



AltusWorks performed an extensive Facilities Analysis of the First Presbyterian Church complex in Chicago, IL.

PROFESSIONAL ALLIANCE SPOTLIGHT

AltusWorks

AT FIRST GLANCE, the similarity between community centers, schools, public park buildings and religious buildings may seem elusive. But Ellen Stoner, principal of AltusWorks, a Chicago-based architecture firm, quickly points out some commonalities: they often suffer from deferred maintenance issues, systems that are beyond their lifespan, and hard wear and tear. Houses of worship serve many constituents, and are, in effect, public spaces. For AltusWorks, working with congregations and churches is simply an extension of its work with community organizations, school districts and universities, and parks administrations since its founding in 2003. And because the firm's focus is restoration, adaptive reuse and rehabilitation, it has the expertise to handle the issues specific to historic sacred places.

In 2006, as part of the *New Dollars/New Partners* training program sponsored by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, AltusWorks conducted a facility analysis of the 1928 First Presbyterian Church complex, comprised of the church, a school,

and a community hall. AltusWorks assessed the interiors and exterior systems of each building, including heating, masonry, roofing, windows and drainage. Part of its initial work involved meeting with the members of the church's *ad hoc* committee overseeing the project, to determine the needs of the church, and what members wanted to see over the long-term. The resulting report provided recommendations to the church on accessibility improvements, and outlined a phased plan that addressed critical, medium- and low-priority repairs that aligned with the church's own strategic plan.

When asked what advice she would give to a congregation that is not sure where to begin the process of rehabilitation or renovation, Ms. Stoner recommends beginning with a thorough facilities assessment. This kind of study will confirm how everything works, acknowledging the historic aspect of each space. It will discover the root of any problems, rather than simply addressing cosmetic issues. Additionally, it can give the proper sequence to long-term work – making sure that water infiltration issues are dealt with before plaster repair, for instance.

Beyond facility analysis, though, Altusworks offers a variety of other services for historic and older buildings, including accessibility improvements and renovation or rehabilitation. In addition, the firm performs a variety

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AltusWorks is a full service architectural firm that applies a high level of expertise and creative problem-solving to the challenges of maintaining, restoring and rehabilitating historic structures. AltusWorks provides facility analyses, envelope repair solutions, accessibility assessments and consulting services to assist owners in preserving their historic buildings. AltusWorks generously sponsored a reception and dinner for Partners for Sacred Places' June Board of Directors meeting in Chicago.

of technical preservation work such as National Register nominations, and rehabilitation plans that conform to the standards needed to take advantage of federal income tax credits. The firm has received noted recognition for its work, including being one of only 11 architecture firms selected by the Public Building Commission of Chicago to provide architectural services for renovations and additions to Chicago Public School buildings throughout the city, and being ranked as the top most-qualified candidate by the City of Naperville (IL) in its search for a historic preservation architectural consultant. AltusWorks was also recently awarded a contract with the City of Chicago's Planning NOW program to provide historic preservation architectural services throughout the city.

Ellen Stoner's graduate thesis focused on the adaptive reuse of a former steel plant boiler house, and this interest in industrial archaeology led her to live and work in Chicago. Prior to founding AltusWorks, she worked for thirteen years gaining experience and expertise in preservation architectural services, all the while exploring the way that preservation has an impact on buildings and their surroundings.

Through AltusWorks, she continues to look at preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse and how such work can revitalize communities and improve the quality of life for those who live or work there.