NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

537

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 220 Winton Road South [ ] not for publication

city or town Rochester [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Monroe code 055 zip code 14610

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [X] nationally [ ] statewide [ ] locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A Pierpont DSHPO 6/26/14
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[X] entered in the National Register
[ ] see continuation sheet
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] see continuation sheet
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register

[ ] removed from the National Register

[ ] other (explain)

for Signature of the Keeper
Alexis Abernathy
date of action
9/2/14

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

[X] private
[ ] public-local
[ ] public-State
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

[X] building(s)
[ ] district
[ ] site
[ ] structure
[ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	**0**	**TOTAL**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/church and school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/church and school

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation poured concrete

walls brick

roof foam

other

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

[ ] **A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

[ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

[X] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] **B** removed from its original location

[ ] **C** a birthplace or grave

[ ] **D** a cemetery

[ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure

[ ] **F** a commemorative property

[ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance:

1961 - 1969

Significant Dates:

1961, 1962, 1965, 1969

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Louis I. Kahn (main church and addition)

August Komendant (engineer)

Robert Hyland & Sons (contractors); Keast & Hood (struc eng.); Fred S. Dubin (mech eng.)

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

[ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
[ ] previously listed in the National Register
[ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
[ ] recorded by historic American Building Survey
_____
[ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record
_____

Primary location of additional data:

[ ] State Historic Preservation Office
[ ] Other State agency
[ ] Federal Agency
[ ] Local Government
[ ] University
[ ] Other repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7.91 acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	292102	4779628
2	18		
3	18		
4	18		

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Walkowski (assistance provided by Bill Fugate, First Unitarian Church)

organization New York State Historic Preservation Office date June 13, 2014

street & number Peebles Island Resource Center, PO Box 189 telephone (518) 237-8643 x3214

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

First Unitarian Church is located at 220 Winton Road South on a roughly rectangular shaped parcel between Hillside Avenue and Nunda Boulevard in Rochester's Cobbs Hill neighborhood, approximately three miles from downtown. The building is located on the east side of Winton Road South, a major north-south thoroughfare, just south of the I-490. The nominated property is a two-story, brick-clad Modern style church building designed and constructed between 1959-62 with an attached 2-story with basement brick-clad addition that was built in 1965-69. The building has a binuclear plan, with two larger units joined by a hyphen that serves as the main entry. A surface parking area is located to the north of the church building and a large garden area is located at the southeastern corner of the property. The church is sited set back from Winton Road on flat and level ground, and has a dramatic slope away from the building towards the eastern end of the property. First Unitarian Church is surrounded by a largely single and multiple family residential neighborhood composed of freestanding houses; on the west side of the street across from the church is located a mid-twentieth century Modern brick Jewish temple complex, the Temple Beth El.

Designed by prominent national and international architect Louis I. Kahn, First Unitarian Church is an excellent example of his Modern architectural style. The church is a two-story, steel reinforced concrete block and poured concrete building which is clad in brick on its exterior. The building measures approximately 230 feet by 115 feet at its longest and widest points and, of that length, approximately the easternmost 75 feet is the addition.

The original church, constructed between 1961 and 1962, has a roughly rectangular plan. This portion of the building consists of a rectangular mass with large rectangular units along the periphery, which have been slid around the main core. The exteriors of these units around the building are characterized by deeply folded brick walls created by a series of narrow, two-story projecting light hoods that help shield the windows from direct sunlight. The windows themselves are typically tall, narrow wood framed units with large fixed panels above smaller operable hopper windows at the base to allow for ventilation. Between the light hoods at the ground floor are projections of the building that form small benches in the interior. Small windows on each side of the bench seats set within the projecting light hoods allow additional indirect light into the rooms but are nearly invisible from the street. These ground level projections give the exterior surface a dual character, emphasizing

the play of light and shadow, projection and void, across the exterior walls. The tall, narrow light hoods that throw the recessed wall surface behind into darkness create a series of vertical shadows on the exterior wall that are reminiscent of a row of columns, their vertical lines adding to the impression of height. As was typical in Kahn's designs, the entrances to the building are concealed and not readily apparently to the passer-by, further emphasizing a sense of solidity and impenetrability in the building. A small entry door is located on the west elevation toward the south corner of the building, recessed and darkly shadowed. The main entry is located behind the original church building to the east, in a hyphen-like space now located between the church and the addition, and faces north toward the parking area. From Winton Road, the main entrance of the building is not readily visible.

One of the most notable elements of the exterior of the church is the series of four massive, square light towers that erupt from the roof. While those surfaces of the light towers that face outwards have a solid brick exterior, the inner-facing surfaces have large rectilinear ribbon windows that bring light inside. The placement of these towers clearly expresses the location of the inner sanctuary of the building, making Kahn's interior plan for the building visible from the exterior.

Kahn was engaged in 1964 to design an addition for the original church building shortly after it opened, and it was built between 1965 and 1969. Located at the rear (east) of the original church building, the new wing was linked to the existing entry vestibule space, turning this area into a sort of hyphen. The addition was much simpler in its overall design, although it is well integrated and complements the existing building. Rather than the convoluted surface of the original church portion, the wing has a simple, smooth brick wall surface. The rhythm of the two-story light hoods is referenced by the two-story recessed slots cut into the addition to accommodate windows, although with a less dramatic visual effect. At the east elevation of the wing, due to the sloping contour of the site, three levels of the building are visible. Here, a three-story V-shaped recess is set behind a flush central brick pilaster, giving the effect that the windows are drawn back from the wall plane.

The interior plan of the original church building consists of a large square auditorium worship space, ringed by a corridor, which is itself surrounded by rooms of assorted size. Kahn also located stair towers along this outer ring at the northeast and southwest corners of the building. The plan of the addition consists of a more traditional double-loaded corridor, with a broad corridor that doubles as a meeting space with adjacent offices. The floor plan of the building guided Kahn's overarching architectural development of the building, and the functional relationships of rooms and spaces was of primary concern.

Throughout the building's interior, Kahn utilized concrete block for walls, many of them square 8-inch by 8-inch blocks, poured and smooth finished concrete floors, and a medium honey-toned oak. Common in many spaces are full-height, narrow slits in the concrete block wall, which hide the building's heat returns. Kahn also left traces of the building's formwork and construction evident in the interior finishes. Poured concrete surfaces typically retain the small holes used to fasten the formwork together. Also commonly used throughout the building was steel reinforced poured concrete, and Kahn carefully selected long, narrow timber for creating the molds so that their impression would be visible on the interior. Some areas of the building have sheet vinyl flooring which mimics the colors of the grey concrete.

The main entrance to the building, located behind the main church building, faces north and enters into a spacious lobby area. This lobby area serves as a hyphen, linking the original church building (at the west) with the addition (east). Directly connected to the lobby, the auditorium space is a large, two-story rectangular volume that serves as the primary space in the building. The room measures 58 feet wide and 66 feet long at the lower level, and is roughly 74 feet wide and 82 feet long at the upper story, which steps back from the lower wall. Entrance to the space is from doors set beneath a cantilevered balcony/choir loft. This balcony appears to be balanced precariously on a single slender center beam, emphasizing the dramatic play of mass and lightness that characterize the architecture of the space. The walls of the auditorium feature a two-part division, with the upper portion stepping back and the lower portion projecting into the main space. Perhaps the most dramatic element of the space is the massive poured concrete ceiling. The immense cruciform concrete structure has a faceted shape that some scholars have compared to the underside of a ship's hull. Kahn carefully selected long,

narrow boards to create the form for the ceiling, and their impression is left visible. These slight ridges on the surface emphasize the linearity of the ceiling structure. Its outer edges do not sit directly on the sanctuary walls but rise above them, giving the sold concrete form a surprising sense of lightness. The ceiling structure is visually supported by twelve slender columns embedded in the lower level projecting sanctuary walls, three columns per wall, and square brackets on top of the central column in each wall support the massive concrete form. The brackets are split in the middle to allow the concrete mass to be perceived as passing through to the outer corridor walls, which provide much of the ceiling support. Each central column is braced to the columns on either side by horizontal beams. The ceiling is lowest and darkest in the center. The overall effect of this complex design is that the massive concrete structure, which appears visually heavy, is lightened by the fact it appears supported by a series of thin, delicate columns. This play of mass and lightness effect is further emphasized by the brightness in the corners of the room, which is provided from the four large light towers. Located at the four corners of the space, these towers fill the corners of the room with hidden, indirect light and enhance the sensation that the large concrete ceiling form is floating. The choir loft features solid concrete block side walls and an open front with a metal balustrade. Near the top of the wall above the choir loft is a series of wooden “windchests,” from which the organ pipes rise. The organ itself is a Wicks organ and was installed in the building along with the pipes in 1981. The room is simply decorated, with folding chairs and a simple wood platform at the west end serving as a stage and podium. Perhaps because the room is dominated by grays and wood tones, the most colorful element in the auditorium is a series of colorful woven tapestries designed by Kahn and fabricated by Jack Lenor Larsen. These long, narrow rectangular tapestries were designed using the spectrum of color, from reds to violets. These fabric hangings have a dual purpose in the auditorium, as they not only introduce a non-representational and non-figural design element to the space, but also aid with sound quality.

Another primary space on the first floor is the Susan B. Anthony Lounge. This room is located just to the south of the main entrance lobby and was part of the original church building. This spacious meeting room features the polished concrete floor, concrete block walls and wood doors and trim that are typical throughout the building; however, the ceiling is detailed in an uncommon method with numerous small wood slats that run

parallel to the length of the room. These slats likely gave this intimate meeting space a greater level of sound control. The room also contains several chairs that Kahn had selected for use in the building, as well as several wood wheeled display units.

Also located on the ground floor, just to the south of the auditorium, is the main kitchen for the church. The kitchen is largely intact to Kahn's original design. It features large wood doors set on a track, so that the kitchen can be opened to the corridor or enclosed to control both noise and smells. Inside, the kitchen features numerous wood cabinets, all finished in the same medium honey-toned oak wood used elsewhere in the church.

Ringing the auditorium are several classroom spaces. These rooms, which vary in size, all feature the same materials common throughout the building. Inside these spaces, however, the folded exterior wall of the building is expressed. Tall, narrow windows flank window seats which are set in the recess between the windows. On either side of the window seats, smaller windows are located. Another notable feature in the classrooms is the use of a modular wall-mounted storage system designed by Kahn himself. Two slats of oak are mounted parallel to the floor in many of these rooms. On these slats, various cabinets and storage units could be hung. These wall-mounted units could be moved, relocated to various rooms and changed around depending on the use of the space.

The first floor of the addition is located to the east of the main entrance lobby and is partially concealed behind a freestanding fireplace which serves a small seating area. The fireplace faces east towards what is known as the Williams Gallery. This large corridor-like space serves a dual function, both as circulation space and meeting room. Large full-height wood panels can swing shut to enclose the room, like a massive pair of doors. Once closed, smaller man-sized doors are located within this partition. At the eastern end of this space, the V-shaped recessed window is visible, set in a brick surround.

Located to the north and south of the Williams Gallery are several offices and spaces used by the minister of the church. These spaces area treated in a similar manner to the classrooms, utilizing typical wood and concrete finishes as well as the wood modular wall-mounted storage systems.

The second floor of the building continues the same plan established on the lower floor of the original church area and the addition. A corridor rings the enclosed upper portion of the auditorium, which like the first floor, is in turn ringed by classrooms and vertical circulation towers. Perhaps the most notable room of the second floor in the original church portion is the children's chapel, which has now been converted into the Choir Rehearsal Room. Located directly above the Susan B. Anthony Room below, and of similar size and configuration, the Choir Rehearsal Room is articulated in a similar but miniature manner as the main auditorium. Here, a simplified version of the concrete ceiling structure is present, in a similar cruciform design. Like the auditorium, hidden skylights above the ceiling structure provide concealed natural lighting in the space that makes the ceiling structure appear to be floating. A brick fireplace is located in the room at the eastern wall, opposite from the entry door.

The addition contains a large, open flexible space that is known as Gilbert Hall. This large multiuse space features the same polished concrete floor, exposed concrete block walls and oak wood common throughout the building. Here, the ceiling is finished with acoustic ceiling tiles, which appear original to the 1960s. The space also uses poured concrete post and beam structures to span the large open spaces in the room. Like the classroom spaces of the original church area, the windows in this space utilize a similar folded appearance, although the windows are larger and broader here and the effect is less dramatic.

Because of the sloping of the land at the rear (east) of the property, a walk-out basement level is incorporated into the addition. This area houses the building’s utility spaces as well as a work and storage area. A room accessible from the building’s south side serves as a multi-use space for various community groups. Like Gilbert Hall, the broad folded wall surface is also visible.

Like many master architects, Louis Kahn also played a large part in the interior design and furnishings of the building, many of which are still used and intact in the First Unitarian Church. Typical of Modern architectural and furniture theory of the era, Kahn designed many of the pieces to be multi-purpose, modular and flexible. His system of wall-mounted wood slats with removable cabinetry reflects his desire in allowing these pieces to be reused, moved and replaced throughout the building as need and use dictated, allowing for multi-functional, multi-use flexible spaces. He designed the tapestries for the auditorium, and while they have been slightly shortened and have been rehung, they still convey the architect's original vision for their use. For First Unitarian Church, Kahn designed wheeled display cases which are still found throughout the building. In the entry lobby near the Susan B. Anthony Lounge, Kahn also designed a wall-mounted folding bulletin board, with large panels on hinges that could be opened for display or closed for a neat finish.

The First Unitarian Church property also contains one contributing site, the extensive gardens at the south-east area of the facility. This garden, initiated in the mid-1960s by master gardener Madlyn Evans, is roughly contemporary with the church. The large garden area consists of various elements and is meant to be a relaxing, contemplative and inspirational landscape to complement the worship services of the church. The garden consists of several paved and wood chip footpaths, various garden areas, seating benches and a wide variety of plant specimens. Notable areas within the garden include the Upper Woodland area, which contains wood chip paths through a variety of shade and low-light plants, the Memorial Wall, which is used as a location for marriages, worship, and memorials, and the Middle Woodland area, which consists of wood chip paths, a Peace Cairn, Japanese maples, and copper beeches. The Community Garden is used by more than 30 cooperative gardeners as an organic vegetable garden, and a Labyrinth defined by bricks is used for meditation. Scattered throughout the extensive garden are a variety of benches that afford stunning views of the church building, as well as serving as peaceful meeting spaces.

While some small changes have occurred in the building, the most significant being the addition of a small ADA-compliant elevator shaft at the south end of the building in 1996, the First Unitarian Church is highly intact to its 1960s-era construction. The building retains its original setting and landscape, its original materials

both on the exterior and interior as well as its interior plan and configuration. The building continues to reflect Louis Kahn's original vision, design and concept for the church.

The First Unitarian Church in Rochester, Monroe County, is a nationally significant example of mid-twentieth century Modern architecture, designed by internationally prominent architect, Louis I. Kahn. At the time he was hired for the commission in 1959, Kahn was emerging as a nationally prominent architect and educator, but was a designer that struggled with finding his own unique voice. Through the lengthy design and development process for the First Unitarian Church, and with the informed input from the congregation's building committee, he was able to refine and crystallize his own theories about architecture, inspiring the mature architectural designs that he would go on to create in projects such as the Salk Institute and the National Assembly Complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh. During his design process for the Rochester building, Kahn's theories of "form and design" were fully developed, and the church served as the basis for what is regarded by many scholars as his most famous lecture, "Form and Design," which he delivered in 1960 before ground had even been broken for the project. First Unitarian Church can also be viewed through the lens of his later theories on "silence and light," with its stunning and controlled use of indirect lighting.

His bold brick design, with its folded exterior wall and prominent light towers, was highly regarded and well-received by scholars and critics from its earliest conception. As Yale University professor and architectural critic Vincent Scully put it, "In the Unitarian Church, structure and light came together for Kahn to make the first great interior space he was able to construct…It might be argued that the Unitarian Church was Kahn's first wholly integrated building, in which he was able for the first time to meet all his own fresh and exacting standards."[1] From a material standpoint, Kahn's extensive use of wood, as a finish for cabinets, doors, and ceiling details to help soften the stark concrete interior, was the first example of this in his work and would afterward be used at the Salk Institute and his later work.[2]

The building continues to be featured in the majority of texts about Kahn and is regularly studied by visiting architects, historians and critics from around the world. In 1982, Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize-winning architectural critic for the *New York Times*, dubbed the First Unitarian Church one of the "greatest religious

[1] Quoted in The Museum of Modern Art, "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," news release, May 9, 1966, Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 11, 2014. This press release advertises that Kahn's drawings, plans and photographs of First Unitarian Church will be included in MoMA's show "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," held April 26-May 30, 1966.

structures of the century," ranking it alongside Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp, and Bernard Maybeck's Christian Science Church in Berkeley, California.[3] The church has also been locally regarded since its construction, being dubbed a building that "could become a historical monument of architecture" as early as 1964.[4] First Unitarian Church is Louis Kahn's breakthrough moment, where he transcended his position as a good modern architect to become one of the most influential architectural minds of the late twentieth century.

The period of significance for First Unitarian Church encompasses the period in which the original church building and the Kahn-designed addition were constructed. While Kahn first began his extensive design process for the church in 1959, the period of significance begins with the start of construction on the building in 1961. Construction of the addition to the building, also designed by Kahn, was completed in 1969, marking the end of the period of significance.

Early History of the First Unitarian Church in Rochester: 1828 – 1950s[5]

The First Unitarian Church traces its origins in December of 1828, when Rev. William Ware, one of the pioneers of Unitarianism in Boston, came to the Rochester area to preach. Rev. Ware delivered four sermons and did much to inspire the local community. At the time of his visit, the Erie Canal had recently opened in 1825 and Rochester was a growing community with ten thousand inhabitants and seven organized churches. A wave of renewed enthusiasm and interest in religious ideas and movements, known as the Second Great Awakening, was spreading throughout Upstate and Central New York State during the 1820s, and this also was an era that saw a national growth of the Unitarian movement.

Unitarianism traces its origins back to the early Christian era, when worshippers were able to choose for themselves from a wide range of beliefs in Jesus. The first Unitarian congregations were formed in sixteenth

[2] Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: Norton, 2007), 115.
[3] Paul Goldberger, "Housing for the Spirit," *New York Times*, December 26, 1982, http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/26/books/housing-for-the-spirit.html?&pagewanted=all.
[4] "Better Building Awards Given," *Times-Union* (Rochester, NY), February 11, 1964.

century Transylvania after the Protestant Reformation reached eastern Europe and the first edict of religious tolerance was declared in 1568. Despite the proclamation, in many areas of Europe, Unitarians continued to be persecuted for their refusal to adhere to the dogma of the Holy Trinity and the worship of Jesus. Persecution forced scientist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestly to flee England, where he arrived in America to establish the American Unitarian church in the Philadelphia area in the 1790s. However, American Unitarianism was established largely as a reaction to the Puritan Calvinist traditions in New England, which focused on humanity's eternal bondage to sin and offered little religious choice for their parishioners. Those who opposed such beliefs and believed in free human will and the benevolence of God formed the nucleus for American Unitarianism in the mid-1700s. The first several decades of the nineteenth century saw great division and intense discussion on religious doctrine amongst American Unitarian congregations, and it was not until 1819 when Rev. William Ellery Channing's sermon "Unitarian Christianity" helped to provide an organized template for the religious movement. In 1825, the American Unitarian Association was organized in Boston.[6]

The First Unitarian Congregational Society of Rochester was founded not long after Rev. Ware's visit, organized on March 16, 1829. Rev. James D. Green, who had come to Rochester the previous January on a preaching tour, was called upon to serve as the first minister. However, Rev. Green declined the position to continue on his tour. Despite not having a minister to lead its services, the society continued to meeting, holding services first in the court house, and then purchasing a modest wood frame building from an Episcopalian congregation that was building a new church. However, the congregation found itself struggling and in debt, and was forced to sell the building in 1831. Despite the setback, Unitarianism continued to be a presence in Rochester during the 1830s and '40s. Former Erie Canal Commissioner Myron Holley, who made his home in Rochester, did much to keep Unitarianism alive in the area, forming a small group that met regularly and

[5] This section is drawn largely from Nancy J. Salzer, *Covenant for Freedom: A History of the First Unitarian Congregational Society of Rochester, New York 1829-1975* (Rochester, NY: First Unitarian Church, 1975). Additional sources as noted.

[6] In 1961 the Unitarians and the related Universalist churches merged, forming the Unitarian Universalist Association. While the Universalists were a more evangelical denomination, both churches shared a liberal, socially-conscious Christian belief system that welcomed a wide range of members including atheists, agnostic, pagans, Christians, Jews and Buddhists. Mark W. Harris, "Unitarian Universalist Origins: Our Historic Faith," Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), 2013, accessed January 24, 2014, http://www.uua.org/beliefs/history/151249.shtml.

welcomed social outcasts of the day such as alcoholics and poor laborers. In 1840, a group of eight men signed an agreement to reorganize the First Unitarian Congregational Society under its original name.

The early decades of the First Unitarian Church were generally marked by transition, discord and upheaval, seeing numerous ministers pass through its doors. During the early 1800s, a few minister stood out for helping to provide moments of steady leadership. Rev. Rufus Ellis became the minister for the First Unitarian congregation early in 1842 and is regarded as the person who truly established the church. Unlike the other more itinerant ministers, Rev. Ellis remained with the church long enough to put it on a solid footing, agreeing to stay for a one-year term before returning to his parish in Massachusetts. During 1842, and with Rev. Ellis leading the group, the church became more organized, holding regular trustee meetings. Under his leadership, the Society raised six thousand dollars and constructed a church on North Fitzhugh Street; it was dedicated on March 9, 1843. After Rev. Ellis's departure in 1843, the congregation was served by Rev. Frederick Holland, who pushed for complete freedom in the pulpit. Rev. Holland was an enthusiastic leader of the church and did much to further the growth and development of the congregation. Holland remained with the church for several years, providing some of the much-needed stability the church needed to become secure, eventually resigning in 1848 to serve as general secretary of the American Unitarian Association.

Despite their internal struggles to find solid leadership, the First Unitarian Church played a supporting role to one of the most significant social movements of the nineteenth century. On July 19, 1848 the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, NY, located roughly 50 miles to the southeast of Rochester. The convention adjourned on July 30th before a regional women's rights convention reconvened at the First Unitarian Church in Rochester on August 2nd. At attendance at the meeting in Rochester were the father, mother and sister of Susan B. Anthony, who, at the time, was teaching in central New York and did not attend these meetings. However, when she returned to Rochester in 1849, Susan B. Anthony joined her family in attending worship services held at the Unitarian Church. While she never relinquished her Quaker membership, for more than fifty years Anthony was a regular attendee of the church. During the era when she attended services at the First Unitarian Church, she emerged as one of the nation's leading women's rights and social reform activists.

