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Note to Editors: Visiting hours, tour times and events are subject to change as a result of COVID-19. Please verify information before publishing.

PHILADELPHIA'S SACRED SITES REVEAL THE CITY'S RELIGIOUS STORIES
Brand New Faith and Liberty Discovery Center Debuts May 1, 2021 On Independence Mall

PHILADELPHIA, April 12, 2021 – This year presents the ideal opportunity to explore Philadelphia's sacred side as the city debuts the **Faith and Liberty Discovery Center** on May 1, 2021. The \$60 million, 40,000-square-foot immersive experience on Independence Mall explores the nation's founding tenets shared in the *U.S. Constitution*, *Declaration of Independence* and the *Bible*.

The Faith and Liberty Discovery Center joins a long list of sacred places, thanks to their history, architecture or emotional resonance, that make Greater Philadelphia an awe-inspiring place to visit for those interested in faith, spirituality and history. Around the region, new sites rise next to centuries-old houses of worship. Together, they provide physical testaments to the indomitable spirit of people who made great sacrifices for the liberty to worship as they please.

Here's a look at the region's old and new sacred sites:

Shrines:

- **The National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa:** Visitors and pilgrims travel here each year to pray in one of the many spaces, including the Lower Church, designed to replicate Our Lady's Chapel from the Jasna Gora Monastery in Poland, or the Upper Church, with the breathtaking sculpture of the Holy Trinity above the altar. The original Barn Chapel, outdoor Stations of the Cross and Rosary Garden provide additional places for private reflection. A Visitor Center, exhibition gallery and gift shop round out the offerings.
- **St. John Neumann Shrine:** Along the busy Girard Avenue corridor sits the St. John Neumann Shrine, part of St. Peter the Apostle Church. The functioning urban parish houses the remains of the bishop who's credited with establishing the diocesan Catholic school system in America. In the basement of the baroque church, visitors are invited to offer prayers in front of a glass tomb that contains St. John Neumann's (1811-1860) remains. Tours are available Monday through Saturday for groups of 10 or more; a guided cell phone tour is available for individuals. Masses and confessions are held several times daily.

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- **National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia:** For more than 100 years, this shrine has honored the saint long known for forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Canonized in 1900, she is often referred to as “The Peacemaker.” Many know the shrine as a place of prayer, devotion and pilgrimage. Both the upper and lower levels house the shrine dedicated to its patron saint. It is open to visitors year-round.
- **Saint Jude Parish and Shrine:** Celebrating 50 years as a parish, Saint Jude Parish serves Catholics in the Central Bucks County community through faith, hope and love of God and neighbor. The shrine itself is devoted to Saint Jude Thaddeus, who offers hope and spiritual comfort to those in need. It's open seven days a week for prayer and reflection.

Historic Churches:

- **Arch Street Friends Meeting House:** William Penn deeded the land to the Religious Society of Friends to use as a burial ground in 1701. In 1803, Arch Street Meeting House was constructed, and it is the largest meeting house in the world by seating capacity. Dioramas about William Penn's life and a piece of “treaty elm” believed to be from Penn's 1682 treaty with the Native Americans help chronicle the experience of the people upon whose principles Pennsylvania was founded. Grounds are open Tuesday through Saturday; building is open Friday and Saturday.
- **The Baptist Temple:** When the temple opened in 1891, it was the largest Protestant church in the United States. More than 120 years later, a \$29 million renovation has restored the building's Romanesque grandeur and re-established its role as a landmark where dignitaries such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt, General Dwight Eisenhower, Helen Keller and Martin Luther King, Jr. have delivered speeches. Owned by Temple University, the structure is now called the Temple Performing Arts Center and is used as a multipurpose event and performance center.
- **Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter & Paul:** Since 1864, the Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter & Paul has served as the Mother Church of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The domed Roman-Corinthian cathedral contains numerous mosaics, medallions, Italian marble columns and a crypt holding the remains of most of Philadelphia's bishops and some of its prominent clergymen. In August 2018, the Cathedral became the site of the Saint Katherine Drexel Shrine and tomb. Drexel (1858-1955) is known for her work with African- and Native-Americans. The cathedral is open daily for mass and prayer.
- **Christ Church & Burial Ground:** Perhaps Philadelphia's most recognized place of worship, Christ Church is where many of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington and Robert Morris, worshiped. Benjamin Franklin and six other signers of the *Declaration of Independence* are buried here. Tours of the National Historic Landmarks occur throughout the day, and guided tours of the burial ground take place from 11:00 a.m. through 3:30 p.m. (except in January and February when the burial ground is closed).
- **Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church:** In use since 1700, the building that houses Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church holds the designation of the oldest church building in Pennsylvania and the second oldest in the United States. It also boasts one of the country's oldest baptismal fonts — a massive Swedish-style font crafted in 1731. Models of the two ships that brought the first Swedish colonists to the region hang from the ceiling.

