

This is a heritage project on the revitalization of the DRC Burgerspark as a vessel for community building in the Pretoria CBD.

Context

DRC Burgerspark¹ sits at 283 Visagie Street in Pretoria Central. The church evolved with the surrounding demographic context post-1994, to now serve the prevailing black community (92% (Frith, n.d)) as Doxa Deo Tshwane Central. The historic Burgers Park serves as opposite neighbour. Many other structures of note are in proximity, like the Melrose House Museum and the Ditsong Museum of Natural History (Figure 1). Burgers Park Lane, on which the church is situated, is lined with various religious institutions like the Tshwane Leadership Foundation (Figure 3).

Site analysis

The building was designed by well-known church architect Daan Kesting in 1969, as a reprieve for the searching soul in the materialistic city. The church brought about a dynamic revival in the inner-city religious context, serving as many as 3,000 members at times. The heavy concrete and brick structure is softened by intricate brickwork detailing and asymmetrical planes. The building houses the largest church work of artist Leo Theron (who completed over 210 works) in the floor-to-ceiling dalle de verre windows spanning the south wall of the church. Five tons of glass were imported from France for this work, and it depicts the theme “From darkness to light,” (Schreuder, 1982:11), bathing the interior in an ethereal play of light. However, the church space has been adapted to serve as an auditorium. All alterations focused on darkening the space – the *dalle de verre* windows are now permanently hidden behind heavy black curtains. Other crafted elements are also confounded to darkness. A stage replaced the liturgical area. Chairs replaced crafted pews. Darkness replaced the spiritual essence.

Statement of Significance

A heritage value matrix was compiled from various heritage charters (such as the Burra Charter) to assess the value of Burgerspark. This valuable instance of Pretoria Regionalism stands as testimony to the quality of construction, craftsmanship and materiality (Figure 2). Individual elements like the *dalle de verre* windows contribute to the overall design. Socially, the church managed to retain some of its contextual significance by adapting to the surrounding demographics.

1. Distinction between Burgerspark (the church and site) and Burgers Park (the public park opposite from the relevant site).

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Conservation is, rather, a present-day interpretation of the past, and such belongs to the present, and not the past

- Welsh, 1999

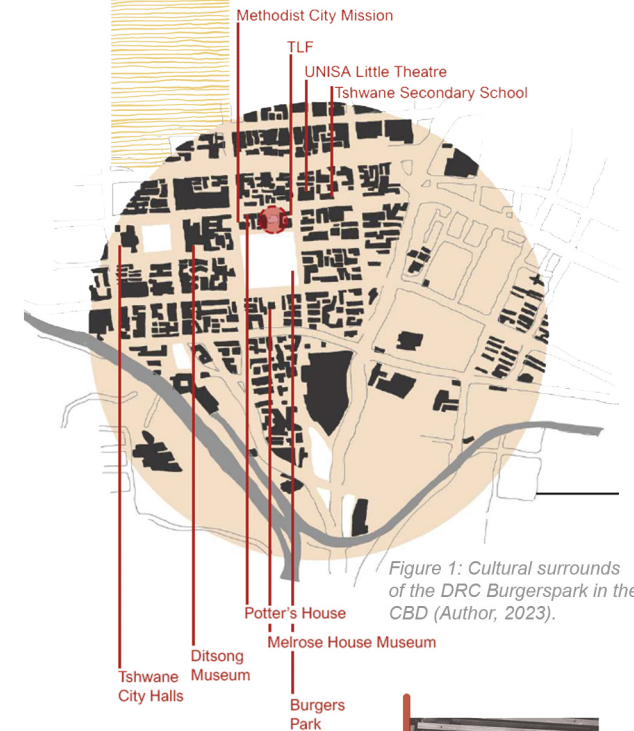


Figure 1: Cultural surrounds of the DRC Burgerspark in the CBD (Author, 2023).



Figure 2: Existing materiality and structures on the Burgerspark site (Author, 2023).

Issues/Concerns

The issues surrounding Burgerspark are more heritage-related than use-related. It falls within the general disconnect between expert and user value of modernist spaces. For the everyday user, Modernist spaces are often viewed as the “not yet loved” (Macdonald, 2013). The site also falls within the decaying Pretoria CBD heritage fabric. Finally, as a societal concern, the church typology is suffering in an increasingly secular society.

