

Proposal

This commemorative bench honors Savannah's rich tradition of interfaith dialogue and religious freedom, celebrating the diverse spiritual communities that have shaped the city's cultural heritage. The bench specifically recognizes the leadership of Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer and the historic role of Congregation Mickve Israel, America's third-oldest Reform synagogue.

Marker Location

The bench will be placed in Monterey Square, at the southeast corner as you enter the path into the square, at the intersection of Wayne and Bull Streets, slightly north and across Bull Street from the historic Mercer House. This location has been carefully selected for several compelling reasons that make it the ideal setting.

This location has been thoughtfully and deliberately chosen for several compelling reasons. It offers a prominent yet peaceful setting, ensuring the bench is both highly visible to visitors and welcoming to locals who may wish to visit a place where their religious beliefs are publicly honored. Its proximity to the Mercer House—a site of historical and cultural significance—adds a layer of visibility, as this location attracts many tourist groups every day.

This makes it an ideal placement to honor the bench's purpose, recognizing Savannah's diverse spiritual community and the city's long history of interfaith involvement. It also reflects and honors the founding principles of America, where religious freedom and inclusion was to be celebrated.

Location Justification:

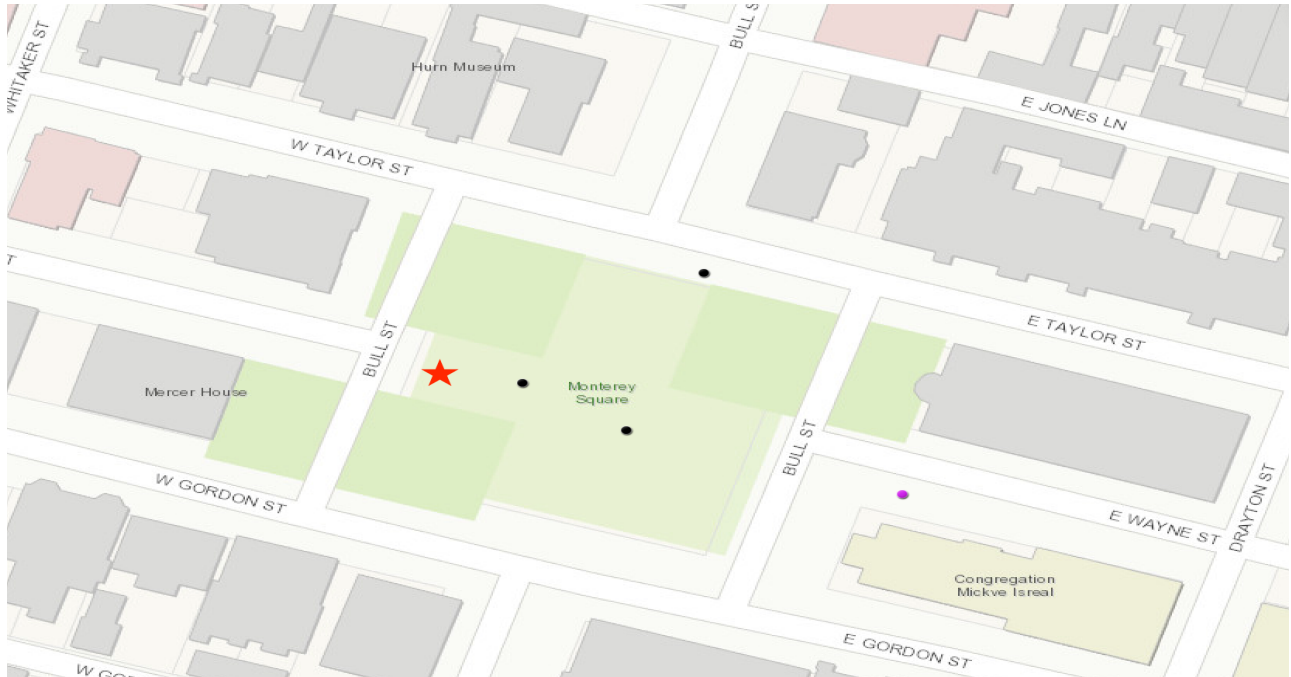
Sacred Proximity: Monterey Square is home to Congregation Mickve Israel, the third-oldest synagogue in America. Placing the bench in the same square creates a meaningful connection to the bench's purpose.