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- **Historic St. George's United Methodist Church:** The country's oldest, continually used Methodist church, St. George's licensed Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, the first African-American Lay Preachers of Methodism, before racial tensions led them to split from the church and establish their own churches. Francis Asbury preached his first sermon in America in this sanctuary in 1771; he later became the leader and pioneer bishop of American Methodism in 1784, after its establishment as new denomination. A museum and library house documents dating to the 1700s; tours are currently on hold due to COVID-19.
 - **Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church:** People walk on hallowed ground when they visit Mother Bethel, the "Mother" Church of the nation's first, independent Black denomination. What began at Mother Bethel is now an international denomination on five continents and more than 40 nations. Sitting on land purchased by A.M.E. founder Bishop Richard Allen in 1791, Mother Bethel holds the distinction of being the oldest parcel of land continuously owned by African-Americans. The current church memorializes Bishop Richard Allen, its founding pastor and first consecrated bishop of the A.M.E. Church with a statue of his likeness on the corner of 6th and Lombard Streets. The basement houses Allen's tomb, The Richard Allen Museum and the Mother Bethel Archives. Trained docents are available for free tours; walk-ins are welcome, but larger groups are encouraged to schedule a tour in advance. Visitors are encouraged to attend Sunday morning services at 9:30 a.m.
 - **Old First Reformed Church, United Church of Christ:** As this German congregation — founded in 1727 — grew, a second church was built at the site, and then a third (the current one) in 1837. When the congregation moved to other parts of Philadelphia in the 1880s, the building became a paint manufacturing company and warehouse. In 1967, they voted to return to the original location and spent 10 years restoring the church. The original altar, which was discovered behind partitions of the paint warehouse, is on view, and the church hosts concerts and community meetings, a winter homeless shelter, a free community breakfast on Saturdays and youth work camps. Visits by appointment only.
 - **Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church:** Soon after the church's founding in 1768, one of its first pastors, George Duffield, defied British arrest by serving as chaplain to the First Continental Congress and joining Washington at Valley Forge. Thanks to Duffield's loyalty and the support of patriots such as John Adams, Old Pine soon became known as the "Church of the Patriots." More than 285 Revolutionary War soldiers are buried in the church's graveyard. Today, it remains the only Presbyterian structure in Philadelphia dating back to Colonial and Revolutionary times. It is open daily.
 - **Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church:** Philadelphia's oldest Catholic community was founded in 1733 and has been led continuously by the Jesuit community. During COVID-19 restrictions, the church is open only during regularly scheduled masses.
 - **Old St. Mary's Church:** Built in 1763, St. Mary's was the second Roman Catholic institution in the city, and it figured prominently in the life of Colonial and Revolutionary Philadelphia. The church was the site of the first public religious commemoration of the *Declaration of Independence* and became the first Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Diocese of Philadelphia (1810-38). Members of the Continental Congress officially attended services here four times from 1777 to 1781, and though not members of the congregation, both George Washington and John
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Adams worshiped here on a few occasions. Old St. Mary's historical cemetery includes the remains of John Barry, Father of the American Navy, and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' great-great-grandfather, Michael Bouvier (1792-1874).

