



Peace Project:
An Unprecedented Endeavor
Pitching Tents of Inclusion

PREAMBLE

Peace Cathedral in the Republic of Georgia is engaged in the Peace Project, which is its current endeavor to construct a mosque and a synagogue attached to the church building, creating a spiritual home for Abrahamic faiths, including both Sunni and Shia Muslims. Once the project is complete, the Peace Project will be a profound example of what the world can and should be.

The Muslim house of prayer will be called *Masjid As-salam* - مسجد السلام (Peace Mosque), and the Jewish home will be called *Beit Kneset ha-shalom* - בית כנסת השלום (Peace Synagogue). These places will not be physically large, but their significance and impact on interfaith peace cannot be underestimated.

At the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18, Abraham pitched the tents for his camp where he showed his hospitality to three angels in the guise of travelers and where he was brought divine tidings. Surah 11 of the Qur'an contains a version of this same story. Peace Cathedral intends to pitch the "tents" of hospitality and peace to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The project is meant to make a contribution to the elimination of prejudice, fear and hatred accumulated in the Abrahamic family, and bring about positive change in their relationships.

Everyone who supports this idea is kindly invited to contribute and become part of this unique endeavor.

A more detailed description of the project follows.

Cover photo: Christian, Shia and Sunni clergy praying for peace, 2018.

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NOTE: It is our urgent request that neither photos nor content of this document should be made available on the internet. For political reasons, the Peace Cathedral must be circumspect in its public statements regarding the Peace Mosque (PM) and Peace Synagogue (PS) until the project is completed.

ABOUT PEACE CATHEDRAL



Easter Vigil being celebrated along with American Anglican, Dutch Reformed and Congolese clergy at the Peace Cathedral. Easter 2019.

Mission

Peace Cathedral was established as First Baptist Church of Tbilisi in 1867. It serves as the mother church of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia.

In the course of its history, Peace Cathedral has repeatedly taken bold stands in support of oppressed minorities, even as the church has suffered periodic harassment from religious extremists.

The faith community, which organizes itself under an episcopal form of church governance, has embraced gender equality, ordaining women to serve as deacons, ministers and bishops, and provided hospitality and safety to Muslim

refugees during the Chechen-Russian war and to those who lost their homes and livelihoods when Russia invaded Georgia in 2008.

The Peace Project has its origin in the Cathedral's recent past. The Cathedral has been involved in interfaith work for more than twenty years. It has built confidence among representatives of Muslim, Jewish, Yezidi and other religious traditions. Therefore, the Peace Cathedral offers an open invitation to those of many faiths to participate in the Peace Project.

It is hoped that the project will make a significant impact in building stronger bridges of peace and partnership among representatives of different religious groups.

Theological Principles

The theological principles that serve as the foundation of the project are:

- **Sacred Beauty.** The world is full of division and bigotry; it is essential that such things are transformed by beauty and kindness. Peace Cathedral serves as a serene environment of beauty and kindness that heals what has been devastated by phobias, hatred and violence.
- **Hospitality as Healing.** Constructing sacred spaces for members of the Abrahamic family under the same roof is Peace Cathedral's way to participate in healing and repairing the breach in the world (*Tikkun olam* תיקון עולם – Mishnaic principle in Judaism). For this reason, Peace Cathedral extends its Abrahamic hospitality to Shias, Sunnis, Sufis, and Reformed, Conservative and Orthodox Jews – all who are ready to accept hospitality in love and acceptance. At the same time, the Cathedral welcomes people of other faiths and those who profess none.
- **Shift in Missiological Paradigm.** The missiological vision of Christian churches has often sought the conversion of those from other faith traditions. However, we recognize a growing number of Christian theologians and clergy affirm the need for multi-faith communities that embrace diversity in thought and practice. The Peace Project reminds Christians to serve and learn from others, inspiring a paradigm shift from triumphalism to humility, even while remaining committed to Jesus's call for radical discipleship.

PEACE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

The vision behind the Peace Project is to foster mutual friendship and partnership among representatives of different religions. Upon completion of construction, the Peace Cathedral will direct attention to three main areas:

Education

As a rule, stereotypes about identity and spirituality abound in the Abrahamic family. The community of Peace Synagogue will promote education from the best scholars and experts of Judaism through talks, lectures, seminars, and workshops about various aspects of Jewish life, scholarship and tradition. Peace Mosque will do the same with internationally acclaimed scholars presenting Islam and its legacy.

