

# FINAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

## TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH COMPLEX

### I. NAME

Historic: Trinity Lutheran Church Complex

Common name: Same

### II. LOCATION

1046 N. 9<sup>th</sup> St.

4th Aldermanic District, Ald. Paul Henningsen

Legal Description: Plat of East Half of the NW ¼ sec 29-7-22 block 162 lots 1 to 8  
Tax Key No. 361-1657-000

### III. CLASSIFICATION

District

### IV. OWNER

Trinity Lutheran Church

1046 N. 9th St.

Milwaukee, WI 53233

V. YEAR BUILT: 1878 (Church)

ARCHITECT: Fred Velguth

### VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Trinity is a remarkable example of Milwaukee's German Lutheran church architecture. Located at the southeast corner of N. 9<sup>th</sup> St. and W. Highland Ave. on a large sloping lot, the church is a massive, cream brick, High Victorian Gothic style structure that rests on a raised, rusticated limestone basement. It is composed of a cross-gabled main block that is abutted by two front towers of greatly differing heights. The building is cruciform in plan and in keeping with a centuries-old tradition of church architecture, its altar end faces east. The subject property includes the church, a surface parking lot at the southwest corner of N. 8<sup>th</sup> St. and W. Highland Ave., and a non-contributing, cream brick, two and one-half story, Colonial Revival style parsonage which is located at 1026 N. 9<sup>th</sup> St. An elementary school was once located on the site of the parking lot.

The neighborhood around the church is an eclectic mix of commercial, institutional and residential buildings that were constructed over a 125-year time period beginning in

the late nineteenth century and spanning most of the twentieth century. The Pabst Brewing Company complex, a Milwaukee designated historic district, is fanned out on the west side of N. Highland Ave. across the street from the church. The main campus of the Milwaukee Area technical college is located immediately east of the church complex.

Trinity's main elevation faces west and it is composed of a central, gabled block that is abutted at either end with a soaring tower. The architectural focal point of the exterior is the larger tower that is located at the street corner and soars to a height of approximately 200 feet. The tower is composed of four stages surmounted by a spire that in turn is topped off with a large round ball and a Roman style cross. The smaller tower, about 128 feet in height, is composed of three stages surmounted by an octagonal spire that is also topped off with a sheet metal ball and cross. Both towers are heavily buttressed, trimmed with extensive ornamental brickwork and fenestrated with regularly placed, lancet-style Gothic arched windows. At the base of each tower is a gabled entry pavilion that frames a pair of recessed, Gothic-arched, double-leafed entry doors.

The side elevations facing north and south are similar in design and each is composed of regularly placed Gothic-arched windows and a projecting transept bay. The apex of each transept gable is topped with a brick and sheet metal Victorian Gothic style chimney. A pair of gothic-arched, double leaf doors is centered on the projecting, west-facing wall of each transept.

The rear elevation facing east is composed of a projecting, semi-octagonal apse that is topped with a faceted roof. A large round window called an oculus is centered in the rear wall and the two walls flanking it are glazed with Gothic arched, art glass windows. The walls of the raised limestone basement beneath the apse are sloped or "battered" and the corners are heavily buttressed.

Trinity is embellished with the most outstanding ornamental brickwork of any church in the city. The arched-like brickwork along the front gable is called a corbel table frieze and it is one of the hallmarks of brick architecture in Germany. Trinity is an excellent example of the massing and detailing associated with church architecture in Germany during the Romanesque and Gothic periods. The exterior of the church remains in its original condition and it has been spared many of the unsympathetic changes that have befallen other churches of similar vintage. All of the cream colored brick has weathered to a pleasing dark brown/black color.

Although the interior of the church is not part of a local landmark designation, it is still important to note that Trinity contains some of the most remarkable wooden altar and interior furnishings of any nineteenth century church in the country. Fine, natural oak and ash hardwoods were used extensively to richly embellish the spacious interior. One of the focal points of the interior is a spectacular, raised wooden pulpit. The base is shaped like a giant goblet and projecting from the wall above it is a richly carved wooden canopy. The pastor ascends to the pulpit by means of an amazing, twisting, wooden staircase that is a masterpiece of the woodworkers' craft. The carved organ case in the balcony and an extraordinary, massive newel post at the bottom of staircase to the choir loft is equally impressive features. The interior remains in nearly original condition with the exception of a wooden partition wall that was erected in the 1920s to enlarge the narthex. The wall was done to such a high standard of craftsmanship that it appears to be an original feature.

The parsonage, located at 1026 N. 9<sup>th</sup> St. and built in 1901, is separated from the church by a small grass lawn. The 2-1/2 story, rectangular, cream brick, Colonial

Revival style building is topped with a hip and deck roof. Designed by the prominent Milwaukee architect Carl Barkhausen, the building is a simplified example of the Colonial Revival style that was very popular around the turn of the century.