- **Old St. Paul's Episcopal Church:** Built in 1761, Old St. Paul's was a leading Anglican Church in Philadelphia during the 18th century. The congregation supported the cause for independence, and some of the greatest calls for severing ties with Great Britain came from the church's pulpit. Along with Christ Church, St. Paul's encouraged the founding of the Episcopalian diocese of Pennsylvania in the 1780s. Though no longer used as a church, St. Paul's is now the headquarters for the Episcopal Community Services of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. In its historical burial ground is the grave of Edwin Forrest (1806-72), the great tragedian known for *Spartacus* and other dramatic roles and for whom Philadelphia's Forrest Theatre is named.
- **Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey:** In its first incarnation, the Seamen's Church Institute was a 75-foot-high, 600-seat church that floated on the Delaware River. This floating chapel served as a destination for worship for merchant seafarers from 1849 to 1859. After many relocations, the ecumenical, non-denominational non-profit serves seafarers at their ships in the terminals of the Delaware River, providing warm welcomes, free transportation and Wi-Fi for communication home.
- **St. Peter's Church:** The first service at St. Peter's was held in 1761, and the church has been in continuous use ever since. William White was the first bishop of the American Episcopal Church and served as rector until his death at the age of 86 in 1836. Absalom Jones, enslaved by founding member Benjamin Wynkoop, attended services here. In 1792, after gaining his freedom and co-founding the Free African Society, Jones established the first African-American Episcopal Church. Bishop White ordained him in 1802. Built on land donated by the Penn family, the church was designed by Robert Smith. All services and events are virtual at this time.

Jewish Sites:

- **Beth Sholom Synagogue:** Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1954 and dedicated in 1959, Beth Sholom Synagogue is one of only four synagogues nationwide to be designated a National Historic Landmark. The building, which incorporates the rich symbols of Judaism, is the only synagogue designed by Wright and one of the last projects he completed before his death. One-hour guided tours are available on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.
- **Mikveh Israel:** The oldest continuous Jewish synagogue in the country traces its beginning to 1740, when Thomas Penn granted land to Nathan Levy for a burial ground. In 1782, the temple's first house of worship was completed with financial assistance from Benjamin Franklin and others. The nearby cemetery contains the grave of Rebecca Gratz, who founded the first Jewish Sunday School and reportedly was the inspiration for the character Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. Call for docent tour times or to schedule a cemetery tour.
- **National Museum of American Jewish History:** Located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, this museum brings to life the 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish-Americans, the museum invites visitors of all heritages to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. Museum galleries are temporarily closed. See website for online programs and exhibitions. Gift shop is open for in-person shopping by appointment.

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- **Society Hill Synagogue:** This synagogue began its life as a Baptist church designed by one of early America's foremost architects, Thomas U. Walter, who also drew the plans for the dome and House and Senate wings of the U.S. Capitol. Almost 200 years after the building's construction, visitors still marvel at the National Historic Landmark.

Places for Rest & Reflection:

- **Faith and Liberty Discovery Center** – This \$60 million, 40,000-square-foot immersive experience is the latest development in a decades-long transformation of Independence Mall. Opening on May 1, 2021, it will explore the nation's founding tenets shared in the *U.S. Constitution*, *Declaration of Independence* and the *Bible*. The space will include interactive galleries, a 3-D theater and an education center. Among the highlighted Americans: civil rights and Baptist leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Catholic anti-war activist Dorothy Day and Quaker William Penn, founder of colonial Philadelphia. The Center will also direct visitors to explore the Faith and Liberty Heritage Trail, including some of the nation's early religious institutions such as Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, home to the denomination's founding congregation, and Mikveh Israel, home to Philadelphia's oldest Jewish congregation.
- **Laurel Hill Cemetery:** The first cemetery in the nation to be designated a National Historic Landmark, Laurel Hill is home to the bodies of six Titanic passengers, several Revolutionary War leaders, more than 30 Civil War generals and many local icons. The bucolic setting, ornate gravestones, walking paths and fun-spirited annual events such as the Gravediggers' Ball and Rest In Peace 5K make this setting just as popular with locals as with tourists. Recreation is welcome, and admission is free. Visitors can use the free mobile app, Laurel Hill Cemetery, for a self-guided audio tour, purchase a highlights map for a few dollars in advance or take a guided tour. Visit the website for updated restroom, office and gift shop availability.
- **The President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation:** At this open-air Independence National Historical Park site, visitors see structural fragments of the home where Presidents Washington and Adams lived during their terms and where the first president kept nine enslaved Africans. Illustrated glass panels, timelines and video re-enactments teach visitors about the events that transpired here — just steps away from the Liberty Bell Center.
- **Museum of the Miraculous Medal Shrine:** This museum contains more than 400 pieces of religious art, including the many phases of the Blessed Mother's life in statue, painting and relief; Christ's Last Supper in seven different styles; statues of Joan of Arc; paintings of saints; and an original Miraculous Medal from 1830. The pieces range from 1653 to modern day and come from places such as Italy, China, the Netherlands, Germany and France. The museum also includes an 80-seat chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

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