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## Historical overview

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Háteigs priesthood was established by law on 17 July 1952, following an increase in the number of priesthoods in Reykjavík that year. In 1963 the parish boundaries were then changed with the establishment of Grensás priesthood.

Rev. Fr. Jón Þorvarðarson was elected lawfully in October 1952 and served the congregation until October 1976. In the beginning the congregation was without a church building, although with an organist and a choir.

It didn't take long until ideas arose for the building of a church, and land was acquired for the project. Architect Halldór H. Jónsson was hired to design the church, and with the joint efforts of the parish committee, the building committee, the fundraising committee, and other people devoted to the project, the construction of Háteigskirkja church began in September 1957. Þórður Jasonarson, Chairman of the parish committee, broke the first ground for the foundation of the church at a ceremonial gathering that year.

During Advent in 1965, a decision was made to consecrate the church, although its construction was still unfinished. The Bishop of Iceland, Mr. Sigurbjörn Einarsson, consecrated the Church at a festive ceremony attended by many.

Rev. Arngrímur Jónsson began serving at the church in January 1964 and served the congregation until 1993. Rev. Jón Þorvarðarson left the post in July 1976 and an election for the priesthood was held the same year. In November the 1976 Rev. Tómas Sveinsson was appointed to the post and served until 2013 together with Rev. Helga Soffía Konráðsdóttir, who was appointed to the church in October 1993. Rev. Helga Soffía still serves the church as the local parish priest as well as being the appointed provost for the Deanery of Reykjavík West overseeing the ten churches of the domain. By her side Rev. Eiríkur Jóhannsson, appointed to Háteigskirkja church in 2014, serves the church.



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Háteigskirkja June 2023

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# Háteigskirkja Church

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Christian Lutheran Church

History,  
Church buildings,  
and Art

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## The Church buildings

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The church buildings of Háteigskirkja are designed by the architect Halldór H. Jónsson. The church form is a basilica, which is a traditional church building form since the beginning of Christianity. The basilica is a square elongated building, divided in three, five- or seven areas by pillars, forming pillar passages, the widest area (the "nave") being in the middle. At the end of the nave there is a protrusion (the "apse") with a raised platform, Halldór wanted to emphasize three key aspects in the design of the Church: it should be **beautiful**, **warm** and **solemn**. The architecture of Háteigskirkja is quite unique for an Icelandic church, with visible eastern influence, notable in features such as the church's pointed towers, the pointed shapes of windows and doors, as well as indoors in the layout of pillar passages, the gilding of pillars and, additionally, in the ornamental garden by the church. Halldór is said to have been influenced by his visit to Granada, Spain, where he explored La Alhambra, a palace and fortress built in 1238-1358 by Muslims in Islamic architectural style, with Spanish influence. The name La Alhambra can be translated from Arabic as "the red fortress", the name referring to the reddish stone from which the fort is built, which may have influenced the red color prominent in the interior of Háteigskirkja. Arch tunnels and gills are noticeable in La Alhambra as in Háteigskirkja, as well as the distinct gardens to which the ornamental garden at Háteigskirkja bears a resemblance. On a tower of La Alhambra there is an embedded pointed roof with a pointed, elongated



cross, bearing likenesses to the four towers of Háteigskirkja, a unique feature of the church. Moreover, Catholic influences are noticeable in Háteigskirkja to a greater extent than most Icelandic churches, with a visible emphasis on the Virgin Mary, testified by the Marian Altar with the portrait of Mary and her child by the artist Benedikt Gunnarsson, seen on the right side of the church choir. Benedikt's grand mosaic altarpiece in the choir, along with the Marian image, add to the Eastern aesthetics of the church. The congregational home was designed by Halldór's son, Garðar Halldórsson, and built in 1992.



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## The Architect

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**Halldór H. (Haukur) Jónsson** (born October 3, 1912, died February 6, 1992) was an architect and businessman who was often referred to as "Chairman of Iceland" due to his service on the Boards of Directors of several large Icelandic companies.

Halldór studied architecture at the Royal Technical College in Stockholm and graduated in 1938. He then returned to Iceland and started working at Sigurður Thoroddsen's Engineering Firm, but a year later founded his own architectural firm. Halldór married Margrét Þ. Garðarsdóttir, the daughter of the merchant Garðar Gíslason, in 1940 and started working at his father-in-law's company, G. Gíslason & Hay. Along with these duties Halldór became acquainted with powerful men in the Icelandic business world, including Sveinn Valfells and Ingólfur á Hellu.

Halldór became known to be solution-oriented and resourceful and subsequently got a seat on the board of directors of companies under the auspices of Garðar and other respected businessmen. Halldór was Chairman of the Board of the well-known construction company "Sameinaðir verktakar" founded in 1954 and owned 50% share in another equally established and respected Icelandic construction company "Íslenskir aðalverktakar" or ÍAV. The CEO of ÍAV, Geir Halgrímsson, became Halldór's benefactor and later became the Prime Minister of Iceland. Halldór was a board member of Eimskip from 1965 and served as Chairman of the Board in 1974 until his death. He also served on the board of the Fertilizer Plant in Gufunes in 1960-78 and in 1952-79 on the board of the Icelandic Employers' Union.

Halldór has been named one of the main influential figures in Icelandic society in the 20th century, along with having been a well-known architect, who drew various nationally renowned buildings in addition to Háteigskirkja. Examples of the buildings he designed include the Watergate building (headquarters of Iceland's main contractor), Hotel Saga, Eimskip's warehouses at Sundahöfn, Fisheries Research Institute (now Marine Research Institute & Ministry of Fisheries), Domus Medica and Hotel Borgarnes.

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## The Artworks – The Artist

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The altarpiece of Háteigskirkja is by the artist **Benedikt Gunnarsson** (born July 14, 1929, died November 22, 2018) and was donated to the Women's Association of Háteigskirkja Church Parish



Council on Advent in 1988. Benedikt also made the Marian picture to the right of the choir. The choir image is 40 square meters in size and is entitled "The Cross and the Light of the Holy Trinity". Both images are mosaic works and were prepared from the author's drawings by Franz Mayer's Hofkunstanstalt in Munich, Germany. It is the first work the German company did for an Icelandic church and Benedikt was also the first Icelandic artist to work with the company on such major works. Benedikt chose for this work mosaic material of different thickness, mostly made of hand-cast flat glass and Venetian glass enamel. He also selected for the work numerous natural stones, including various marble teas, semi-precious stones, carved glass and antique glass, leaf silver, and leaf gold. In the congregational home there is another artwork by Benedikt, which was his second suggestion for a choral image, the work "Pentecost – the Power of the Holy Spirit" that Benedikt presented to the Church as a gift in November 2002 on the occasion of the congregation's half-century anniversary.

Benedikt has made large murals and stained windows in other churches and buildings in Iceland, such as Keflavík Church, Háþær church in Þykkvibær, Fáskrúðarbakki church and Suðureyrarkirkja church, as well as Hofsóss primary school and Vík í Mýrdal, in Héraðsskólinn við Skógar.

Artworks by Benedikt can be found in many locations in Iceland, such as in the Icelandic National Gallery of Art, the Kópavogur Art Museum, the ASÍ Art Museum, as well as in many municipal museums and many private museums and foundations. In addition, Benedikt works can be found in museums around the world, such as in Kanada, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Mexico, Colombia, Denmark, Sweden and in Ben Guri-on-hai in Isra-el.