Despite its own struggles to find leadership, the First Unitarian Church's willingness to host what was, at the time, a radical movement, speaks to the liberal and inclusive doctrine perpetuated at the church.

The 1850s saw the continued succession of ministers and issues within the Unitarian church. The church continued to struggle financially and lacked strong leadership. Perhaps the most devastating blow to the congregation came in November 1859, when a suspected arsonist burned down the South Fitzhugh Street church building. Given the financial and organizational shambles of the congregation and the destruction of its worship space, there was little initiative to rebuild. The land was sold off, and the congregation ceased worshipping together.

Following the Civil War, however, the congregation began to stabilize. Rev. Frederick Holland returned to Rochester and donated his services as minister beginning in February of 1865, which led to a renewed interest in the Unitarian congregation. Because of Rev. Holland's aid, the congregation was able to work together to raise funds to construct a new church, located at the corner of Fitzhugh and Church Streets, dedicated on January 24, 1866.

After a series of short term ministers, whose arrivals and departures appear to be less discordant that in the pre-war era, Rev. Newton Mann took over as leader of the Unitarian church in 1870. Rev. Mann provided the much needed tenure and leadership that helped put the church on a solid footing after decades of turbulence. He was noted by later church historians as a man who ushered in an era of intellectualism and morality, preaching a rationalized, highly scientific type of Unitarianism. According to church historian Salzer, Rev. Mann is acknowledged as the first American clergyman to accept and preach from the pulpit the theory of evolution.

In 1883, the Unitarian congregation was offered $23,000 for its church property by the United States government, which sought to construct a new post office on the site. At the same time, the Third Presbyterian Church was looking to relocate its congregation from the church and parish house at Temple and Cortland Streets to a built a new church on East Avenue. The Presbyterians offered their buildings to the First Unitarian

Church congregation in exchange for the $23,000 from the Federal government. The Unitarians accepted the deal and acquired the historic Gothic Revival church building that was designed by nationally-prominent church architect Richard Upjohn in 1859. The Upjohn-designed church building served as the longtime home of the First Unitarian congregation. Its adjacent chapel building was enlarged and converted to a parish house known as the Gannett House in 1910. The building was named in honor of Rev. William Channing Gannet, who was one of the most prominent leaders of the Unitarian church, focusing his ministry on community service and cultural and social betterment projects.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the First Unitarian Church continued to grow and prosper. In 1954, the church celebrated its 125th anniversary with a special service that included an address by Dr. I Frederick May Eliot, the president of the American Unitarian Association. The 1950s was an era of tremendous growth, and between 1952 and 1956 the number of families on the mailing list doubled to 423. The church also noted a change in the demographics of the congregation, as more young couples with children began attending services. By 1955, the decade's growth spurred initial conversations about enlarging the building.

Later in the decade, however, the congregation would be faced with a more serious concern. In April of 1958, the church was approached by planners of the proposed Midtown Plaza project, the first urban redevelopment project in the country to feature an all-pedestrian mall, with an offer to purchase the property. Municipal authorities offered the First Unitarian Church $500,000 to vacate both of its properties, the church and school building. Already considering the growing congregation and need for more space, the church weighed the options of staying at the downtown location or relocating to a new area in Rochester. While the congregation began to consider options, nearby demolition work for the new project shook the foundations of the church so severely that the building was rendered structurally unsound.[7]

[7] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 137.

First Unitarian Church's Preparatory Phase: 1958-1959

Early on, minister David Williams began to explore the options open to the church. Williams met with the church's board of trustees, where he presented a memo outlining three possible courses of action. He proposed that the church could build elsewhere in downtown Rochester, it could relocate and build a new facility in the growing suburbs, or it could try to find a way to retain the historic downtown church while seeking other alternatives for housing the school. In order for each member's voice to be heard, the congregation met in discussion groups of twenty, before gathering as a whole for a vote. Critical to the First Unitarian congregation was to reach a consensus through the delicate balance of personal expression and communal compromise. The majority response was that the congregation should sell its buildings and relocate to a new site on the periphery of downtown Rochester, where many members had already moved.[8]

Faced with these issues about how to move forward, as part of their consideration of the topic the congregation prepared a series of documents that provided a detailed and accurate assessment of their current needs, desires, goals and plans for the future. In keeping with Unitarian beliefs, these documents helped to ensure that each member of the congregation had his or her voice heard and had a say in the future church's design and planning. Rather then hire an architect before organizing its own wishes for the design of the building, the First Unitarian Church undertook this extensive planning process prior to engaging an architect. This preparatory phase helped the congregation organize and express their desires, independent of the theories and agenda of the selected architect, giving the members a clear understanding of their own needs and goals that would later prove useful during the design phase.

Prepared by William F. Neuman, president of the Board of Trustees, the report, *What Can we Do About Growth,* began to outline the consequences of growth in relationship to the size of the congregation and of the church building, its location, and the necessary budget for expenses. Based on Neuman's analysis, the congregation formed the Fact-Finding Committee to investigate four alternatives. In their report, *Four Courses of Action*, the

[8] Goldhagen, 137.

committee outlined options of retaining the status quo, remaining in the existing downtown building while constructing a new education building, building an entirely new church building, and relocating to an existing building in the downtown area. After a detailed discussion of each option, the third course of action was recommended, building a new church and school, as the preferred option. The report emphasized the congregation's liberal approach to religion and reflected an interest how this could be expressed in architecture, noting that "to have the opportunity to express our faith in an exciting and lasting architectural endeavor is to have an opportunity that is only rarely available to a congregation."[9] The report highlighted conversations with ministers from other churches, whose congregations had recently constructed new buildings, noting the positive responses. This document also began to establish a vision for a new building, discussing the present and future size and seating capacity requirements, present and future attendance in the school, and outlining programmatic requirements such as areas of space, cost, location, size and estimated construction costs based on other newly constructed church buildings in the area. Also highlighted in the study was the main issue for the First Unitarian Church: how to build an aesthetically satisfying design within a tight budget.[10]

Upon completing their *Four Courses of Action*, the Fact-Finding Committee continued its efforts to balance the financial capabilities of the church with the wishes and desires for the design of the new building. The committee prepared and distributed a questionnaire with the goal of clarifying the congregation's preferences for design, size, purpose, program and facilities. After receiving 240 responses, the committee issued its analysis and findings in the *Report to the Congregation from the Fact-Finding Committee on Church Document*. The first portion of this document recorded the congregation's desires for the physical building itself. When asked what terms reflected the Unitarian faith, respondents noted it as "searching, rational, democratic, non-dogmatic, tolerant, ethical, unity-in-diversity and dynamic."[11] For the physical structure descriptive of these ideas, the congregation felt the building should be "functional, imaginative, plain and simple (beautiful in simplicity), dignified and harmonious (in itself and in relation to the site)."[12] Respondents also agreed that the desired

[9] Quoted in Fahmi Dogan and Craig Zimring, "Interaction of Programming and Design: The First Unitarian Congregation of Rochester and Louis I. Kahn," *Journal of Architectural Education* 56, no. 1 (September 2002): 49.
[10] Dogan and Zimring, 49-50.
[11] Quoted in Dogan and Zimring, 50.
[12] Quoted in Dogan and Zimring, 50.

design of the building should be Modern or contemporary, preferred that exterior materials were stone, brick and glass, and specified that interior materials include paneling, wood and plaster. When asked about potential architects for the project, members suggested Frank Lloyd Wright, Eero Saarinen, Pietro Belluschi, Edward Durrel Stone, and local architects Samuel R. Sheppard and Olga Valvano. In a second series of questions, the congregation was asked about any future enlargement of the new building as a way to accommodate growth. Here, 70 percent of respondents felt that the church building should not be enlarged, and many favored holding two services if necessary. The majority felt that the worship space should be designed to hold five hundred people. A third group of questions discussed programmatic issues such as specifying the facilities necessary, indicating the feeling of the sanctuary and desired materials. Here, members identified the critical facilities as "auditorium-sanctuary, church school, offices for ministers, church secretary and church school secretary, dining and kitchen facilities, social and recreational rooms, coat rooms, lavatories and storage space" and also noted that choir, library and lounge spaces would be desirable.[13] In response to a series of questions that asked about the configuration and orientation of the church building, responses noted the desirability of a multi-purpose building with an educational building attached to the main structure, indicating a sort of bi-nuclear design. When asked about the budget for the new church, which was established at $505,000, 42 percent felt that the budget should be increased in order to achieve the best possible building, while 30 percent felt the budget was sufficient.[14]

The First Unitarian Congregation also prepared two additional documents, as they continued to explore their design and programmatic options. In *The Profile of the New Unitarian Church Building*, six selected quotations directly expressed the congregation's thoughts on a range of programmatic, stylistic and design choices. These selected responses appear to have been chosen as representative of the general spirit of the congregation. In his response, Roger Coakley responded,

> *I strongly believe we should design a church which will best meet our needs and which will satisfy us aesthetically and then find a way to pay for it…If we are not willing to make a concerted financial effort*

[13] Quoted in Dogan and Zimring, 50.
[14] Dogan and Zimring, 50.

> *to get the best possible church and church school, we have little reason to stick together as a congregation.*[15]

In his reply, Raymond Nasemann summarized the congregation's desire to have a direct role in the design of their new church, noting that they "must pass all of these considerations to an architect whom I fervently hope will perceive all for which we strive. Unfortunately, you can't tell an artist how to paint – only if you like his painting."[16]

As a final planning document, the congregation prepared the *Recommendations of the Building Committee for the New Church*. This report served as a distillation of the previous documents and studies and served as a programming document. Here, a concise list of facilities required for the new building was enumerated, listing the required spaces and amenities. This report was the culmination of intense discussion, study and thought by a large and diverse range of congregational members.

Selecting an Architect for the New Building: 1959

With a clear understanding of the desires and goals of the congregation for their new building, the First Unitarian Church began the process of selecting an architect. A selection committee consisting of James Cunningham, Beth Ruth and Jack Bannett was formed, with Jean France later replacing Bannett. This committee was well informed about architecture, as Ruth held a master's degree in architecture from Harvard and Cunningham had taken courses in architecture from Louis I. Kahn. The committee drew up a list of potential candidates, tasked by the Board of Trustees with the mission of selecting one architect to recommend to the congregation. It was decided to contact well-known architects in small architectural offices where they served as the primary designers of that firm and thus had a hands-on connection to the project. The committee ultimately reached out to Frank Lloyd Wright, Paul Rudolph, Carl Koch, Eero Saarinen, Walter Gropius and

[15] Quoted in Dogan and Zimring, 51.
[16] Quoted in Dogan and Zimring, 51.

Louis Kahn. Rather than have the architects come to Rochester and make their presentation, the committee decided to travel to cities around the East Coast to interview the architects and view their works first hand.[17]

Of those contacted architects, Wright was not interested in the project and presented a costly proposal. Saarinen turned down the job due to his busy workload. After visiting with Rudolph, the committee was not impressed by his work or by the architect himself. Although the committee members liked Gropius's philosophy and personality, they felt that he lacked the emotional depth needed for a church project. Finally, they visited Kahn at his office in Philadelphia on May 9, 1959, and liked the feeling of his studio. After meeting with him and touring some of his buildings, including the AFL Medical Services, the recently completed Richards Medical Center, and the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut, the selection committee decided that Kahn was their preferred architect. After spending the day discussing their goals and vision for the church, drawn from the extensive programmatic development process, the committee felt that Kahn, who himself had a questioning, mystical take on religion despite his Jewish background, was "a natural Unitarian."[18] Jean France cited five major reasons behind the selection of Kahn. First, Kahn was a philosophical designer. Second, he would be directly leading the design and construction of the church building, not relegating the project to a junior designer. Third, the timing seemed well-suited for both parties, as Kahn was not yet an internationally prominent architect but he had reached a stage of exploring and questioning the fundamentals of architectural design, so that the congregation was entering "on the ground floor of a new incarnation" of his career.[19] Fourth, the committee approved his expression of the integrity of materials in his designs. Finally, Kahn's architecture was modern, yet it conveyed a sense of spirituality and emotion and a connection to the past that the committee felt suitable for their new Unitarian church.[20]

With the recommendation to choose Louis Kahn made by the selection committee, Board president Neuman invited him to Rochester to present to the entire congregation. In his letter to Kahn, Neuman emphasized

[17] Goldhagen, 138. Also, Dogan and Zimring, 52.
[18] Quoted in Goldhagen, 138.
[19] Quoted from Robin B. Williams, "First Unitarian Church and School, Rochester, New York 1959-69," in *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, by David Bruce Brownlee and De Long David Gilson (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 340.

creativity and inventiveness over the simple fulfillment of programmatic needs, setting the stage for Kahn's lengthy design and development process. He also recognized that Kahn would be bringing his own unique architectural perspective and ideas to the project, as he had with the previous projects that had impressed the selection committee. On June 2, 1959, Kahn received a copy of the program developed by the congregation, which stipulated its desire for a single, self-contained building that was not to be built for future expansion. At Neuman's invitation, Louis Kahn visited with the First Unitarian congregation on June 17 and 18, 1959, presenting his ideas to the building committee and lecturing before the whole congregation. The contracts were signed that August.[21]

Louis I. Kahn, Architect[22]

Louis Isidore Kahn, architect of First Unitarian Church, is an internationally prominent architect, active during the mid-twentieth century, whose works moved away from the International Style Modernism of the early and mid-1900s. Based largely out of his office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Kahn was a prominent lecturer, educator, urban designer and practicing architect emerging in the 1920s. Unlike many architects, however, Kahn's work and architectural theories blossomed late in his career, beginning in the 1950s and lasting until his death in 1974. Louis Kahn is generally accepted by many architectural historians, critics and scholars to have been one of the most influential architects of the twentieth century.

Kahn was born as Leiser-Itze Schmuilowsky on March 5, 1901 to Lieb and Beila-Rebecka (nee Mendelowitsch) in Russian-controlled Estonia. His father, Lieb, was of Latvian origin and worked as a stained-glass artisan before being drafted at age seventeen into the Russian army. When he was a three year old child, young Leiser-Itze was badly burned in an accident at the family's home, leaving him with serious scars on his face and hands. However, his mother saw his disfigurement as an omen that he would go on to be a great man. Facing increased anti-Semitism in Estonia, the Russian takeover of his mother's ancestral farm, as well as the looming threat of a

[20] Dogan and Zimring, 52. Also, Goldhagen, 138.
[21] Goldhagen, 138-139. Also, Williams, 340.

war with Japan, the Schmuilowsky family decided to relocate to the United States, planning to join family that had already settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Lieb left for America in 1904, intending to find a job and get settled before his family arrived. Beila-Rebecka, Leiser-Itze and his younger brother and sister joined Lieb, arriving in Philadelphia on June 25, 1906.[23] Often teased by other children for his facial scars, he began to adopt the name of "Louis" as an attempt to fit in. His father Americanized the family's surname to Kahn in 1915, at which time young Leiser-Itze became Louis Isidore.[24]

Like the majority of architects in the early twentieth century, Louis Kahn trained in the traditional Beaux-Arts method. From a young age, Kahn's skills as a painter and artist were recognized, and in 1919 he won the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts' first prize for the best "original free-hand drawing" by a high school student in the city. His work so impressed the prestigious academy that it offered him a four-year scholarship. However, after taking a course in architectural history, Kahn decided to pursue architecture rather than painting, and attend the University of Pennsylvania (Penn).[25] Kahn entered Penn in the fall of 1920, despite the family's continuing financial troubles. While at Penn, Kahn received a typical education in the Beaux-Arts tradition. Drawn from the teaching methods of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the Beaux-Arts approach dominated architectural education in the United States between the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Drawing from a Classical Roman and Greek vocabulary of forms, Beaux-Arts training involved honing skills such as drawing, sketching and painting and focused on fundamentals such as unity, harmony, balance, order and proportion. Perhaps the most critical element of Beaux-Arts instruction involved training students to solve architectural problems, teaching problem solving, logical thinking and project development skills. While the Beaux Arts is typically associated with Classical designs, there was great variety of styles and architectural expressions, particularly by the early decades of the twentieth century. At Penn, Kahn trained under some of the

[22] Louis Kahn's life and background have been well discussed and written about, and will be summarized here. For a more thorough biography, consult sources including Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: Norton, 2007). Also, Alexandra Tyng, *Beginnings: Louis I. Kahn's Philosophy of Architecture* (New York: Wiley, 1984).
[23] Wiseman, 12-15.
[24] Wiseman, 15-16.
[25] Wiseman, 20-21.

nation's leading Beaux-Arts architects, including John Harbeson, an École des Beaux-Arts alum, as well as Paul Philippe Cret.[26] Kahn graduated from Penn on June 18, 1924 and was awarded the Brooke Medal for Design.[27] After graduation, and still facing financial issues, Kahn began working as a freelance draftsman, creating renderings for firms in Philadelphia. However, while he was well positioned for the architectural industry as a graduate of Penn, the field of architecture was undergoing a dramatic shift in the 1920s, away from the Beaux Arts in which he had been trained. In the post-World War I era, a new movement towards modern architecture was being popularized in Europe by such diverse architects as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus in Germany which put forth industrial-influenced architecture of steel, glass and concrete. In Europe, Modernism was tied to a strong social agenda, as architects and designers sought a new expression to match the new social and cultural changes that were transforming that continent in the early 1900s. In this atmosphere of great architectural exploration, Kahn took his first job, working for the city architect of Philadelphia, John Molitor. While Molitor's work remained rooted in the Classical tradition, he was tasked with designing for the Sesquicentennial International Exposition in the city, held in 1926. Kahn was installed as part of the design team, tasked with six massive buildings of more than 1.5 million square feet in size. Like most exposition buildings, they were designed using non-permanent materials such as staff, stucco and wood, but they allowed Kahn to work on a real-world, large scale architectural effort.[28]

In 1927, Kahn met Esther Virginia Israeli, a doctoral student from an educated Russian-Jewish family, and began pursuing a relationship. However, his work in Philadelphia was becoming creatively stagnant, and in 1928 he set off for a European "grand tour," long considered a prerequisite for architects and artists. Between 1928 and '29, Kahn visited and toured England, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy, visiting not only some of the leading modernist projects of the era, but also noting historic

[26] Cret was one of the leading architects and designers of the early twentieth century, and combined the Beaux Arts' focus on axial planning, Classical symmetry and monumentality with a new simplification of historical forms and traditions. Rather than focus on the lavish, ornate Classical forms popular around the turn of the twentieth century, Cret began to simplify and flatten elements in a style called "stripped Classicism." Cret also incorporated modern construction and materials into his buildings. Cret's architecture, such as the Detroit Institute of Arts (1927), the Folger Shakespeare Library (1932) and the Eccles Building (home of the Federal Reserve, 1935-37), all reflect his mastery of monumental architecture combined with his simplified Classically-derived detailing.
[27] Wiseman, 24-26.
[28] Wiseman, 28-30.

buildings and ruins, all the while drawing and sketching what he saw. In Paris, Kahn met with classmate Norman Rice, who had been one of the first Americans to study with Le Corbusier.[29]

Returning to the United States in April 1929, Kahn took a position in the office of his Penn mentor, Paul Philippe Cret. Here, Kahn worked on the circulation patterns for Cret's Folger Shakespeare Library. In addition, he exhibited his European drawings and entered the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts' annual watercolor show. Despite his interaction with some of the leading Modernist architects during his European tour, his work at this period still reflects Kahn's attachment to traditionalism. After his return to America, Kahn rekindled his relationship with Esther, and the two wed on August 14, 1930. However, despite his promising home life, Kahn's professional life suffered. Like many architects of the era, Kahn was hard hit by the Great Depression, as jobs and projects dried up. Cret was forced to let Kahn go, and the couple moved in with her parents while Esther supported the couple with her job as a research assistant at Penn. Kahn was able to work occasional short-term jobs for firms in Philadelphia but struggled financially.

During the 1930s, Kahn began to embrace the ideals of Modern architecture. By this era, Modernism had started to dominate the architectural discourse in America, however, the social agenda of European Modern architecture was largely lost, as architects focused more on new materials and forms. Events such as the Museum of Modern Art's landmark 1932 show curated by art historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, introduced the "International Style" to a broad audience. Among the American projects featured in the show was a building familiar to Kahn, the 1929 Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building, a bold Modernist skyscraper. However, while some architects saw the commercial benefit of Modernist architecture, which was easy to imitate and relatively cheap to produce, Kahn felt a connection to the social agenda of Modernism, that architecture could change the world for the better. While he was still out of work, Kahn joined together with other struggling architects and designers to form the Society for the Advancement of Architects, or SAA, which later became the Architectural Research Group, or ARG, in 1931. Meeting regularly to discuss architectural advancements, the group focused on mass housing and even submitted a monument design for a competition in

[29] Wiseman, 34-37.

Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), USSR, on which Kahn was the designer. While the group disbanded in 1934, it did establish Kahn as a leader in mass housing issues in the United States and brought greater attention to him as an architect.[30]

The year 1938 marked a turning point for Kahn's career, thanks to the Philadelphia Housing Authority's sponsorship of a competition to redesign a blighted area of Philadelphia. Architect George Howe, an emerging figure in the national Modernist movement thanks to his work on the PSFS Building, was a leading candidate for the project and asked Kahn to collaborate with him as part of a team response to the competition. While the project was ultimately abandoned, Howe later reached out to Kahn again to work on post-war government projects, including the Carver Court housing project in Coatesville, Pennsylvania which brought him his first national exposure. By the early 1940s, Howe had relocated to Washington, while Kahn, along with Oscar Stonorov, continued working to design public housing. Perhaps his most significant work during this era was a contract from the Revere Copper and Brass Company to create two booklets in neighborhood planning in 1943 and '44. The latter, *You and Your Neighborhood*, focused on preserving and renovating existing buildings as well as new infill construction and allowed Kahn to crystallize his thinking on the role of historical architecture and cultural connection in the context of modern urban communities. Also during this time, Kahn delivered an essay titled "Monumentality" at a symposium on urban planning, where he began to express his view of Modernism beyond just a cold, sterile, industrial and technological trend but capable of being imbued with a sense of spirituality, emotion, eternity and stability, viewing "monumentality" in relation to the great historical buildings such as those he had witnessed in Europe. Through these writings of the 1940s, Kahn's growing frustration with mainstream Modernism, and its focus on technological development and inexpensive construction over architectural history and precedence, began to take shape.[31]

Eventually, Kahn, growing frustrated with his perception that he contributed more to the partnership, severed his work with Stonorov. Setting up an office on Spring Street in Philadelphia along with designer, Kahn started work on commissions that included several residences and a psychiatric hospital. In 1947, he took on one of the

[30] Wiseman, 37-46.

most important jobs of his career, accepting a teaching position at Yale School of Fine Arts. Working in an educational environment suited Kahn well, as he was able to coalesce the practical design and construction issues with his new developing intellectual and artistic theories that he was beginning to work through. Unlike many of his peers at Yale, Kahn was well suited for the era of architectural discourse, bringing an understanding of architectural history, a background often disregarded by those who studied solely in the Modernist manner, as well as a looser connection to the tenants of Modernism to his teachings. Known as a demanding but thoughtful teacher, Kahn was instrumental in bringing his friend and colleague George Howe to Yale to serve as the school's chair of the architecture program. Under Howe, Yale became a center for architectural discourse in the 1940s and '50s, bringing in a variety of lecturers and guest critics, including Eero Saarinen. In 1950 Howe also brought in noted architectural critic-turned-architect, Philip Johnson. Also in 1950, Kahn was invited to serve as architect in residence at the American Academy in Rome, a prestigious opportunity for him to become immersed in Classical architecture in Italy, Greece and Egypt. In addition to classical monuments, Kahn visited the Unité d'Habitation, Le Corbusier's landmark housing block that was under construction in France, showing more interest in the architect's work than he had during his previous trip. While his stay through the academy was brief, lasting only three months, it had an apparently profound impact on his thinking and work, as he was visiting Europe with the more experienced eyes of a nearly fifty-year-old professional.[32]

Upon his return to Yale in 1951, Kahn found that the school was growing rapidly, especially the School of Fine Arts. The need for an expansion became apparent, and, with the support of George Howe, Kahn was awarded the commission to design the New Art Gallery and Design Center. To bolster his lack of experience with large-scale constructed works, he was aided by the office of Douglass Orr, a proven professional. While much of the plan had already been worked out prior to Kahn's work, he made some important contributions to the project. Because of steel limitations due to the Korean War, Kahn turned to reinforced concrete for his building and specially ordered non-standard 4-inch by 6-inch concrete blocks that would better harmonize with the art to be displayed. Kahn's Yale Art Gallery combined a variety of influences, ranging from Beaux Arts to Modernism and even ancient Rome, and revealed his interest in expressing the construction process in the finished building

[31] Wiseman, 47-50.

through details such as revealing the mold marks left in his cast-concrete elements. Opened in November 1953, the gallery attracted great attention to Kahn. However, with the departure of friend and advocate George Howe as chairman in 1954, subsequent changes at Yale made Kahn's academic career increasingly frustrating. The final straw was apparently the fact that new chairman and Yale Art Gallery director Paul Rudolph, hired in 1957, made serious alterations to Kahn's building without consulting him.[33]

Not long after his departure from Yale, Kahn was hired by his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, to help reinvigorate that school's program. At Penn, Kahn found a similar sort of partnership that he had with Howe in Dean G. Holmes Perkins. Kahn was regarded by his students at Penn with a sort of hushed sense of awe and was well known for blending his studio classes and his professional career, using his students and coursework to help solve architectural problems and work through ideas. While at Penn in 1954, Kahn received the important commission for the Trenton Jewish Community Center in New Jersey. While Kahn and his wife, Esther, had never really celebrated or rejected their Jewish heritage, the JCC project may have attracted the architect because of his background. While the original project was a large-scale undertaking, financial issues and internal disputes limited Kahn's role to the design of four small pavilions and a modest bathhouse.

In February of 1957, Kahn was awarded the commission to design the Richards Medical Research Building for the Penn campus. In his design for the building, Kahn began to grapple with the issues of complex planning to serve diverse needs and functions. Here, he explored his concepts of "served" and "servant" spaces, differentiating spaces based on use, function and utility. For the facility, Kahn designed three stacks of studios, connected with tall service towers that contained animal quarters, utilities and HVAC systems, and air ducts for circulation. Despite challenges during the design and construction process, the project brought a new level of attention to Kahn's architecture and work.[34]

[32] Wiseman, 64-66.
[33] Wiseman, 78-80.
[34] For additional information on the Richards Medical Research Building project, see Wiseman, 94-105.

Not long after beginning work on the Penn campus, Kahn received another important commission that would further help propel his career. In 1959, Kahn began his work designing the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, located in La Jolla, California. Working closely with polio vaccine pioneer, Dr. Jonas Salk, Kahn found a client whose romantic vision for the design of the building matched his own. The sweeping building is widely regarded as a visual masterpiece, and unlike the Richards building, also was well suited for its practical use due to the close working relationship between Salk and Kahn in developing the project.[35]

Kahn's reaction to the precision and machine-like International Style and his exploration of feeling and human emotion and its relationship to architectural design marked an important milestone for modern architecture in the late 1950s. While Kahn was never a historicist or a preservationist, he combined the clean lines and truthfulness of materials of modern architecture with references and a study of historic models. His theories would have a profound influence on architecture during the next half century. At the time he was hired by the First Unitarian Church, Kahn was just emerging as a prominent architectural thinker, ready to begin the transformation of Modern American architecture.

Design Development of First Unitarian Church: 1959 – 1961

First Unitarian Church had a lengthy period of design and development. This period was dictated by an architect who sought to explore his developing concepts of architecture as well as a congregation with a clearly developed program and perspective on its new building. This design period was also somewhat mythologized after the fact, mostly by Kahn himself, as the architect refined his theories on "form and design" (discussed later), and therefore some of Kahn's account of the development period is somewhat misleading and unsupported by documentary information from the congregation and other sources. Working from documents, interviews, and records from the church, historian Robin B. Williams has identified three primary design phases for Kahn's work at the First Unitarian Church. These design phases are based on the evolution of Kahn's design in response to the input of the congregation. The first design phase likely began in preparation for the

[35] For additional information on the Salk Institute, see Wiseman, 106-113.

presentation in Rochester, in May and early June 1959, and consisted of simple preliminary sketches of geometric circular and octagonal centralized structures. A second stage involved a more square form, developed at the insistence of the congregation to produce a design in December 1959, until March of 1960. At this point, the congregation demanded a fresh start from Kahn that began a third and final design phase, in which Kahn developed a loosely rectilinear scheme. He refined this design concept into what was essentially the final design in June 1961, with only a few small changes made later.[36]

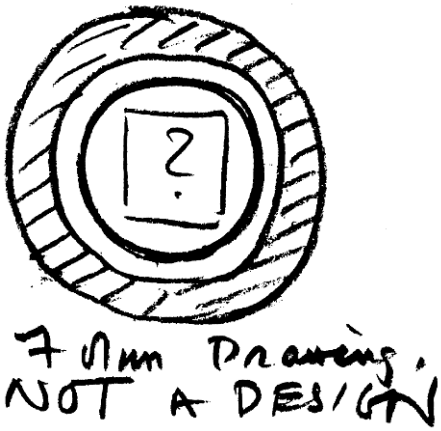

Figure 2: Form Drawing, First Unitarian Church (May-June 1959)[37]

Kahn's design work for the First Unitarian Church seems to have started in preparation for the mid-June 1959 meeting where he presented his design concepts in Rochester. From the beginning, Kahn appears to have been looking to break away from what was at the time a landmark in modern Unitarian architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, and its binuclear plan with separated school and auditorium worship space. Kahn preferred a centralized plan, with the school classrooms surrounding the auditorium (figure 2). While Kahn later claimed that this design concept was inspired upon hearing a speech about Unitarianism by a minister at his first meeting with the church, he never met with a minister in Rochester. He had, however, discussed Unitarianism with a minister in Philadelphia prior to meeting with the congregation. Some scholars also note that, as early as September 1956, Kahn was already asking his students to explore the design of non-denominational worship

[36] Williams, 340.
[37] Selected figures are included in the text to better illustrate the design development of First Unitarian Church. Those images not present in the text, along with larger versions of those that are included, can be found in Section 11.

spaces in his studios at Yale, indicating this concept was already something he was beginning to explore.[38] This mid-June 1959 diagrammatic sketch shows a centralized plan, either a circular or octagonal shape, which is in stark contrast to his later square and rectilinear plans. Williams suggests that one of the likely influences for this strongly circular plan was Rudolph Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, a copy of which Kahn had received in 1954, which depicted centrally planned churches from the Renaissance era.[39]

During his first trip to Rochester on June 17-18, 1959, Kahn presented his initial "form" sketch. This sketch depicted a square with a question mark, ringed by concentric circles. As Kahn described it,

> *I made a square centre in which I placed a question mark. Let us say I meant it to be the sanctuary. This I encircled with an ambulatory for those who did not want to go into the sanctuary. Around the ambulatory I drew a corridor which belonged to an outer circle enclosing a space, the school. It was clear that School which gives rise to Question became the wall which surrounds Question. This was the form expression of the church, not the design.*[40]

While Kahn would later claim that he arrived at that drawing in a moment of divine inspiration while discussing the church with the congregation, many who attended the meeting recalled that he came in with the idea already pre-formed. In either event, Kahn inspired the congregation with his philosophical view of Unitarianism, and he was hired for the project. Also during this first visit, Kahn examined potential sites for the building, agreeing with Jim Cunningham, a member of the search committee and Kahn's former student, on a site on South Winton Road.[41]

[38] Goldhagen, 141-142.
[39] Williams, 340.
[40] Louis I. Kahn, "Form and Design," *Architectural Design* 31 (April 1961): 148.
[41] Williams, 340.

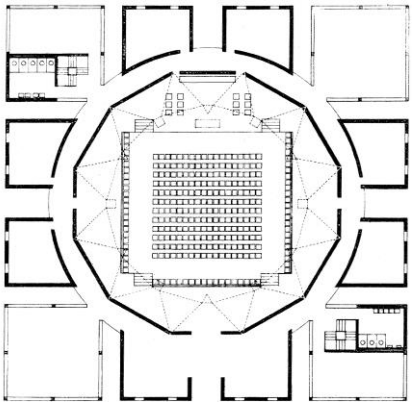

Figure 3: First Unitarian Church - First Design Solution, Plan (ca. December 1959)

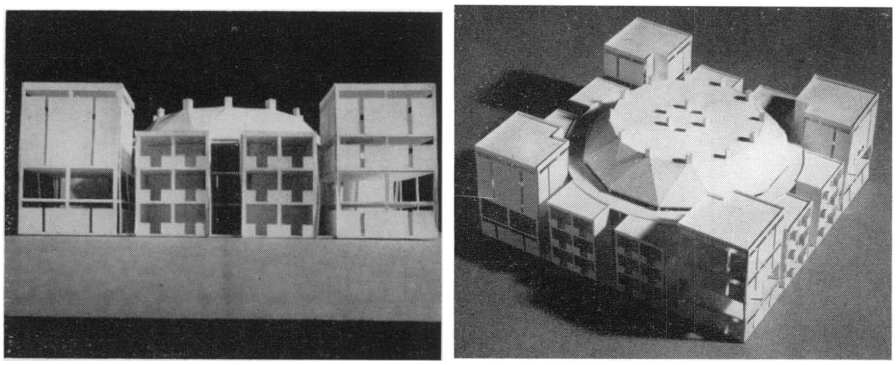

Figure 4: First Unitarian Church - First Design Solution, Model (ca. December 1959)

The next evolution of Kahn's concept for the First Unitarian Church occurred in late November or early December 1959, after the building committee, impatient with Kahn's delays, scheduled a meeting for December 13th with the expectation that the architect would present a substantial proposal. At the meeting, Kahn presented a plan drawing and model of his "first design solution" (Figures 3 & 4). Similar to his initial form sketch, the proposal consisted of a rigidly geometric central square worship space, polygonal ambulatory and circulation corridor, enclosed within a twelve-sided truss roof structure. This portion was then set into a square shape, rather than round as depicted in his initial sketch, that was created by four corner towers housing the library, chapel and offices, with classrooms set between. Kahn's site plan showed a fortress-like building surrounded by a moat. The massive building reached three stories in height and initially appealed to the congregation. However, its projected $2 million cost soared above their $400,000 budget, prompting Kahn to immediately remove one story from the design. Despite the change, the congregation disliked the inflexibility of the plan, its lack of classroom space, and what they perceived as the building's incompatibility with the site.[42] In a January 1960 letter to Kahn from Helen R. Williams, chair of the building committee, the architect was urged to reconsider his design,

[42] Williams, 340-341.

> *Under the circumstances we feel that further revision of your present plans would be futile and that a brand new approach to the problem would be preferable.*[43]

After the dismissal of this initial proposal, an undated sketch (probably from February 1960) reveals Kahn's next approach to designing the First Unitarian Church. Turning away from the rigidly circular forms of his initial concepts, Kahn explored a right-angled scheme in this second stage. Freed of the limitations of the circular forms, this new concept allowed him to adjust the sizes of various spaces, giving him greater flexibility. His sketch retained the corner towers of the first design solution, however, which revealed similarities with Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, which was then considered the archetypal Unitarian church. Despite the new exploration, Kahn's sketch once again met with dissatisfaction from the congregation, which disliked the continued reliance on the strict geometric forms proposed by Kahn, and commented that its "greatest concern [was] with the inherent 'squareness' of the building.[44]

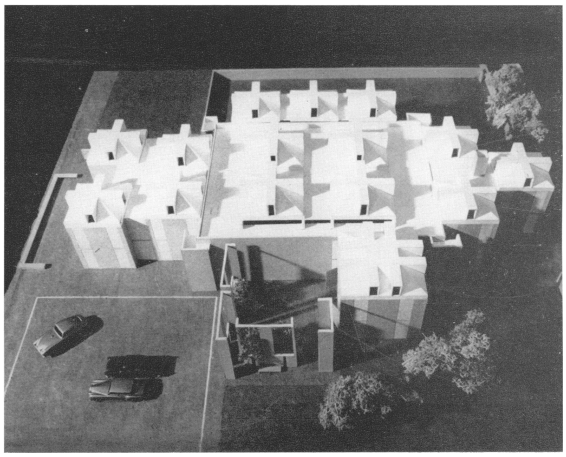

Figure 5: First Unitarian Church - Second Design Phase, Model (early March 1960)

Returning once again to the drawing board, Kahn next began to develop his third design in early March 1960. At the urging of the congregation, Kahn explored the concept of separating the school from the auditorium. Building committee members felt that this would bring Kahn's designs into closer alignment with their own needs and financial resources. Still uneasy with the binuclear plan, Kahn discussed with the congregation that

[43] Quoted in Williams, 341.
[44] Williams, 341-342.

elements from the separated school portion could be rearranged in closer relationship to the auditorium, tightening up the layout and "testing the validity" of Kahn's original plan. In March 1960 Kahn submitted his second model (figure 5). Here, the corner towers were eliminated and other spaces were shifted, giving the building a more longitudinal orientation. Unlike the Unity Temple prototype, Kahn's second model did not consist of two relatively balanced units and still maintained some degree of his original centralized concentric plan around the auditorium. This proposal also marked an important moment in Kahn's design development, as it introduced a new roofing system to the auditorium (figure 6). Reflecting his growing interest in manipulating natural interior illumination, this new roof structure consisted of concrete caps with a shallow pyramid topped by a raised cruciform shape where the open ends served as four "dormer" windows. Kahn presented this new proposal to the building committee on March 26, 1960 and in April it was displayed to the congregation. While some questioned the structural feasibility of the massive roof elements, the committee approved this plan in mid-June, 1960. In the following two months, Kahn modified his roof design by incorporating light towers (figures 8 & 9). At the suggestion of the building committee, these towers had only their inner faces glazed, using adjustable windows that could control the brightness in the worship space. Working with engineer August Komendant, who had worked with Kahn on his Richards Medical Research Building, a system of pre-stressed reinforced concrete was devised that could span the church's auditorium without the need for central supports.[45]

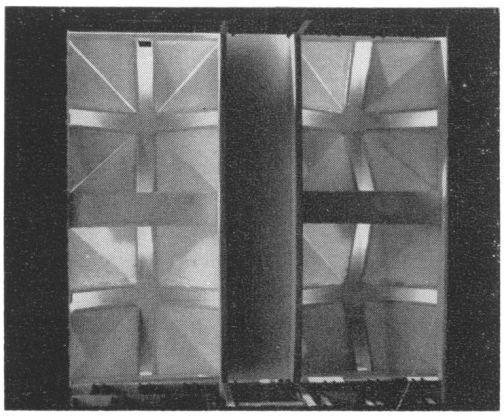

Figure 6: First Unitarian Church - Second Design Phase, Model of ceiling (early March 1960)

[45] Williams, 342-343.

Kahn refined his design for the First Unitarian Church and it was largely finalized by January 1961. By simplifying the room layouts, Kahn was able to bring the building footprint back into a near rectangular shape. In his final revisions, he shortened the length of the entrance foyer, which projected from the rear of the building away from the auditorium, and also merged smaller meeting rooms. He also refined the exterior of the building as well, using a series of rendered elevations to explore the play of light and shadow across the undulating surfaces (figures 12, 13, 14, 15). Through these sketches, Kahn harmonized the exterior by creating varied but similar elevations, with patterns of deeply recessed windows.[46]

While some questions remained about Kahn's design, little was altered between January and June of 1961. The building committee still had lingering questions, including those about the acoustics in the auditorium, given its numerous hard surfaces. Despite these issues, construction of the building began to move forward, and in May 1961 nine contractors were invited to bid on the project. After receiving their bids, which exceeded the project budget, the building committee began to consider that the design would need to be altered yet again. However, in an urgent telegram from Kahn on June 15, he reinforced the "simplicity and inspiration" of the design and urged them to move forward. He noted that the bids were fair and that by making further revisions to the plan the committee would ultimately end up spending more time and money on the project. Kahn's telegram apparently had the desired effect, and two days later the contract was awarded to Robert Hyland & Sons; site preparation began on June 23. Construction of the building took less time than the design phase, and the new home of the First Unitarian Church was completed for its dedication on December 2, 1962. Obviously proud of his new building, Kahn himself delivered the "sermon" at the dedication, discussing the relationship between architecture and religion.[47]

Not long after the building was completed, the First Unitarian congregation began work on a garden area on the church property. The Church Garden was first started in the mid-1960s, contemporarily with Kahn's work on the church itself, by gardener Madlyn Evans who sought to transform an area of the land which was a wild tangle of weeds, plants and even construction debris left on site. Intended as a place of contemplation and

[46] Williams, 343.

connection to the natural world, the garden was meant to continue the opportunity for spiritual explorations that happened within the church during services. Actively in use today, the Church Garden has grown to encompass a large swath of land on the south-eastern corner of the First Unitarian Church property. It features numerous winding paths that allow visitors to wander through areas such as the Labyrinth, the shaded Upper Woodland area, the Rock Garden, the Butterfly Slope and the Xeriscape, all providing varied and distinctive varieties of plants and landscapes. The Susan B. Anthony Terrace is used as an outdoor room and hosts small gatherings and picnics. The Memorial Wall has served as the backdrop for many weddings, commitment ceremonies, memorials and other events. Many area residents and members of the church utilize the Community Gardens to grow and share organically grown vegetables. Created at the same time as the building, the Church Garden has been a long-time fixture on the grounds of the First Unitarian Church.[48]

Kahn's attention to the First Unitarian Church continued through the 1960s. In 1962, he designed a series of woven tapestries for the walls of the auditorium (figure 26). These long, narrow panels were woven with a simple variegated pattern representing the splintering of light into the color spectrum. Like the design of the church itself, the tapestries took two years to create by master weaver Jack Lenor Larsen due to their intricate pattern and shading and were finally installed in 1964. Around the same time, the church's Board of Trustees was faced with the rapid growth of the congregation. Many flocked to the Unitarian church during the early 1960s. When the building opened in 1962, the church reported having 491 active members. Not long after it had opened on Winton Road, the need for additional space was already apparent. Despite their original stipulation that the church be designed not to accommodate an addition or expansion, in September 1964 the Board of Trustees voted to expand the building. At this time, the church had between 560 and 675 members, reflecting an impressive growth in only a few years. In May 1965 the congregation voted to hire Kahn to design an addition that would be sensitive and compatible with the earlier building. Kahn's design for the addition added a two story with basement wing to the rear (east) end of the building, connecting from the lobby area, and housed additional classrooms, offices and adult meeting rooms. In contrast to the folded exterior wall surface of the original building, Kahn's addition was more simply designed, with a smoother wall surface and rectangular

[47] Williams, 343.

mass. The large rectangular recessed voids mimic the smaller articulated wall recesses of the original portion, but they are simplified and regularized. At the east elevation of the addition, Kahn's use of a screen-like wall surface, with the actual mass of the building recessed behind a flat, planar structural support, recalls his contemporary work in buildings such as the National Assembly Complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Mimicking the folded structure of the original church building, the large two-story window units along the north and south elevations of the addition were recessed, creating a similar although less dramatic folded appearance in the spaces. Like the original church itself, planning and development of the addition took a long period of time, and ground was broken for the addition in the fall of 1967. The addition was dedicated on May 25, 1969.[49]

"Form and Design" and the First Unitarian Church

Even before his design was approved by the building committee or ground was broken, Kahn expressed his enthusiasm for the design of the First Unitarian Church in Rochester. The lengthy design and development phase, coupled with a like-minded and well-informed client that continued to push him to explore new creative ideas, allowed Kahn to begin refining his own mature architectural expression. During his work on the First Unitarian Church, Kahn developed his theories of "form and design," concepts that would become highly influential in the later work for which he earned his international reputation. While his "form and design" theory is best seen at the First Unitarian Church and generally regarded as his dominant hypothesis, the church project has also been viewed by many scholars in relation to his later theories on "silence and light."

In their simplest meanings, Kahn described his concepts as: "Form is 'what.' Design is 'how.' Form is impersonal. Design belongs to the designer."[50] Form was a universal concept, inherent regardless of site, conditions, or materials. Form is an abstract ideal, a timeless concept impervious to architectural styles or trends. Design, on the hand, was the physical manifestation of this form, translating the form concept into a circumstantial and material reality. Buildings must conform to certain realities of gravity, weight, materials etc.

[48] First Unitarian Church, *Gardens of First Unitarian Church* (Rochester, NY: First Unitarian Church, No Date).
[49] Williams, 344.

