



Rothko Chapel



2020 Annual Report

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Fiscal Year 2020 / July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

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Dear Friends,

How quickly life can change. We began the new year with great anticipation that we would complete Phase I of the *Opening Spaces* site development plan in March 2020, allowing us to reopen the restored Chapel and welcome visitors to the new Suzanne Deal Booth Welcome House and newly redesigned grounds. Our programming during the fall and into the new year remained strong, as detailed below and in our program reports.

During the Chapel restoration process (in the course of Phase I of *Opening Spaces*), we discovered that there was no steel reinforcement in the exterior walls, as required by current building codes. It was therefore imperative that the restoration work include necessary reinforcement to the structure, which delayed completion by four months at an additional cost of more than \$1 million. Thankfully, The Houston Endowment and other generous donors came forward to help offset these expenses, ensuring the safety and structural integrity of the Rothko Chapel in the face of hurricane force winds and other regional weather events.

Just as we were recalibrating the reopening for early summer, we faced a much larger crisis, as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. With the reopening date now uncertain, we closed the administrative offices even as the restoration continued. As public health reports were released, it was clear that this was a global health crisis, whose magnitude most of us had never experienced, with no certain conclusion in sight. The impact was, and continues to be, monumental, affecting all aspects of life including our physical and spiritual well-being. In response, the Chapel created “Care in the Time of Coronavirus,” an online series of previous Chapel programs designed to offer hope, compassion and community in the midst of so much uncertainty.

During this new public health emergency, another ongoing crisis reached a flashpoint. The murder of George Floyd made clear the ongoing racism, brutality, fear and inequities that Black people and people of color face daily in this country. George Floyd’s murder exposed the depth of this nation’s racial crisis as a public

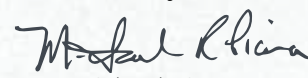


emergency—and shined a light on the work required from each of us to change systems, perspectives and practices to create a more just and equitable world. In addition to several key internal conversations and public communiques, the Chapel offered a compendium of programs drawn from the archives titled “Reflections on Racism, Inequity & Social Justice.” By looking to previous programs and speakers, we were able to see more clearly the systemic character and effects of racism in our country, as well as the urgent need for social transformation if our nation is to truly be a place of possibility for all people today and into the future.

This call for change was also central to the biennial Óscar Romero Awards held on June 30th. Building on our 2019 Spring Symposium: “Toward a Better Future: Transforming the Climate Crisis,” the 2020 Óscar Romero Award honored three people who have dedicated their lives to climate justice, and who represent the Chapel’s commitment to exploring the intersections of art, spirituality and human rights: Gérman Chirinos, Founder of MASSVIDA (Honduras); Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee (Alaska); and Jorge Díaz, Co-Founder of AgitArte (Puerto Rico).

As we prepare for the next fiscal year and program season, we do so mindful of the uncertainties that each of us face, and of the struggles of all who continue to be impacted not only by the pandemic, but also by the public health crises and spiritual trauma caused by racism and other entrenched social injustices and inequities. Our hope is that the Chapel will reopen as soon as possible so that people may once again gather to experience the transformative power of this sacred space. Until then, we will continue our efforts to maintain and develop connections to one another, to lend each other support, and to look outward with a commitment to further justice. We honor these tasks in our efforts to provide a sacred space where each of us can discover the most important aspects of life, leading us to a more resilient, ethical, sustainable and equitable world.

We thank you for your support and look forward to our future work together.

Sincerely,

Michael Piana
Chair


David Leslie
Executive Director



EXPLORING
PROGRAM
ENGAGEMENT
Highlights





Photo courtesy of Holocaust Museum Houston



Photo courtesy of Legacy Community Health-Montrose



Photo by BEND Productions

Practicing Spirituality and Living Mindfully

This year the Chapel created and supported a series of off-site and virtual offerings to promote mindfulness, compassion and empathy. These programs sustained the spirit during a year of unprecedented challenges, as we collectively navigated the stark realities of racial injustice and a worldwide pandemic.