These educational programs will be open for clergy, laity, youth and children from all respective religious communities.

Interfaith summer camps will be organized to bring children from different religious traditions together.

Even though the Peace Project endeavor is explicitly Abrahamic, this does not exclude representatives of other faith traditions. People of all faiths (or who profess none) will be warmly welcomed to participate in all the activities of the project for the benefit of mutual understanding, global peace and harmony.

Pilgrimages

After completion of Peace Mosque and Peace Synagogue, the Cathedral will become an interfaith pilgrimage destination for people weary of sectarianism, tribalism and religious antagonism.

Prayers for Peace will be offered in Islamic, Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions. Peace meditation and liturgical traditions will be shared in respect and reverence and be open to all.

There will be a Hospitality Team developed at the Cathedral that will be responsible for welcoming, hosting and guiding pilgrims from around the world. Pilgrims will be free to experience the richness of liturgical diversity created by Christians, Muslims and Jews.

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They will also be welcome to use the Mosque and Synagogue for meditation and prayer according to their interests and religious identities. The Cathedral will also offer pilgrims an opportunity to visit the Yezidi Temple in Tbilisi, Shia communities near Tbilisi, and Sunni villages in the mountains of Adjara to learn firsthand about their lives and traditions.

Partnership for Peace

There is no peace without social justice and defense of human dignity. Upon completion of the Synagogue and Mosque, the Cathedral will facilitate cooperation in solidarity with poor, outcast, persecuted and marginalized groups throughout the region.

These partnerships are where genuine friendship and trust can be built among people.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE CONSTRUCTION



Peace Mosque

Peace Mosque is almost finished. Supporters must make their contributions soon before construction is complete (see the Donation Principles section below).

The architect has recently finished the stone mihrab and walls around it. Everything was done in the tradition of ancient stone workmanship. Peace Mosque repeats the features of the main nave of Peace Cathedral where the apse is not completed. Neither has the main wall of Peace Mosque been completed. This feature points out that God's work is never finished and should be continued from generation to generation.

There is some work to be done to complete Peace Mosque:

- Plastering of the walls
- Installing the heating and light systems
- Laying the marble floor
- Building the sandstone entrance
- Laying carpets on the floor (to be ordered, made and imported from Cashan, Iran)

If the necessary funds are contributed, Peace Mosque could be finished in early 2021. Peace Mosque will not be opened until Peace Synagogue is also completed. The formal opening of both edifices will take place at the same time, when both buildings are completed.

Estimated cost for Peace Mosque: Euro 12,500 (\$15,200 USD)

Peace Synagogue



Work has already been done to prepare the site for laying the foundations. Soil was excavated and hauled away from the site. Existing walls have been strengthened and treated to keep moisture out. Stones have already been bought from old villages, which will give the edifice a distinct appearance. The stone for Peace Synagogue has been purchased from a village near Tbilisi. Funds for purchasing the stones were provided by Broadway Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas, USA.; Dr. Ye Chen, China-Australia; and Mr. Kwang Woo, USA.

The work on the concrete shell of the Synagogue is the priority for this year (Euro 7,500). Next year we will need to do masonry work, plastering, windows and door installation. The Aron Kodesh and bimah will be built in sandstone and green diabase stone from the mountains of Georgia, and will be used for two columns. For the flooring, grey marble stone will be laid. The Aron Kodesh will be reminiscent of some features of the Dura Europos Synagogue in Syria.

Estimated cost for Peace Synagogue: Euro 33,800 (\$41,000 USD)

Centre for Interfaith Dialogue

The Mary Ruth and Roger Crook Centre for Interfaith Dialogue is almost finished. Yet there is remaining work to be done. The Centre is housed in the Lady Chapel located on the first floor of Peace Cathedral, with Peace Mosque on the ground floor of the same building. There will be two different libraries located in the Centre.

- ***Roger Crook Interfaith Library***

Roger Crook is a dedicated friend of Peace Cathedral and has been a spiritual and academic guide to the leadership of Peace Cathedral. Both he and his late wife, Mary Ruth Crook, were the first American Christians allowed to establish relations with Peace Cathedral more than 30 years ago. This couple laid a foundation for the friendship between Peace Cathedral, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, and the Alliance of Baptists. This library will collect all the best texts produced by different religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yezidism, and Zoroastrianism. The library will also have a full collection of Dr. Crook's writings in Christian Ethics and Church History.

