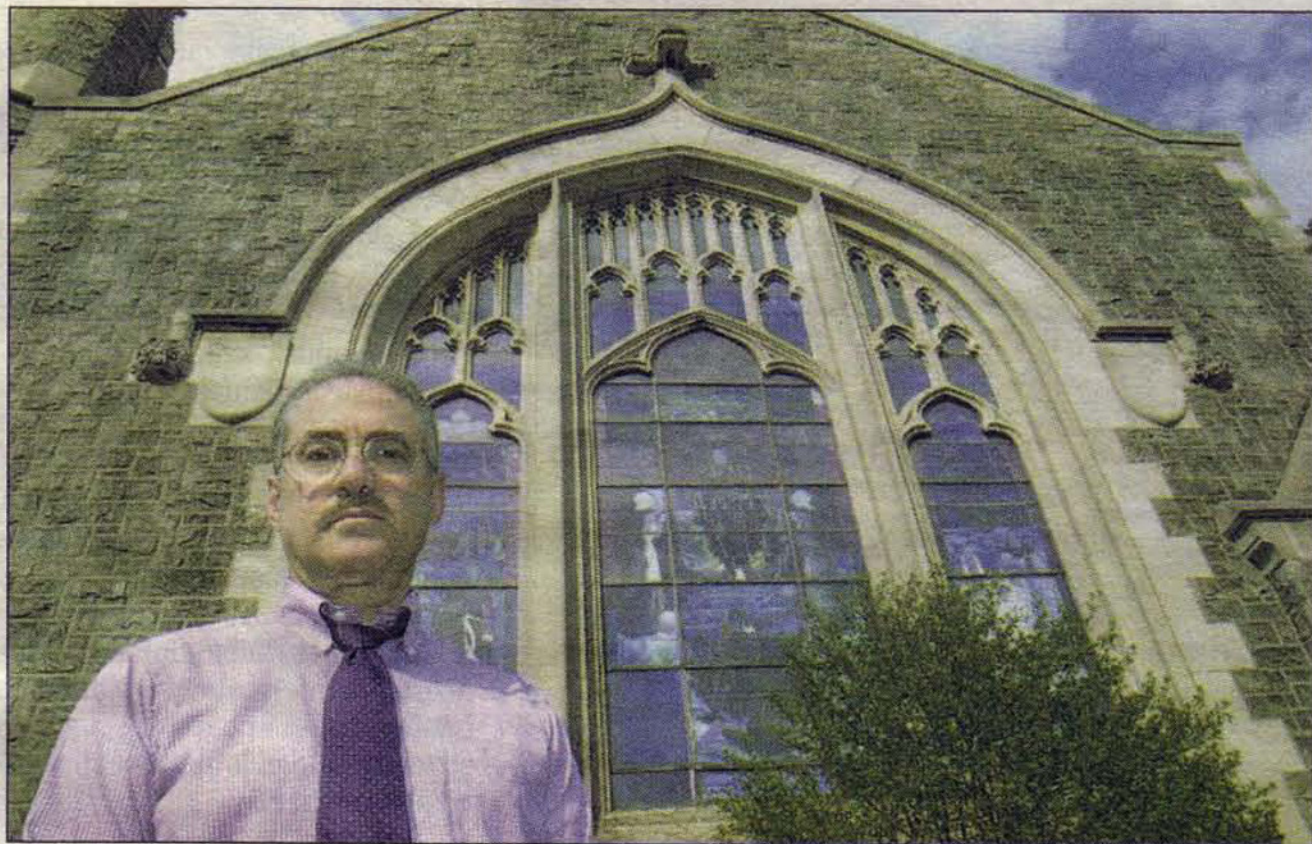
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Trustee Richard Kirk and Calvary United Methodist Church offer a model of preservation.

A vow to save sacred places

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STAFF WRITER

Last decade, the Calvary United Methodist Church at 48th Street and Baltimore Avenue in West Philadelphia was up for sale.

"It was an expensive church when it was built, very beautiful and ornate, and the congregation was just too small to take care of it,"

said Richard Kirk, one of its trustees.

Today, the sale sign is gone and the church, which has one of the largest stained glass windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany in the area, is being restored.

Funding for the restoration has come from a variety of sources. But the plan that enabled

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the church to get the funding was worked out with the help of a Philadelphia nonprofit called Partners for Sacred Places.