These offerings began in November 2019 in partnership with Covenant Baptist Church, where we gathered for the 35th Annual Houston Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. Hosted by the Chapel since 1985, this service includes prayers, readings, chants, and reflections from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. This year, leaders and members of nine different faith communities from across the city came together around the theme "The Network of Life," a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living things: humans, animals, plants and natural elements. Through their own traditions and native languages, each presenter expressed both

gratitude and a continued commitment to care for the earth, one another, and all that is living.

International Days of Observance are another way that the Chapel provides an occasion to gather in community, gain understanding around significant issues, and stand in solidarity with those on the frontlines of the struggle. This year, while the Chapel was closed, we joined with our community partners to contribute toward two city-wide offerings.

First, on December 1, we observed World AIDS Day at Legacy Community Health-Montrose. David Leslie shared the stage with government officials, religious leaders, artists, and those living with HIV/AIDS to provide a series of reflections, prayers, songs, and testimonials. This program provided a moment to remember those we lost due to HIV/AIDS, and to remind us of the measures that we all must take to end this epidemic. The event ended with a candle-light vigil and walk through the neighborhood.

On December 10, we gathered at the Holocaust Museum Houston for a Human Rights Day Observance to mark the anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Chapel organized a contemplative practice led by Rabbi David Segal from the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and joined other social justice organizations in creating information displays regarding human rights programs and work. The event also included a tour of the Human Rights Gallery and a presentation by Kamil Khan from Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, who shared his experience working with asylum seekers and refugees. The event placed the work being done in Houston within a global framework and context, reminding us that regardless of the exact role we play—or how we contribute—we all have the responsibility and potential to create a world where all humans are treated equally.

By March 11, 2020, businesses were forced to close their doors to the public, and people were asked to wear masks and stay at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the close of December 2020, tens of millions of people had lost their jobs, and approximately 1,820,000 lives were lost worldwide. At a time when the Chapel remained closed, we had to think creatively about how to provide care, compassion, and relief during times of uncertainty and upheaval to our friends locally and globally. As a result, we curated a series of video and audio playlists titled "Care in the Time of Coronavirus," which included a collection of past meditations, contemplative practices, music, poetry, and reflections that took place at the Chapel.



Photo courtesy of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

Experiencing the Transformative Power of Art

While the Chapel remained closed for restoration, staff and volunteers continued to organize and participate in collaborative experiences offsite with a number of local and national arts organizations. In October 2019, Rothko Chapel Executive Director David Leslie took part in the Contemporary Art Museum Houston’s “Art at Noon” series during the exhibition *Nari Ward: We the People*, to share ideas on how art and spirituality can sustain long-term social justice advocacy. David reflected on works in the exhibition that focused on historical memory, political and economic disenfranchisement, racism, and democracy, and shared his personal experiences of art’s impact on social justice efforts at the Rothko Chapel.

The Rothko Chapel also participated in several area conventions in the fall of 2019. In October, staff and volunteers hosted a booth at the Texas Contemporary fine art and design fair at the George R. Brown Convention Center, sharing more information about the *Opening Spaces* campaign and restoration in progress. In November 2019, joining with representatives from over twenty local and state-wide archival and library collections, the Chapel participated in the second biennial Houston Archives Bazaar, inviting families to engage with some of our region’s historic resources, and to learn best practices for managing collections. The Chapel’s Archives team put together a collection of historical photos documenting significant moments from the

Chapel’s nearly 50-year history. The materials included plans, renderings, and images of the Chapel’s restoration and lighting design journey and offered unique insights into the impact of this sacred space through correspondence, testimonials, and visitor comment books.

Rothko Chapel staff supported organizing efforts for the Common Field Convening, originally scheduled to take place at Houston Community College and the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum in April 2020, and later moved online in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Convening is a critical platform for artists, organizations, and organizers from across the US to envision and enact a more equitable, collaborative, and sustainable field of arts resources and practices.

Program Coordinator Kelly Johnson collaboratively curated two virtual sessions on Zoom in partnership with DiverseWorks and the Center for the Healing of Racism respectively. “All Together Session: Notas al Calce/Footnotes to the City,” highlighted overlapping cultural narratives framed by artists and arts organizers from across the 640 square miles that make up the city of Houston, and “Houston, We Have a Problem: Confronting Racism in the Arts,” offered a conversation on different manifestations of racism and inequity in reference to recent news articles.