The main elevation faces N. 9<sup>th</sup> St. and is simply composed of recessed corner porches at either end of the façade, a large modern projecting bay window on the first story, and two double hung windows on the second story. The bay window is apparently a replacement for an original landscape sash window that was sheltered by a projecting porch that was also removed long ago. According to church members, several dormers were removed from the roof.

The side elevations facing north and south are fenestrated with randomly placed double hung windows. The rear elevation facing east features an entry door and double-hung windows that are randomly placed to respond to the needs of the interior. Although the main elevation has been extensively altered, the building still retains much of its original character and appears to be in good condition. The parsonage is a non-contributing structure in the Trinity church complex. This means that building could be demolished and replaced with a new structure that would require prior design approval from the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

## **VII. SIGNIFICANCE**

Trinity Lutheran Church is architecturally significant, as the city's best example of a German-inspired, High Victorian Gothic style church. The architectural and historic importance of the church makes it an irreplaceable part of the city's unique and nationally significant collection of churches.

In terms of the building's significance to the state's architectural history, the Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan, published by the State Historical Society, has identified a need to preserve good examples of ethnic architecture of which Trinity is an outstanding example.

The phrase "ethnic architecture" refers to a specific architectural style or feature that is strongly associated with the homeland of an ethnic group. Milwaukee's inventory of ethnic worship structures ranks as one of its most outstanding architectural assets. The preservation of the city's historic ethnic churches, built mainly between about 1855 and 1905 is a top priority because good examples of ethnic architecture in America are relatively rare.

Trinity was designated a Milwaukee Landmark in 1967 by the city's old Landmarks Commission. That designation, done prior to the adoption of the current Historic Preservation ordinance, is honorary in nature and neither protects the building from indiscriminate demolition nor grants the Historic Preservation Commission the right to review any significant exterior changes. The church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 8, 1979.

## **VIII. HISTORY**

### **Architecture**

Trinity is one of the jewels of late nineteenth century German Lutheran church architecture in America. The church brims with the religious and ethnic pride of the burgeoning, German-American community that built it. When Trinity was completed in

1880 it is believed to have been the largest and most elaborate Lutheran church building in North America. As it stands today it is probably one of the three largest remaining nineteenth century Lutheran churches in the country. The other structures are St. Stephen's Lutheran in Frankenmuth, Michigan and St. John's Lutheran at 804 W. Vliet St. in Milwaukee.

Trinity owes much of its bold character to the designs of German Carolinian, Romanesque and Gothic style churches built between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. German-American architects in Milwaukee were often influenced by contemporary architectural trends in Germany where medieval styles were being revived during the late nineteenth century. Trinity is one of the most remarkable examples in Milwaukee of the continuance of Old World building traditions and styles here in America.

The extraordinary ornamental brickwork that adorns Trinity church reflects a building tradition that was brought to Milwaukee by German immigrants. In the northern region of Germany where many of Trinity's early members and its architect Frederick Velguth had lived, buildings were often made of brick because the area lacked a supply of quality building stone. Out of necessity, builders and masons in Northern Germany became remarkably proficient in the design and construction of ornamental brickwork as a substitute for carved stone trim. Many of those German brick masons immigrated to Milwaukee during the nineteenth century and it was their skills that contributed immensely to the character of the city's architecture during the nineteenth century.

The list of the original contractors who worked on the church reads like a "Who's Who" of the city's most talented tradeworkers of the late nineteenth century. The brick and stonework was done by Carl Bussack; Valentine Mandt, general carpentry; Louis Biersach and August Niedermeyer of the firm Biersach and Neidermeyer, sheetmetal and roofing; Jobst Buening, ironwork; Julius Bruss and William Wollaeger, pulpit, altar, stairways and other wooden altar area furnishings; William Willer, the organ casing, wainscot and parapet of the organ loft; Peter Petersen, painting, Friedrich W. Wehle, altar paintings; and William Schuelke, pipe organ; William E. Goodman, gas fixtures and lighting; Jansen and Schubert, fresco work. G. Misch of Chicago fabricated the stained glass windows and the Jones Bell foundry manufactured three bells in the large tower in Troy New York. The clock was made in Howard, New York, although it has since been electrified.

Trinity is also significant because it is among the dwindling number of structures made from Milwaukee's unique cream-colored brick that is an inseparable part of the city's history. In the late nineteenth century, the large number of buildings in Milwaukee made from the impressive, golden-colored brick earned the city its "Cream City" nickname. Cream brick, however, has not been made since the 1920s making the remaining structures made of this material an increasingly valuable part of the city's architectural history and its civic pride.