For Kahn, these concepts described not only his concept of architecture but also his design procedure, where he worked to discover some new ideal, preexisting form of the intangible and translate it into the real, based on "what a thing wants to be."[51]

Kahn's theories first began to emerge in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as he began to reflect on his own creative process in reaction to what he perceived as the cold, dry, analytical approach posited by the popular International Style. Throughout this early era, Kahn explored more human-oriented concepts, such as *feeling* and *thinking,* in architectural design. He began to see the two terms as functions vital to the creative process, running parallel to each other and of equal importance. By 1953, this thought process had progressed to what he called his "order-design thesis," which he represented as a linear progression moving from the abstract to the concrete. Later he expanded this process to "the nature of the space-order-design." Throughout the next seven years, Kahn continued to refine and develop his ideas. By 1955, the word *form* began to intrigue him, and he began to see the word as part of his design development process. He began to narrow down his previous concept, incorporating both "nature of the space" and "order" into his developing concept of "form."[52]

By 1959, Kahn's ideas of "form and design" were beginning to crystallize. Kahn's earliest exploration of this theory may be found as a handwritten draft in his personal notebook, which is undated but thought to have been written in 1959.[53] As early as October 1960, Kahn used his drawings for the First Unitarian Church to illustrate a lecture he gave in California, where he discussed his concept of "form and design" in a lecture titled "The Difference between Form and Design." Based on this presentation, Kahn later gave a *Voice of America* radio broadcast of a slightly revised version, retitled "Structure and Form," broadcast on November 21, 1960.[54] This radio broadcast, subsequently renamed "Form and Design," was published in the April 1961 issue of *Architectural Design.*[55]

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[50] Kahn, "Form and Design," 148. Also, Alexandra Tyng, *Beginnings: Louis I. Kahn's Philosophy of Architecture* (New York: Wiley, 1984), 30-31.
[51] Williams, 343.
[52] Tyng, 27-31.
[53] Steven Fleming, *Arq* 10, no. 1 (2006): 30.
[54] Williams, 343, 345.
[55] Kahn, "Form and Design," 145.

Numerous scholars have explicitly identified the First Unitarian Church, designed contemporarily with Kahn's ultimate synthesis of his "form and design" theory, as the best representation of this philosophy. Historian Steven Fleming noted, "Kahn's First Unitarian Church and School in Rochester represents the clearest application of his 'form and design' theory to a building."[56] Given his extensive exploration of this topic in 1959, it is seems likely that Kahn apparently had in mind his notion of the form drawing for the First Unitarian Church (figure 2) before he met with the congregation in 1959. In his form drawing for the church, Kahn envisioned the spiritual heart of the church as its auditorium, which he envisioned as a central question mark representing the questioning nature of Unitarianism as he came to understand it. From this question, learning and spiritual growth radiated outwards. From his form diagram, Kahn gradually began to translate the ideal into the circumstantial, into what he called the "design." Here, with the application of the architectural program dictated by the functional needs of the congregation, the arrangement of spaces took physical structure. Throughout the design development process, or what he called "testing the form," the "form" remained present, proving to Kahn the validity of the original form.[57]

First Unitarian Church served as the laboratory for Kahn to test and validate the viability of his "form and design" concept, which he subsequently applied to his later works. While his understanding of this theory continued to become deeper, enriched by experience, it served as the basis for projects such as the Bryn Mawr College dormitory building, the Exeter Library, and perhaps his most prominent work, the National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Later in his career, Kahn would expand his theory of "form and design" beyond the individual structure to encompass his thinking about cities at the larger scale. Working during the urban renewal era, with its emphasis on large-scale, sweeping city planning projects, Kahn sought to imbue the city with the same sense of inspiration that had prompted its founding. He translated his thoughts on "form" to the city, seeing inherent qualities implied by streets, buildings, shopping center and civic centers.

"Silence and Light" and the First Unitarian Church

[56] Fleming, 25.

Kahn's theory of "form and design" is most clearly developed and viewed through the First Unitarian Church project, but many scholars have also noted a clear connection between his later theory on "silence and light." Kahn's theory of "silence and light" was a later development in his career, although it was an expansion of his earlier thoughts on the human urge to express coupled with nature's laws, making inspiration possible. According to historian (and Kahn's own daughter) Alexandra Tyng, "Kahn saw light as the means or a tool of expression given by nature, and silence as the desire for expression welling up from the collective unconscious."[58] As early as 1959, while he was crystallizing his theory of "form and design," he began to reflect on nature's role in the process of inspiration. In his 1961 article "Form and Design," developed during the design and construction of First Unitarian Church, Kahn commented about his interest in light,

> *[T]o the musician a sheet of music is seeing from what he hears. A plan of a building should read like a harmony of spaces in light.*
>
> *Even a space intended to be dark should have just enough light from some mysterious opening to tell us how dark it really is. Each space must be defined by its structure and the character of its natural light. Of course I am not speaking about minor areas which serve the major spaces.*
>
> *An architectural space must reveal the evidence of its making by the space itself. It cannot be a space when carved out of a greater structure meant for a greater space because the choice of a structure is synonymous with the light and which gives image to that space [sic]. Artificial light is a single tiny static moment in light and is the light of night and never can equal the nuances of mood created by the time of day and the wonder of the seasons.*[59]

A source of Kahn's theory on "silence and light" stems from his reverence for the spiritual quality of light, an interest that developed slowly during the 1950s and 60s.[60] His own thoughts on light shifted from its use purely through mechanical and functional needs, the predominant Modernist approach to using light, and by 1960 he began to explore the thought that light could define the structure of a room. Kahn's fascination was with natural

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[57] Tyng, 43-44. Also, Fleming, 25-26.
[58] Tyng, 129.
[59] Kahn, "Form and Design," 149.
[60] A small group of scholars, including Vincent Scully, attribute Kahn's interest in the use of light and his consciousness of window openings to his interactions with his young employee and colleague, Robert Venturi. In fact, Venturi himself seems to claim responsibility for opening Kahn's eyes to these factors in his architecture in the late 1940s and early '50s, and Kahn's lifting of Venturi's work eventually caused a rift in their relationship. For an interesting discussion of the influence of Venturi on Kahn, see

light, which changed and shifted, giving life to architectural forms. Always fascinated with the mystical and spiritual in his architecture, Kahn was interested in the magical qualities of light and its life-giving interaction with architecture and a sense of its evolutionary role in the origins of life. Like architects working in the Gothic cathedral age, Kahn's notion of light drew on its spiritual, inspiration power.[61]

His theories of natural light were further enhanced during a 1961 trip he took to Luanda, Angola, where he became intensely aware of the space-defining qualities of light, as well as the negative physical effects of light in the form of glare. It is also possible that his developing ideas of the use of light influenced the redesign of the First Unitarian Church roof elements, from the small windows of the heavy cruciform design (figure 6) of around March 1960 to the larger, indirect light towers of the final design. After this trip, Kahn discussed his new approach to interior illumination in the auditorium of First Unitarian Church:

> *The getting of light below was a problem…though one could get light to shape this room above, it was difficult to get light to shape this room below. So I devised four wells for light in the four corners. The light came in above and went down to define this space below. This space being an oblong…only two sides in light was not sufficient to express the oblong…and therefore I felt that getting the light from above and down a well into the corners of the space gave expressions to the form, to the shape, of the room chosen*.[62]

However, Kahn's concern with light was not restricted solely to the auditorium space, but became a more practical concern during his design and development of the folded exterior walls. These walls consist of a series of projecting and recessed forms, where interior window seats are inserted in the projection formed between two recessed windows. When developing this element in his final design schemes, he created numerous small studies and sketches to try to understand the way in which light would come into the rooms. In these spaces, many of them classrooms, Kahn was keenly aware of the negative effects of glare that he had first become aware of during his trip to Luanda.

Sam Rodell, *The Influence of Robert Venturi on Louis Kahn*, Master's thesis, Washington State University, 2008, http://spokane.wsu.edu/academics/design/documents/S_Rodell_09858138.pdf.pdf.

[61] Tyng, 128-131.

[62] Quoted in Fleming, 25, 28.

We felt the starkness of light again, learning also to be conscious of glare every time…whether it's the glare in Rochester or glare in Luanda, it still was one realization…if you looked at a Renaissance building...in which a window has been highly accentuated architecturally…a window that's made in this form – windows framed into the opening…

This was very good because it allowed the light that came in on the sides [through small windows beside the benches] to help again to modify the glare…when you're in the off at an angle you can choose to see the light directly or not.

And this came about also because there was a desire to have some window seats – there's a great feeling that a window seat should be present because there is no telling how the room will be used…

I felt this window seat had a lot of meaning and it struck me as a demand of several people in the committee…and it became greater and great in my mind as meaning associated with windows.[63]

As a part of his interest in light, Kahn also demonstrated an interest in color. Color, being the visible spectrum within white light. Color was the perception of light, and it was changeable depending on the time of day, weather, season and other forces. As Tyng notes, "Without color, there is only white light, and Kahn believed there was no such thing as white light." [64] Here, the tapestries that Kahn designed for the First Unitarian Church auditorium in 1962 drew their inspiration. Designed as panels in the spectrum of colors, and located around the auditorium, these decorative wall hangings can be seen as the physical manifestation (or "design," to use Kahn's terminology) of his theory on the spirituality and the multi-nuanced qualities of light. Given his feelings about the spiritual qualities of light, these textiles can be viewed as serving a symbolic, non-representative religious role in the auditorium. In the context of the Unitarian faith, Kahn's tapestries draw on the spiritual nature of light in the form of color to depict the multi-faceted, diverse religion and are located in the auditorium in a manner comparable to the use of stained glass windows bearing the images of saints and martyrs used in Gothic cathedrals.

In 1967, he introduced the term *silence* in relationship to light. Silence was difficult for Kahn to describe, as it was a "process in motion rather than a fixed phenomenon."[65] However, he never used the term in regard to its

[63] Quoted in Heinz Ronner and Louis I. Kahn, *Louis I. Kahn, Complete Works: 1935-74* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Pr., 1987), 120.
[64] Tyng, 130-131
[65] Quoted from Tyng, 132.

traditional meaning of "quiet." In his emerging theory of "light and silence," the two terms together produced inspiration. Later, Kahn would describe "silence" in scientific and evolutionary terms, as a great void beyond the confines of time and space, devoid of life. However, this void of "silence" contained the potential for life. The development of his theory on "silence" was perhaps a natural reaction to his earlier thoughts on light as the source of life. While he was unaware of it at the time, Kahn's theory of the duality of "light and silence" resembled closely the ancient Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, that within each nature the seed of the other exists, and that neither exists in a static or pure state. Yang represents the spiritual and the light, and was an energy not a concrete, comparable to what Kahn had theorized about light. Yin referred to the darkness and "primeval waters." Kahn himself had early-on described his concept of "silence" as coming from the water of darkness.[66]

As historian Steven Fleming noted, Kahn pioneered his new theories on the use of daylight illumination at First Unitarian Church, a Christian church, despite his Jewish background. Trained in the Western architectural tradition and its strong focus on medieval Christian church architecture, Kahn would have been familiar with the Christian doctrine as embodied in architecture. Kahn's attention to using light in a spiritual, inspirational manner at First Unitarian Church can be seen as a conscious attempt to connect this modern building to a long tradition of Christian church architecture.[67] Kahn freely associated the First Unitarian Church with the Christian cathedral tradition, commenting "It is very Gothic, isn't it? Does that bother you? I like it myself."[68]

However, part of the reasoning behind Kahn's use of light in the church auditorium stemmed from a more practical reason. For the interior ceiling of the primary worship space, Kahn designed a massive concrete structure that has been likened to the hull of a ship with its faceted surface. The effect was so massive and weighty both physically and visually, that the congregation was concerned it would make its members feel oppressed with this heavy mass sitting above them. To ease the weighty feel of the ceiling structure, Kahn lifted the form from the walls of the auditorium, visually supporting it through the use of thin, delicate bracket-like

[66] Tyng, 132-33.
[67] Fleming, 33.
[68] Heinz Ronner and Louis I. Kahn, *Louis I. Kahn, Complete Works: 1935-74* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Pr., 1987), 122.

structures. These fragile forms helped to diminish the massiveness of the ceiling. As he made revisions to the ceiling in March of 1960, Kahn also added the building's signature light towers. These towers helped illuminate the corners of the room, letting light wash over the concrete block walls. Even on a cloudy day, the brilliant but concealed light reinforces the sense that the ceiling is floating or hovering.[69]

Critical Response and Scholarly Publications about the First Unitarian Church

Even before ground was broken, Louis Kahn disseminated his design for First Unitarian Church through many different avenues, including public lectures, radio broadcasts and architectural journals. Showcasing his breakthrough with his ideas of "form and design," as well as "light and silence," Kahn's First Unitarian Church was part of an immediate contemporary discussion by critics and scholars. Throughout its more than 50-year history, the church has been widely praised by historians and critics and is frequently discussed in monographs on Kahn as well as architectural history textbooks and lessons.

Kahn's ideas and designs for First Unitarian Church first came to the attentions of a national audience before construction had even started. His first public discussions of his work at the church consisted of a lecture, "The Difference between Form and Design," given to the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on October 11, 1960. Shortly after, Kahn presented a revised talk, entitled "Structure and Form," and discussed the project during a Voice of American Forum Lecture, broadcast via radio on November 21, 1960. This lecture he later edited and had reprinted as "Form and Design" in 1960. In 1961, *Perspecta Seven*, an architectural journal published by Yale University, published a lengthy article about three of Kahn's recent projects drawn from a February 1961 interview with the architect in Philadelphia. Two of the projects were never ultimately constructed; however, an extensive series of his sketches and drawings documenting the design development for the First Unitarian Church project were included. Here, Kahn's developing concepts of the form and its expression at First Unitarian Church were disseminated. The article also highlighted Kahn's own interest in trying to depict the intangible essence of Unitarianism in relation to designing a building that could physically manifest the needs of the congregation. During Kahn's time at Yale, the school was a center for

[69] Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: Norton, 2007), 114-115.

architectural ideas and development, and this article would not have escaped the notice of a national critical audience. Architectural historian Robert Twombly later published a reprint of the *Perspecta Seven* article in his 2003 compendium *Louis Kahn: Essential Texts*, highlighting the importance of this conversation in the discussion of Kahn's career.

While no formal reviews of the building have been located, the First Unitarian Church was immediately embraced by historians and critics and became part of the architectural discourse. One of the earliest proponents of Kahn's work was the noted historian and influential critic of modern architecture, Vincent Scully. Scully first became friends with Kahn in 1947, when the architect came to teach at Yale.[70] After completing his dissertation, Scully later joined the faculty of Yale himself in 1949. Scully would emerge as one of the most influential critics and scholars of the twentieth century, with works spanning more than half a century. Early in his career, Scully worked to document many Modern architects and helped give shape to the early understanding and appreciation of work from this 1940s and 50s. In early 1962, Scully wrote the book *Louis I. Kahn* as part of George Braziller's Makers of Contemporary World Architecture series which devoted an entire volume to the work of his friend and emerging architect. Scully's documentation of Kahn's work in the early 1960s was a pivotal era for the architect, as Kahn transitioned into becoming an internationally influential force in Modern architecture. In this early study of Kahn's work and career, Scully noted that the First Unitarian Church was still under construction at the time, but served as a "demonstration of Kahn's sequence of what he now calls Form and Design."

Not everyone was such a supporter of Kahn's work at First Unitarian Church, however. In 1965, Vincent Scully accompanied Kahn on a trip to Leningrad in the Soviet Union, where his work was exhibited in a show on American Architecture. Kahn obviously thought highly of the project for the church, enough so to feature it in a prominent international exhibition. Of the trip, Scully later recalled a somewhat humorous moment involving the design of the First Unitarian Church:

[70] Vincent Scully and Neil Levine, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13.

> *He* [Kahn] *walked around with the mayor of the city, who was inspecting the show, and they came to this Rochester building. The mayor said that it didn't look like a church, which by Russian standards was true enough. Kahn instantly replied, 'That's why it was chosen for exhibition in the Soviet Union.' The translator wouldn't translate it, but all the Russians laughed anyway, indicating they understood perfectly well what we were saying. And of course it didn't look like a church. It has the abstraction Kahn insisted upon, and, more than this, the glass is subordinated.*[71]

Shortly after its construction, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City featured the First Unitarian Church in a comprehensive review of Kahn's work. In a show titled "The Architecture of Louis I. Kahn," which ran from April 26 until May 30, 1966, MoMA displayed photographs, drawings and plans for the building in the show, which "survey[ed] the achievements which have brought the 65-year old architect international acclaim."[72] In its press release, MoMA included a quote from Vincent Scully:

> *In the Unitarian Church, structure and light came together for Kahn to make the first great interior space he was able to construct…It might be argued that the Unitarian Church was Kahn's first wholly integrated building, in which he was able for the first time to meet all his own fresh and exacting standards*.[73]

Kahn's work was already gaining an international reputation during the 1960s. In April of 1968, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in England published "A Re-Appraisal of Mid-Century American Architecture." Originally presented as a lecture accompanied by lantern slides by Fello Atkinson, an architect who taught at Harvard and Cornell, on January 17, 1968, the lecture focused on taking a look at the achievements of American architects and their influence on British architecture, from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. The lecture discussed the works of a wide range of architects, from Wright, Sullivan and Richardson to Mies van der Rohe, Eero Saarinen and Philip Johnson. While Atkinson briefly discussed the work of Kahn as representing a "conscious neo-historicism," noting only his Salk laboratory by

[71] Quoted from Vincent Scully and Neil Levine, "Chapter 17: Louis I. Kahn and the Ruins of Rome," in *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 310.

[72] Quoted from The Museum of Modern Art, "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," news release, May 9, 1966, Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 11, 2014. This press release advertises that Kahn's drawings, plans and photographs of First Unitarian Church will be included in MoMA's show "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," held April 26-May 30, 1966.

[73] Quoted in The Museum of Modern Art, "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," news release, May 9, 1966, Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 11, 2014. This press release advertises that Kahn's drawings, plans and photographs of First Unitarian Church will be included in MoMA's show "The Architecture of Louis Kahn," held April 26-May 30, 1966.

name, the article featured an image of the First Unitarian Church as the representative building of Kahn's work.[74]

While the design of the First Unitarian Church was rapidly gaining national and international attention, the building also appears to have been well-received by the local community as well. A 1962 article in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* shortly after its dedication described in detail the materials, layout and concept behind the new church building. The article's author noted the simplicity of the exterior, as well as the masterful use of concealed natural lighting in the interior. "The First Unitarian Church's new building in Winton Road South differs perhaps as much from the conventional American church building as the first Romanesque ones departed from their Byzantine predecessors," the author noted.[75] Besides just articles documenting its construction and appearance with a sense of awe and wonder, the building would be recognized more formally. In 1964 the First Unitarian Church was awarded an "unprecedented" special award by the Better Rochester Building Contest, a local architectural contest that recognized commercial architecture projects sponsored by the *Times-Union* and *Democrat and Chronicle* newspapers. Recognizing the church as an immediately significant work of architecture, the judges specially recognized it despite not being a commercial project. Judge David Dobereiner, a professor of architecture at Syracuse University, noted that the First Unitarian Church "could become a historical monument of architecture."[76]

At the time of Kahn's death in 1974, book-length studies of architects, known as monographs, were becoming increasingly popular, replacing the more common brief, article-length discussions that had been common throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An early monograph on the life and work of Kahn was issued by Romaldo Giurgola and Jaimini Mehta, *Louis I. Kahn*, in 1975. Both authors had worked as employees of Kahn, but despite their familiarity with their subject matter, their book is an unemotional catalog of his works. In the section "The Place of Worship," which documented five religious-related projects, Giurgola and Mehta

[74] Fello Atkinson, "A RE-APPRAISAL OF MID-CENTURY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 116, no. 5141 (1968), accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/41371862?ref=search-gateway:2506e9dad01fe53dedb54671c4e9cb30.
[75] Al Donner, "A Look at New Unitarian Church," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, December 2, 1962.
[76] Quoted in "Better Building Awards Given," *Times-Union* (Rochester, NY), February 11, 1964.

included the First Unitarian Church as the first project, accompanied by many images and drawings of the building.[77] Also in 1975, August Komendant, Kahn's friend and the structural engineer for many of his projects including First Unitarian Church, published his book, *18 Years with Architect Louis I. Kahn*. Chapter 4 of his book documents his experiences and recollections from the Rochester church project. Komendant recalled a conversation about the building with Kahn that included talk about his theories of silence and light in relationship to the worship space. From a more engineering perspective, Komendant also discussed the structural process for creating the massive roof structure for the building. The engineer also recalled calling the building "the best Kahn [had] made so far" to the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania.[78] First Unitarian Church was also included in Alexandra Tyng's 1984 book *Beginnings: Louis I Kahn's Philosophy of Architecture*. Tyng, Kahn's daughter by his liaison with Anne Griswold Tyng, devotes several pages to the church in her discussion of the architect's theories on form and design.[79]

Even in the 1980s, when Brutalist architecture from the 1950s and '60s was becoming passé in favor of Postmodernism and other contemporary movements, Kahn's First Unitarian Church continued to be praised and valued by architectural historians and critics. In a review of several books on religious architecture that was published in the *New York Times* on December 26, 1982, then architecture critic Paul Goldberger noted the inherent difficulty in expressing the ethereal nature of religion in a tangible, concrete form. In his review, Goldberger wrote:

> *For the struggle to express the inexpressible - to create what Le Corbusier called, in reference to his great chapel at Ronchamp, France, "ineffable space" - is one that has yielded few successful results in our time or in any other. The extraordinary balance between the rational and the irrational that characterizes Ronchamp, or Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Ill., or Louis Kahn's Unitarian Church in Rochester, N.Y., or Bernard Maybeck's Christian Science Church in Berkeley, Calif., to name four of the greatest religious structures of this century, is not something that can be made by formula, and it is not something that can be dictated by style.*[80]

[77] Vincent Scully, *Louis I. Kahn* (New York: G. Braziller, 1962), 39-43.
[78] August E. Komendant, *18 Years with Architect Louis I. Kahn* (Englewood, NJ: Aloray, 1975), 33-40.
[79] Tyng, 43-45.

