Religious spaces and places of worship are both public and private. The physical space & rituals are open to the public; they are places and events for people to come together and form community. The concepts of reflection, worship and prayer, however, are extremely private. During holidays and weekly services, the congregation gathers together and becomes the community's common point of reference. It has become the community center, a cafe, a nursery -- many different things together in one multi-layered space. During 'off-times', the space becomes very quiet - a solemn, reflective atmosphere. Individuals come and go, often with very specific purposes, but with very little interaction with each other.

Candles often play a role in how individual people of the congregation make a prayer or a blessing. They symbolize votive offerings, intentions, and wishes. This act of lighting a candle is an extremely personal and intimate event, though they are often grouped in clusters representing the prayers and wishes of the overall community.

At any given moment, a religious space contains artifacts, inscriptions, iconography & semiotics that display pieces of the religion's history. The number of people and their activities provide information about the time of day, the type of service and the community surrounding the church. Even just focusing on the clusters of candle offerings and the altar area that they reside on gives us tons of information -- the reasons for lighting the candle, the length of time it takes the candle to burn out, the number of candles lit at any given time, the ritual around lighting the candle, and the wishes, thoughts and stories behind each lit candle. Stories and situations around each candle are silently exposed in the lighter's thoughts but never revealed to the congregation.

Community Blessings is a candle altar interface designed to bring the collective back to the experience of candle lighting. It allows users to explore the blessings of other members of the congregation and potentially keep them in mind as they proceed to make their own wish. Users can also explore archives of all of the other stories and prayers that have preceded them in this specific religious environment. The stories revealed can be big or small, but the goal is to get the community more invested in each other's personal explorations of religion. Some thoughts regarding implementation include a touch screen interface allowing users to select stories they are interested in viewing; a physical candle altar that includes sensors which will trigger a story to appear through gestures that mirror the actual motion of lighting a candle; or projections of stories on to the candle surfaces for the duration of time it takes for the candle to burn out.