Historic Significance: The southeast corner provides a dignified setting that aligns with Savannah's planned squares and maintains the integrity of the Oglethorpe Plan, while honoring the modern and enduring actions of Congregation Mickve Israel and Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer's leadership, which globally positioned Savannah as a leader in interfaith understanding—an example of what's possible when people of good faith work together for peace and harmony.

Accessibility and Visibility: The corner position at Wayne and Bull Streets ensures high visibility for residents and tourists visiting this historic area. The bench will serve as both a place of reflection and an educational opportunity about Savannah's interfaith legacy.

Symbolic Positioning: The bench's placement across from the Mercer House creates a symbolic dialogue between Savannah's architectural development and its spiritual history.

Community Gathering Space: Monterey Square has long served as a gathering place for reflection and events. The memorial bench will provide a dedicated space for quiet contemplation while remaining accessible to residents, community leaders, and visitors interested in Savannah's interfaith legacy.



Marker Theme

Religious History

One of the founding principles of America is religious freedom. This bench directly honors Savannah's decades of religious leadership. The bench commemorates spiritual service and the religious foundations that have shaped Savannah's faith community. The proposal highlights Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer's role as a religious leader and the bench's placement facing the historic synagogue—the third-oldest synagogue in the U.S., where he served for decades—making this a fundamentally historic commemoration for Savannah.

Social and Humanitarian

This bench, honoring interfaith understanding, unites and builds bridges between diverse faith communities and represents the significant social and humanitarian contributions to Savannah. It celebrates initiatives that bring together congregations of every tradition in Savannah, fostering dialogue, respect, and collaboration in pursuit of peace and shared humanity. The bench reflects the humanitarian efforts that have created lasting partnerships across religious and cultural divides in Savannah.

Cultural and Ethnic Heritage

This bench acknowledges the critical role of religious heritage in Savannah. The proposed interfaith symbols engraved on the bench—such as the Star of David, Christian Cross, Crescent Moon and Star, and others—represent Savannah's diverse cultural and ethnic communities.

Many people came to Savannah fleeing their homelands due to hunger, war, persecution, and devastation. These shared experiences created enduring bonds between different cultural and religious groups, contributing to Savannah's multicultural heritage and its spirit of community cohesion.

Marker Drawing

The bench will feature a commemorative plaque on the backrest, honoring the interfaith foundation in Savannah. In addition, religious symbols will be carefully engraved into the bench to embody unity, respect, and shared community values.

Symbols include:

- Star of David (*Judaism*)
- Christian Cross (*Christianity*)
- Crescent Moon and Star (*Islam*)
- Dharma Wheel (*Buddhism*)
- Om Symbol (*Hinduism*)

To further emphasize harmony, an olive branch or interlocking hands motif will also be incorporated, representing peace and cooperation across faith traditions.

Significance of the Symbols

The inclusion of these symbols reflects the **importance of faith** as a source of **identity, guidance, and connection** for communities worldwide. By bringing them together in **one shared space**, the bench becomes a **physical representation of interfaith dialogue**—a reminder that while **beliefs may differ**, the values of **peace, compassion, and mutual respect unite us all**.

The greater Savannah metro area has approximately 461 religiously organized houses of Worship.

Dominant religions represented:

- Christianity: The most widespread, mainly Protestant (Baptists, Methodists, non-denominational), alongside Roman Catholic and Episcopal congregations
- Judaism: Savannah hosts a longstanding Jewish community, with Congregation Mickve Israel, the third-oldest Reform synagogue in the United States
- Hinduism: Listed as the second-largest religion in the city
- Islam
- Baha'i

The bench will measure 6 feet in length x 20” height. powder-coated steel bench, with a 12"x24" cast bronze plaque on the backrest.



Marker Text

Through interfaith dialogue, we built bridges, not walls, leaving a legacy of compassion, understanding, and hope.

“Be a shepherd of peace, a voice for unity.”

— Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer

Text Size and Font

Font: Times New Roman.

Body: 0.8" tall

Heading: 1.8" tall

Cost Estimate

6-ft powder-coated steel bench: \$2,000.00

12"x24" cast bronze plaque: \$1,600.00

Estimated Shipping: \$350.00

Park and Tree Department Installation: \$600.00

Maintenance Escrow: \$600.00

Total: \$5,150.00

The marker is being funded by Joyce Piersanti. After installation, the marker will become the property of the city of Savannah and Aldermen, and the City of Savannah will be responsible for future maintenance of the marker.