Goldberger appreciated the building as a masterpiece of religious architecture which transcended its era of design, its "structural exhibitionism," or its style, noting it as a rare modern building that successfully created a profound religious space.[81]

Vincent Scully was an early enthusiast of the work of Louis Kahn and remained consistent in recognizing him as one of the greatest American architects of the twentieth century. On November 12, 1992, Scully first gave a lecture as the first James Michelin Traveling Scholar at Caltech that was later adapted into one of his most notable articles, "Louis I. Kahn and the Ruins of Rome." In his analysis of Kahn's work, Scully gives a lengthy description of the design process and architectural realization of the First Unitarian Church, a project he had first known during the 1960s. Remaining steadfast in his enthusiasm for the building, and with four decades to reflect and understand its significance in the national and architectural dialogue, Scully noted that the First Unitarian Church served as a springboard for his later, mature works. It was a laboratory where all of Kahn's earlier training and ideas came together during an extensive design development phase to realize his true artistic vision. "You can really feel the silence he talked about, thrumming as with the presence of divinity, when the cinder block is washed silver by the light that floods down upon it, while the heavy, heavy slab is lifted overhead," Scully elegant described. "This space joins that of Yale Art Gallery as one of Kahn's early essays into the sublime, into whose vast silences all his late work was to move."[82]

Kahn and his First Unitarian Church are the basis of numerous thesis and dissertation studies, undertaken by numerous scholars and students around the world. Kahn's work continues to be the source of inspiration, study and analysis for scholars. For his master's thesis, "An Architectural Myth: The Design Evolution of Louis Kahn's First Unitarian Church," completed in 1990 at the University of Pennsylvania, Robin B. Williams (now a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design) studied the architect's mythologizing of the design

[80] Paul Goldberger, "Housing for the Spirit," New York Times, December 26, 1982, http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/26/books/housing-for-the-spirit.html?&pagewanted=all.
[81] Goldberger, n.p.
[82] Vincent Scully and Neil Levine, "Chapter 17: Louis I. Kahn and the Ruins of Rome," in *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 309.

procedure for the church.[83] In his 2003 PhD dissertation, "The Role of Conceptual Diagrams in the Architectural Design Process," completed at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Fehmi Dogan used three case studies to support his discussion. He used the Staatsgalerie by Stirling & Wilford Associates (1979-84), Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum (1989-2001) and the First Unitarian Church. In his dissertation, Dogan devoted a chapter to understanding Kahn's design process, his use of conceptual diagrams, and the design evolution. Dogan's work interprets Kahn's First Unitarian Church nearly fifty years after its design and development, viewing it through the lens of comparative study of modern and more recently constructed buildings.

In 1991-92, a resurgence of interest was focused on the work of Kahn. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles sponsored the first major retrospective of Kahn's work in 1991 which would later be hosted by top modern art museums in the United States and Japan. The exhibit was advertised by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was held there between June 14 and August 18, 1992. Spanning the entire career of Louis Kahn, from his Beaux Arts beginning with Paul Cret to his mature period of the 1960s and '70s, the exhibit served as a reintroduction to his work. Among the various notes and highlights of the program at MoMA was a film by Peter Kirby titled *Louis Kahn: Three Buildings*. As the press release indicated, the film documented "three of the architect's most significant works...The First Unitarian Church, Rochester, Exeter Academy Library, New Hampshire and the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla."[84] Accompanying the exhibit was a comprehensive book, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, edited by David B. Brownlee and David G. DeLong. Among the projects selected for the book was First Unitarian Church, which included a lengthy analysis of the building by Robin B, Williams, as well as mention elsewhere in the text.[85]

In his book *Source Book of American Architecture: 500 Notable Buildings from the 10th Century to the Present* (1996), George Everard Kidder Smith devotes half his study to Native American and early American buildings, and the other half to buildings from the twentieth century. In his forward, Paul Goldberger noted that Kidder

[83] Williams, 345.
[84] The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Public Information, "Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture," news release, May 1992, The Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org/pdfs/docs/press_archives/7035/releases/MOMA_1992_0043_38.pdf?2010.
[85] David Bruce Brownlee and De Long David Gilson, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991).

Smith ambitiously set out to tell the story of American architecture through its masterworks, having "no agenda other than quality."[86] With these qualifications for inclusion in mind, Kidder Smith devoted page 475 to the First Unitarian Church, noting that Kahn "unequivocally expressed the Unitarian thesis that education must accompany intelligent worship."[87]

More recently, discussions of Kahn's First Unitarian Church are regularly included in texts and monographs about the architect. One of the most highly regarded books to emerge is Sarah Williams Goldhagen's *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism,* published in 2001. In her book, Goldhagen explored seven of Kahn's greatest works in their intellectual, cultural and artistic contexts. Chapter 6 of the book, titled "Rethinking Modernism: Authenticity and Community in the First Unitarian Church of Rochester," is devoted to the exploration of the design process, context and Kahn's emerging theoretical ideas of First Unitarian Church. While she did not radically change the thinking about the church project, she did provide a good, modern study of its design and development and included new and detailed information that had emerged on the project through interviews and correspondence. Goldhagen selected only two projects from Kahn's later career, First Unitarian Church and the governmental complex at Dhaka, Bangladesh, a work often regarded as his masterpiece. By devoting an entire chapter to First Unitarian Church, Goldhagen suggests she felt the building was an influential and notable project in understanding Kahn's work and career.[88]

Beyond just a scholarly audience, the First Unitarian Church is used as a model to help younger architects and designers understand architecture and space. In 2007, the education department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MoMA) prepared the booklet "Artist's Work/Artist's Voice: Louis I. Kahn" as a guide for educators. MoMA noted that "rather than exhaustive monographs, these guides consider key examples of an artist's work in relationship to his or her social and cultural context" and explain that examples were drawn from the

[86] G. E. Kidder Smith, *Source Book of American Architecture: 500 Notable Buildings from the 10th Century to the Present* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 5.
[87] Kidder Smith, page 475.
[88] Brownlee and Gilson, 239.

museum's collections.[89] For this guide, six lessons were established that included "What is Architecture?," "The Power of Drawing," "The Process of Design," "Form and Function," "The Spirituality of Matter," and "Designs for Urban Life." While the initial chapters of the guide were broad introductions to the basics of architecture and provided an overview and context for Louis Kahn, the third lesson focused specifically on the First Unitarian Church. In this lesson, students worked from Kahn's numerous design drawings and sketches for the First Unitarian Church to learn about how an architect conceptualizes and plans a building. MoMA's use of the First Unitarian Church project as a model and educational resource, even for younger audiences, is an indication of how significant and ingrained the building is to our modern understanding of twentieth century architecture. This booklet is still available as an educational resource on MoMA's website (2014).

The building has also been the subject of the growing online architectural community. In 2010, Andrew Kroll wrote an article about the First Unitarian Church project for the popular site *ArchDaily*, noting that the church successfully fused the modern design aesthetic with the Unitarian spiritual values of community and inclusivity. Kroll simply states, "the First Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York is one of Kahn's most impressive works."[90]

For more than half a century, First Unitarian Church has been discussed, dissected and studied by numerous architectural scholars and critics. First Unitarian Church is included in the majority of the most notable and significant books about Kahn's work and career, and the building has been featured in numerous individual studies and research projects from the 1960s until the present day. The general consensus is that Kahn created a lasting, timeless work of spiritual architecture that is reflective of the subtly shifting Modern architectural scene of the early 1960s in its materials, incorporation of historical references, and new approach to the use of light, allowing the building to transcend the mere popular styles and fashion of the age. From the start, the building has provided scholars with a wide range of nuances and different aspects to study and analyze, providing a rich and seemingly unending source of interest. The study and discussion of the building continues to the present

[89] *LOUIS I. KAHN A Guide for Educators*, Artist's Work/Artist's Voice (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 1, http://www.moma.org/pdfs/moma_learning/docs/kahn_full.pdf.

day, as newly emerging scholars continue to take interest in the project, bringing new approaches and new understanding to the broad pool of published work on the First Unitarian Church. Kahn was an architect whose ideas and approach to architecture had a significant influence on the direction of modern architecture in the second half of the twentieth century, and First Unitarian Church was a key moment in his career. While not his largest or most famous project, Kahn's First Unitarian Church is regarded as a pivotal moment in the career of an internationally prominent architect and is a topic that continues to inspire new ideas and new ways of thinking about architecture.

Kahn's Work After First Unitarian Church

As many historians and scholars have noted, First Unitarian Church served as a vital turning point in Kahn's career. Unlike many architects, Kahn's most significant work was accomplished toward the end of his life, after decades of practicing. First Unitarian Church, and Kahn's exhaustive planning and conceptualizing phase, served as a breakthrough for his later works, which led to his international renown as an architect and planner.

Not long after Kahn had started his work on the First Unitarian Church, he received the commission to design a dormitory for Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, beginning in 1960. Drawing from his design process at First Unitarian Church that joined two different types of spaces, Kahn was keenly aware of the nature of the shared public spaces in the dormitory, and the division between that space and the activities that occurred there compared to the private sleeping quarters. The plan for the dormitory resembles the plan for the First Unitarian Church, where three square units are formed with a shared communal space at the center of each square which is then ringed by private bedrooms.[91]

Kahn's remaining work continues to reflect the maturation and refinement of the thought process established at First Unitarian Church. The last projects that he designed reflect the continued translations of his "form and

[90] Quoted in Andrew Kroll, "AD Classics: First Unitarian Church of Rochester / Louis Kahn," ArchDaily, November 9, 2010, accessed April 17, 2014, http://www.archdaily.com/84267/ad-classics-first-unitarian-church-of-rochester-louis-kahn/.
[91] Tyng, 45-46.

design" and "silence and light" design process and conceptualization. Louis Kahn is most widely known for the design of the National Assembly Building at Dhaka, Bangladesh. Kahn first received the commission for the project in 1962, just as First Unitarian Church was nearing completion. The Exeter Library in Exeter, New Hampshire (1967-1972) reflected the influence of First Unitarian Church with its inner core and outer ringed design, with the library designed as two concentric forms.[92] The Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (1966-1972) was designed with a series of cycloid vaults that formed long interior gallery spaces. While the form of the building is a departure from that established at First Unitarian Church, Kahn utilized a comparable design development process, paying special attention to the use of indirect natural lighting in the interior spaces.[93] The Mellon Center for British Art and Studies in New Haven, Connecticut (1969-1974), Kahn's final project, utilized a rectilinear plan of interlocking spaces that allowed both for movement between the rooms as well as maintaining just enough integrity to each unit to give each space a private feel.[94]

Although Louis Kahn was a practicing architect beginning in the 1920s, it is his mature period between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, late in his life, that saw him create his finest works. His design for First Unitarian Church was at the dawn of this mature period, and was an opportunity that allowed him to crystallize his various thoughts, experiences and observations into a series of clear, fresh theoretical approaches to his architecture. At First Unitarian Church, Kahn developed a process for designing and creating architectural spaces. Even before ground was broken for the building, it was a notable project and widely discussed in the architectural and scholarly community, becoming quickly incorporated into modern architectural discourse. Louis Kahn died suddenly at Penn Station in New York City on March 17, 1974, at the age of 73, only 5 short years after completing his work at First Unitarian Church.

[92] Tyng, 51.
[93] Tyng, 54-56.
[94] Tyng, 57-58.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries encompass a roughly square parcel of land on the east side of Winton Road South. See attached map with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all land currently and historically associated with the First Unitarian Church.

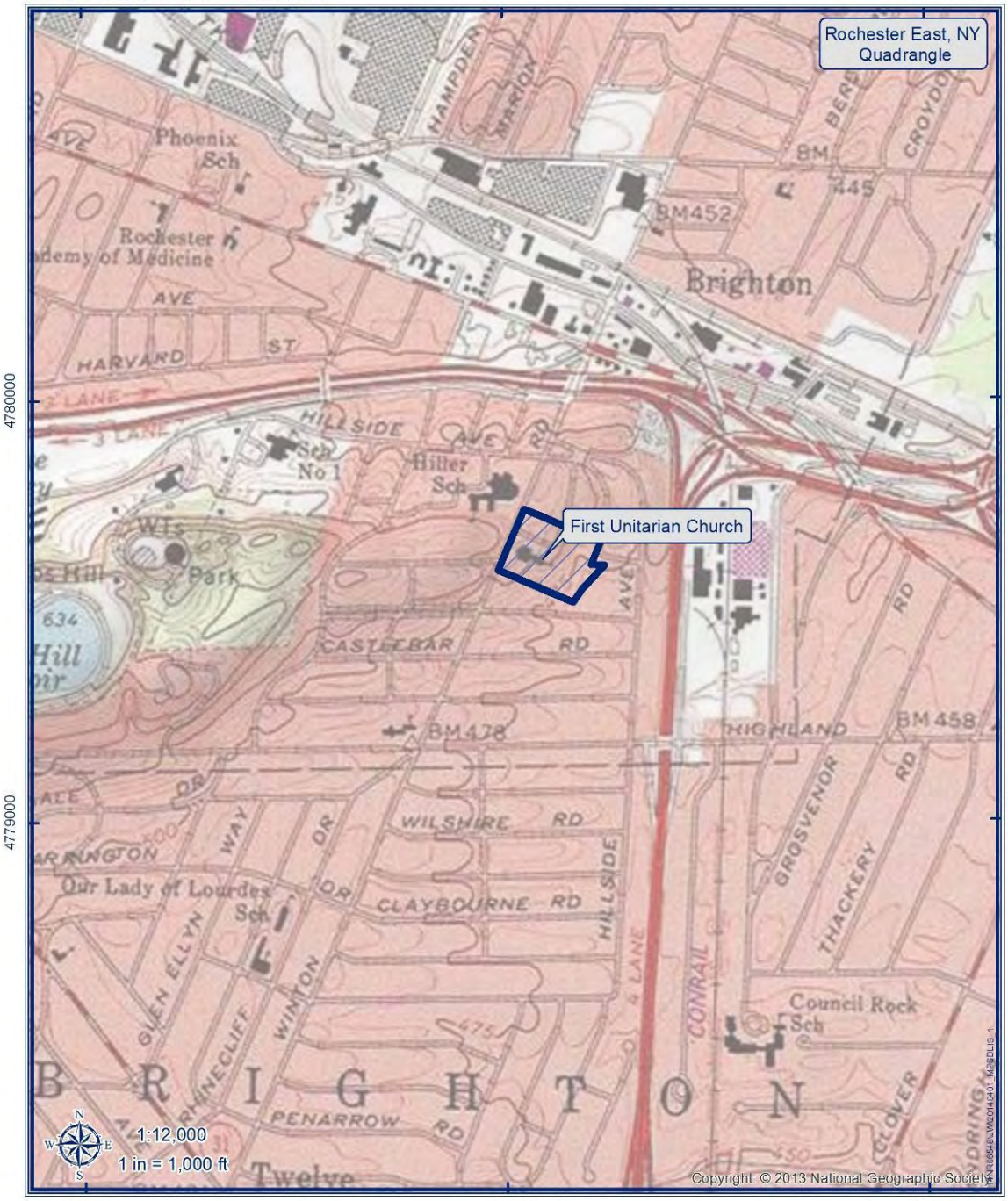
First Unitarian Church
Rochester, Monroe Co., NY
220 Winton Rd. South
Rochester, NY 14610
∑ = 7.91 Acres
East Ave
I 490
Norris Dr
Hoyt Pl
I 490
Cobbs Hill Dr
Nursery St
Hartsen St
Bengal Ter
Cobbs Hill Dr
Winton Rd S
Cathaway Park
Aberthaw Rd
292109E 4779628N
Rd
E Highland Dr
Beckwith Ter
Nunda Blvd
Rosegrey Ter
Castlebar Rd
Hillside Ave
I 590
San Gabriel Dr
Highland Ave
Village Ln
Oakdale Dr
Templeton Rd
1:5,000
1 in = 417 ft
4780000
4779000
292000
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Feet
0 140 280 560
First Unitarian Church
Tax Parcel Data:
Monroe Co, RPS
monroecounty.gov/gis
NEW YORK STATE

First Unitarian Church
Rochester, Monroe Co., NY

220 Winton Rd. South
Rochester, NY 14610

First Unitarian Church
Rochester, Monroe Co., NY

220 Winton Rd. South
Rochester, NY 14610



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

Feet
0 345 690 1,380

First Unitarian Church
USGS quad index

Tax Parcel Data:
Monroe Co, RPS
monroecounty.gov/gis

Additional Information

Name of Property:	First Unitarian Church
City or Vicinity:	Rochester
County:	Monroe
State:	NY
Name of Photographer:	Jennifer Walkowski
Date of Photographs:	January 2014
Location of Original Digital Files:	Peebles Island Resource Center, PO Box 189, Waterford, NY 12188

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0001
Primary west façade, looking southeast

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0002
Primary west façade, from Winton Road

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0003
North elevation, showing entrance and addition, looking south

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0004
North elevation, showing entrance court, looking southwest

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0005
East elevation of addition, looking west

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0006
South elevation, showing original church and addition, looking north

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0007
View of west and south elevations, looking northeast

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0008
Interior, worship space showing entrance and choir loft, looking east

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0009
Interior, worship space showing platform, looking west

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0010
Interior, worship space, balcony and entry door detail

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0011
Interior, worship space, view of inverted groin vault ceiling

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0012
Interior, first level, view of kitchen

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0013
Interior, classroom, showing folded exterior wall and window seats

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0014
Exterior, wall detail of previous area, showing exterior of folded wall

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0015
Interior, modular cabinets designed by Louis Kahn

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0016
Interior, first level, view looking west toward entry

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0017
Interior, first floor, view of movable wall in Williams Gallery

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0018
Interior, second floor, former children's chapel/presently choir room

NY_Monroe County_First Unitarian Church _0019
Interior, folding bulletin board designed by Kahn

Figure 1: The Old Unitarian Church at Temple and Cortland Streets, designed by Richard Upjohn (1859, image ca. 1930s)

Originally designed for the Third Presbyterian Church, this building was home to the Unitarian congregation beginning in 1883. It was demolished in the 1950s to make way for the Midtown Plaza.

Source: Fahmi Dogan and Craig Zimring, "Interaction of Programming and Design: The First Unitarian Congregation of Rochester and Louis I. Kahn," *Journal of Architectural Education* 56, no. 1 (September 2002): 51.

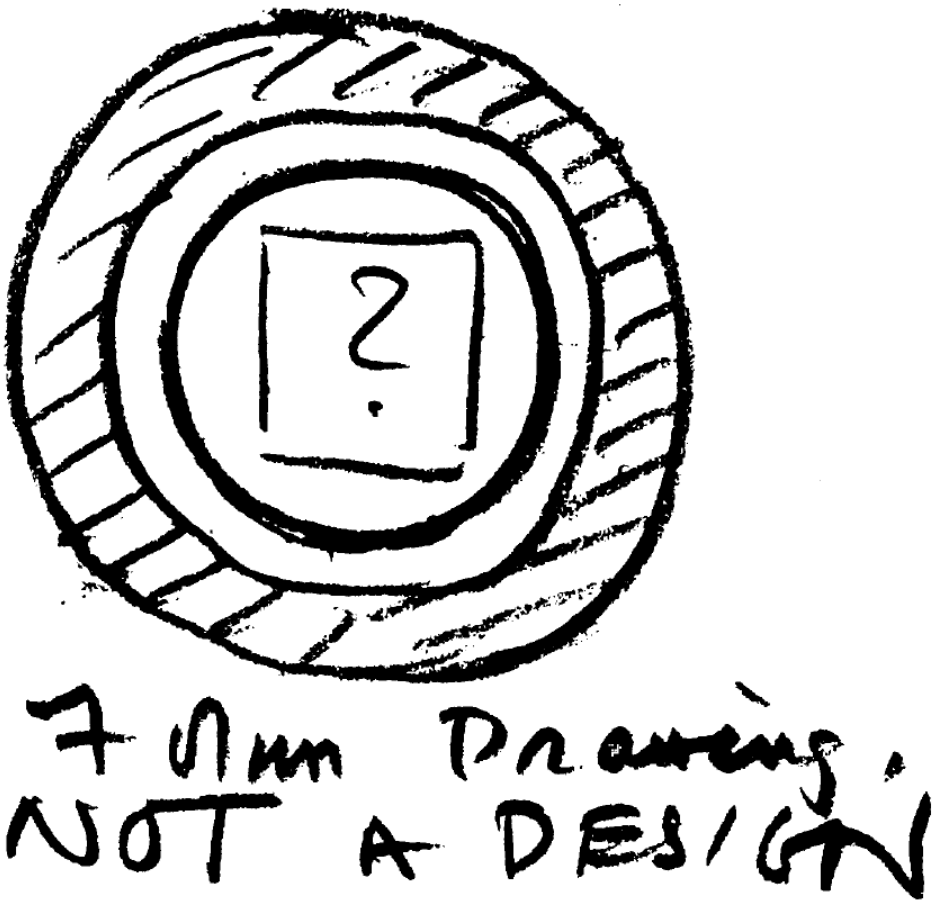


Figure 2: Form Drawing, First Unitarian Church (May-June 1959)
During his first meeting with the congregation in June, 1959, Kahn presented this diagram. While Kahn claimed that this diagram came to him through his discussions with the First Unitarian members, other accounts indicate he had this model in mind prior to the meeting. Here, Kahn envisioned the sanctuary as the central question, surrounded by an ambulatory that allowed participants to enter or not enter as they wished. A corridor then surrounded the ambulatory. The outer ring contained the school, the "walls which surrounded the question."
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 14.

