

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received AUG 3 1987

date entered SEP - 8 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic St. John's Roman Catholic Church

and/or common (same)

2. Location

street & number 1915 University Avenue not for publication

city, town Des Moines vicinity of

state IA code 019 county Polk code 153

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Diocese of Des Moines

street & number 815 5th Street

city, town Des Moines vicinity of state IA 50314

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder's Office

street & number Polk County Courthouse, 500 Mulberry

city, town Des Moines state IA 50304

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Des Moines Survey (Maves Survey) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975 federal state county  local

depository for survey records Bureau of Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of Iowa

city, town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance Description

**Style, Massing, Materials, Plan.** St. John's Catholic Church is one of the best examples of the Lombardy Romanesque Revival Style in Des Moines. Built in 1927, the largely unaltered church exemplifies the period revival designs of that time, both in the details employed and the marriage of historical forms with modern construction methods and preferences.

The massive (80'10" x 138'3") church is a Romanesque basilica form. Typical elements are present: an elegantly formed apse (the tiled curving roof is especially pleasing), nave with soaring fifty-foot ceiling (barrel-vaulted and coffered), side aisles with immense (7x13') stained glass windows, clerestory also with stained glass, and narthex.

A prominent hipped roofed, 115-foot bell tower is located at the side rear and serves as a beacon for traffic. Seven dentilled courses divide it into eight sections. Sections two through five have single window slits, and the amount of decoration increases moving up the tower. Section six has paired windows on each side. The top two sections have open three-part arcades for the bell tower (and the pigeons). Decorative squares and diamond shapes in contrasting colored stone adorn these upper sections. The tower had no bell until 1961 when a bronze bell from the I.T. Verdin Company of Cincinnati was installed.

Small, gabled entries occur off the main facade on the west side. Their location masks the side aisles from the front, making for a more complex outline as one moves around the building. Other notable features are the 15-foot diameter rose window of the main facade, crosses atop the tower and at the apex of the main facade, and dentils (a repeated motif inside and out).

Tri-Cities' Stone Company of Davenport, Iowa probably supplied the Indiana limestone veneer used on the exterior. It has a smooth finish and was applied in a random ashlar pattern. Rowat Cut Stone Company of Des Moines, Iowa provided all the cut stone trim. (Rowat noted in a letter to Father McNamara that between August 4 and August 21, 1925 they delivered 2,000 cubic feet or five car loads of stone to the church construction site.) The light, smooth stonework contrasts well with the curved red clay roof tile. The drainage system is the original copper. Rough granite is used for some steps and courses at the base of the church.

Rowat used plans provided by the architects, Maginnis & Walsh. On the main facade, fine sculptural detail draws attention to the massive pairs of double doors and angels and a welcoming Christ figure above them. A Biblical inscription is carved in the space above the doors. Ornate Corinthian capitals with acanthus designs and religious motifs continue the decoration, which contrasts well against the smooth stone of the wall surface. The semi-circular frame for the Christ figure is repeated at side and rear entries. These entries variously feature pilasters, dentils, molding, an incised cross, and smooth tympanum. Based on notes in the blueprints, the latter were apparently left uncarved until such time that the parish could afford to have them carved.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian
___ 1800-1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1927 **Builder/Architect** Maginnis & Walsh, Boston, Architects

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Criterion C: Architecture Contributing Count: 1  
**Significance Information** (Rectory (1912) is non-contributing yet included)

**Summary Significance Statement.** St. John's Catholic Church is one of the best examples of the Lombardy Romanesque Revival Style in Des Moines and one of the best examples of early twentieth century period revival styles in the city. Built in 1927, the largely unaltered church exemplifies the period revival designs of that time—in the details employed, the marriage of historical forms with modern construction methods and preferences, and clearly organized plan. The massive church is a Romanesque basilica form; the typical elements are present (apse, nave with barrel-vaulted ceiling, side aisles, clerestory, and narthex). Its design is based on St. Catherine's Church in Sommerville, Massachusetts (c. 1915, Maginnis, Walsh & Sullivan) and S. Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome (St. Paul's Outside the Walls) (380, rebuilt after 1823).

St. John's is one of a handful of known designs in Iowa by the nationally important architectural firm, Maginnis & Walsh of Boston. Maginnis & Walsh specialized in Roman Catholic designs and played a significant role in the period revival movement nationally.

