



Stewardship

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The Greenest New Church in America

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St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California, may be the “Greenest New Church” in America. Given the fact that it is located in Southern California, this perhaps should come as no surprise. Positive environmental actions are as common to Southern Californians as is surfing. What may be more of a surprise is that St. Mark Presbyterian is the first church to have registered in the Audubon International Signature Program!

The St. Mark Presbyterian congregation, by its own

admission, is a group of free-thinkers, and perhaps ahead of its time in its approach to environmental preservation. In June 2005, the congregation began to further strengthen their environmental stance by planning the development of a new educational and spiritual complex with a goal of becoming certified in the Audubon International Signature Program.

Not only would this new complex showcase the latest environmentally friendly materials, the entire project would also provide an opportunity to merge the congregation’s spiritual beliefs with positive environmental actions. The members of St. Mark take their stewardship of the environment seriously, and led by Reverend Gary Collins, they are very proud of the spiritual connection they have created between land, building, congregation, and community.

Slated to open the new church in November 2007, St. Mark

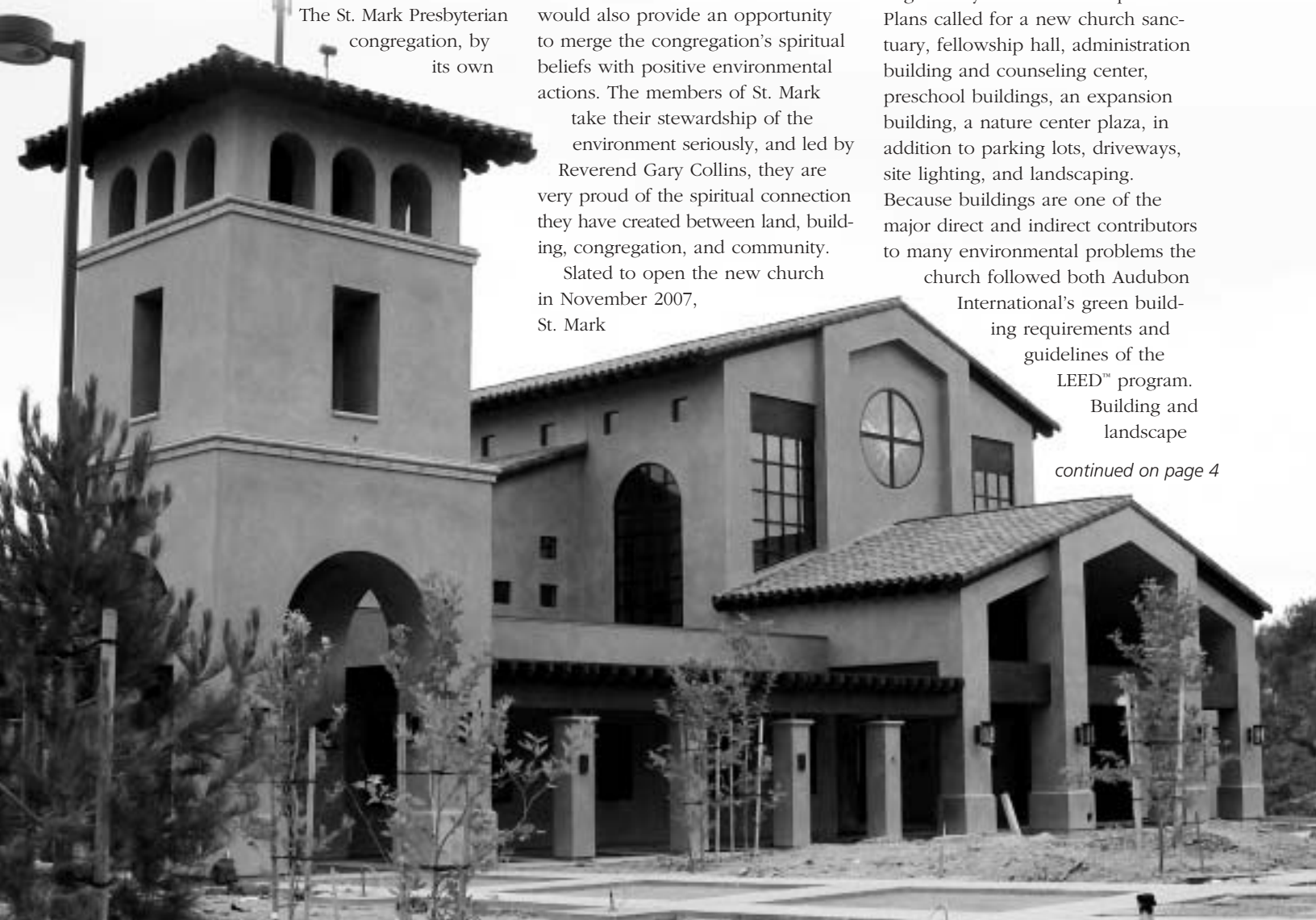
“Our church is interested in... stewardship of the earth. Theologically, it’s a central theme for us. We want to determine how we can make the least impact on the earth.”