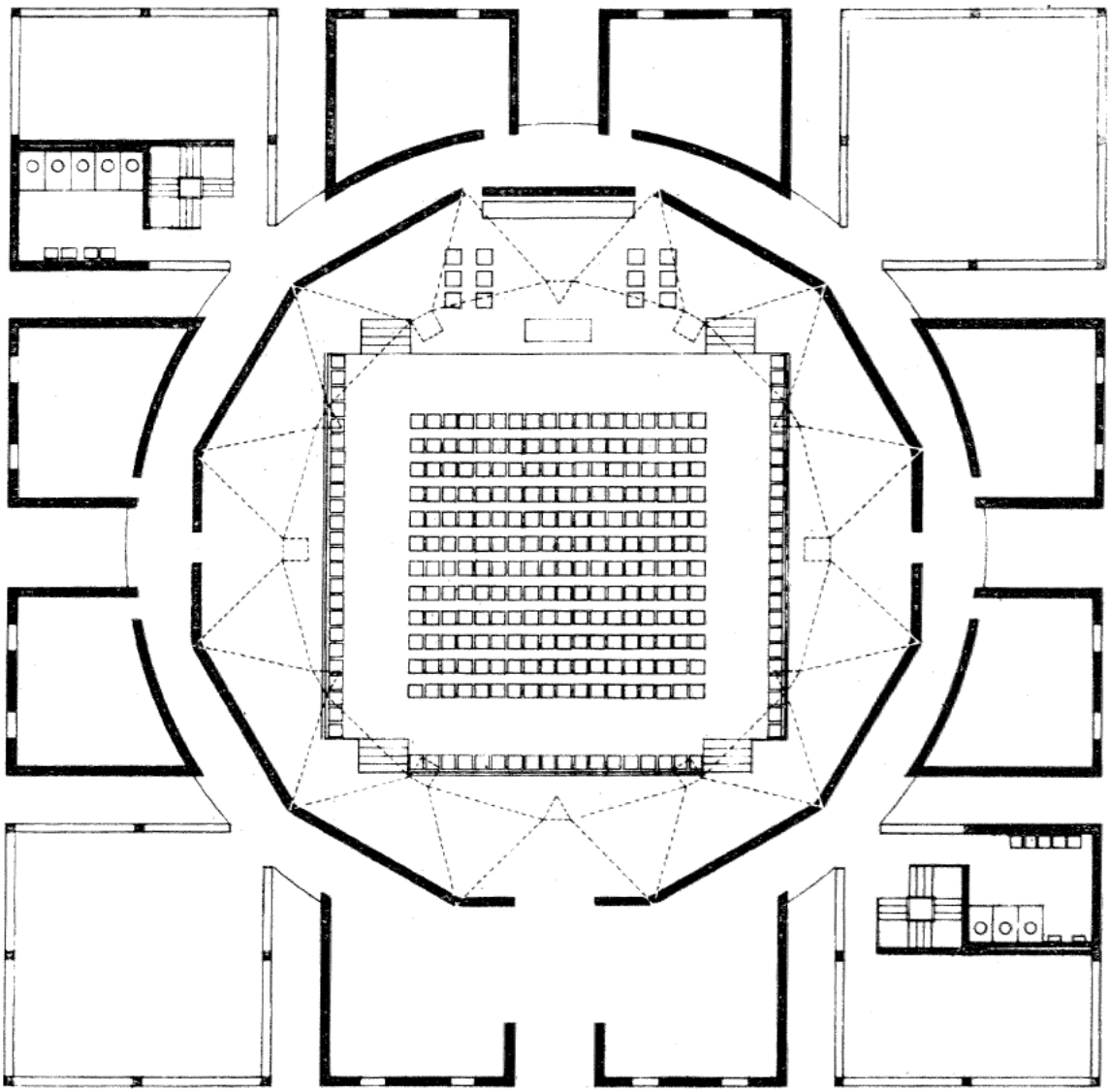
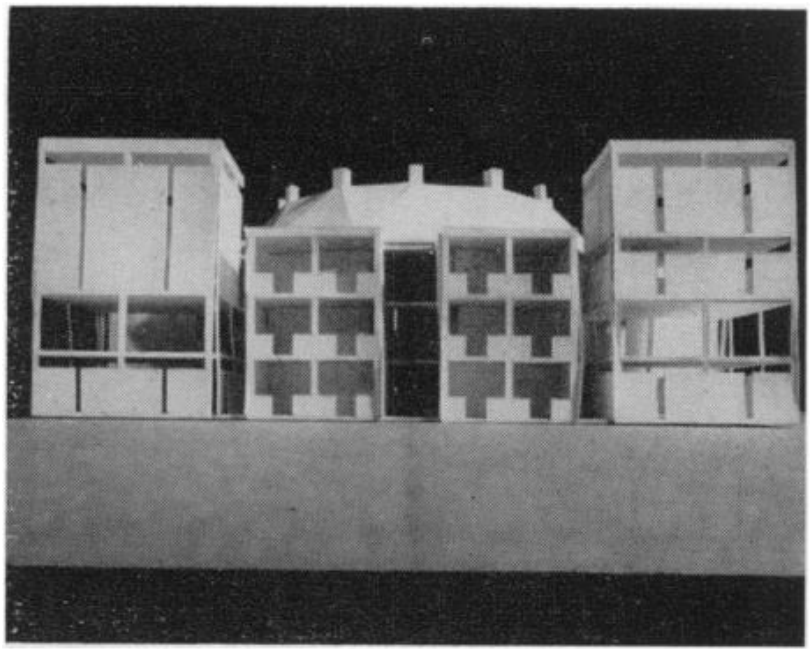


Figure 3: First Unitarian Church - First Design Solution, Plan (ca. December 1959)
This initial plan represents a near literal translation of Kahn's form diagram into a design. The sanctuary, at center, is a rectangular shaped space set within the octagonal ambulatory. The building is surrounded by the classroom and other spaces, which are rigidly uniform to adhere to a strict geometric plan.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 23.



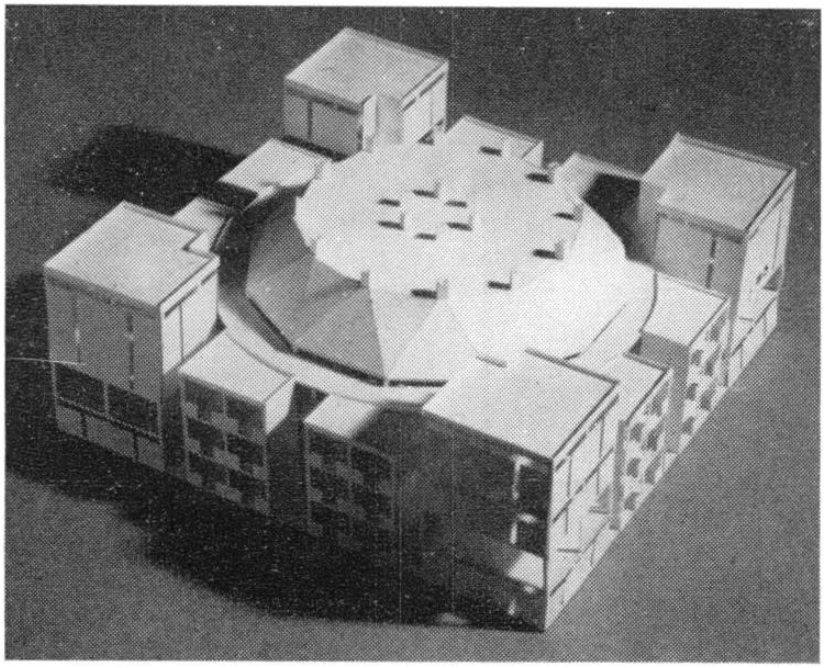


Figure 4: First Unitarian Church - First Design Solution, Model (ca. December 1959)
Note the prominent corner towers and multi-faceted dome over the sanctuary, as well as the overall massiveness and monumentality of the design. This scheme was rejected by the congregation because of its rigid geometric symmetry as well as its expense to build. In his site plan for this design, a moat surrounded the building.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 23.

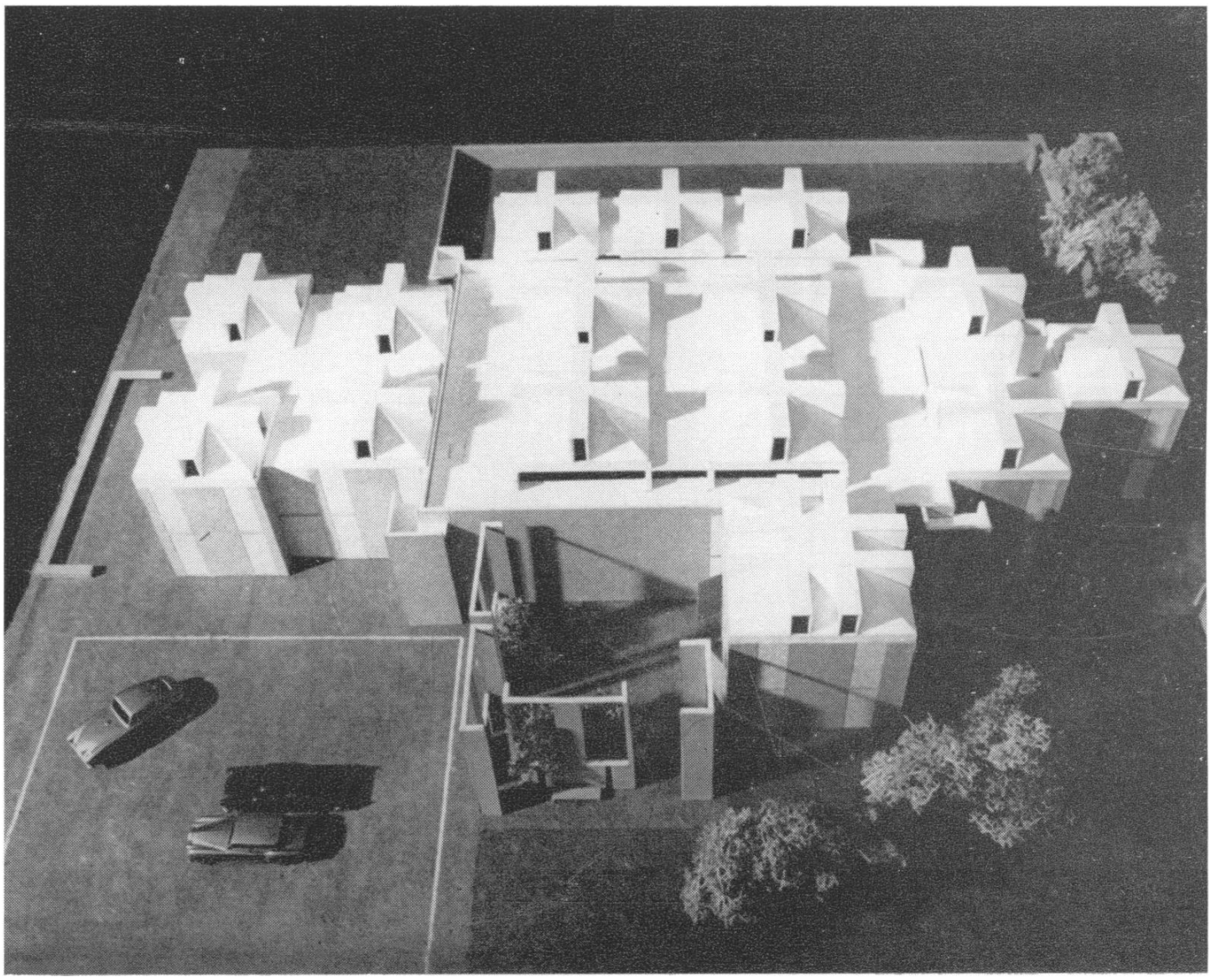


Figure 5: First Unitarian Church - Second Design Phase, Model (early March 1960)
Here, Kahn begins to move away from the rigid symmetry of the previous plan.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 24.

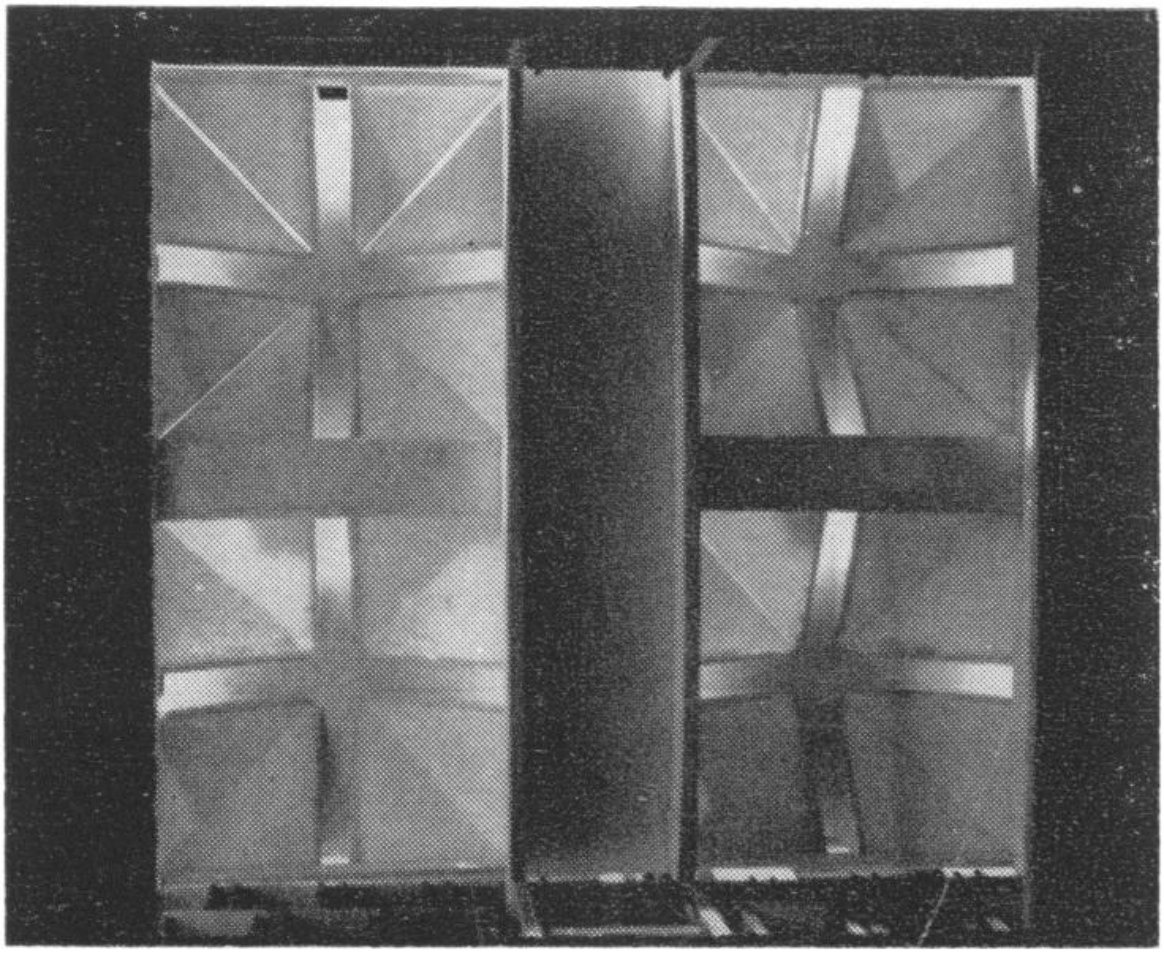


Figure 6: First Unitarian Church - Second Design Phase, Model of ceiling (early March 1960)
This image shows the unique cross-shaped pyramid roof structure Kahn devised as an experiment with interior light. This idea was modified into the larger light towers, as it was thought this structure would be too heavy to build and would require many interior support columns.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 24.

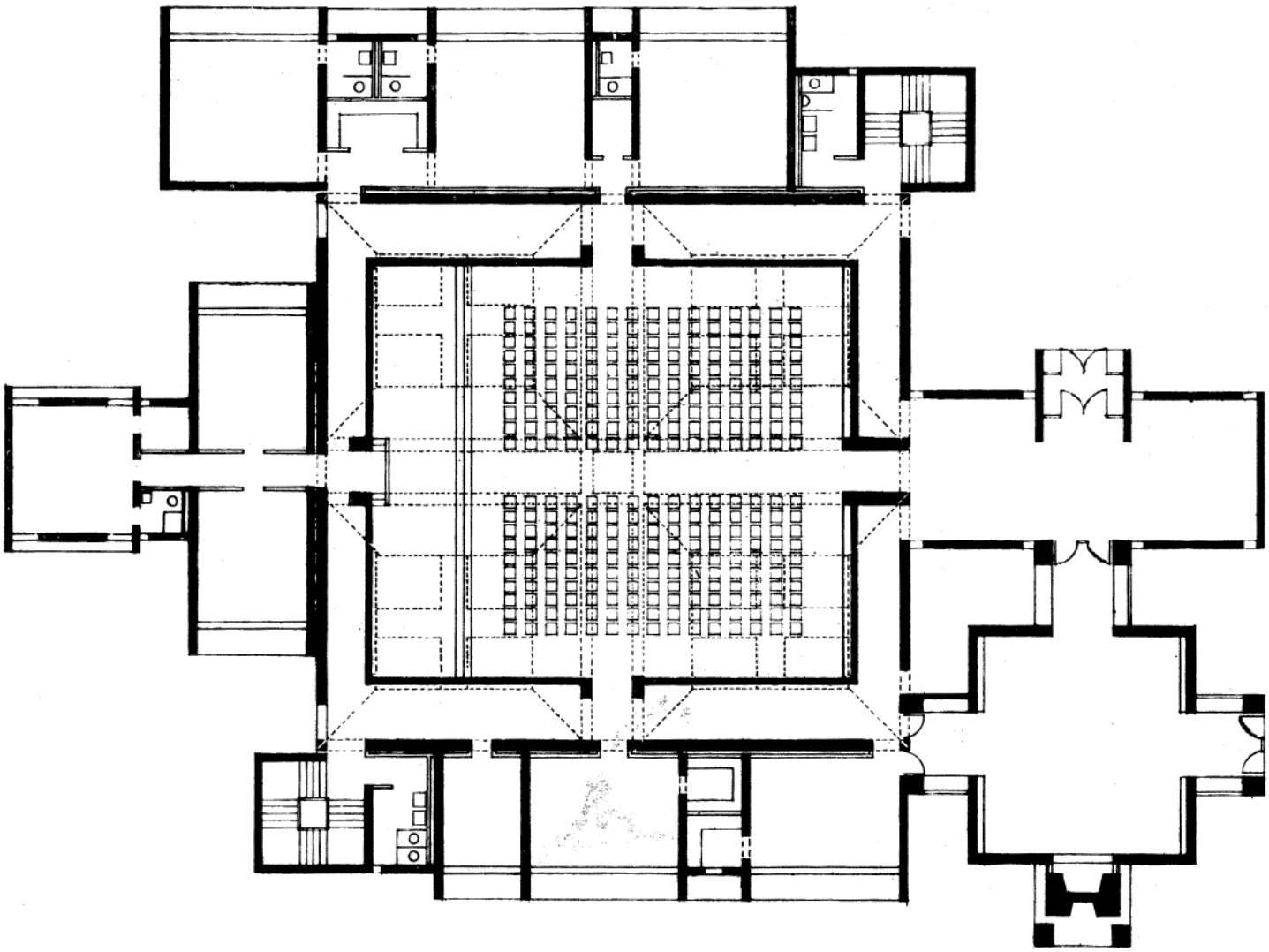


Figure 7: First Unitarian Church - Third Design Phase, Plan (ca. mid-June 1960)
Here, Kahn refines the two-building concept he explored in his second model, refining and shifting spaces around the auditorium core. While this scheme continues to use corner stair towers, note the similarities in this early version of his final design phase to the as-built plan, such as the entry lobby and meeting space (at right).
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 25.

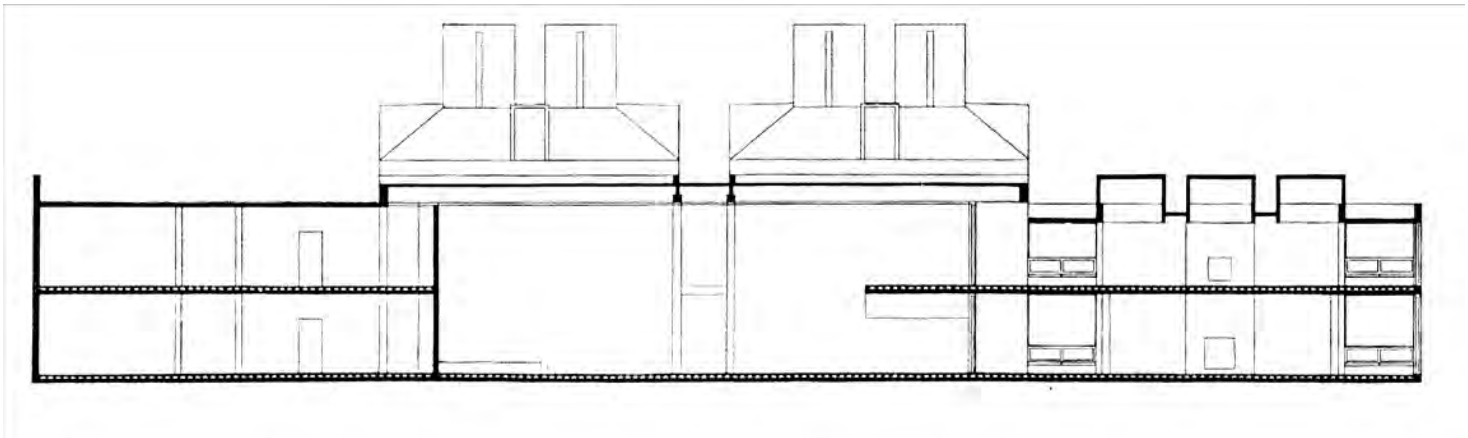


Figure 8: First Unitarian Church - Third Design Phase, Section (ca. mid-June 1960)
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 25.

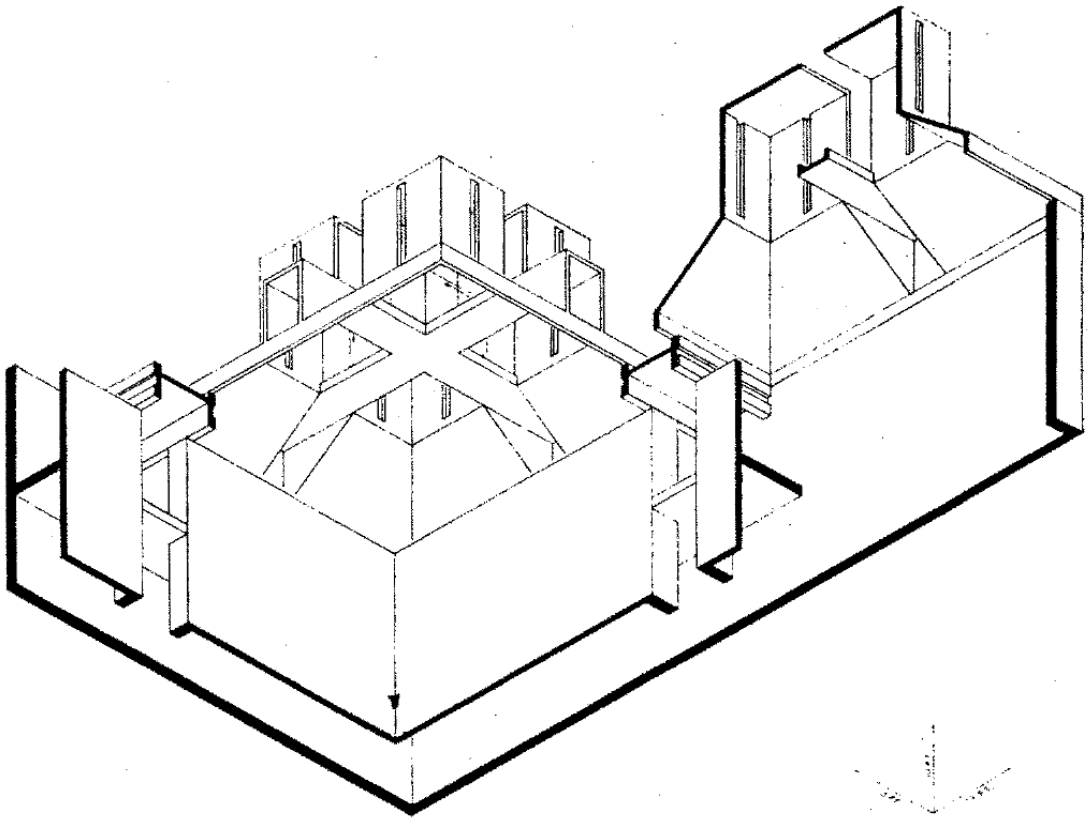


Figure 9: First Unitarian Church - Third Design Phase, Isometric drawing (ca. mid-June 1960)
Here, Kahn and engineer August Komendant appear to be working through the light towers in the auditorium.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 25.