**Representation in Surveys.** St. John's Catholic Church was included in the Mave's 1975 windshield survey of Des Moines, Iowa. It was identified as individually architecturally significant and assigned an "A" or "key" rating. Although there has been no survey of churches in the city, the state architectural historian has informally surveyed these buildings. He believes St. John's is the best twentieth century Roman Catholic church design in Des Moines.

**Historical Context.** St. John's Catholic Church has no peers in Des Moines. Although it is one of three in the city designed by the nationally important Boston architectural firm of Maginnis & Walsh, St. John's is the only stone (vener) Catholic Church from the early twentieth century time of period revival designs. No other Des Moines Catholic churches are known to have been executed in the Lombardy Romanesque Revival Style, the style which the eminent reputation of Maginnis & Walsh primarily rests upon.

St. John's Catholic Church is a Romanesque basilica form, and the typical elements of that form are present. A prominent hipped, 115-foot bell tower is located at the side rear. Although the dominant design features harken back to the Lombardy Romanesque, the church design incorporates also modern elements. The largely unaltered interior is among the most elaborate in the city and continues the Romanesque stylistic influence of the exterior. The church is an excellent example of the marriage of historical design precedents with modern needs and preferences.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2+

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Des Moines Southwest

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	4	4	6	4	0	0	4	6	0	4	4	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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H 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Except that part given to the City for streets, lots 40-44, inclusive and S. 250' of lot A, O. P. of lot 21, O.P. of 33-79-24. Includes church and connected rectory, excludes school. Includes southern five lots and vacated alleyway on southwest corner of block.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nomination written and researched by Ms. Barbara B. Long, Consultant  
Form prepared by James E. Jacobsen, Chief, Bureau of Historic Preservation

organization State Historical Society of Iowa  
Bureau of Historic Preservation date July 22, 1987

street & number Capitol Complex telephone 515-274-4358

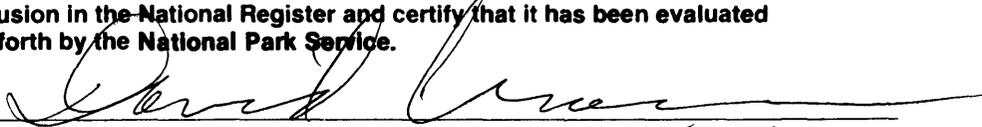
city or town Des Moines state IA 50319

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

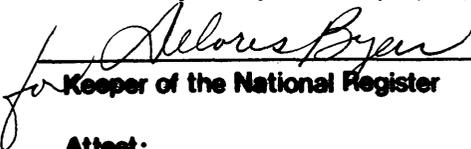
title David Crosson date 7/24/87  
State Historic Preservation Officer

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

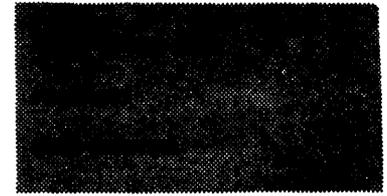
date 9-8-87

for   
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      2

Windows--whether clerestory, in bands, or paired--are elongated, and an engaged column (smooth shaft, simple capital) separates them. Most paired windows are slightly recessed within a semi-circular shape. Along the long ends of the nave are nine sets of paired, stained, leaded glass clerestory windows (5x7'). Below them, in the side aisles are the stained, leaded glass windows of the nave. And below them are frosted glass windows which light the basement parish hall. Simple smooth pilasters (or vestigial buttresses) separate both clerestory and aisle windows and provide an element of motion.

Parishioners began saving for stained glass windows as soon as the church was built, but financial constraints related to the Depression of the 1930s and World War II precluded their installation, which was completed in 1953. The first window was installed west of the altar in 1947. The Conrad Pickel Studio, then of Waukesha, Wisconsin and now of Vero Beach, Florida, designed the 10 nave windows and the 36 clerestory windows. The Pickel Studio also designed the stained glass windows for the east addition (handicapped access) around 1984.

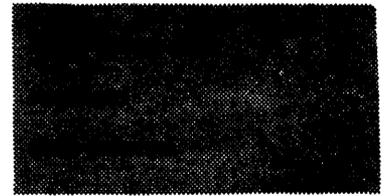
In the center medallions of the large nave windows are depicted important events in the life of Christ. Top and border designs deal with the Apocalypse of St. John, patron saint of the church. The artist for the Pickel Studio noted that the latter subject "was a particular challenge to the artist." The clerestory windows facing east depict the "supernatural sciences," such as baptism and confirmation. The west-facing windows have the "natural sciences"--music, literature, zoology, botany, astronomy--as subjects. It is said that these educational themes face west in recognition of the presence of Drake University several blocks away.