– Pastor Gary Collins

has been planning and working on this “green” sanctuary for several years. Located on a 10.81-acre site in Newport Beach, CA, site clearing began early in 2006 in two phases. Plans called for a new church sanctuary, fellowship hall, administration building and counseling center, preschool buildings, an expansion building, a nature center plaza, in addition to parking lots, driveways, site lighting, and landscaping. Because buildings are one of the major direct and indirect contributors to many environmental problems the church followed both Audubon

International’s green building requirements and guidelines of the LEED™ program. Building and landscape

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Aerial view of the educational and spiritual complex set to open in November 2007. The site includes 10.81 acres within the city of Newport Beach, CA, and will serve as a community center.

architects were selected based on experience and understanding of church needs as well as current criteria of environmental stewardship.

Located at the head of a watershed that drains into the Back Bay of Newport Bay, Audubon International was instrumental in giving advice and guidance to the planning committee of the church and their environmental group known as the Ecophilians. Because water conservation and reduced water use were considered a high-criteria goal, the selection of the irrigation system (a primarily porous tubing distribution system) and an irrigation controller were chosen to ensure there would be efficient irrigation water use and no water runoff from the irrigated areas. On-site coastal sage scrub, native plants which require little irrigation, have been saved and expanded with additional planting. Such a habitat also will support small animals and bird

life, both in number and diversity of species. Existing, but limited, sycamore and elderberry have been saved during the construction process. Selected Mediterranean species with low water requirements have also been used for aesthetic or functional reasons in appropriate locations. "Water capture" islands in the auto parking area are designed to remove oil from the parking area and prevent its discharge off-site. The perimeter of the site will be planted with pines, Indian hawthorn, and tall fescue turf grass, in accordance with local ordinances so that the church will fit aesthetically into the surrounding community.

A number of other considerations were involved in the site location and design for future needs of the church. One example includes the nearby Newport Beach Transportation Center, located across the street to allow easy access to the church. The Center provides the opportunity to bus transportation to the site if desired. Sidewalks are also available from all directions, with pedestrian crosswalks to the church entrance. Site design has provided for a bicycle rack and storage area and for an auto recharging station, if appropriate, in the near future. And lastly, upkeep of the environmentally-friendly campus will continue with the internal efforts of church members and the on-going relationship with Audubon International.

Although St. Mark Presbyterian Church has applied to be the very first Audubon International Certified Signature Program church in America, we hope it will not be the last, because of our collective need to be good stewards. ●

The mission of the Ecophilians is to educate, motivate, and provide action opportunities for the St. Mark congregation and, in turn, the wider community, in support of environmental sustainability in the context of their Christian values.

Some of the positive environmental actions taken by St. Mark Presbyterian Church include:

Site Actions

- Planting of 530 trees
- Extensive use of drought resistant native plants for greatly reduced water use
- Maintenance and replanting of coastal sage gnat catcher habitat
- Reduced peak water runoff from the existing conditions
- Bio-swale filtration of runoff for protection of downstream flow
- Use of state of state-of-the-art filtration technology and three retention ponds
- Protection of the on-site canyon in its natural state
- Retain 62% of open space
- Buildings designed for a very low floor area ratio of buildings to land
- Lowered site and perimeter trees offers low visibility of parking areas
- Public access to environmental stewardship education information
- Retain wildlife corridor
- Environmental certification process undertaken with Audubon International.

Building Actions

- Limited use of air conditioning because of moderate coastal climate
- Adoption of LEED™ credits in the use of local and regional manufactured materials, and use of daylight (energy conservation) and views in 90% of building space
- Use of E-glass for energy efficiency
- Finished concrete surfaces to reduce carpet use and replacement needs
- Use of interlocking pavers in gathering areas for water drainage
- Use of waterless urinals in men's restrooms
- All windows can be opened for natural ventilation
- Use of "instant heat" (tankless) water heaters
- Use of veranda trellises for shade
- Mahogany chosen for all pews obtained from a regenerating tree farm and not from native stands