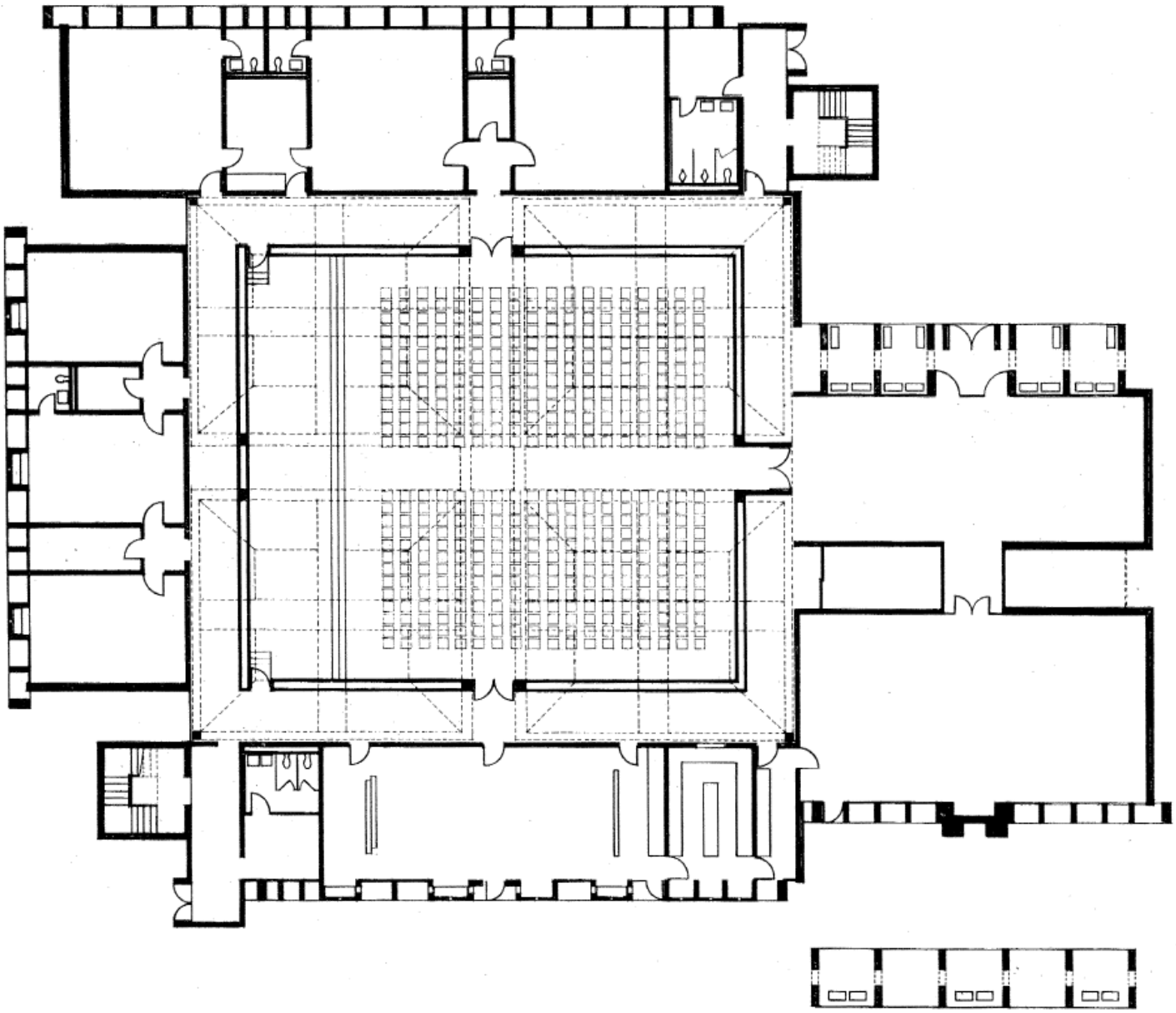


Figure 10: First Unitarian Church – Fourth Design Phase, Plan (ca. mid-June 1960-January 1961)
Another phase of refinement of the final design, this plan shows how Kahn shifted the peripheral spaces around the central core and continued to play with their size, shape and configuration. Notice here that the plan is being brought back to a squarer footprint.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 26.

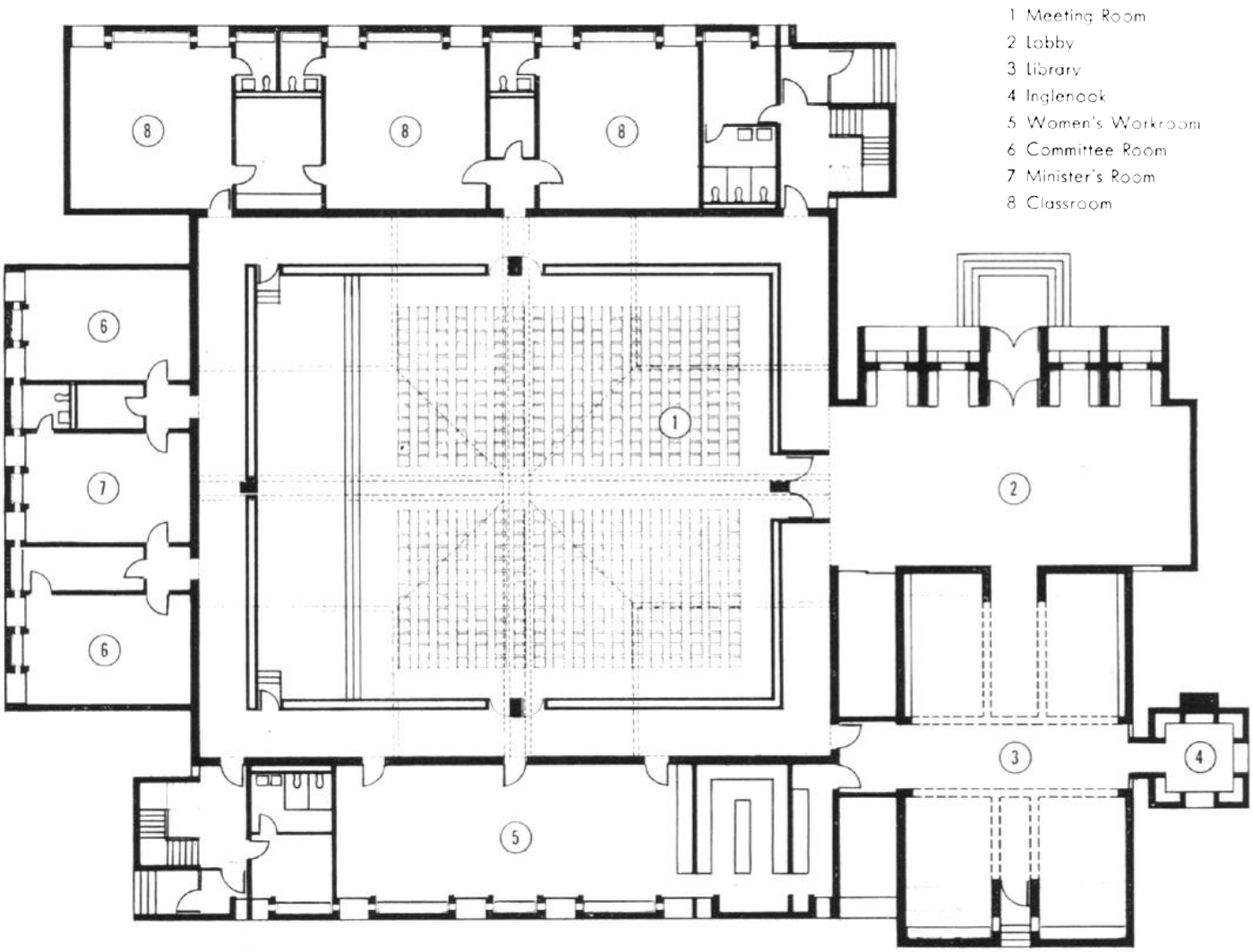


Figure 11: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, Plan (ca. mid-June 1960-January 1961)
While comparable to the final design and layout of the church, this plan reflects the final stages of Kahn's design development for the church.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 27.

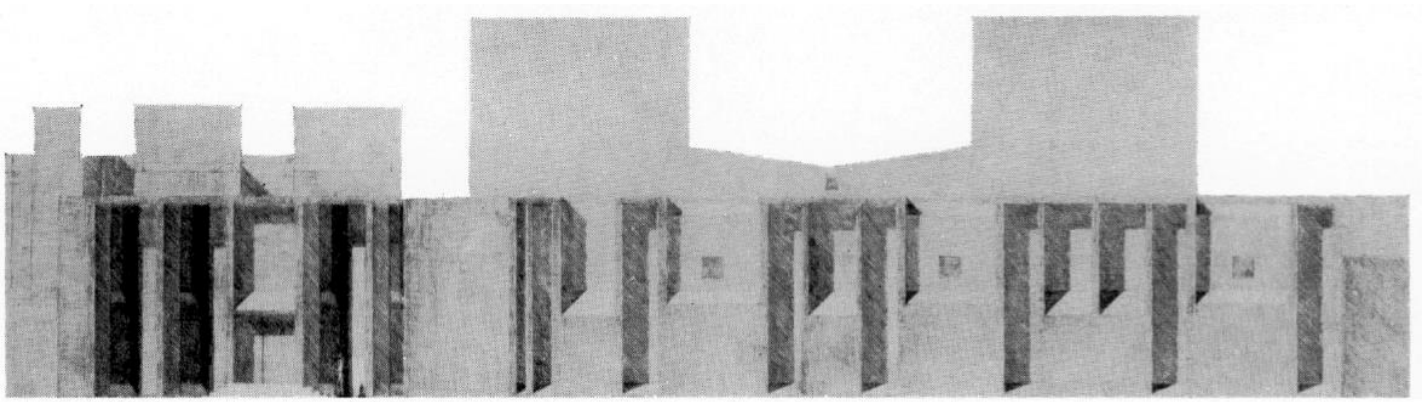


Figure 12: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, North Elevation Rendering (ca. January 1961)
The following series of drawings reflect Kahn's interest in the way light and shadow would play against his undulating building façade.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 27.

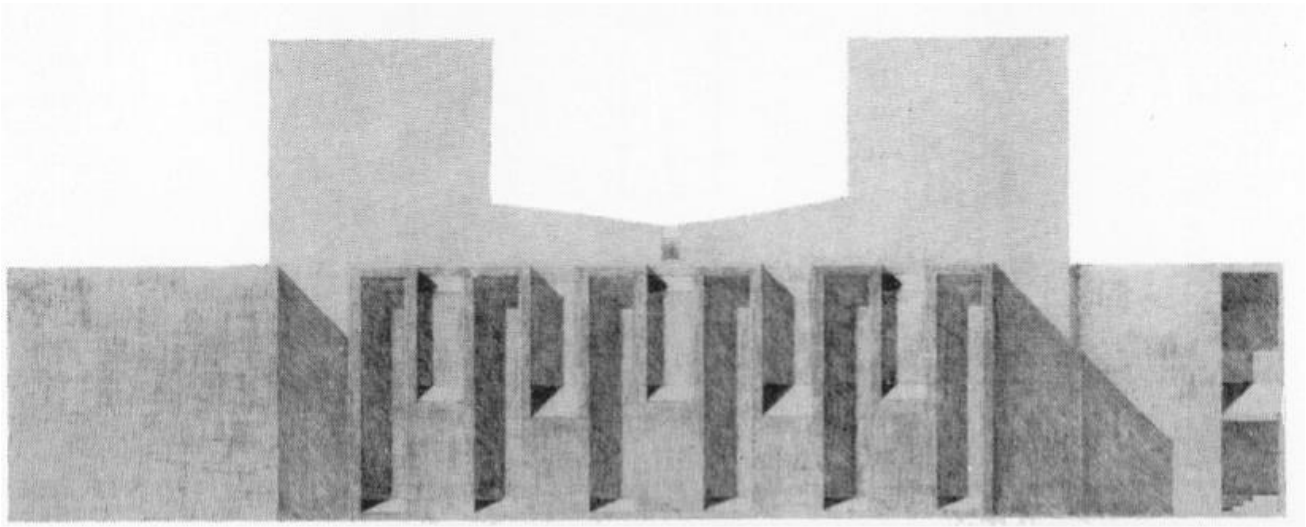


Figure 13: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, West (front) Elevation Rendering (ca. January 1961)
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 27.

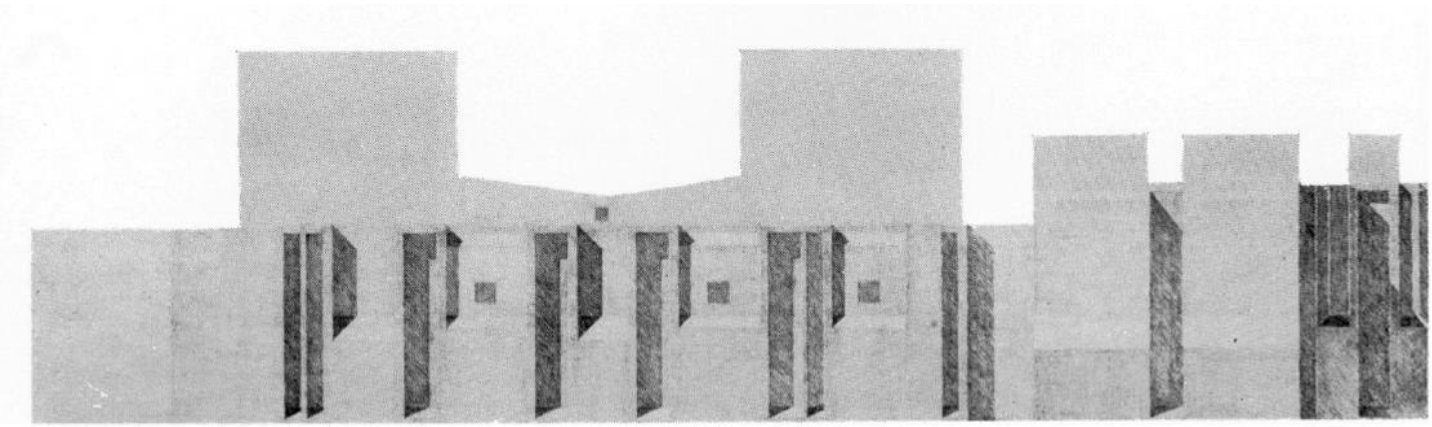


Figure 14: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, South Elevation Rendering (ca. January 1961)
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 27.

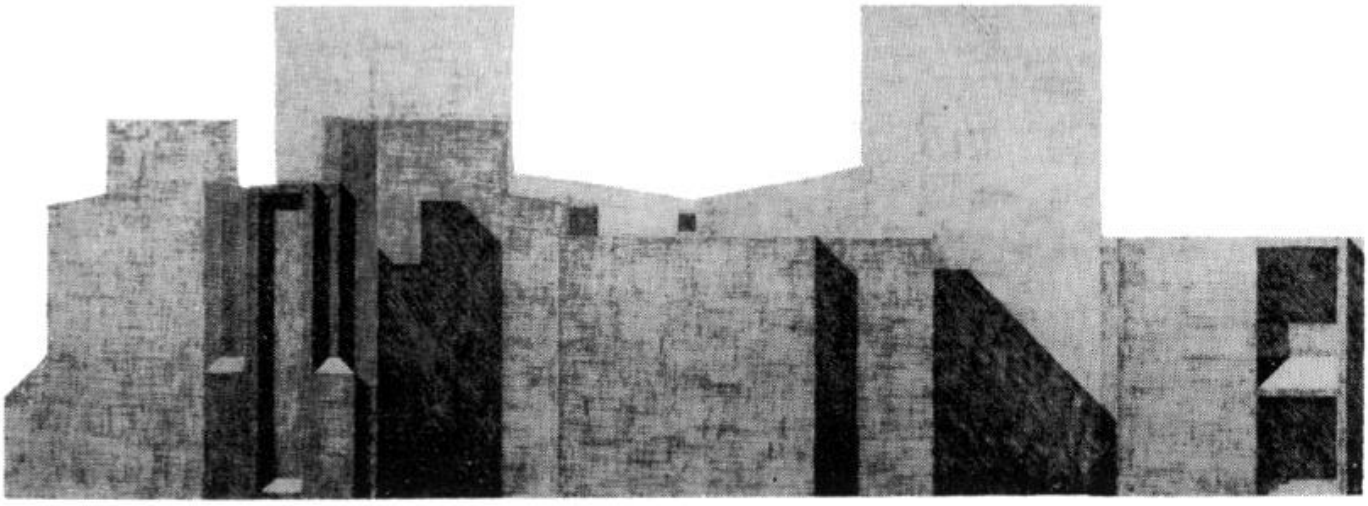


Figure 15: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, East (rear) Elevation Rendering (ca. January 1961)
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 28.

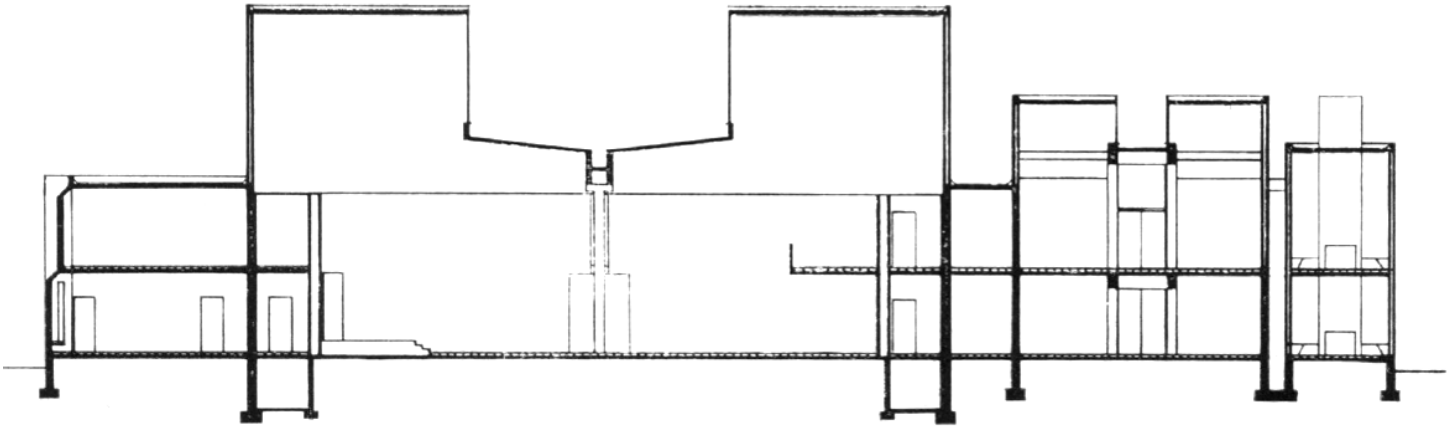


Figure 16: First Unitarian Church – Fifth Design Phase, Longitudinal Section (ca. January 1961)
This section shows the relationship of the sanctuary and the light shafts.
Source: Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn," *Perspecta* 7 (1961): 28.