Inspiring Action for Social Change

Through off-site, in-person programs, curated playlists, and virtual events, the Chapel continued to bring people together and rally around significant issues of the day. The program season began in October with the fifth annual Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold Endowed Lecture in Peace, Social Justice and Human Rights at The University of Texas School of Law presented in partnership with The Rapoport Center. The event began with poetry readings by NAACP Image Award winner Reginald Dwayne Betts and MacArthur Fellow Natalie Diaz, and was followed by social theorist, geographer and prison abolitionist Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who gave a keynote address titled “Meanwhile: Making Abolition Geographies.” During her presentation Professor Gilmore explored how visions of abolition guide and connect organizers across a range of social justice struggles. She highlighted how abolitionist visions operate, and drew illuminating comparisons among the approaches and work of environmental justice activists, public sector labor union members, farm workers, undocumented households, and criminalized youth. The program also served as the opening keynote for the Rapoport Center conference, entitled, “Prison Abolition, Human Rights, and Penal Reform: From the Local to the Global.”



Lower two photos courtesy of BEND Productions

“I am hopeful. I have been in this work for a long time. What gives me hope is that we have an intergenerational movement and young people who are not old enough to vote who are working on these issues, working for environmental and climate justice.”

—Dr. Robert D. Bullard

This program was followed by two off-site events organized as part of the Chapel’s two-year initiative addressing the climate crisis, and as a lead up to the 2020 Rothko Chapel Óscar Romero Award. First, on January 15, the Chapel continued its annual celebration of the life and living legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., through a partnership with Barbara Jordan – Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University. Together we presented “Actions of Change: From the Civil Rights Movement to the Struggle for Environmental Justice.” This program featured presentations by Dr. Robert D. Bullard, Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy at Texas Southern University in Houston and the “father of environmental justice”; Bridgette Murray, Founder and Executive Director of the non-profit organization Achieving Community Tasks Successfully (ACTS); and Yvette Arellano, policy research and grassroots advocate with Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s). Also included was a moderated conversation by Dr. Richard M. Mizelle, Jr., an Associate Professor of History and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Houston. The presentation explored the influence of Dr. King’s work on the environmental justice movement and its subsequent evolution.

Further conversation explored the continued environmental challenges and inequities faced by vulnerable and frontline communities here in Houston and nationally. The panel also explored some actions being taken to improve the health of the region, including

- deepening coalitions between community-led organizations and researchers to empower communities with self-driven reports and strategic planning
- bringing lawsuits against corporate and government energy entities to ensure accountability for community health issues
- educating and listening to youth leaders like students at Furr High School, the nation’s first environmentally focused secondary school
- increasing greenspace and food access in low-income communities
- protecting freshwater resources such as the Permian Basin
- emphasizing environmental organizations’ obligation to learn about historical class, race, and gender oppression in the U.S. broadly, as well as in environmental movements

A couple of weeks after the MLK program, the Chapel rejoined Yvette Arellano and t.e.j.a.s. founder Juan Parras for a Toxic Tour, exploring some of the most polluted areas in Houston, including a designated Superfund site located in a residential East End community. This tour originated over 20 years ago in Houston as an educational tool for individuals within and outside of the community to gain a deeper understanding of environmental justice issues. Pictures cannot easily convey the surreal site of this massive industrial complex, nor the thick polluted air. The trip traversed Houston neighborhoods to the ship channel, providing opportunities for attendees to walk through and experience first-hand the air pollution, toxic chemical smells, and manufactured plastic waste materials visible in the soil.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world witnessed the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery between February 23 and May 25, 2020. Immediately, people took to the streets to march together, and cry out against the blatant, searing acts of racism, white supremacy and inhumanity that continue to be witnessed and experienced here in the U.S. Once more, during a time when the Chapel was closed, and people were unable to gather due to the pandemic, we created a video compilation from our archives titled “Reflections on Racism, Inequity & Social Justice,” which featured conversations, presentations, and performances from past Chapel events that confront issues such as mass incarceration, environmental justice, immigration, income inequality and the ongoing struggle for civil rights.



“We have to practice not oppressing the natural formations that live around us: bodies of water, areas of land, and our invaluable clean air.”

