

2022 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

First Congregational Church of Long Beach



A multi-year, \$2.4 million project stabilized, cleaned, repaired, and restored the brick and terra cotta masonry of the First Congregational Church, a 1914 Italian Romanesque Revival building in downtown Long Beach, California. The church is designated by the City of Long Beach as a Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The church has a steel frame, mass brickwork walls and ornate terra cotta dressings. The early scope of work included careful removal of the stained-glass leaded-lites of the East façade windows for off-site studio cleaning, conservation, and subsequent reinstatement; low-pressure steam cleaning of the brick and terra cotta masonry to reveal the full range of deterioration problems; and hazardous materials identification and abatement. The damaging impacts of long-standing, severe seismic and systemic steel corrosion problems were particularly exhibited by the fractured terra cotta tracery of a large Rose Window, and only discovered by the Church when stained-glass conservation was about to take place.

Work on the Rose Window was impressive for its innovative methods that went above and beyond more standard approaches to such work. Few terracotta Rose Windows have ever been dismantled, repaired, and restored due to the complexity and fragility of the multi-layered tracery system. The project demonstrated effective use of multidisciplinary design, incorporating engineering, architectural and craft skills to obtain subtle interconnectivity of materials in tight spaces. The Design Team devised a circular structural armature for the Rose Window to emulate the original anchoring system behind the terra cotta but this time in more seismically robust stainless-steel sections, firmly attached to the surrounding brickwork. The outboard face of the existing wooden tracery, having been waterproofed by a coating of urethane amended asphaltic mastic, was connected to the new steelwork by screwed eyebolts and stainless-steel wire.

The cleaned and repaired stained-glass was reinstated and the extant Mahogany fascia repaired, cleaned and varnish touched-up to restore its appearance. Minor blemishes on the decorative plaster frieze also were repaired. All work involved close consultation with Long Beach City Planning (for a Certificate of Appropriateness, conforming to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for preservation and restoration) and with Building Safety on engineering and code compliance.

The project had strong community support with Long Beach Heritage holding Open Day events for the public to see and learn about the Church project. A local café, closed for safety concerns, volunteered its parking lot as a staging space for the repair work. The Church ran various educational and fundraising events throughout the project, and local press reported on the progress and success of the work. The project has helped to ensure the First Congregational Church building remains an active and valued landmark of the Long Beach community for decades to come.