



CASE STUDY

St. Matthew Trinity and the SMT Center

How a congregation in Hoboken reclaimed a neglected street-facing property, restored public trust in its presence on the block, and built a more visible platform for ministry, recovery, education, and neighborhood partnership.



LOCATION

Hoboken, New Jersey

A fast-changing neighborhood where St. Matthew Trinity's public-facing property had fallen badly out of step with the congregation's witness and mission.

CHALLENGE

Deferred maintenance and weak financial readiness

The Washington Street storefront had peeling paint, a history of being boarded up, and years of deferred maintenance. Internally, the congregation did not believe its finances were strong enough to support a bank conversation, much less a major redevelopment effort.

OUTCOME

A renewed community asset

The building became the SMT Center, a renovated and accessible space that now supports community events, recovery groups, education, advocacy partners, and congregational life.

The situation

When Peter Beeson began serving St. Matthew Trinity in 2014, the congregation already owned the full stretch of real estate along one side of its block. That included a storefront on Washington Street and six units of naturally occurring affordable housing that the congregation self-managed.

The property held significant value, but it sent the wrong signal to the wider community. The storefront had once been boarded up during the Hoboken arson fires of the early 1990s. Years later, peeling paint and deferred maintenance still defined the public-facing side of the block. Neighbors walking past on Washington Street could easily assume this neglected building was the church itself, even though the congregation's historic sanctuary stood well maintained at the opposite end of the block.

Why it mattered

Hoboken had changed. What had once been a blue-collar working-class neighborhood had become a far more affluent area with mid-career professionals and young families moving through the neighborhood every day. St. Matthew Trinity needed its public presence to match both its ministry and its care for the community.

This was never only about curb appeal. It was about whether the congregation's property could reflect its identity, support its ministries, and open the door to stronger relationships with the people already passing by.

The work

The project moved forward in parallel on two fronts: rebuilding financial credibility inside the congregation and building a compelling public-facing vision for the property.

Financial repair

The congregation's financial statements were in such poor shape that leaders did not believe they could take them to a bank. Over four years, financial statements were cleaned up, policies and procedures were improved, and the congregation's tax-exempt status was solidified.

Strategic leadership

The work included strategic planning, external-facing storytelling, donor cultivation, and a capital campaign that gave the congregation a practical path from uncertainty to action.

Public-facing renewal

The vision centered on turning a tired storefront into a visible sign of hospitality and purpose, one that could better serve the congregation and the broader Hoboken community.

What changed

Financial confidence was rebuilt.

The congregation moved from assuming a project was out of reach to having cleaned-up statements, a stronger financial foundation, and the confidence to move forward.

Fundraising momentum became visible.

Before Peter left, the congregation had raised more than 79% of the needed funds in cash on hand, with no debt.

The project became a community asset.

The renewed SMT Center now offers accessible gathering space, upgraded infrastructure, and a home for recovery meetings, education, fellowship, advocacy events, and other community uses.

What stood on Washington Street no longer had to tell a story of neglect. It could tell the truth about the congregation instead: a church committed to hope, healing, and wholeness in the heart of Hoboken.

The SMT Center today

According to St. Matthew Trinity, the renovated center supports diverse community events, youth education, recovery groups, and advocacy partners. The congregation also uses the space for Bible study, fellowship, confirmation classes, and alternative worship gatherings.

The result is more than a renovated building. It is a stronger connection between property, ministry, and neighborhood life.

Project highlights

Owned with foresight

The congregation had already assembled a strategically important set of properties on one side of the block, including affordable housing units and a main-street storefront.

Funded with discipline

Leadership and donor engagement helped move the project forward with strong cash support before debt became necessary.

Aligned with mission

The finished center supports hospitality, recovery, education, and community partnership in a way that fits the congregation's long-standing ministry in Hoboken.