

Georgetown University's St. Ignatius Chapel - Calcagnini Contemplative Center

Architecture

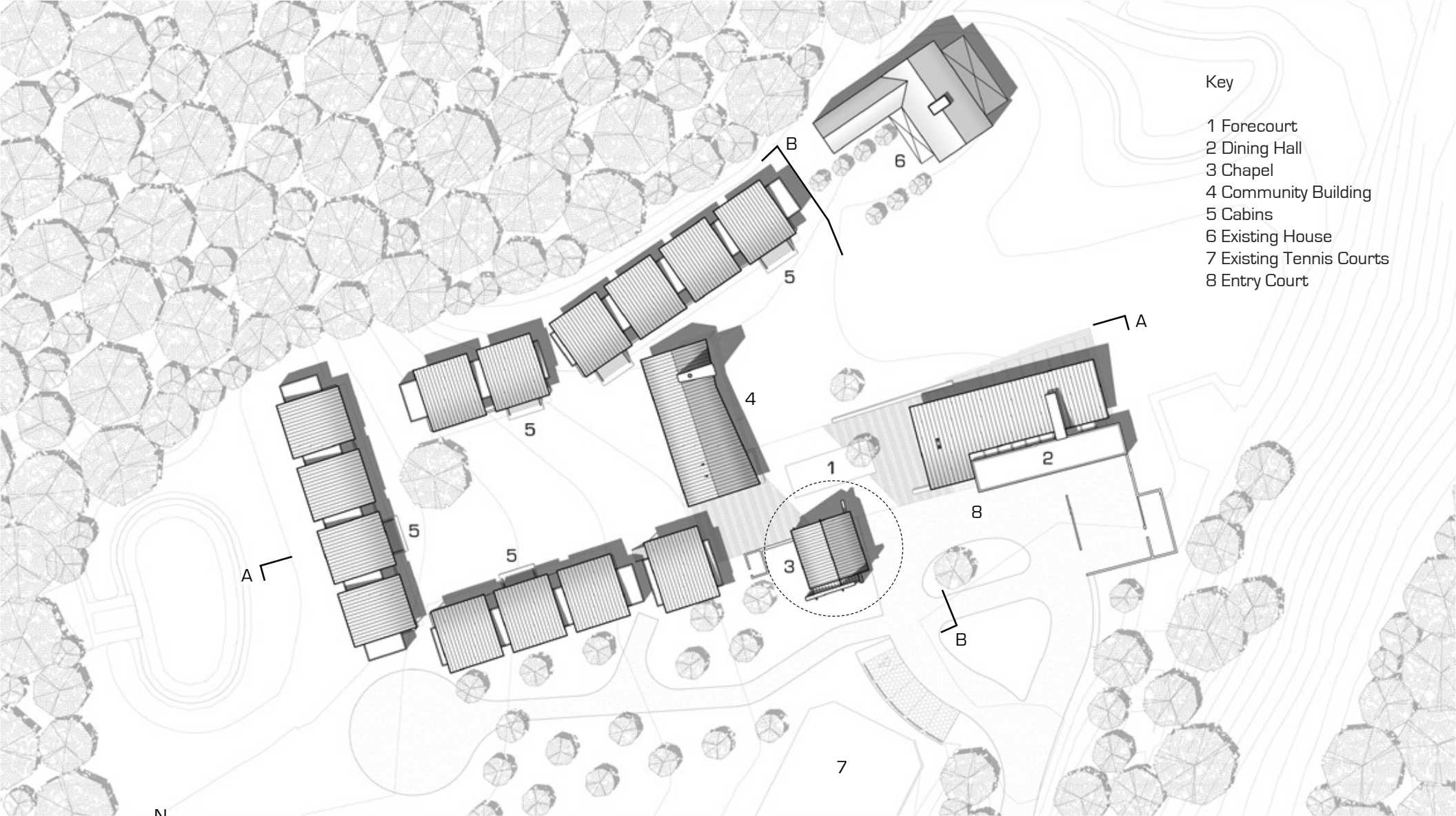
Combining a spare yet textured modernism, simple massing and a palette that speaks of the region, this Chapel serves the University's mission unlike any other facility in its 225 year history.