Burgerspark was selected due to a dire need for a reconciliation of architectural value and user value. Although the current Doxa Deo Church is operational, *in use* unfortunately does not equate to *conserved*. The interior is being chipped away by insensitive alterations. The greatest loss is the decrease in spiritual experience in the space. The well positioned, expansive site is also not operating optimally.

Theoretical framework

The main project question asks: “How can interior architecture be used to expand the meaning of Modernist churches by interpreting an adaptive reuse strategy to create an inclusive, community-building environment that stimulates inner city revival?” The project aims to answer this by transforming Burgerspark from a church *in* the city to a church *with* the city (Figure 4) (Swart, 2010). The vision entails community development, collective identity, longevity and resilience.

The project emphasizes the importance of understanding **conservation vs. preservation** - the theory of managing change (Figure 5) (Barker, 2020). In order to alter perceptions of Modernist churches, the value of first-order and second-order meanings also become integral – how to connect **matter and meaning** (Konigk, 2015). The intangible heritage. The **adaptive reuse** strategy - stemming from research into various heritage proximities and design principles – is to move beyond mere contrast to true mimesis between old and new. The selected adaptive reuse strategies entail restoration (in the existing interiors), insertion (in the church space), and attachment (towards the south of the building) (Figure 6).

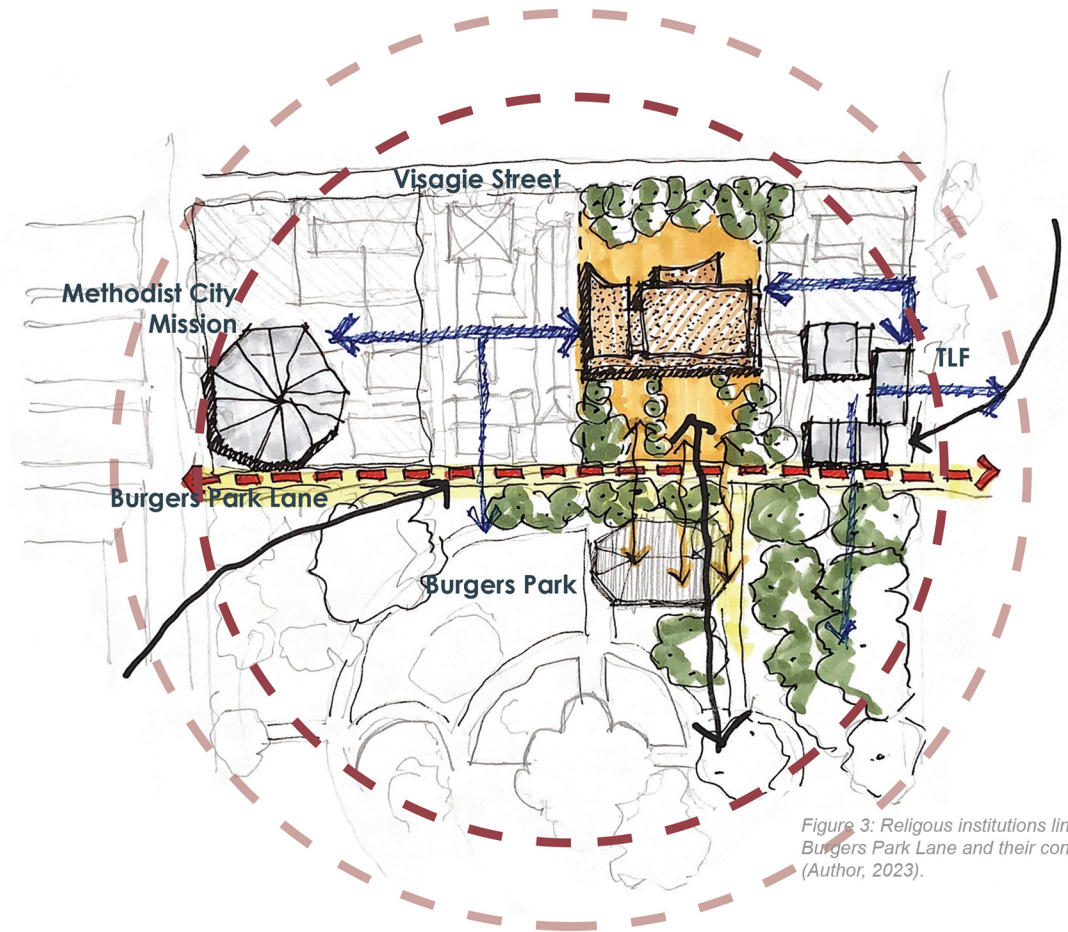


Figure 3: Religious institutions lining Burgers Park Lane and their connections (Author, 2023).