Milwaukee's first brickyard began operating about 1835. The first brick makers actually expected red brick to result from firing the red-brown Milwaukee clay, but an unusually high content of calcium and magnesium in the clay gave the brick a unique soft yellow color instead. The cream brick, as it became to be known, grew in popularity in and the city's brick making industry flourished. One of the most prosperous brick makers in the city, the Burham Brothers, patented one of the nation's first brick making machines that greatly reduced the amount of handwork necessary to make brick.

In May of 1859 the schooner M.S. Scott sailed from America to Hamburg, Germany carrying, among other things, samples of Milwaukee's cream brick to the mayor of Hamburg. The Germans were impressed with the Milwaukee brick and imported a

quantity of it for use in ornamenting new buildings. It is not known if there are any buildings surviving in Germany today that feature Milwaukee's Cream brick. The popularity of Milwaukee's cream brick was reflected by the fact that as late as the 1920-s a large paint manufacturer, headquartered in the eastern U.S., Pittsburgh Paint and Glass, sold a ready-mixed house paint in a cream color called "Milwaukee brick."

## **Church History**

Its congregation has called Trinity the "Lutheran Cathedral of Milwaukee". Founded in 1847, a year before Milwaukee was incorporated as a city, Trinity is the city's oldest congregation associated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) which is based in St. Louis, Missouri and includes more than 2 million members. Many historians regard Trinity as that synod's most outstanding 19<sup>th</sup> century church building.

The congregation's first church was a small frame structure located at the corner of N. 4<sup>th</sup> and W. Wells Sts. After only one year, however, the church and its site were too small for the rapidly growing congregation so they decided to sell their building and construct a new one. Unable to find a buyer for the building, however, they traded their site for another, larger one just a block west at N. 5<sup>th</sup> and W. Wells Streets and then moved the church building there. In 1850, they finally constructed a larger church at the new site to temporarily meet the needs of their congregation.

During the 1850s there were some negotiations to merge Trinity with another German Lutheran congregation, St. John's, which is located today at 804 W. Vliet St. The plan was dropped after it drew considerable opposition from members in both congregations. Some local historians believe that a modest rivalry between the two congregations might have prompted St. John's to build its own cathedral-like church in 1889 that, like Trinity, is now recognized as one of the best examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century German Lutheran Church architecture in this country. St. John's, incidentally, was associated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod (WELS).

In 1868, John Pritzlaff, a wealthy member of Trinity who operated a wholesale hardware business, gave the congregation its present property at the corner of N. 9th St. and W. Highland Ave. The large lot had been the site of Milwaukee pioneer Frank Lackner's house and later it was the location of Terrace Gardens which was a public pleasure garden and a popular venue for outdoor concerts. Despite the continued growth in the congregation it took another 10 years for construction to begin on the present church. When the cornerstone for the church was laid on July 8, 1878, the ceremony was attended by an estimated 1,000 people.

When the church was finished in 1880 it attracted considerable attention and that is still true today. One of Milwaukee's most complete historical reference books, "The History of Milwaukee" (1881) edited by Frank A. Flower, described the church with nearly two full pages of meticulous details. Many other churches were described in the book, but none to the extent of Trinity.

Many of Milwaukee's well to do German-Americans attended Trinity during the nineteenth century and the church reflected not only their heritage but also their accomplishments here in the New World. During the early twentieth century the church gradually moved away from its German roots and adopted the English language for its services. The church building, however, was never significantly altered and it has always been kept in top condition.

After World War II the membership of Trinity began to decline as the older German-American residential neighborhoods around the church gave way to commercial

redevelopment and families moved away to far-flung, newer areas of the City of Milwaukee and its suburbs. Trinity, however, responded to changing demographics in the city and today it is a growing, ethnically diverse congregation that draws its members from virtually every part of the metropolitan Milwaukee area.

## **Germans**

Trinity was built in the wake of an unparalleled era of German immigration to America during the last half of the nineteenth century. The overwhelming German presence in Milwaukee left its legacy on virtually every social, religious, cultural and business activity in the city. The first significant wave of German immigration to America and Milwaukee began in the late 1840s. A potato blight that swept across most of Western Europe in 1845 severely affected many German farmers who were particularly dependent on the crop. Many emigrated rather than face starvation and hardship.

Still other Germans were political refugees nicknamed the “forty-eighters” who fled their country following the unsuccessful liberal revolution of 1848. A third, smaller group of Germans called Old Lutherans came to America beginning in 1839 because they opposed the union of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches that was imposed in 1817 by King Frederick William III of Prussia, who ruled the northeastern part of present-day Germany and western Poland.

Nearly one million Germans came to the United States between 1845 and 1855. Many of the Old Lutherans settled in rural areas outside of Milwaukee although about 20 families settled in the city west of the Milwaukee River on land they purchased from Byron Kilbourn, one of the founders of the city. Thousands of German immigrants came to Milwaukee during the 1840s, mostly from the southwestern states of Rhenish Prussia, Baden and Saxony. Later, immigrants in the 1860s and 1870s came from northern Germany. Most of Trinity’s early members came from an area called Pomerania which today is the northeastern part of Germany and northwestern Poland.