—Yvette Arellano



Photos on the previous page and above by Chiquita Jones

Program Numbers

- 7** Total programs:
- 35** Total program presenters
- 774** Total attendees

2019-2020 Program Partners List

- Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at University of Texas School of Law, Austin
- Covenant Church
- Legacy Community Health
- Holocaust Museum Houston
- Texas Southern University Barbara Jordan – Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs
- Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (t.e.j.a.s.)
- MASSVIDA Southern Environmental Movement for Life (Movimiento Ambientalista del Sur por la Vida)
- Gwich'in Steering Committee
- AgitArte
- Common Field



Behind the scenes production photos by Chiquita Jones

2020 Óscar Romero Award Ceremony

**“We will no longer be silenced;
our work will become known.”**

–Gérman Chirinos

The Rothko Chapel’s Óscar Romero Award has been given biennially since 1986 to recognize courageous, grassroots human rights advocacy. The award is named in honor of Saint Óscar Romero of San Salvador who was assassinated on March 24, 1980 due to his vocal opposition to the violent oppression facing his fellow citizens.

An urgent concern and focus of the Rothko Chapel’s programming remains the wide-ranging impact of climate change and our collective responsibility to address the human causes that contribute to a rapidly warming planet. Building upon topics addressed at our 2019 Spring Symposium, “Toward a Better Future: Transforming the Climate Crisis,” an animating factor of this year’s Óscar Romero Award is the impact of climate change on politically, economically and socially marginalized communities. Vulnerable communities are experiencing critical problems and emergencies, including widespread displacement due to rising sea levels, drought and the loss of arable land, challenges to physical and emotional health, and a rise in stress-related disorders.

This year the Rothko Chapel Program Committee and staff established a new structure for the awards, expanding opportunities for up to three award recipients. To better represent the Chapel’s unique intersectional areas of interest, eligibility was extended to individuals or organizations that include artists and artist collectives, spiritual leader(s), and human rights activist(s). A committee of experts in the areas of art, spirituality, and human rights with a focus on climate justice was convened to nominate grassroots leaders who demonstrated “courageous struggle,” commitment to self- and community transformation, and who would benefit from the award’s financial support and increased visibility to enhance their work and impact.

The 2020 Nomination Committee included Cassandra Carmichael, Executive Director at the National Religious Partnership for the Environment; Guillermo Kerber, former Program Executive for Climate Justice at the World Council of Churches; Cara Mertes, Project Director for Moving Image Strategies at the Ford Foundation; Marianne Møllmann, Director of Regional Programs at the Fund for Global Human Rights; Bryan Parras, Healthy Communities Campaign Organizer at the Sierra Club; and Nato Thompson, Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary.



Photo courtesy of Gérmán Chirinos



Photo courtesy of Bernadette Demientieff



Photo courtesy of Jorge Díaz

The 2020 Rothko Chapel Óscar Romero Award recognized three individuals who collectively represent the Chapel's intersection of art, spirituality, and human rights, and who have committed their life's work toward climate justice and the creation of a more sustainable and possibility-filled world. Awardees included:

Gérmán Chirinos,
Founder of MASSVIDA (Honduras);

Bernadette Demientieff,
Executive Director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee (Alaska); and

Jorge Díaz,
Co-Founder of AgitArte (Puerto Rico).

Gérmán Chirinos is a land and water rights activist who founded the Southern Environmental Movement for Life (Movimiento Ambientalista del Sur por la Vida) or MASSVIDA, an association of 37 communities in active resistance to the destruction of land and water in Honduras.

Bernadette Demientieff is Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in and the Executive Director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, standing strong to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge-Coastal Plain, the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in way of life in Alaska. **Jorge Díaz** is the co-founder and artistic director of AgitArte, an editor of the book *When We Fight, We Win!*, and a founding member of Papel Machete, a collective of radical artists and street theater/puppetry workers dedicated to education, agitation and solidarity work in 21st century Puerto Rico and its Diaspora.