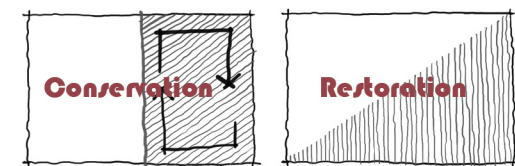


Figure 5: Principles of Restoration and Conservation (Author, 2023).

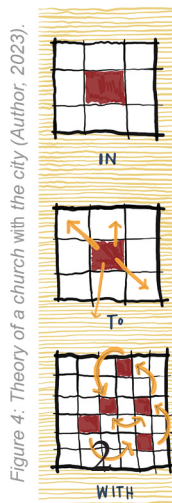


Figure 4: Theory of a church with the city (Author, 2023).

Programme & Users

The proposed programme transforms the site into a mixed-use precinct encompassing four main sub-programmes: a daytime community centre, weekend/night-time events space, a church and an educational centre (Figure 6). The community centre provides an outside communal space (a new addition) as an extension of Burgers Park, an outdoor meeting space, a kiosk, an indoor library and flexible workspaces. During an event, the interior church space reconfigures to serve as an auditorium, attracting users from afar. The education centre in the separate block serves as a daily childcare centre while providing courses in botany and hospitality, feeding into the other on-site programmes. Through these programmes, a variety of users are involved – the existing users, the surrounding residents, the neighbouring religious institutions as well as external visitors to the CBD. The site becomes an activation node, a connector between the Methodist City Mission, TLF and Burgers Park.

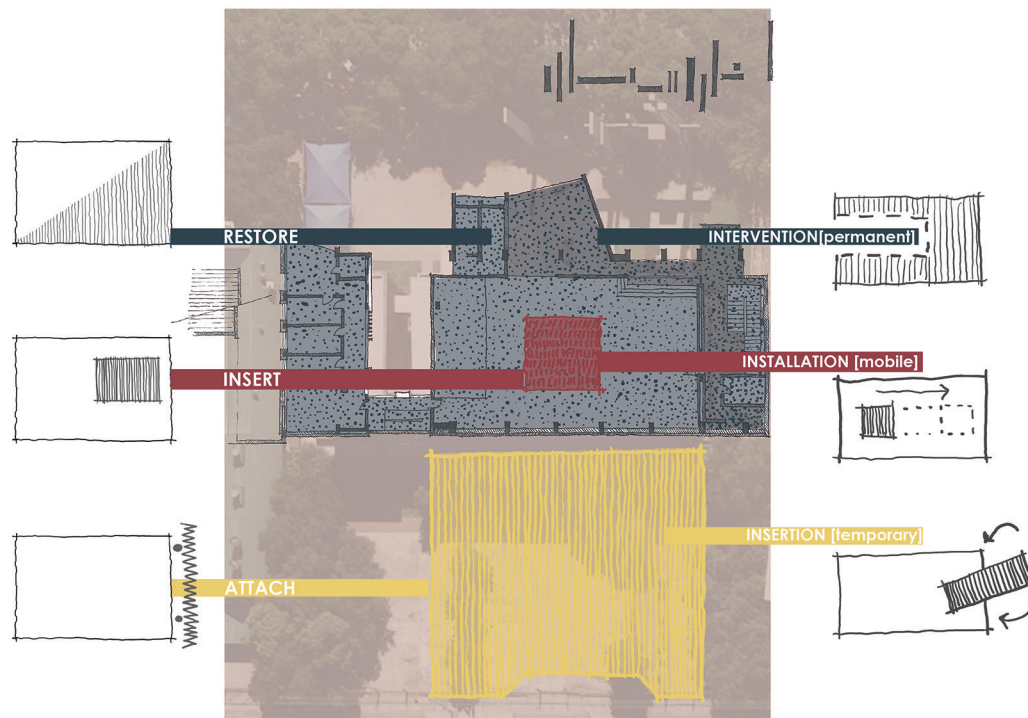


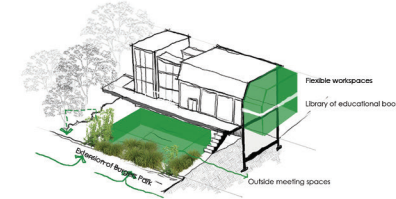
Figure 6: Adaptive reuse strategies employed on site (Author, 2023).