"The goal [of the plan] was to develop it both as a venue for culture and the arts and also as a sacred place — to keep it as a church," Kirk said.

Partners for Sacred Places has helped embattled churches such as Calvary United throughout the country put together plans to stave off the wrecking ball. Now, it wants to go one step farther and help finance those plans itself, at least locally, with the Philadelphia Regional Fund for Sacred Places.

Partners' initial goal is to raise \$1 million for the fund by the end of the year so it can receive a matching \$1 million grant from the William Penn Foundation. It eventually wants to make the fund large enough to dispense \$5 million in grants to 50 area religious organizations over the next five years.

Partners thinks it can attain that goal, in part by pointing to its Sacred Places at Risk study, which looked at more than 100 congregations with pre-1940 properties in six cities across the country.

The study found that 93 percent of the congregations made their buildings available to the community around the buildings and that the average congregation hosted four community-service programs. That indicates that the buildings Partners wants to help save play an important role in their neighborhoods, particularly if the neighborhoods themselves are decayed or decaying.

"The point we make, and the point congregations need to make, is they are *de facto* community centers for much of the week," said A. Robert Jaeger, Partners' executive director.

Partners used an earlier grant from the William Penn Foundation to train leaders of congregations in three Philadelphia neighborhoods how to make that point to organizations that would help fund their efforts to preserve their buildings.

After it completed that work about a year ago, Jaeger said, Partners returned to the foundation with the idea for the fund. The foundation agreed to provide it with a \$1 million challenge grant and with a \$275,000 grant to help it put together the infrastructure needed to raise and run the fund.

"This really is part of our strategy of helping the region capitalize on its outstanding assets," said Brent Thompson, the foundation's communications director.

There are plenty of them.

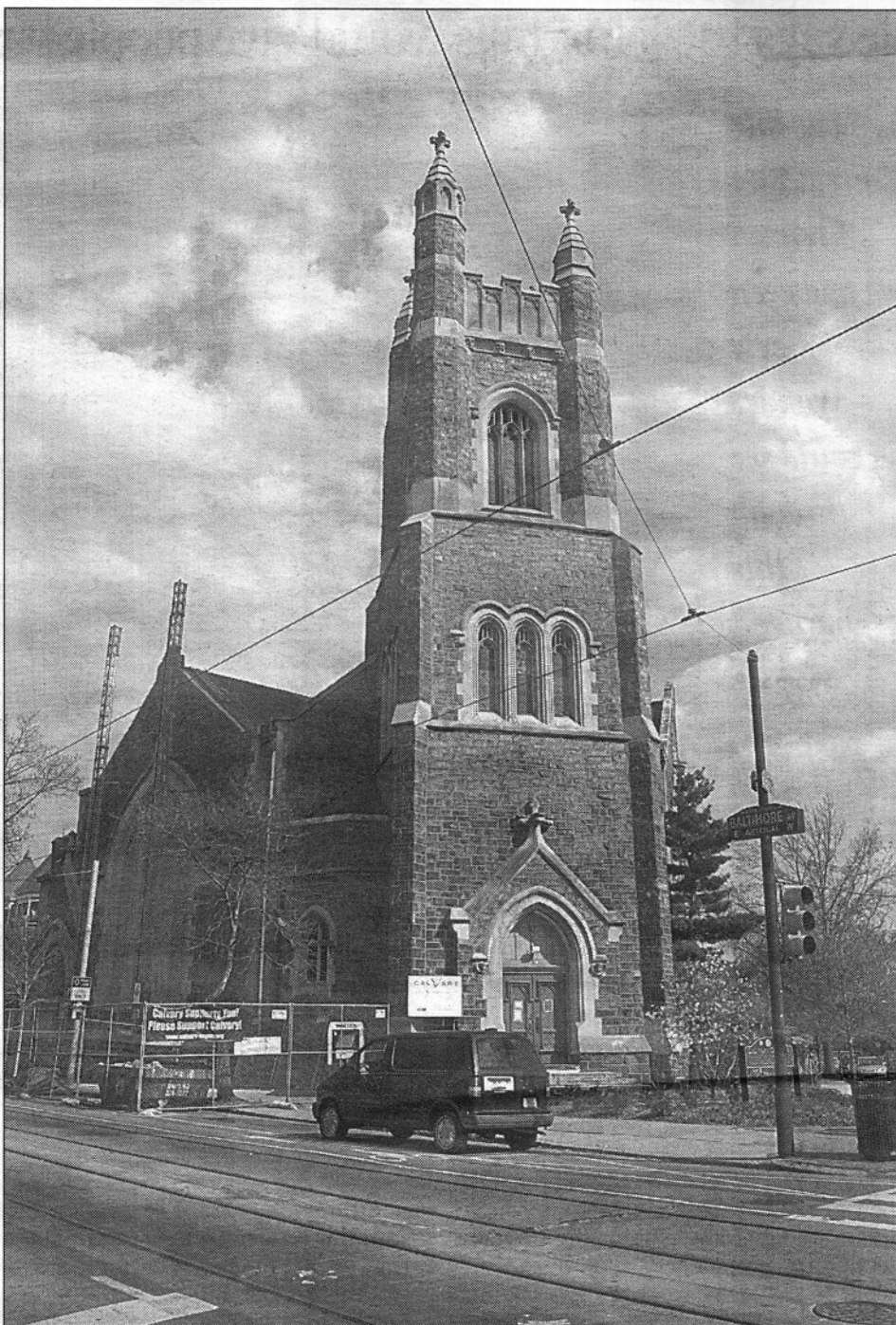
Partners estimates there are 800 older churches or synagogues in Philadelphia and probably an equal number in the counties surrounding it. Of those, probably 200 or so meet the criteria for receiving grants from Partners' fund:

They are historically and architecturally significant;

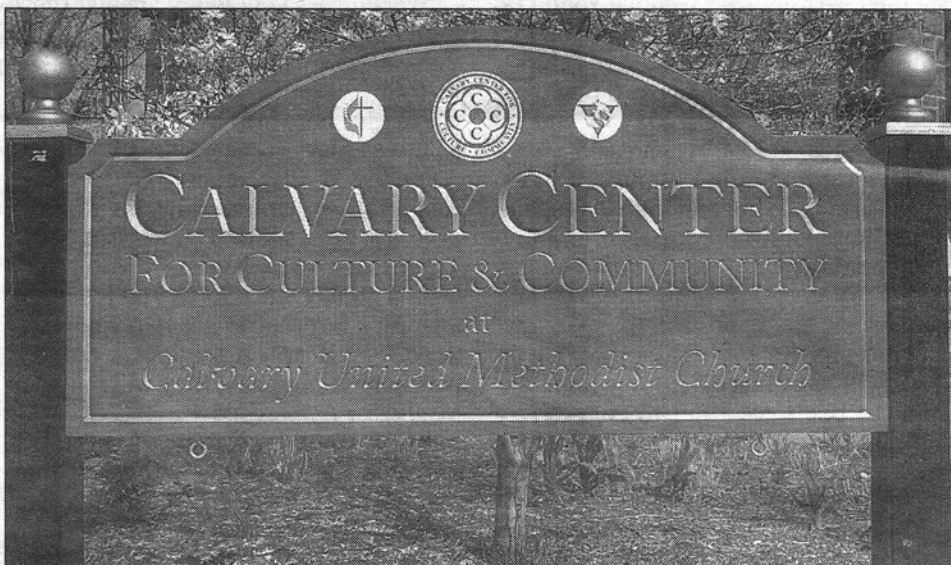
They are widely used by the community around them, and;

They are run by a strong congregation with a committed leadership that has a comprehensive plan to repair them.

Congregations that get grants will still have to raise money from other sources to



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Calvary United Methodist Church sits at 48th Street and Baltimore Avenue in West Philadelphia. Thanks to efforts by Partners for Sacred Places and others, the church, once up for sale, is undergoing restoration, and is considered a community asset.

complete the work they need to undertake. The typical inner-city church or synagogue needs \$1 million to \$2 million in repairs, Jaeger said.

The fund should be able to help congregations get much of that. A nonprofit called Historic Boston Inc. found that \$1.2 million in grants to 46 religious properties

over 10 years generated more than \$10 million in additional donations.

"I think that's one reason donors are responding," Jaeger said. "It's not just the need. It's the feeling that there's a value-add we can bring beyond the grant itself."