

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

BASILICA OF ST. JOSAPHAT (Written Fall, 1987)

I. NAME

Historic: Basilica of St. Josaphat

Common: Same

II. LOCATION

601 West Lincoln Avenue

Tax Key Number: Part of 497-1101-112-8

Legal Property Description: Wanda Subdivision in NW ¼ SEC 8-6-22, Block 1, the east 160 feet of Lot 1, Lots 2, 3 and 4 and the vacated alley adjoining

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

St. Josaphat's Congregation
2333 South 6th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53215

V. YEAR BUILT

1896-1901

Architect: Erhard Brielmaier & Sons

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Basilica of St. Josaphat is located at the southwest corner of West Lincoln Avenue and South Sixth Street in the midst of a modest nineteenth century residential neighborhood of small wooden cottages and duplexes. Lincoln Avenue in the vicinity of the Basilica is a neighborhood commercial strip of mostly two-story, brick, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century commercial structures. The Basilica is sited a few yards back from the sidewalk behind a strip of grass. The green copper dome of the structure, which is over 200 feet tall, looms over the neighborhood and can be seen for miles around, making it one of Milwaukee's most visually prominent landmarks.

The Basilica is a cruciform, domed, dressed limestone, eclectic Neo-Renaissance style church. The elaborately carved and architecturally articulated structure measures about 213 feet long by 127 feet wide and faces Lincoln Avenue. The façade consists of a colossal, six

column pedimented portico approached by a broad ramp of stairs. The columns, which stand on tall paneled plinths, have smooth polished granite shafts and Corinthian capitals. Rising behind and above the portico are a pair of opened arcaded belfries 100 feet tall flanking a pedimented rose window. The peak of the pediment is crowned with a statue of St. Josaphat. Dominating the building is the eighty-foot in diameter green copper clad dome, which rests on a tall, arcaded, limestone drum. A doomed lantern caps the structure. All of the elevations of the building are elaborately articulated in limestone with quoining, paneled pilasters, tall arched, stained glass windows and numerous moldings, belt courses and heavy cornices in the Italian Renaissance style.

The interior contains a lower church at the basement level and an upper church. The domed upper church is magnificently decorated in the Renaissance manner with extensive frescoing and richly molded, painted and gilded plasterwork. Ornate alters and shrines in wood and marble surround the auditorium.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Basilica of St. Josaphat is architecturally significant as the most elaborate Neo-Renaissance style church in Milwaukee. It is one of the most visually prominent landmarks on the south side skyline. It is historically significant as the leading Polish Roman Catholic Church in Milwaukee and one of only three Roman Catholic Basilicas in the United States.

VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St. Josaphat's congregation began as an offshoot of St. Stanislaus Church at South 5th and Mitchell Street and was organized in 1888. It was named for St. Josaphat, who was born in Lithuania in 1580 under the name John Kuncevic and was raised in the Eastern Rite Church of Kiev, Russia, which was then separate from Rome. He eventually became a priest and later archbishop and worked to have the Orthodox Church reunited with the Roman Catholic Church. He was murdered on November 12, 1623 because of these efforts and was eventually canonized a saint in 1867.

The young parish's first church on the site of the present Basilica was destroyed by fire on May 12, 1889 and a new building that was a combination church and school was constructed shortly afterward just to the west of the Basilica site on Lincoln Avenue (razed in the 1970s). This soon proved to be too small due to the influx of Polish immigrants and Father Wilhelm J. Grutza conceived of the idea of building a magnificent new church. He received archdiocesan permission to build one. By this time the parish consisted of about 1300 families. In 1896 Milwaukee architect Erhard Brielmaier, a leading church architect in the Great Lakes region, was engaged to draw the plans for a new brick and terra cotta church. After the plans were nearly complete, Father Grutza traveled to Chicago where he was able to acquire, for \$20,000, all of the salvaged materials from the sixteen year old Chicago Federal Building, which was being razed at that time. The materials were shipped to Milwaukee by railroad and stored near the Basilica site. Brielmaier redesigned the church to utilize the salvaged limestone and materials and the present St. Josaphat structure was dedicated in July of 1901. Father Grutza died one month after the dedication. Work continued on the interior decoration of the building for several more decades until it was essentially completed to its present appearance by 1929.

The parish was the largest Polish Roman Catholic parish in the city for many years. Because of its large membership, influence, the tireless promotion of efforts of its leaders and the sheer size and grandeur of the church, St. Josaphat was elevated to the status of a Minor Basilica.

On February 20, 1929 the Procurator General of the Franciscan Order, which had assumed the administration of the church in 1910, petitioned Rome to declare the church a basilica. A number of factors were behind the petition. The jubilee of the Pope's priestly ordination took place in 1929 and it was also the 700th anniversary celebration of St. Francis' canonization and, therefore, an important event for American Franciscans.

Basilica status was seen as a reward for the financial support of the church by faithful Americans and would encourage Polish Americans to continue their close historic bond to Rome. St. Josaphat's was a great work of architecture and housed great works of art as well as numerous relics. Pope Pius XI designated the church as a basilica on March 19, 1929 although the ceremony elevating it to a basilica was not held until January 1, 1931. St. Josaphat's was the third basilica to be designated in the United States.

"Basilica" is a status conferred by the Pope for various reasons:

1. The building is a historic center of Church growth.
2. The church contains unusually famous or outstanding art treasures.
3. The church is a center of pilgrimage, novenas or special ministry, for example to an ethnic group.

Since that time, St. Josaphat's historic importance has been recognized by being listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, by being recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1969 and by being designated by the former Milwaukee Landmarks Commission in 1968. The parish is still one of the largest and most active on the south side. Today the congregation has declined in size and is now only about seventy percent of Polish descent with a growing number of Hispanic parishioners.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Basilica of St. Josaphat be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria one, two, five, seven and nine of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 2-335(2)(e).

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. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the Basilica of St. Josaphat. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape and dormers. Skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline or pitch. Retain the existing roofing and trim. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the existing materials as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted stone should not be painted or covered. Avoid painting or covering natural stone. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint or coating at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that 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 limestone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. 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.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate 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. Retain the historic patina on old bronze or copper metal trim.
- b. Repair 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.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain original window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds, sills, doors, and hardware, except as necessary to restore the building to its 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. Use storm windows or protective glazing that have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and that obscure the prime windows as little as possible.
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 door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass-block or concrete block. Avoid using

modern style window units in place of the existing sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance.

E. Additions

The north, west and east elevations and roofline are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions 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, color and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

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.

G. Site Features

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