

21ST CENTURY LONDON

THE NEW ARCHITECTURE

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The Lumen United Reformed Church (previously Regent Square Presbyterian Church) is a decent if unremarkable 1960s replacement for a much larger church, designed as a reduced version of York Minster but badly damaged in 1945 by bombing. Theis & Khan's £1,800,000 remodelling of the building was driven by the (tiny) congregation's wish to make the building more accessible and useful to the local community while retaining and expanding its primary role as a place of worship: in short, to give it a new lease of life and save it from likely redundancy. A church hall was sold to fund the scheme.

The building – which did not even merit a mention in Nikolaus Pevsner's *Buildings of England* – has been retained as a worship space that can also be used as a meeting hall; indeed, clearing the concrete-framed structure of furniture makes its basic dignity all the more apparent. The focus of the space is an enigmatic tapered zone, constructed of rendered polystyrene, enclosing a top-lit 'sacred space' that can be used for private prayer or small gatherings. A new font was designed by the sculptor Alison Wilding.

The rest of the church space was turned into a cafe, clearly visible from the street. The original church building is enclosed by new low-rise structures containing a mix of community spaces and offices. At the rear of the site, a small cloistered garden provides a calm retreat from the city streets. The imagination and courage of the congregation and the clear commitment of its architect have given a new sense of purpose to a building that could easily have been sold for redevelopment and lost to the community.

Below
The church spaces are bold yet contemplative, calm yet inspiring.

Opposite
The central cone contains a private space for worship and prayer, and emphasises the height of the interior.