PROPOSED PROGRAMME

A mixed-use precinct as a vessel for community building in Pretoria Central, ensuring activation of an old Modernist building on a human scale

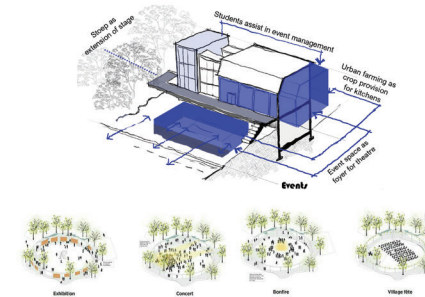
DAYTIME COMMUNITY CENTRE

- Extension of Burgers Park
- Outdoor meeting space
- Kiosk
- Library
- Flexible workspaces

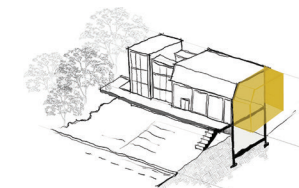


WEEKEND/NIGHTTIME EVENT SPACE

- Outdoor event space
- Theatre/Auditorium



CHURCH



EDUCATION CENTRE

- Daily childcare
- Educational courses in botany and hospitality

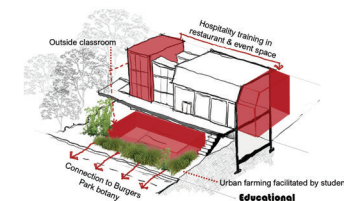


Figure 7: Mixed-use programmatic delineation (Author, 2023).

Informants

The existing site provided an array of design informants to draw from. Asymmetrical forms, sculptural openings, timber latticework and brass detailing served as inspiration. Most importantly, the deconstructivist *dalle de verre* windows were selected as the most valuable heritage and spiritual element, and thus the design departure point.

Concept

Conceptually, the design will emphasize the universal language experienced and valued by all in Modernist church designs – the spiritual journey. This manifests as a series of thresholds, similar to those found in churches layouts. The journey starts as a public atrium on the street, progresses to a semi-private narthex (the exterior space) and finally culminates in the private church space. Different scales of intimacy unfold along a promenade journey, slightly ascending to the most holy space. The spirituality is further enhanced through the architecture of light and the emotions the implementation thereof evokes.

The design brings the massive Modernist structure down to street level. Timber slat walls outside create a perforated boundary, opening the church up to the city. Figure 8 visualizes the manifestation of these influences. The materials found in the existing design diffuse outward from the interior, reintroduced in modern ways. Adaptable furniture allows agency of the spaces.

The original design is lightly touched, but reintroduced to its contemporary, fast-paced context. Conserved .