The 2020 Rothko Chapel Óscar Romero Award ceremony was the first-ever virtual Rothko Chapel event, livestreamed via Vimeo on Tuesday, June 30, 2020, as a safety measure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The virtual ceremony was led by David Leslie, Executive Director of the Rothko Chapel, with an invocation by Myokei Caine-Barrett, Shonin, the Resident Priest of Myoken-ji Temple in Houston. Each awardee spoke on the importance of protecting their community's land and enhancing their community's collective agency through grassroots activism, spiritual experience, and art making and performance. Photos depicting each awardee's advocacy work among their fellow community members were shown during their remarks, signifying the collaborative

nature of their struggles for justice, and further illustrating the ways in which our collective decisions and actions are intertwined, as the issue of climate destruction affects everyone across our planet. The livestream ceremony established a precedent for continued virtual programmatic engagement even after the pandemic subsides.

“We must all remember that we are on a spiritual path, and that co-existing and respecting each other's ways of life is important.”

-Bernadette Demientieff



ROTHKO
CHAPEL'S
GUILD



Rothko Chapel's Guild

The Chapel Guild, comprised of 37 dedicated individuals, reflect Houston's diverse professional, cultural and religious communities. During the closure and restoration of the Chapel, Guild members helped continue the Chapel's presence in the community as they hosted an information table for visitors outside of the Chapel offices, supported off-site and livestream programming, and participated in group volunteer activities at the Houston Food Bank and The Women's Home. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Guild members gathered at the Live Oak Friend's Meeting House to celebrate another year of service and experience the

James Turrell Skyspace sunset sequence, organized a visit to artist David Adicke's sculpture studio, and engaged in a book club focused on Pamela Smart's *Sacred Modern: Faith, Activism, and Aesthetics in the Menil Collection*. Volunteers stayed connected to one another and the Chapel virtually starting in March 2020 with the onset of the pandemic, hosting group meditations and gatherings on Zoom.

Over the past year, the Chapel Guides continued to deepen and develop their understanding of the Chapel through trainings, in-person and virtual gatherings, and behind-the-scenes experiences of the *Opening Spaces* restoration. Guides expanded their training

and education through a trip to the painted churches of Schulenburg, Texas, discovering the ways in which art, architecture, and spirituality intersect, and through an in-depth exploration of the Chapel's restoration process including a review of the previous restoration periods in the Chapel's history, the various skylights and methods of lighting design, and a tour of the restored space with its new lighting configuration and enhanced infrastructure with a member of the *Opening Spaces* construction management team, Linbeck Group.

Guild Volunteer Hours: **610**



Chapel Guild photos courtesy of Guild members and Chapel staff



OPENINGspaces

A Campaign for the Rothko Chapel

As one of Houston’s most beloved and iconic institutions, the Rothko Chapel plays a vital role in our city’s cultural, spiritual, and social justice ecosystem. Our vision for the Chapel’s growth, as captured in the *Opening Spaces* masterplan, is to meet the evolving needs of the nation’s most diverse city.

This \$32-million visionary master plan is the most ambitious and transformational effort the Chapel has undertaken since it was constructed nearly 50 years ago. The project aims to fulfill an array of objectives including realizing the founders’ and artist’s vision for the Chapel; setting the stage for programmatic expansion; and building its organizational capacity.



OPENINGspaces

re-envision the Chapel’s campus and facilities through the following elements:

Restore the Chapel to enhance the meditative quality of the sanctuary, allowing for the paintings and space to be experienced as they were intended by the artist. The building interior will be restored to its original proportions, with a reconfigured skylight, lighting design and reimagined entryway. In the sanctuary, louvers will provide a gentle light that will preserve the paintings while enhancing their presentation.

Construct a north campus by developing land owned by the Chapel on the north side of Sul Ross Street which will feature new collaborative public spaces:

Welcome House, which will house didactic and historical displays, and bookstore, and serve as a gathering point for groups and tours.

Administration and Archives Building, which will foster research and support expanded operations.

Program Center, which will accommodate an enriched range of public programs, receptions and presentations, including dance, music, exhibitions and film screenings, as well as symposia, lectures and workshops.

New energy facility that employs second floor placement of mechanical and control equipment and a new back-up generator which will ensure that the Chapel will be protected from weather disasters.

Landscape and drainage infrastructure improvements will also work to safeguard the campus.

Guest House, a renovated bungalow which will host Chapel speakers and special guests, as well as artists or scholars in residence.

