

# Arts + Social Impact Explorer Fact Sheet

## OVERVIEW

AMERICANS  
for the  
**ARTS**

The intersection of the arts and religion is as old as spiritual practice itself. All art forms have served as teaching tools, instruments for praise and worship, and revelatory mechanisms. For centuries, religious institutions have also been primary funding partners of art making, and have played central roles in informal or personal practice, including choirs, fabric arts, writing, and social dancing.

The perceived liberal/conservative challenges of this moment run counter to a long and fruitful history of collaboration. Artifice continues to sit at the center of most faith traditions, and the creation of awe and wonder continue to drive a lot of art.

Involving arts in religious practice increases attendance, deepens spiritual understanding, and promotes tolerance. Moreover, the pairing of religion and the arts is a powerful way to provide a “third space” for youth and promote pro-social behavior.

# ARTS + RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

## IMPACT POINTS

**85%**  
INCLUDE  
THE ARTS

85 percent of places of worship sponsor artistic activities each year.<sup>1</sup>

**47%**  
BELIEVE  
ART RAISES  
ATTENDANCE

Almost half of all churchgoers said that incorporating more music would motivate them to attend church more often.<sup>2</sup>

**64%**  
INCREASE IN  
ATTENDANCE  
THROUGH MUSIC

Two out of three churches with worship practices that incorporate praise bands reported an increase in attendance.<sup>3</sup>

**3-OUT-OF-4**  
CHURCHGOERS SEEK ART

About 75 percent of church members say churches should encourage the artistic talents of their members as part of their practice, and about 50 percent said that churches would benefit from incorporating new forms of music and art.<sup>4</sup>

**CHOIR PARTICIPATION IMPROVES QUALITY OF LIFE**

Participating in a choir or religious singing group significantly improves your quality of life, according to several studies. Singing in a choir offers opportunities for social relationships, social support, emotional expression, and relaxation.<sup>5</sup>



# EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE

## Aura at the Notre-Dame Basilica, Montreal, Canada



This collaboration between Moment Factory and the Basilique Notre-Dame de Montreal is a 45-minute light and projection show conducted nightly inside a 200-year-old church. Originally created in 2016, the spectacle's mission is to encourage spectators to discover the beauty and richness of the Basilica through art.

<https://momentfactory.com/work/all/all/aura>  
[infoaura@basiliquenddm.org](mailto:infoaura@basiliquenddm.org)

**image:** A light and music extravaganza has been created in Montreal's Notre-Dame Basilica. Image: Moment Factory

## Dancing for the Gods, New York, NY



The Bharatanatyam, one of the oldest Hindu dances, communicates religious stories through movement and expression and is accompanied by music and singing. Dancing for the Gods is an interactive multimedia website dedicated to Bharatanatyam and brings the form to K-12 classrooms.

<http://dancingforthegods.org/>  
[mail@dancingforthegods.org](mailto:mail@dancingforthegods.org)

**image:** Preeti Vasudevan performs in *Stories by Hand*. Photo by Maria Baranova. Courtesy of Thresh Inc.

## Liturgical Arts Conference, Canton, MS



The Liturgical Arts Conference believes that all aspects of worship—from vestment making and mandalas to music and Stations of the Cross—are part of liturgy. It offers artistic guidance for those wishing to deepen their service in these realms.

<http://www.liturgicalartsconference.com>  
[ezell@graycenter.org](mailto:ezell@graycenter.org)

**image:** Instructor Suzanne Shleck leads the class Icons: The Gospel in Lines and Color. Photo by the Rev. Jennifer Deaton. Courtesy of Gray Center.

## Namgyal Monastery Institute of Buddhist Studies, Ithaca, NY



A sand mandala, created using Tibetan iconography, is used as a tool for consecrating the earth and its inhabitants and provides a visual framework for establishing the mind of the Buddha. Namgyal Monastery creates these mandalas for exhibition worldwide.

[namgyal.org/sand-mandala](http://namgyal.org/sand-mandala)  
[office@namgyal.org](mailto:office@namgyal.org)

**image:** Johnson Museum Cornell Namgyal Monastery mandala

**top image:** A light and music extravaganza has been created in Montreal's Notre-Dame Basilica. Image by Moment Factory.