Completed in 2013, St. Ignatius, a component of the Calcagnini Contemplative Center, supports the retreat programs at Georgetown University, the premier Jesuit school in the United States.

At the core of Ignatian teachings and Jesuit traditions are spiritual exercises that are the basis of the ritual of retreats within this order. The University's program of retreats is varied; some are spiritual others are non-religious. Historically, Georgetown rented multiple venues to serve this broad agenda. In 2004, the school purchased land in rural Clarke County, Virginia to build a center to house all its retreats. A key component of the center is the St. Ignatius Chapel.

Small and intimate the chapel is intended for groups up to 24. Developing an architecture that imparts a strong and clear spirituality without specific reference to any one religion was at the heart of the design intentions. While Georgetown is a Jesuit university its make up of students and faculty is diverse. The chapel needed to serve all communities at the school. Both religious - Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, etc.- and those without a secular affinity. The design succeeds, avoiding both domesticity and overt religious allusion through its austere palette and simplicity of design.





- Key
- 1 Forecourt
 - 2 Dining Hall
 - 3 Chapel
 - 4 Community Building
 - 5 Cabins
 - 6 Existing House
 - 7 Existing Tennis Courts
 - 8 Entry Court

Site Plan



Site Section A-A



Chapel Design

With a history of design that embraces both high culture and the totally tacky and all that lies between, chapel architecture has a whacky family tree. One that includes Magdalen Chapel, the Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel in Las Vegas and any number of anonymous rooms tucked into back spaces of airports and hospitals. So what makes them all chapels?

The answer, though not black and white, is fairly simple. Chapels tend to be single rooms or chambers, places in which individuals find calm and spiritual resonance outside of a congregation. Often they are ecumenical. It is not uncommon for a chapel, when attached to a religious institution, to be removed from the main hall or campus, in a secondary location. Our design for St. Ignatius is clearly part of this tradition, in program, siting and understanding.

Part of a retreat center 70 miles from the main Georgetown University campus, this one-room building affords a peaceful and quiet space where one can find solace. Except for some furniture, nothing in the room suggests a particular religious affiliation. It is open and welcoming to all. It serves the varied program of the Contemplative Center, but also serves those seeking some remove from the more structured activities that comprise the life of the Center.

While clearly modern, our design reaches deep into chapel history. The word “chapel” derives from the Latin *capella* – little cape. Supposedly St. Martin of Tours, while still a soldier, tore his cape and gave half to a beggar, Christ in disguise. When taking it into battle, the Frankish kings, who later came into possession of the torn shroud, kept the relic in a tent called a *capella*.

The roof of St. Ignatius alludes to this cape, conceived as a loosely fitting shroud not specifically tied to the geometry of the building, making a simple statement about shelter. And, with the history and narrative of the word in mind, the design suggests that we are members of a community, rightfully expecting care by others and responsible to help those in need.

Conceived as an elemental pavilion the design sought to meld a spiritual architecture with the massing and materials found in the prosaic farm buildings of this rural area. The Chapel's palette is spare yet rich. Stuccoed masonry walls are perforated with slabs of glass. The simple gabled galvanized roof, fir framing, cedar boards, and poured-in-place concrete floor are all typical of the barns and agricultural sheds of the Piedmont of Northern Virginia.



Chapel South Elevation



View from Entry Court



Site Section B-B





Sustainable Design:

The project was built on a very low budget. less than \$240/sq. ft., the high cost of administration during design and contract administration required for LEED certification precluded designing and building to that goal. Still, decisions in line with sustainable/ responsible design were made where possible.

Chief among these was siting the building so that the masonry walls and concrete floor would provide thermal mass in the winter months and the deep eave and courtyard wall to the northwest deliver shade later in the year. Additionally, light fixtures are LED; cedar boards are sealed and allowed to weather; no paint was used on the walls or ceiling significantly diminishing air borne VOCs. There are no computers, phones or AV equipment. Finally, the bell was recycled; we purchased it on EBay.