- ***Brandon's Children Library***

The library is named after a son of friends of Peace Cathedral, Rita and Brad Berglund, who contributed funds for the children's library and for the shelving to house the first interfaith children's library in Georgia.

A marble floor is being laid now, and bookshelves are being built. The Centre will require furniture: two tables and 30 chairs. It will be necessary to purchase some high-tech equipment: a computer and an overhead projector. The books must be collected from all monotheistic religions, ranging from scholarly titles to those for children.

The main wall has been painted by a famous Georgian painter, David Khidasheli. The dome of the building has yet to be painted. To commission a painting will require an additional Euro 2,300. The dome will remain unpainted until a donor is identified.

Estimated cost for the Centre for Interfaith Dialogue: Euro 14,000, excluding the dome painting (\$17,000 USD).

Peace Cathedral Main Nave

The main nave of the Cathedral will require a stone floor, a new baptismal pool, a stone ambo, and staircases. A new staircase is to be built and the existing chairs replaced.

Total cost: Euro 19,000 (\$23,000 US)

Architectural Features

Peace Cathedral sacred spaces are designed in accordance with characteristic features of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic architectures.

The focal points of Peace Synagogue will be both the Aron hakodesh (Hebrew: אֲרוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ, 'Holy Ark'), where the Torah Scrolls are kept, and Bimah (Hebrew: בֵּימָה 'platform' or 'pulpit'), used for the reading of the Torah.

In Peace Mosque, the focal point is Mihrab (Arabic: محراب), a semi-circular niche which is an architectural recess in the wall that indicates the qibla, the direction that Muslims face when praying.

In the Peace Cathedral nave, focal points are the altar, pulpit and baptistry. The altar has already been built, the baptistry is being constructed, and the pulpit will be built before Easter of 2021.

The architectural style of all three sacred spaces will be reminiscent of pre-Romanesque architecture.

All three worship places will also have three characteristic features in common:

- Architecturally and religiously designated focal points—the Christian altar, the Muslim Mihrab and the Jewish Aron Hakodesh—will be pointed at by a lamp hanging in front of each of them.
 - Walls of each sacred space will be partially built with old and reused sandstone blocks, but those walls will be left unfinished in order to make a point: God's work is never finished; it should continue forever.
 - All three sacred spaces will have yet another common feature: each of them will be attached with two columns. One set of columns will be at the entrance of the Muslim space, one set at the Synagogue's Aron hakodesh, and one set behind the Christian altar. These two columns will symbolize two fundamental principles in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: loving God and loving one's neighbor.
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MAKING DONATIONS

Donation Principles

After having made the decision to construct Peace Mosque and Peace Synagogue, the Cathedral has developed the following rules for fundraising to demonstrate the mutuality of support:

Peace Mosque: only non-Muslims may contribute to this project.

Peace Synagogue: only non-Jews may contribute to this project.

This principle was introduced in order to enhance the mutual form of fund-raising among Muslims, Christians and Jews, through which the three faith communities are developing ways to encourage each other's work and witness.

It is to be admitted that these rules slow the fundraising process, but it also makes it a valuable means for encouraging the appreciation of diversity and for celebrating the global heritage of religions.

The Cathedral is keen to abide by these rules until the necessary funds are raised (please see more in the Contributors and Supporters section below).

There is also an option to make a contribution to the Peace Project overall, which will enable the project to acquire the necessary literature and equipment for the Library and also organize international and national interfaith seminars and lectures.

Peace Cathedral will also welcome volunteers to assist in the construction, as well as in operating and organizing projects of any size.

Donor Recognition

The peace project is being carried out for the glory of God and in obedience to God's commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbor. Since it is an unprecedented project, Peace Cathedral believes it is important that the names of all donors are duly recognized and recorded by an inscription on a plaque which will be affixed to the wall of the Cathedral.

If a donor chooses to remain anonymous, the contributor's plaque will read: "An Anonymous Christian," or "Muslim" or "Jewish" or "Unaffiliated" donor.

Recognition of donors is meant to encourage the hope for peace which is rather rare in our world.

