Project Description:

This environment memorializes a community’s gathering to mourn yet sustain hope despite tragedy. It enriches a renovation honoring the congregation’s 160th anniversary, accommodating gifts and increased attendance following the church’s hosting of the community memorial for the Sandy Hook shooting. In gifting four September 11th memorial “Bells of Remembrance,” the Franciscan Community imagined a tower. Designers and clergy thought a bell tower too monumental; a bell garden would be in scale and useful. Bells came to represent four reasons to pray for peace—911 victims, Sandy Hook victims, children suffering from poverty and hunger, and the military and first responders. The resulting Peace Garden reaches out to community, transitions from street to campus, and forms intimate spaces.

- Garden-wall heights respect the church
- Above-eye-height facing street for privacy
- Lower facing campus inviting use
- “Rooms” evoke round sacred spaces like kivas
- Semi-enclosed for containing space, resonating bells
- Semi-open for community awareness, broadcasting bells
- Places for meditation, outdoor classrooms for campus school
- Sandy-Hook-tragedy time capsule buried under one room
- Brick matches existing, representing the human: hand-made/hand-laid
- Curvilinear planters and paths intertwine rooms
- Varied vistas for spiritual journeys
- Pedestrian gathering zone
- Flowering plants suggest life, tenderness, and hope, with varieties symbolizing peace
- Windowed portals suspend bells from curved-steel lintels
- Mechanized/remote operation for music and tolling
- Congregation and community enter to reflect individually, gathering periodically to remember together
Sacred room – many items related to the Sandy Hook tragedy are placed in a time capsule under one of the rooms.
The garden was sited adjacent to the church entrance, parking lot, and street. A portion of the existing parking lot was removed to make way for the new memorial.
The bell garden was designed as a series of circles, featuring four 19th-century bronze bells donated by the Franciscan community. The two larger circles create an infinity loop for meditation as the smallest circle frames a re-furbished St. Rose statue from the original church.
Working hand-in-hand, the design team developed 2D hand sketches into 3D models. The models illustrated the design intent to the community and assisted in understanding scale, proportions and views.
Once the design was set, the 3D models were finalized into more realistic views used for fundraising efforts to establish the donor budget.
The view from the relocated St. Rose statue into the garden maximizes the visibility of the bells from all perspectives.
The 3D rendering on the previous slide translates into the built design from the same perspective.
A built elevation of the memorial shows the slope across the garden. The walls stretch vertically into the fall foliage beyond, intertwining the garden visually with the New England landscape.
Brick and bluestone matches the materials of the church beyond, integrating the aesthetic into the overall campus while introducing new dynamic forms.
Each circular room provides an opportunity for a moment of inward reflection.
Three serviceberry trees will bloom white in the spring as a backdrop to the St. Rose statue. This circle in particular has a lower seating height to accommodate children in an outdoor learning environment.
Each bell has its own meaning along with an inspirational quotation.

Peace is my farewell gift to you, my peace is my gift to you; I do not give it to you as the world gives peace. Do not be distressed or fearful.

John 14:27

Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.

Matthew 11:28-30
As evening falls, the bell garden is gently illuminated with soft LED accent lighting.
The garden is noticed at night from the campus itself, but also while driving along the street as a beacon of hope for the community.
The Bells of Remembrance – Peace Garden serves as a place of solace for the families of those lost in the Sandy Hook tragedy and reminds us of the power of community.