### REFERENCES

- Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies. (1999). Places of Worship as Venues for Artistic Activities. Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Retrieved 9 February 2018 from <https://www.princeton.edu/culturalpolicy/quickfacts/artsorgs/ars99.html>
- Reformed Church in America. The Theology and Place of Music in Worship [Electronic version]. Retrieved 9 February 2018 from <https://www.rca.org/resources/theology-and-place-music-worship>

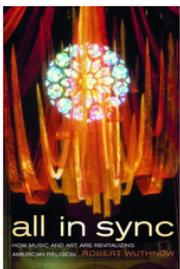
3. Survey: How to Get People to Attend Church More Often. Software Advice. Retrieved 2 April 2018 from <https://www.softwareadvice.com/resources/survey-get-people-attend-church-often/>

4. Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive. 2003. "Places of Worship as Venues for Artistic Activities." Princeton, NJ: Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive." Retrieved 9 February 2018 from <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/ARTS.asp>

5. Johnson, J. et al. (2013, Aug 21). Quality of life (QOL) of older adult community choral singers in Finland. *International Psychogeriatrics*. Retrieved 2 April 2018 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3748797/>

# READING LIST

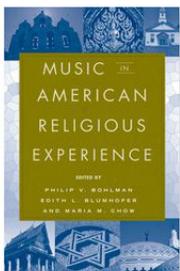
## All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion



All in Sync draws on more than 400 interviews with church members, clergy, and arts organizations, along with a national survey, to document a strong relationship between participation in the arts and interest in spiritual growth.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/100826>

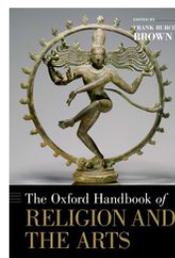
## Music in American Religious Experience



The essays collected here explore the ways in which music shapes the presence of religion in the U.S. and address its role in American religious history.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/100828>

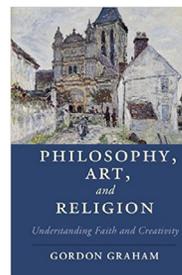
## The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts



The Handbook offers nearly 40 essays on the topics, issues, methods, and resources for the study of religious and theological aesthetics.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/100827>

## Philosophy, Art, and Religion: Understanding Faith and Creativity



This book focused on philosophy, religion, theology, and the arts, is accessibly written for use in discussion groups organized by churches, art museums, and the like.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/100829>



# ORGANIZATIONS

## Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies (SARTS)

This academic society of scholars, clergy, and artists are interested in the interrelationships among theology, religious studies, spirituality, and the arts. It works to foster collaboration to support scholarship, artistic ministries, and engaged classrooms.

<http://www.societyarts.org>

## Faith on View

Faith on View has gathered resources for those who are interested in the intersection of art and Christianity.

<http://www.faithonview.com/art-faith-resources/organizations>

## American Guild of Judaic Art

Founded in 1991 in New York City, the American Guild of Judaic Art's continuing mission is to promote awareness of fine art and craft objects created in the Jewish spirit.

<https://jewishart.org/>

## Museum of Contemporary Religious Art (MOCRA)

Saint Louis University's MOCRA is an interfaith museum of contemporary art that engages religious and spiritual

themes. It is dedicated to dialogue between artists and faith traditions, and to serving as a forum for interfaith understanding.

<http://www.slu.edu/mocra>

## The Brehm Center's Visual Faith Institute

The Visual Faith Institute is a study and exhibition center that seeks to encourage Christian engagement with the visual arts, including supporting visual artists, helping Christians understand the role of the visual arts in the renewal of culture and worship and displaying excellent art at that intersection.

<http://www.brehmcenter.com/initiatives/visualfaith/about/>

## The History of Dance in the Church

Refined/Undignified is a discipleship program that seeks to equip students to be spiritual leaders and excel in dance.

<http://www.refinedundignified.com/home.html>

top image: Instructor Suzanne Shleck leads the class Icons: The Gospel in Lines and Color. Photo by the Rev. Jennifer Deaton. Courtesy of Gray Center.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



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Americans for the Arts developed this Fact Sheet as part of the Arts + Social Impact Explorer.