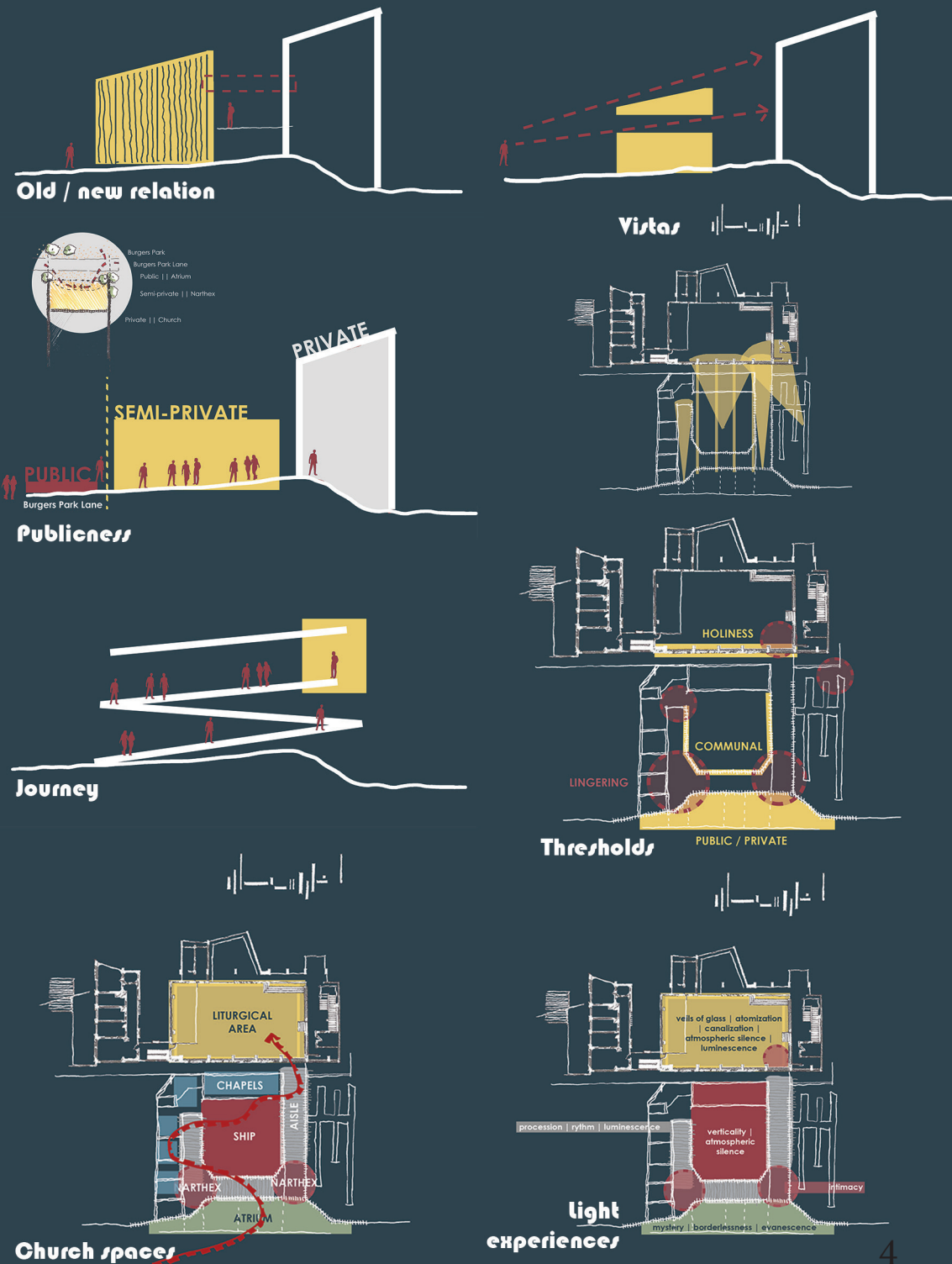
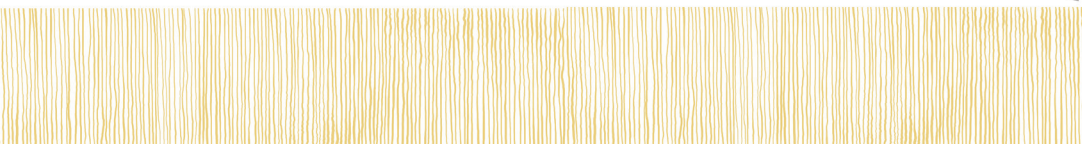


Figure 8: Parti diagrams indicating conceptual informants (Author, 2023).