Enhance the Chapel’s landscaping and greenspaces, creating a unified campus that preserves and defines a sense of quiet sanctuary.

Tranquil new garden spaces for reflection.

Redesigned landscaping to provide a fluid transition between the Chapel grounds and Menil Park.

New plantings and improved seating around the *Broken Obelisk*.

The addition of more than 300 new trees planted in groves on the grounds and along the street to provide welcome shade and screens from increased commercial activity in the neighborhood.

Fortify our endowment in order to maintain restored and new properties while supporting expanded programming and operations.

In March of 2019, the Rothko Chapel closed to the public to begin executing Phase I elements of the *Opening Spaces* masterplan. The centerpiece of Phase I construction was the restoration of the Rothko Chapel. In addition to the Chapel restoration, Phase I included an expanded and redeveloped North Campus with landscape enhancements and infrastructure improvements, as well as the building of the new Suzanne Deal Booth Welcome House.

By the summer of 2020, we completed Phase I and began the design work for Phase II of the project, which includes a new meditation garden; guest bungalow to provide dedicated housing for Chapel speakers, fellows and other visitors; and the construction of two new buildings—an Administration and Archives Building and a Program Center. When completed in 2023, the Program Center and North Campus will feature approximately 11,500 square feet of dedicated indoor and outdoor multi-use space for programming and community gatherings, bolstered by critical infrastructure and state-of-the-art audio/visual equipment.



OPENING spaces

A Campaign for the Rothko Chapel

\$5,000,000+

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\$2,000,000 - \$4,999,999

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As of June 30, 2020

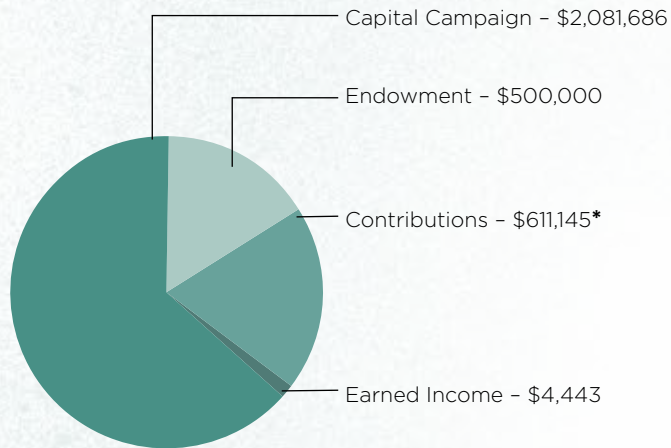


Photo by Paul Hester

By The Numbers

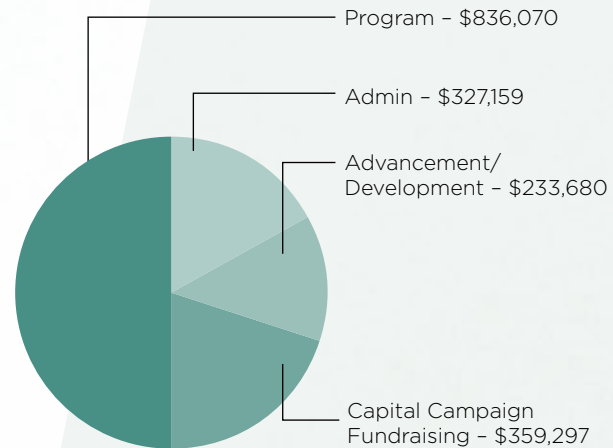
For Fiscal Year 2020

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020



Revenue
\$3,197,274

*Includes loss on disposal of property - \$13,245



Expenses
\$1,756,206

The data are derived from the audited financial statements of the Rothko Chapel as of June 30, 2020.



Our Supporters

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

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People Behind the Rothko Chapel

Thanks to the time, dedication, and generosity of the many individuals listed here, the spirit of the Rothko Chapel lived on in our community throughout the 18-month *Opening Spaces* restoration project and closure, and the COVID-19 pandemic. From leadership, administrative staff and new visitor services team members, to interns, advisors and volunteers, the Chapel is able to sustain the community through trying times, provide a safe, quiet, and open space to connect to yourself and others, and illuminate our shared humanity.

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