Community Connectivity:

98% of all users arrive by bus and remain at the Retreat Center for the duration of the retreat. County regulations required 5 parking spaces for 78 occupants. The Walk Score rating is 90 – 100.

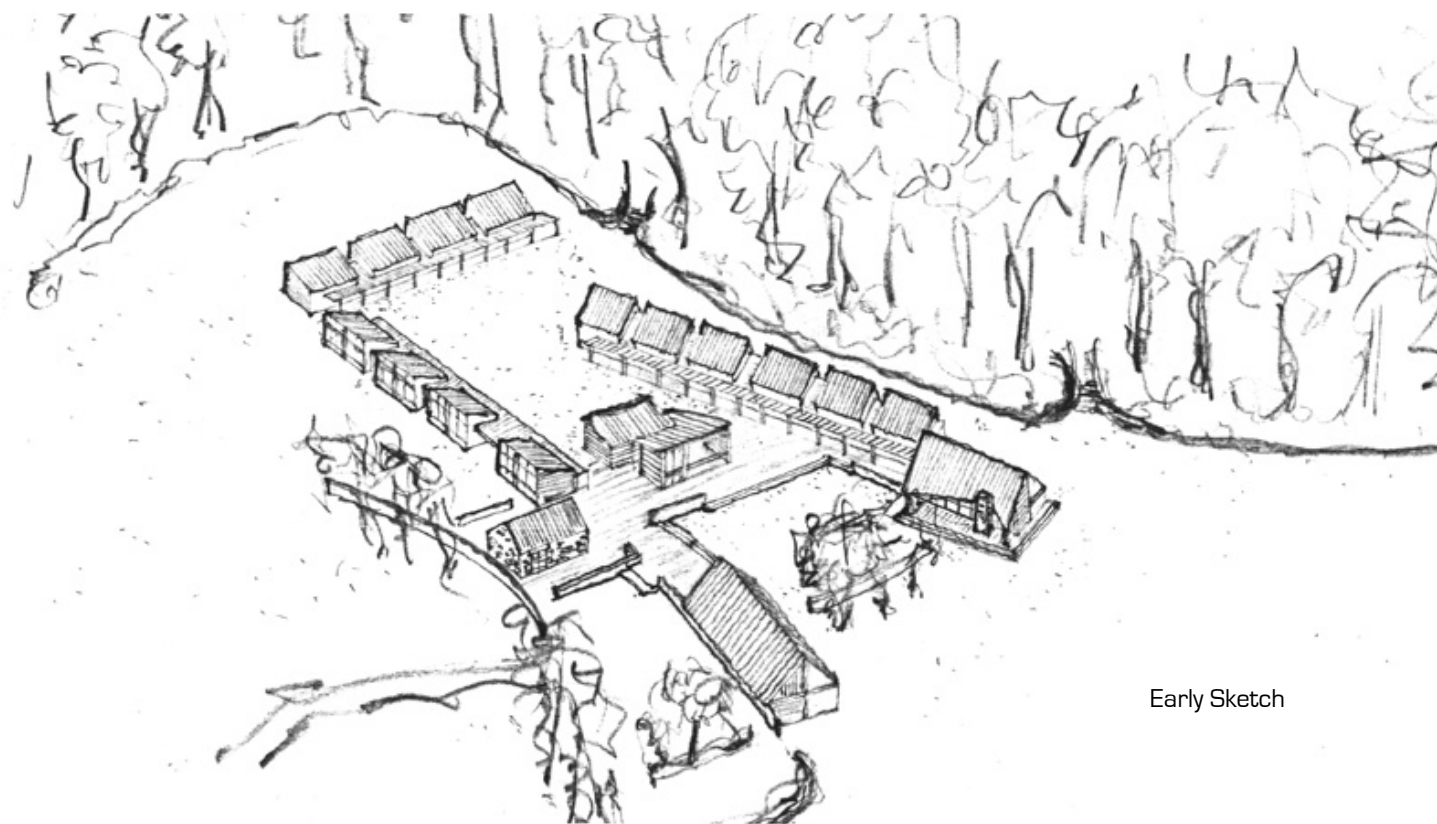
Water:

A chapel does not have the potable water requirements of most buildings. The Chapel has 1 fixture unit – a small lavatory. It is only used to wash the chalice after a mass and the water must drain directly to the earth in accordance with canonical law. Water usage is 12 gal/sf/yr.