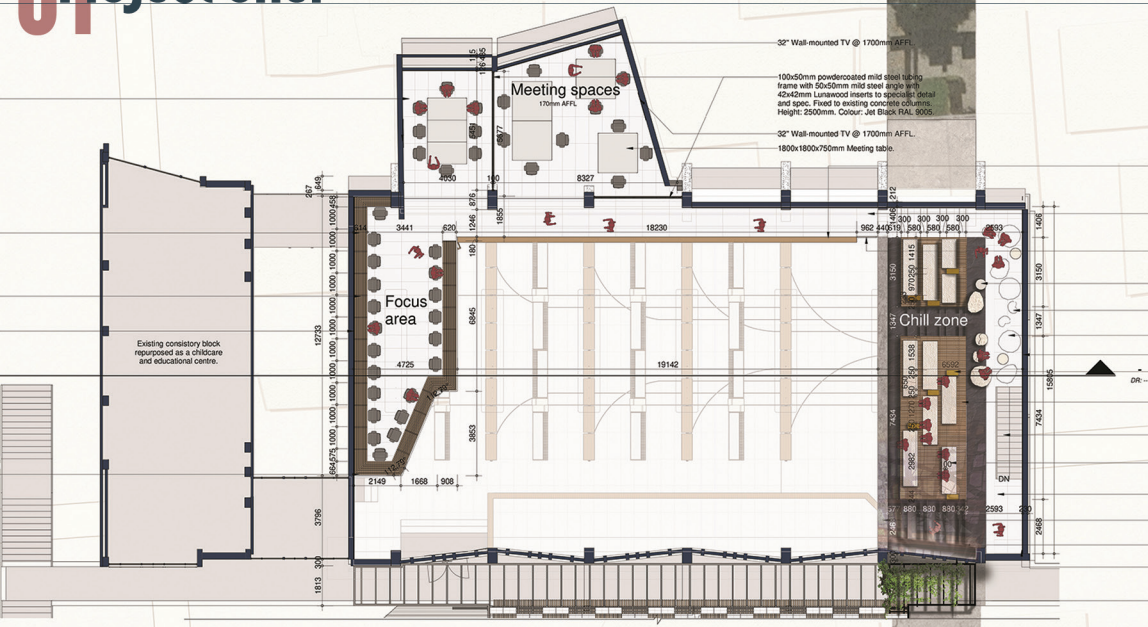


Figure 10: Artist impression of the streetside entrance (Author, 2023).

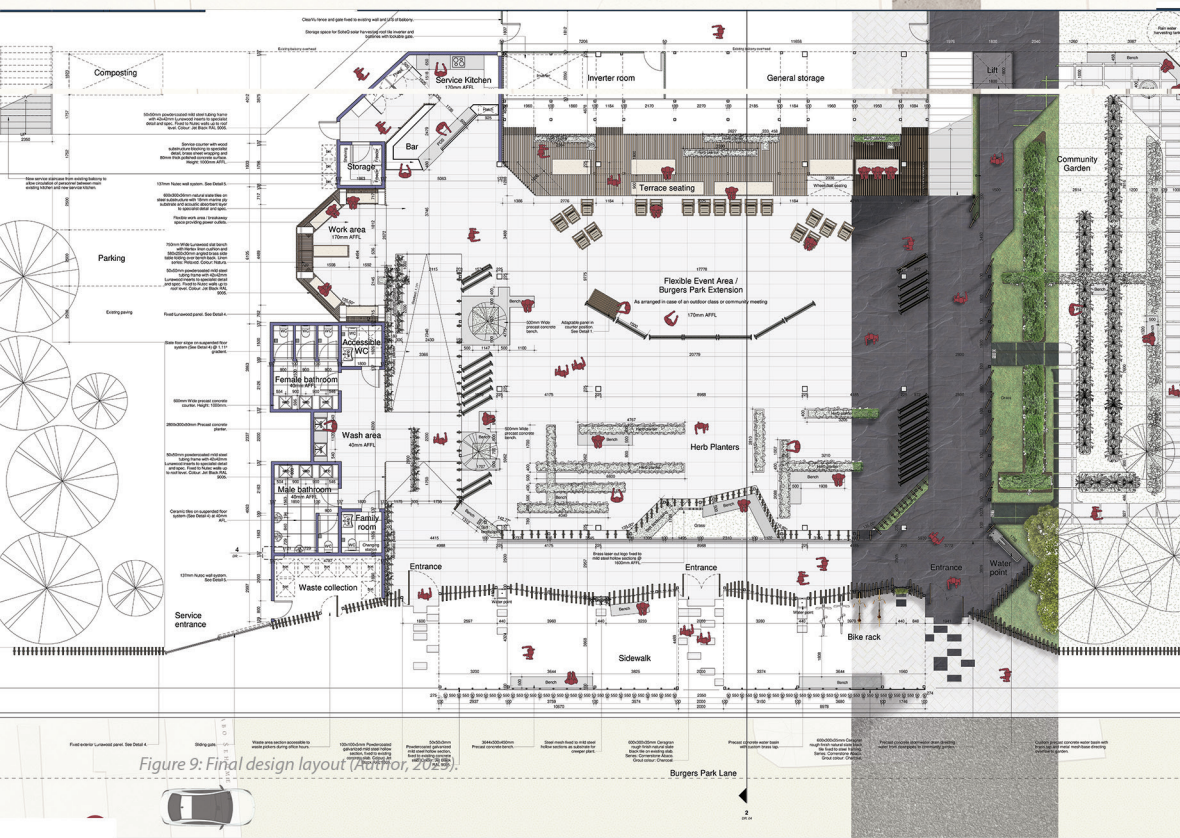


Figure 9: Final design layout (Author, 2023).



Figure 11: Artist impression of the church interior (Author, 2023).