All the donors will be invited to the opening of Peace Mosque and Peace Synagogue once both buildings are complete. In the meantime, donors will be kept informed about the progress of the project.

Ways to Give

Donations, however small or great, will be accepted with gratitude. Peace Cathedral has an account with TBC Bank in Tbilisi, which uses German banks as intermediaries. These are the bank account details you need to transfer your donation:

- *For USD and Euro Transfer*

Beneficiary's Bank

Head Office Swift: TBCBGE22

JSC TBC Bank

Swift: TBCBGE22

Bank address: 7 Marjanishvili Street, 0102 Tbilisi, Georgia

Ben's account (IBAN): GE43TB79 1793 6180 1000 01

Name of Beneficiary: Peace Cathedral-

Religious Community of Evangelical Christians and Baptists

Address of the Beneficiary: 6 Kedia Street, 0159 Tbilisi, Georgia

- *Alternative Way to Give*

You may also make your donation through the Alliance of Baptists online giving platform. The Alliance is a partner organization to Peace Cathedral. You will simply need to use the link below and put "Peace Project-Tbilisi" in the designation for the gift:

<https://allianceofbaptists.org/give>



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Background of the Project

Numerous factors and individuals have contributed to the development of the idea that different religious groups can have their sacred spaces under the same roof.

- *Nisan Babalikhshvili*



Nisan Babalikhshvili (1938-1986)

It is not unusual that minds and hearts of individuals towards strangers are changed by personal encounters. In 1984-86, the head of Peace Cathedral, Malkhaz Songulashvili, was a language student of a famous Jewish Scholar, Nisan Babalikhshvili. In fact, he was one of Babalikhshvili's last students as Babalikhshvili died in 1986 at age 48. Participation in his funeral service was the first challenge to M. Songulashvili's conservative views on interfaith relations.

- *Encounter with Chechen Refugees*



Chechen refugees

In the aftermath of the Second Russo-Chechnian war, many Chechnian refugees came to Georgia. Peace Cathedral participated in relief work among the refugees. It was the first encounter with Muslim refugees which changed the Cathedral's perspective on Muslim-Christian relations.

- *Outburst of Islamophobia, Homophobia and Anti-Semitism, 2010-2013*



Mob attack on members of the LGBTQ community in the yellow bus. May 17th, 2013.

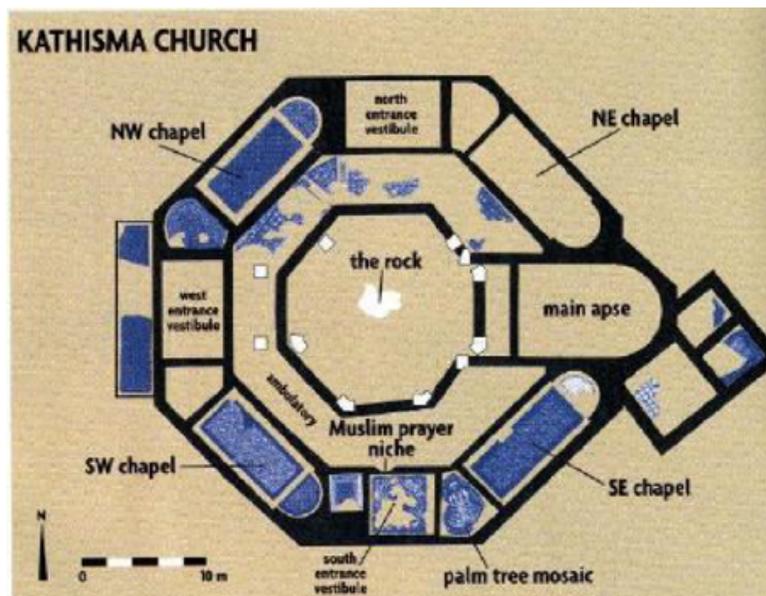
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The Judeo-Christian sacred text has been clear what triggers irrational fear towards different groups. The book of Esther, which includes a story of the genocide of the Jews, tells us that they were targeted by the state power of Persia because they were “different” from others. Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them” (Esther 3:8).

After 2010 Georgia saw unprecedented growth of the people in society who were different from the majority population. The groups particularly targeted were Muslims and members of the LGBTQ community. The day of May 17, 2013, was particularly dramatic: a small group of LGBTQ people and their supporters were attacked by more than 20,000 people, including bishops, priests, deacons, monks, nuns, and laity.