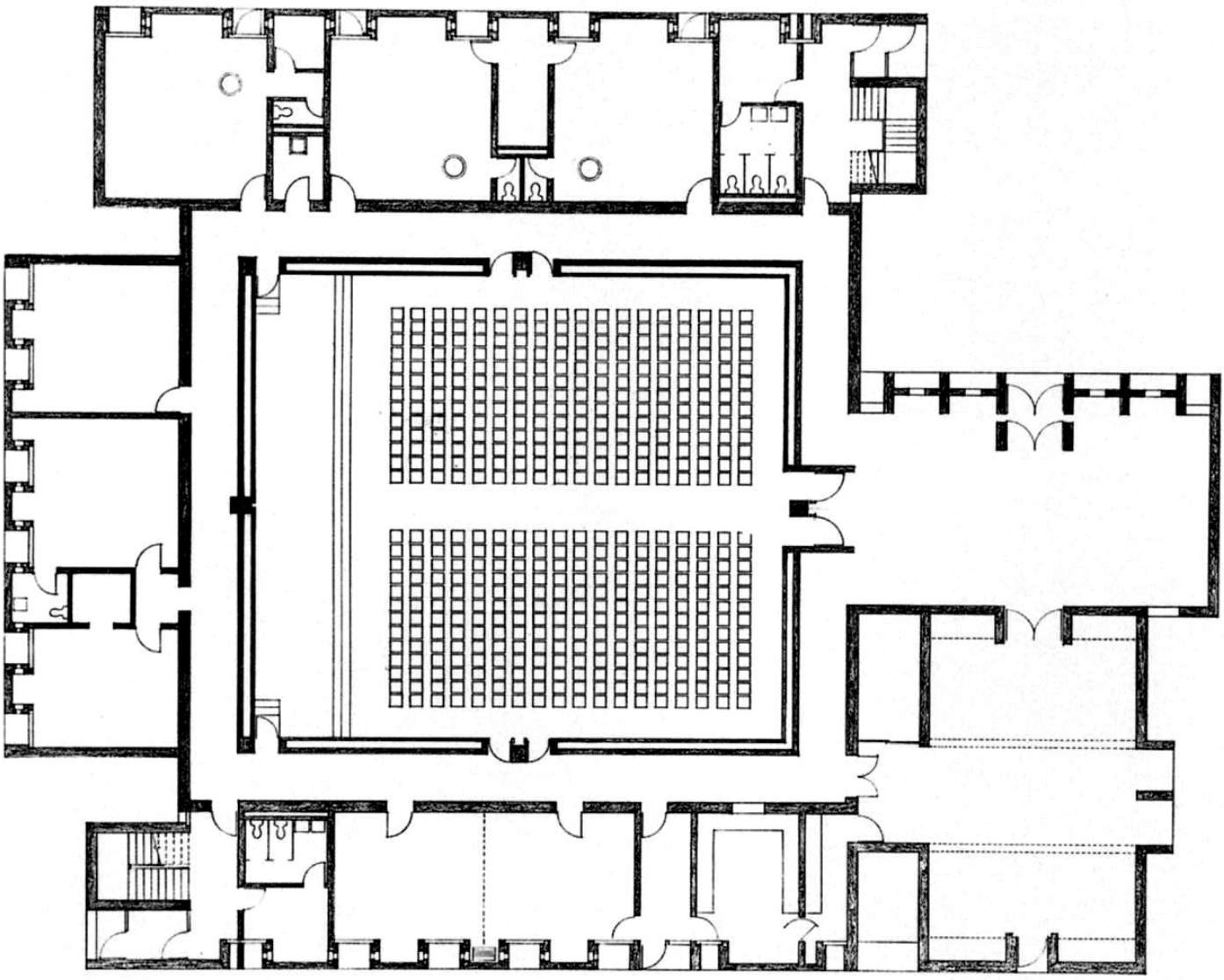


Figure 17: Kahn's Final Design Scheme, First Floor Plan (ca. January 1961)

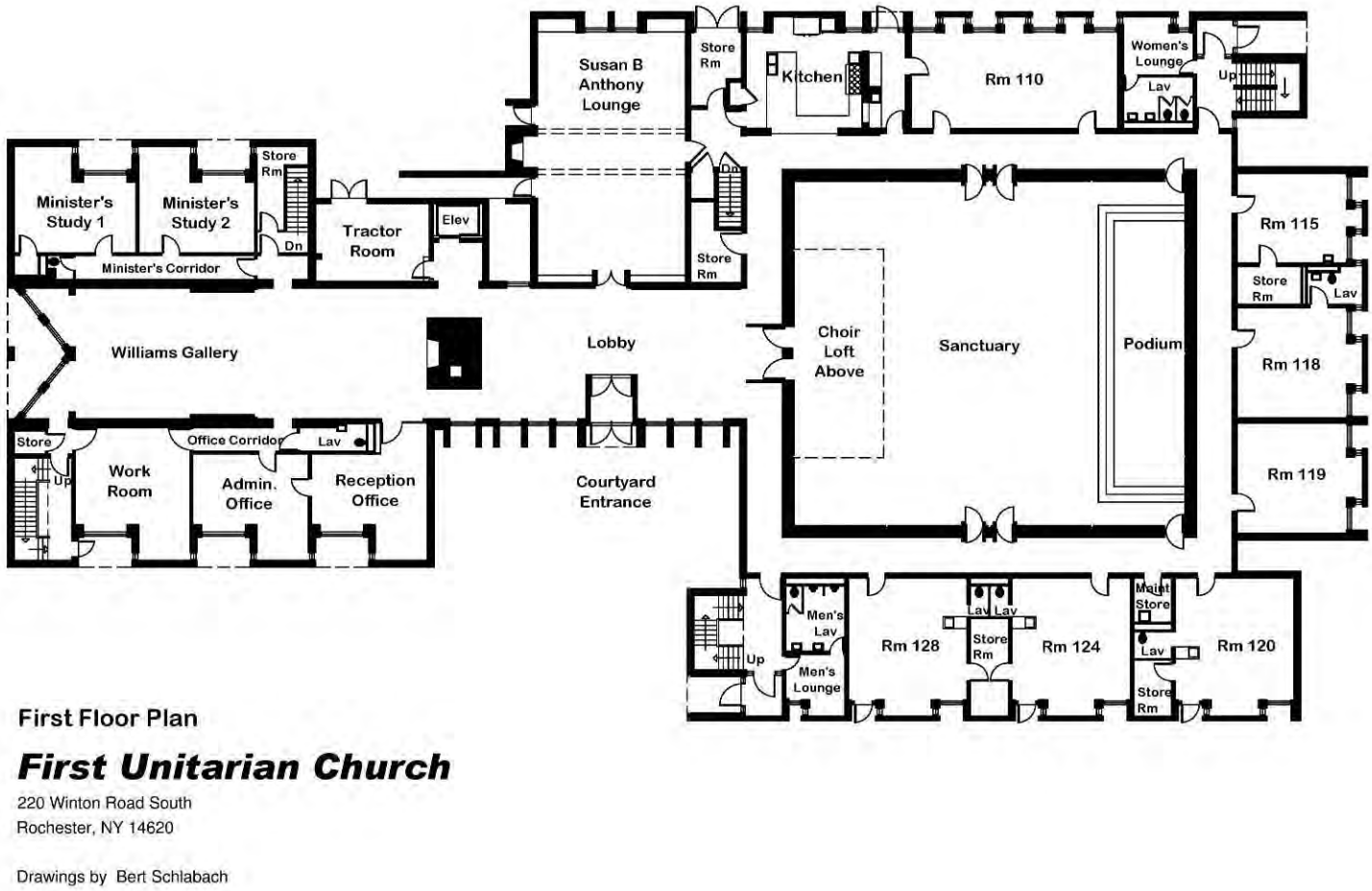
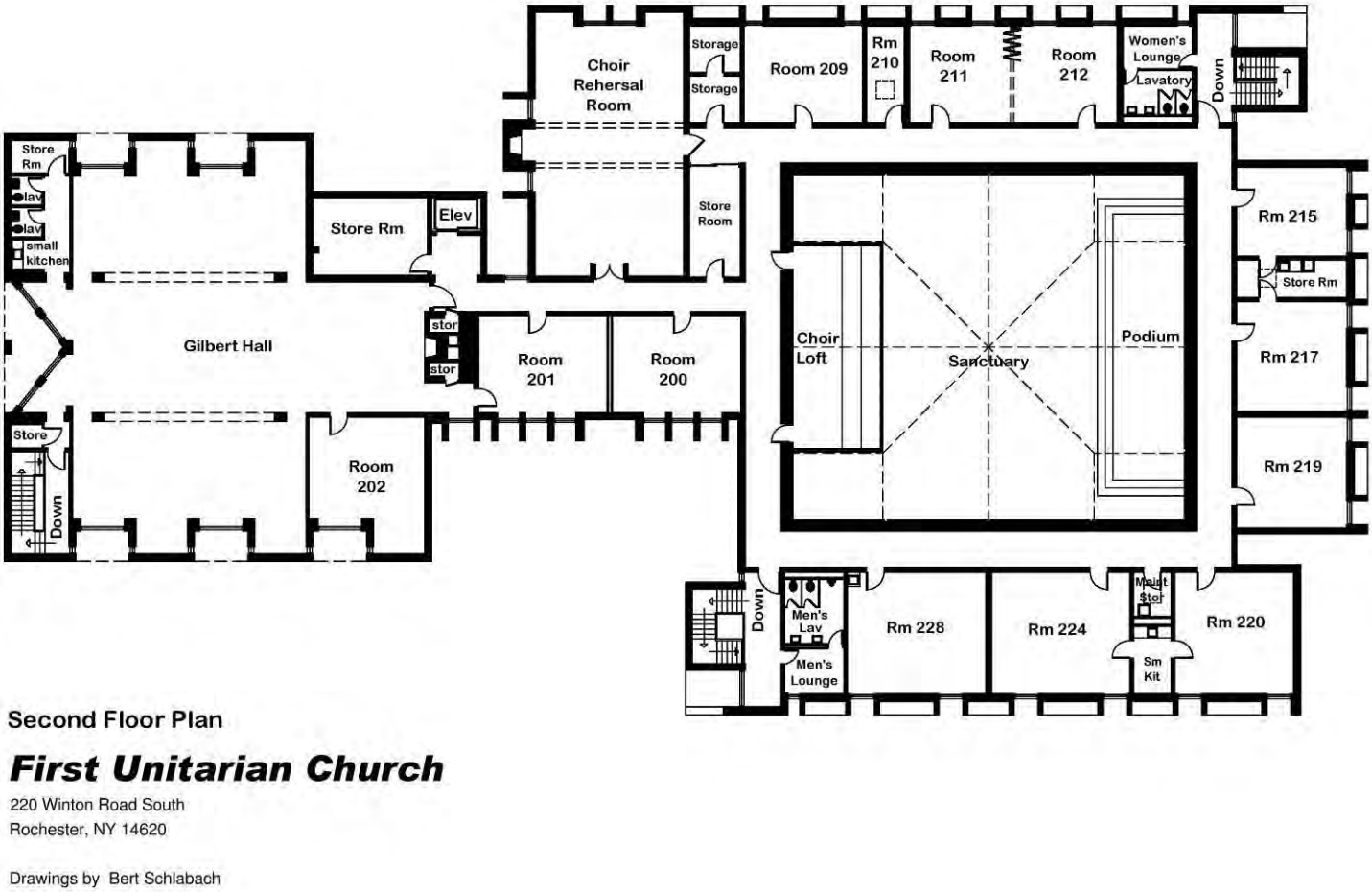


Figure 18: First Unitarian Church – Current First Floor Plan (2014)

This current plan includes the 1965-69 addition to the building, designed by Kahn, as well as the small addition just north of the main lobby to accommodate the ADA-compliant elevator, finished in 1996. Few modifications have been made to the original section of the building. The addition, necessitated nearly immediately after completion of the building, shifted the design of the building away from Kahn's central plan to a more bi-nuclear plan. North is down in this drawing.

Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester



Second Floor Plan

First Unitarian Church

220 Winton Road South
Rochester, NY 14620

Drawings by Bert Schlabach

Figure 19: First Unitarian Church – Current Second Floor Plan (2014)
North is down in this drawing.
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

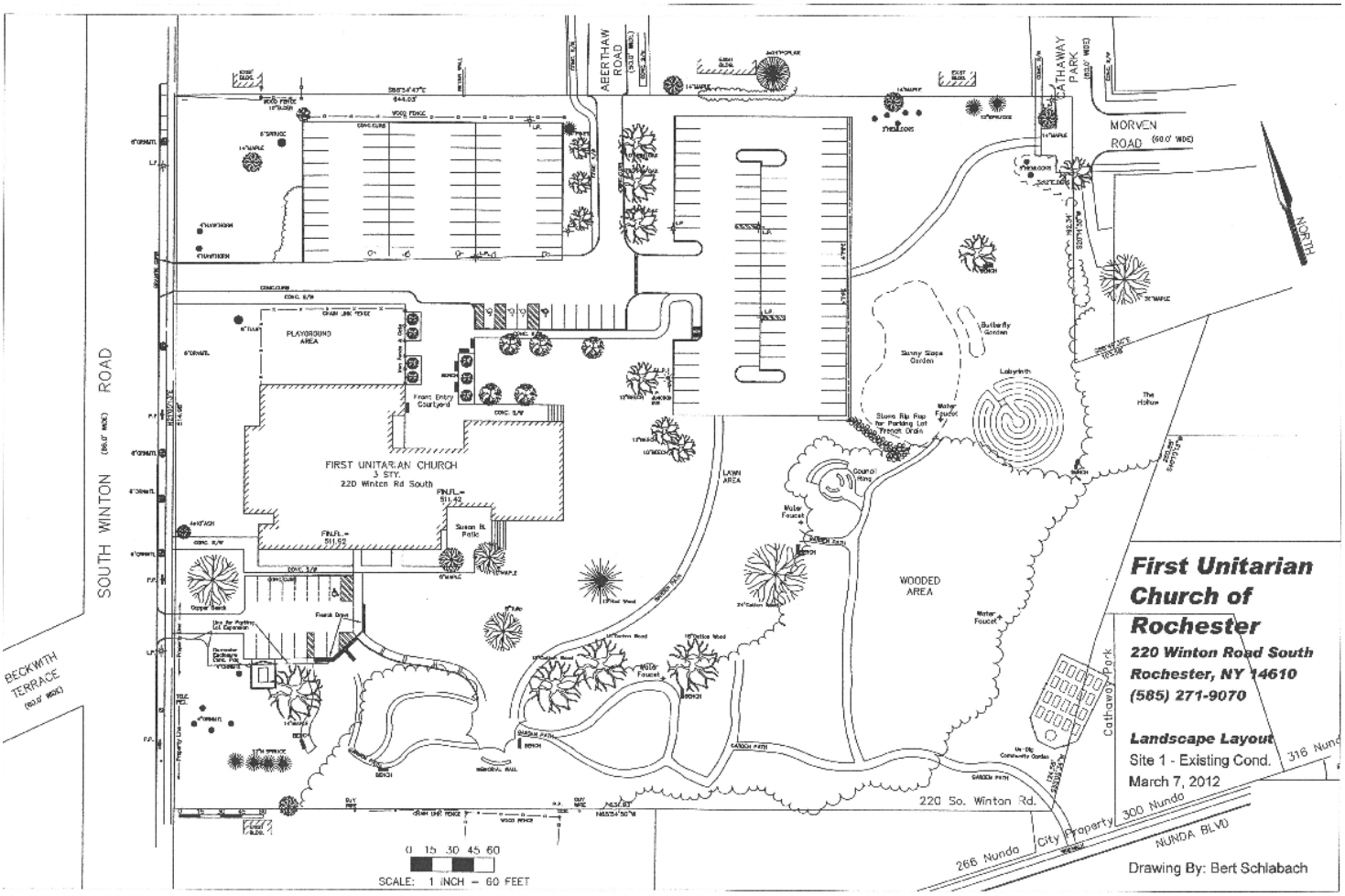


Figure 20: First Unitarian Church –Current Site Plan (2014)
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 21: First Unitarian Church – Kahn speaking at groundbreaking (ca. 1961)
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

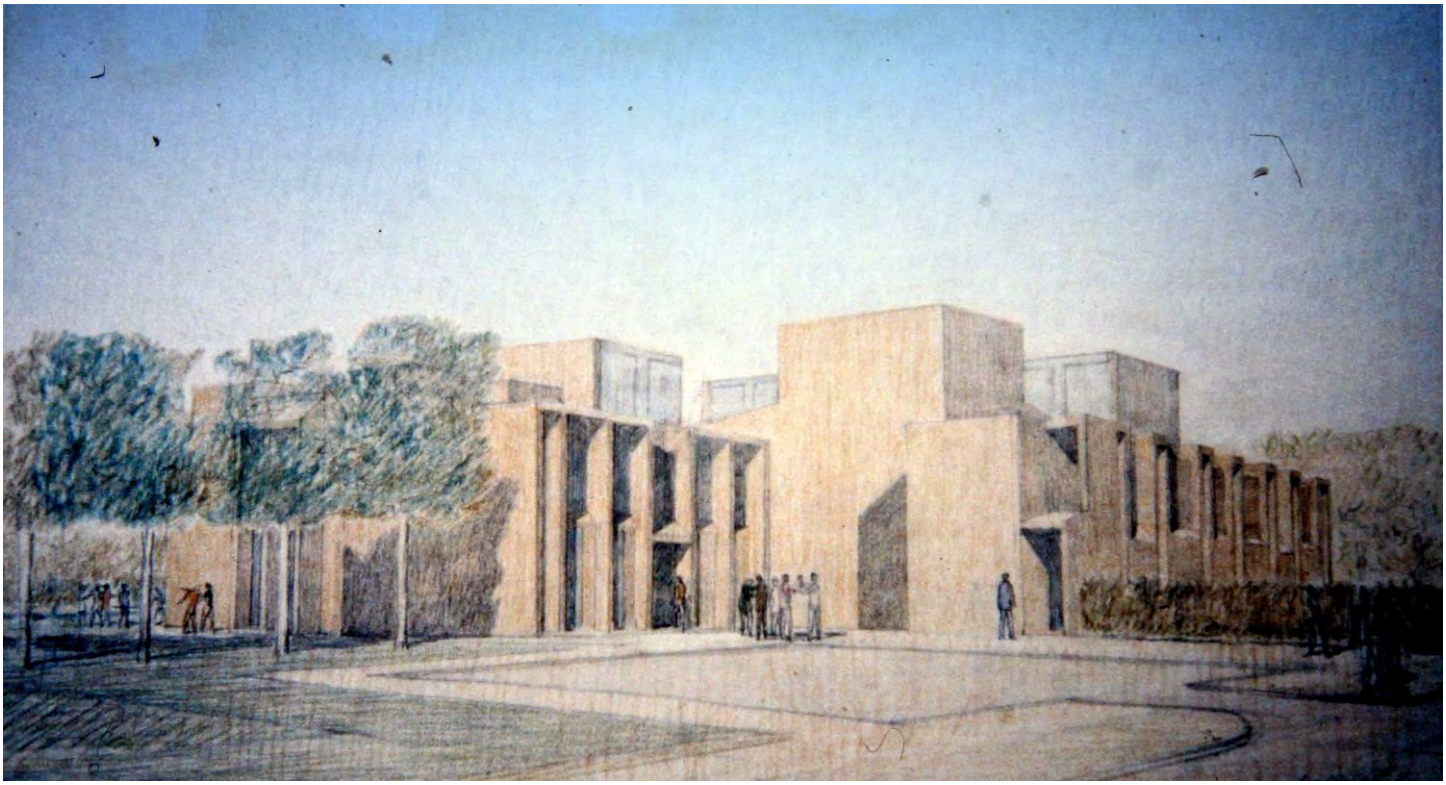


Figure 22: First Unitarian Church – Final Design Rendering (April 1961)
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 23: First Unitarian Church – Building Construction (ca. 1961)
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 24: First Unitarian Church – Building Construction (ca. 1961)
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 25: First Unitarian Church – Building Construction (ca. 1961)
This image, taken from the south-east of the property looking toward the rear of the building, shows the dramatic citing of the building.
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 26: First Unitarian Church – Building Construction (ca. 1961)

Here, workers lay the wood framework used to form the massive cruciform auditorium ceiling. Kahn had specially selected extra long timber for this ceiling, as he wanted to carefully control the textured appearance of the finished exposed concrete ceiling inside the worship space.

Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Figure 27: First Unitarian Church – Building Construction (ca. 1962)
This image shows the building during its last phases of construction, as the exterior envelope appears complete. Notice the lack of landscaping, which indicates interior work may be still on-going.
Source: Collection of First Unitarian Church, Rochester

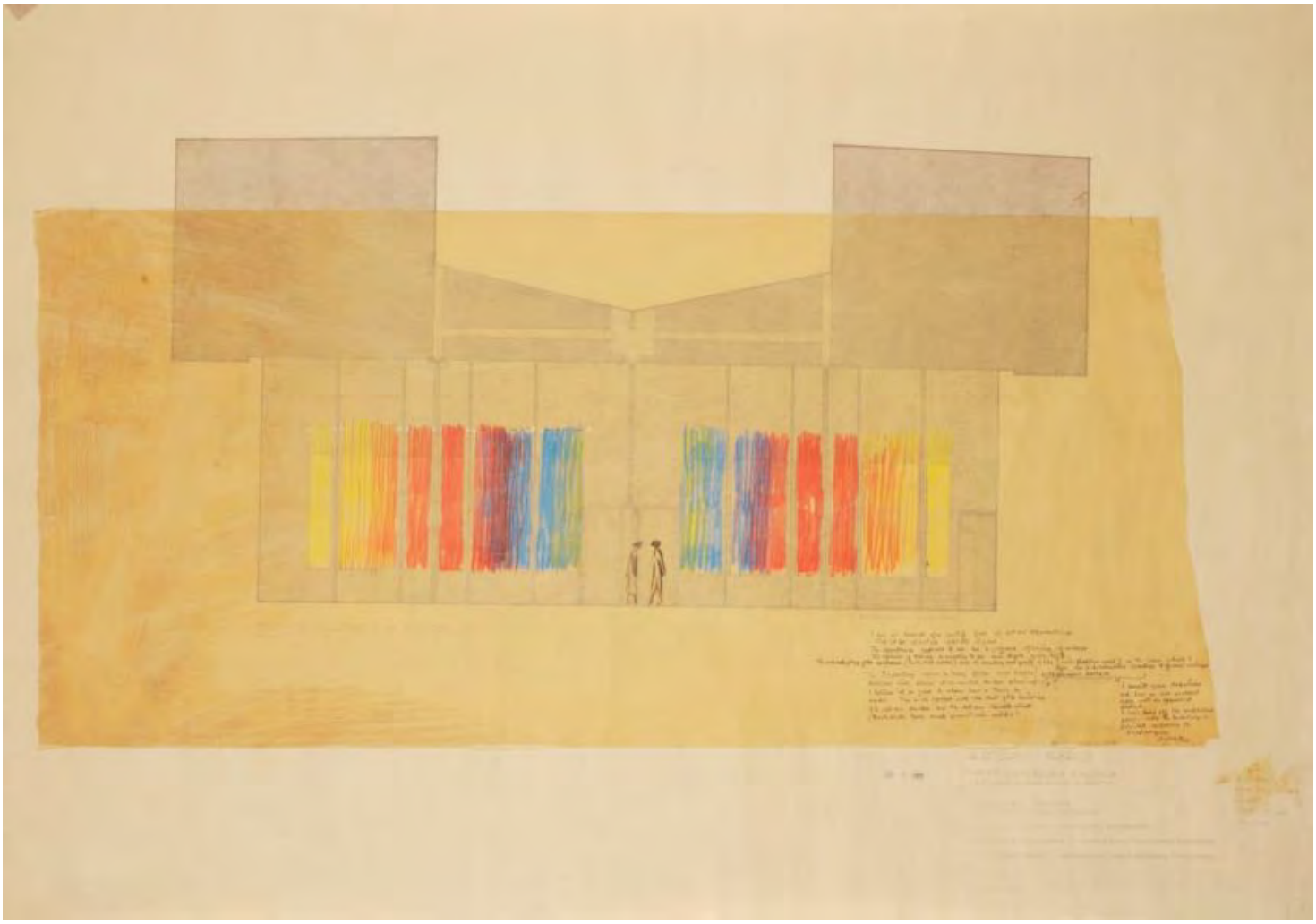


Figure 28: First Unitarian Church – Elevation Showing Revised Proposal for Wall Hangings (ca. 1962)
This sketch shows a close approximation of the final tapestry design that Kahn devised in 1962. They were implemented using only red, blue and yellow threads by master textile artist Jack Lenor Larsen. They were installed in the auditorium in 1964.
Source: The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of the First Unitarian Church, Rochester

Welcome to First Unitarian Church