During the last 30 years of the nineteenth century, Milwaukee gained a reputation as the Deutsche Athens or, in English, the German Athens. German immigrants brought with them an appreciation of theater, music, literature, art and architecture. Milwaukee was also sometimes referred to as the American Munich because of its many beer gardens and cafes. The German language was used as often as English was in business, churches and even some public schools.

Beginning in the late 1880s, the predominantly German character of the city began to erode as immigrants from other European countries began pouring into Milwaukee. Trinity church is one of the most inspiring reminders of the contributions of the German-American community that played a pivotal role in building the city.

## **Architect**

Trinity is the masterpiece of German-American architect Frederick Velguth. The church is the most outstanding building he worked on during his long career as a carpenter, stair builder and architect. Mr. Velguth offered what is called a “turn-key” service to his clients meaning that he took a project from the design phase through completion. He exercised a high degree of quality control in his buildings and his approach yielded the outstanding results that can be seen in Trinity church.

Mr. Velguth was born in 1838 in Magdeburg, Germany and little is currently known about his training or work history there. He came to Milwaukee in 1858 at the age of twenty and probably brought along many memories of German architecture. Mr.

Velguth worked for eighteen years in Milwaukee as a building contractor before he felt he had acquired the necessary expertise to assume the title of architect.

He entered his profession at a time when architects were either self-taught or trained in the office of another architect during a long apprenticeship. The peak years of his design career were apparently the 1870s and 1880s and he worked extensively with Milwaukee's burgeoning German-American community. He also collaborated with German-American architect Otto Gombert on the design of Milwaukee's water tower (1873) which is located at the foot of E. North Ave. The two men waged a bitter public dispute over who actually authored the design for the splendid stone structure but their argument was never settled. Unfortunately, most of the other buildings from Mr. Velguth's busiest professional years have apparently been demolished.

Mr. Velguth designed at least two other churches in Milwaukee but neither can approach the zest and originality he poured into Trinity. His design for Christ Lutheran (1901), a National Register-listed structure located at 2235 W. Greenfield Ave., reflects a conservative and decidedly scholarly interpretation of the designs of late nineteenth century Gothic Churches in Germany.

Redeemer Lutheran Church (1906) located at 2623 W. Rogers St. is a small, but interesting Gothic Revival style church that is made from rusticated concrete block which was a completely new building material when the structure was built. A well-known downtown commercial structure designed by Mr. Velguth is the Schoenleber Building (1883) which is today the home of Buck Bradley's restaurant and tavern. A good example of his residential design work was his own impressive Queen Anne style house which was located at 817 N. 26<sup>th</sup> St. Unfortunately it was demolished in the early 1990s.

## **IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that Trinity Lutheran Church be considered for designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-4, e-5, e-6 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

- e-4 Its portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style.
- e-5 Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.
- e-6 Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, interior designer, craftsperson, or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin or the United States.
- e-9 Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City of Milwaukee.

## X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

### A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. Retain the historic roofing materials on the church if at all possible.

### B. Materials

#### 1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective or deteriorated mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles, which were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive blasting to brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. These methods of cleaning erode the surface of the material and accelerate deterioration and the accumulation of dirt on the exterior of the building. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone or terra cotta.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new materials that duplicate the hold as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is in appropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

#### 2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. The church steeple and entry porch and the rectory porch and gable details are essential features of the buildings in the complex and should be retained.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were

unavailable when the building was constructed. The use of vinyl or aluminum trim or siding is prohibited

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or doors. Avoid using inappropriate sash and replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as concrete block or glass block. Avoid using modern style sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. The leaded glass windows in the church should not be altered or removed except for restoration.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the exiting trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance, but not necessarily in material.

E. Additions

All elevations of the church building are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevation.

F. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building. No internally illuminated box sign will be approved.

G. Site features

New plant materials, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building.

## H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed so as to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the church.

### 1. Siting

New construction must respect the historic siting of the church. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the church from the street as freestanding structure.

### 2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components such as overhangs and fenestration that are in proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the church.

### 3. Form

The massing of new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the church as a distinct freestanding structure. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main historic church should express the same continuity established by the historic building if they are in proximity to it.

### 4. Materials

The building material, which are visible from the public right-of-way and in proximity to the church, should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions and combinations of cladding materials used on the church. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

## I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there might be instances when demolition could be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The parsonage is a non-contributing structure. This means that it could be demolished and replaced with new construction that meets the criteria found in these guidelines. Such new construction would require the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission shall take the following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, into consideration when reviewing demolition requests.

### 1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.