It is a tradition of Peace Cathedral to respond to these acts of ugly bigotry with acts of beauty and creativity. Construction of sacred spaces for the people of “different” religious traditions was one of the responses of Peace Cathedral to counter the intolerance and bigotry which was inspired and orchestrated by the majority Georgian Orthodox Church.

- *Kathisma Church near Jerusalem, Israel*



The Kathisma Church floor plan

Archaeological excavations have revealed possible remains of a small octagonal shrine built around 456 CE by the widow, Ikelia. It is the Church of the Seat of Mary. It is called Kathisma Church (from Greek: κάθισμα, 'seat'). The ruins of the church are located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It was built on the alleged resting place of Mary on the road to Bethlehem mentioned in the Proto-Gospel of James.

One of the most interesting features of the shrine is that its southern apse was turned into a mosque in the first half of the 8th century, while the rest of the structure continued to be used as a church. Scholars hold that the church was destroyed during the Persian invasion in 614 CE.

- *Walsingham, England*



Orthodox Chapel at the Walsingham Shrine

Malkhaz Songulashvili and his wife, Ala Kavtaradze, were on holiday in Croma, east Anglia, when they paid a visit to the Shrine of Walsingham. Walsingham is a village famous for its shrines in honor of the Virgin Mary. It is also a major center for pilgrimage. In 1061 CE, according to Walsingham legend, an Anglo-Saxon noble woman had a vision of the Virgin Mary in which she was instructed to build a replica of the house of the Holy Family in Nazareth in honor of the Annunciation. There are two sets of shrines there: one belonging to the Church of England and another one to the Roman Catholic church. In the Anglican shrine, both the bishop and his wife discovered that there was a long-established small Orthodox chapel. This led them to share sacred space both with different churches and possibly with other religions.

- *St. Francis of Assisi*



Another source of inspiration for the project was the legacy of St. Francis of Assisi, who went to Egypt believing that by converting Muslims, he could save them from hellfire.

St. Francis changed his mind after encountering Muslims there. He became respectful of Islam and was keen to learn from Muslims, while encouraging his fellow Christians to emulate them in prayer and prostration, and to join Muslims — and others — in service to all regardless of religious differences.

- *Friendship of Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel*



Heschel and King in silent protest of the Vietnam War at Arlington National Cemetery, February 6, 1968

King and Heschel, Christian and Jewish leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, were both good friends and prophets of their time—and perhaps for our time, as well. They first met in 1963 at a conference where, as biographers say, the bond between them was immediate.

Both King and Heschel were influential religious thinkers for Peace Cathedral.

- *Mevlevi Sufi Order in Turkey*



Sheikha Nur Artiran, the leader of a Mevlevi Order

Friendship and spiritual connection with a Mevlevi Sufi Order in Istanbul was yet another interfaith experience that made the decision regarding the Peace Mosque and Peace Synagogue projects not only possible but desirable. The spiritual leader of the Mevlevi Order visited Peace Cathedral and delivered a sermon in the context of Sunday liturgy. Bishops, clergy and laity have been welcomed guests of the Sufi House in Turkey on many occasions.

- *The House of One, Germany*



Father Gregor Hohberg, Rabbi Tovia Ben-Chorin, and Imam Kadir Sancı of The House of One Project

Last, but not least, one of the contributing factors has been an establishment of bilateral relations between Peace Cathedral and the House of One project in Berlin, Germany. The connection was established due to the shared membership of Peace Cathedral and St. Mary's Cathedral Church of Berlin in the Community of the Cross of the Nails. St. Mary's Church has also been a driving force for the House of One project. Mr. Wolfgang Kuhla, whose daughter-in-law served as a curate at St. Mary's church, was instrumental in introducing the idea of the House of One project to Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili in 2014. Eventually a strong bond was established between Peace Cathedral and St. Mary/the House of One.

Contributors and Supporters



The Rev. Dr. Nancy Petty of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC, was the first Christian minister to contribute to Peace Mosque from her personal savings.



Imam Dr. Taj Harguy of the North Oxford Mosque, Great Britain, was the first Muslim to contribute to Peace Synagogue.



Rabbi Dr. Miriam Berkowitz was the first Jewish Rabbi to donate funds to Peace Mosque.