100% of precipitation is managed on site.
100% of waste-water is reused on site and returned to the natural water table.

Energy:

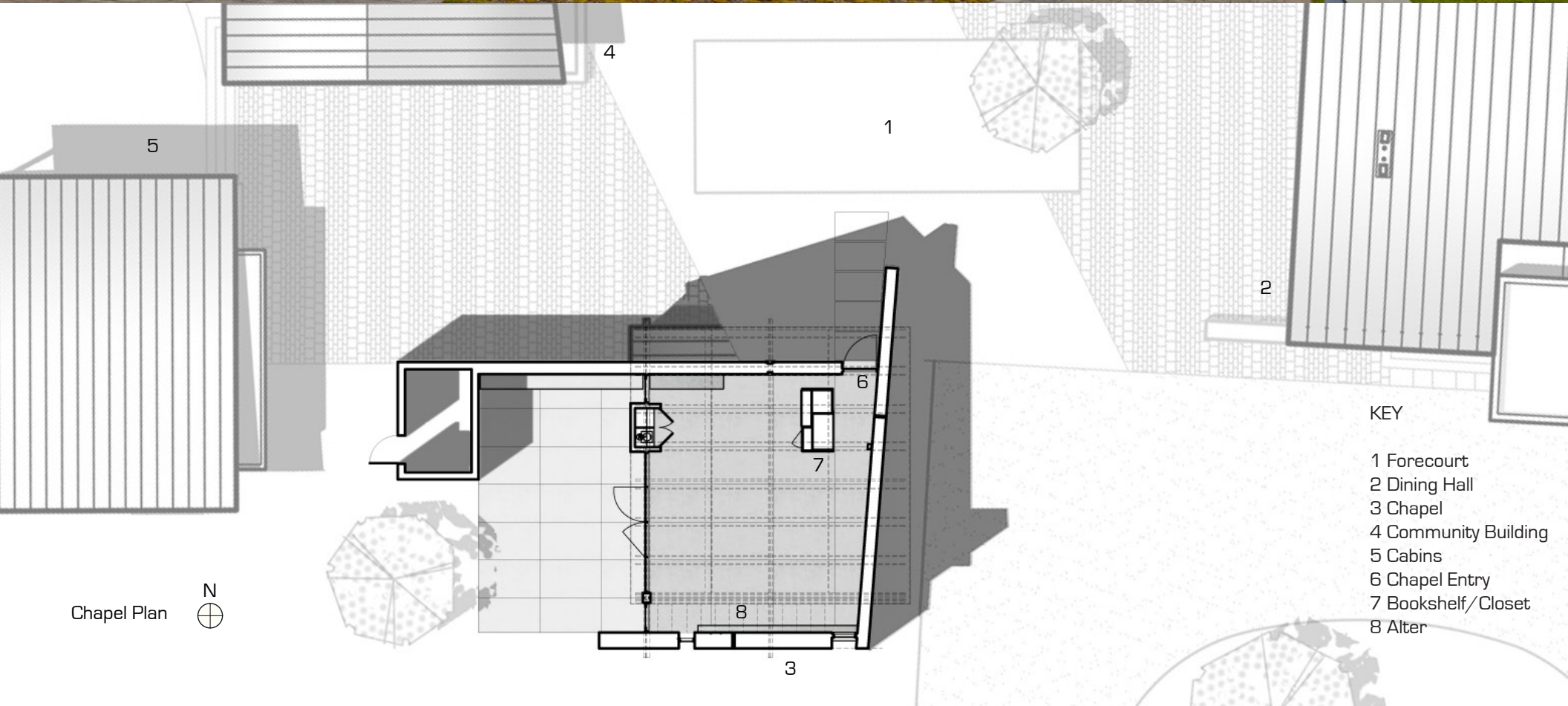
CBECS does not list a datum energy use for religious building. Our predicted EUI in kBtu/sf/yr is 16.7. This is based averaging our KWH/month over the course of a year.



Early Sketch



View of Chapel From Dining Hall Entry





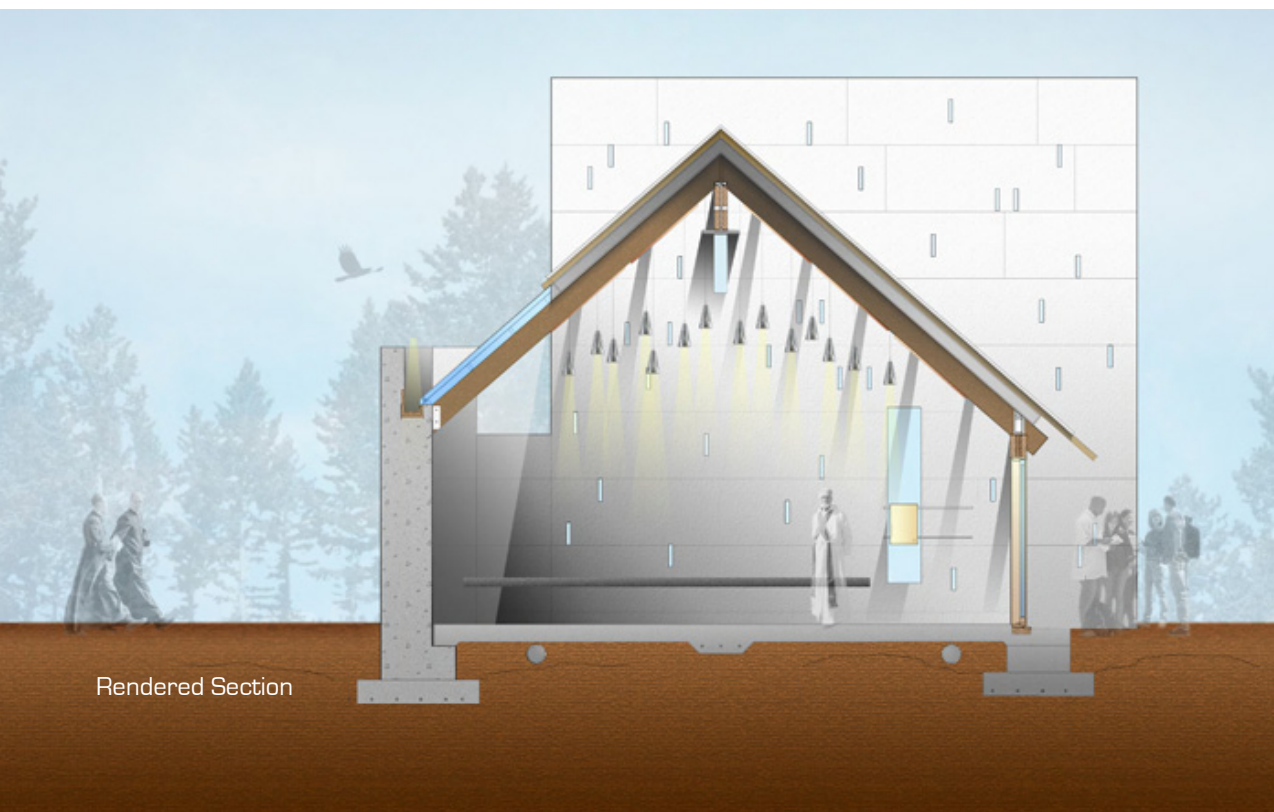
Chapel North Elevation



Chapel Interior



View from Entry



Rendered Section

Materials:

This building is built with a simple palette – stained concrete floor, stucco on masonry wall with embedded glass slabs, translucent lightweight skylight, exposed fir framing and weathering cedar boards. The roof structure employs locally fabricated SIPS panels reducing waste. The only applied finishes are the concrete stain and wood sealer – both low VOCs. The room enjoys abundant natural lighting, electric lighting are LED fixtures. The roof is galvanized aluminum. Low maintenance minimizes additions to the waste stream.



Alter



Tabernacle