Ambassador of Israel at Peace Cathedral



The Ambassador of Israel at the Peace Cathedral. Photo by Natela Tochilashvili

On the 31st of July, 2020, Peace Cathedral observed a Muslim feast of Eid Al-Adha. The Cathedral choir chanted Muslim prayers and the presiding Bishop recited a sura from the Qur'an in Arabic.

The prayer service was attended by the Ambassador of Israel, H.E. Ran Gidor. The Ambassador thanked Peace Cathedral for its peace-building ministry and donated 3000 GEL for Peace Mosque.

"I am proud to be able to participate in the project initiated by Peace Cathedral by making a modest contribution to it. I understand this is a drop in the ocean, but I hope it will play its role," said the Ambassador, after contributing towards the Peace Mosque project.

"This is indeed a unique event when a Jewish Ambassador attends the Muslim feast day at a Christian Cathedral and makes donation to Cathedral's interfaith project," said Bishop Ilia Osepashvili following the service.

It is customary for Peace Cathedral to celebrate main feast days with other Abrahamic religions. Eid Al-adha is the feast which recalls one of the most significant episodes from the life of Abraham, who is the patriarchal figure in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

“The Judaeo-Christian and Islamic story of Abraham’s sacrifice is still relevant in this world which is torn apart by divisions, tribalism and violence,” said Metropolitan Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili in his homily. “The story of Abraham’s sacrifice is teaching us that the strong should not raise a hand over the weak, with or without a knife; the rich should not exploit the poor; the educated should not take advantage over uneducated; the majority representatives should not persecute minority representatives...”

Project Team and Contacts

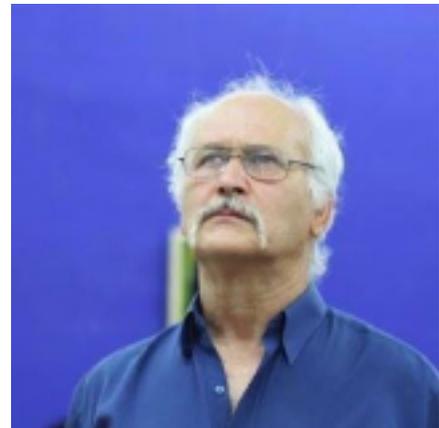
The head of Peace Cathedral, Metropolitan Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, has been the key visionary and sponsor of the project. His idea of building a spiritual house for Abrahamic faiths inspired the whole community to become thrilled to be part of this unusual experience. The construction of Peace Mosque and Peace Synagogue has been democratically and unanimously approved by the general assembly of Peace Cathedral.

Many people have been involved in this project. Groups of Georgian, American, German, Austrian, Dutch, and British volunteers have carried out a lot of work. Peace Cathedral is immensely grateful for their participation in the project. Peace Cathedral is particularly grateful to Bishop Ilia Osephashvili, who has been instrumental in recruiting volunteers from Europe.

There are two people who have been at the center of every development of the project: the architect and the project manager.

The Rev. Giorgi Songulashvili (right)

The project architect is an artist and sculptor by profession. He is also an ordained deacon of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, and is among a select few who have designed a Christian Church, a Muslim Mosque and a Jewish Synagogue.



The Rev. Gocha Barnov (right)

As project manager, Rev. Barnov has been very committed to the reconstruction plans of Peace Cathedral since their inception.



Address and Contact Information

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Photo Gallery of Construction Progress

Peace Cathedral Main Nave



2018



2020



Main nave. August 2020

Centre for Interfaith Dialogue



2018



2020



The interior of the Centre as a marble floor was being laid. August 5th, 2020.

Peace Mosque



2018



2020



The entrance of Peace Mosque and the steps leading to the prayer hall. August 5th, 2020.

The mihrab of Peace Mosque. August 5th, 2020.



Peace Synagogue



The wall to be cut through in order to make the entrance to Peace Synagogue. 2018.

The same wall after the entrance had been cut through. August 5th, 2020.



The passage from the main nave of the Cathedral to Peace Synagogue. August 5th, 2020.

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The place being prepared for concrete work on the site of Peace Synagogue. August 5th, 2020.

Concrete being poured into the foundation of Peace Synagogue. August 10th, 2020.



After having concrete poured into the foundation of Peace Synagogue. August 12th, 2020.



Stones collected in the courtyard of Beteli Centre to be used in Peace Synagogue. August 5th, 2020.