Although the dominant design features harken back to the Lombardy Romanesque, the church is clearly of the twentieth century. Modern elements include the heating system (radiators concealed along aisle windows), electric aisle lighting, restrooms, and basement doubling as a parish hall. In addition, unlike the solid stone Romanesque churches it resembles, St. John's rests on concrete footings, and has structural steel framing and brick with a limestone veneer overlaying it. Other modern influences include the restrained exterior decoration and a certain simplicity and clarity of design.

The plan of the church is straightforward, its composition balanced but not symmetric. Side aisles, one-story high, flank the soaring nave. At the north, sanctuary end are two central altars on a raised platform and two smaller side altars. To the east is the priest's sacristy, and the bell tower is on the west side. Stairs lead to the basement from the bell tower, the sacristy area, and also off both sides of the narthex.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet Description

Item number 7

Page 3

An entrance for the handicapped (1983) occurs off the narthex's east end and connects the church with the rectory (c. 1912). This hallway addition is approximately 22 feet long. It is executed in matching stone and clay roof tiles. The paired windows and doorways are similar to, but do not match exactly, those of the church.

Dimensions for the church are 80'10" wide by 138'3" long (excluding the apse). The seating area of the nave extends 79'7", leaving a sanctuary of around 36' and a narthex of around 23'.

**Interior.** The interior of the church continues, in elaborate gilded fashion, the Romanesque stylistic influence of the exterior. However, the narthex is quite spare. Columns and pilasters have simple molded square tops. Early plans called for marble columns and marble wall panels, but these were never installed, probably in the interests of economy.

The organ or choir loft features a 38-rank organ (installed by the Casavant Company of Canada in 1963). Its 1,800 pipes frame the rose window, forming an impressive sight for departing worshippers.

Three sets of double doors (with paired pointed-arch windows) open from the narthex into the nave, revealing the majestic coffered barrel-vaulted ceiling. Each coffer (17'1/2") consists of a gold-painted square (10" across) surrounded by bands of rosettes, decorative molding, and acanthus. The recesses of the clerestory windows have organically inspired patterns also painted gold. Decorative stone capitals, similar to those of the exterior, separate the stained glass clerestory windows.

Below the clerestory are six richly textured courses, including the recurrent dentil motif. Details are picked out and highlighted in gold. Below the courses and the inspirational Biblical passages are arcaded columns separating the nave from the side aisles. Panels and squares containing organically inspired plaster ornamentation, also highlighted in gold, draw the eye to the arches. The patterns culminate in elaborate plaster capitals featuring appropriate religious motifs. The intricacy of the tangled designs contrasts with the smooth shafts of the columns. Polished stone medallions which are surrounded by plaster dentils punctuate the arcade.

The side aisles have light fixtures suspended by metal chains. Brandt-Dent Company of Watertown, Wisconsin supplied them. Built-in radiators with metal grills occur at intervals along the windows walls. Dark wood wainscoting follows the line of the radiators.

In the back of the altar, the apse features a gilded upper section with a mural of Christ the King surrounded by the Four Apostles. Dominic Damiana of Des Moines painted the figures, reportedly drawing his inspiration from a

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet Description

Item number 7

Page 4

small Holy Card. Latin inscriptions surround his work, and squared pilasters frame the space. Below the mural are a variety of painted patterns which continue the curving, organic motifs of the interior.

An elaborate pedimented baldachinno shown on Maginnis & Walsh plans dated March 12, 1928 highlights the original high altar. Its shape echoes that of the main facade entrance. The columns are violet Bescia marble, the capitals and vaults plaster. Like the predella of the baldacchino, the main altar, which contains religious relics, is stark white Botticino marble; both were installed in 1929.

**Design Sources.** The design of St. John's Church emanated from Father Martin S. McNamara and the Boston architectural firm of Maginnis & Walsh. Both sources, in turn, drew upon their knowledge of Lombardy Romanesque basilicas.

Responsible for some 115 Catholic churches and institutions during forty years of practice all over the country, Maginnis & Walsh were perhaps the best known firm specializing in Catholic design in the early twentieth century. The eminent church art historian of the period Ralph Adams Cram, noted that the firm "excel(s)" in the Lombard and Spanish Renaissance Revival Styles. The firm designed churches, shrines, chapels, seminaries, convents, missions, and colleges in at least twenty states, Canada, Mexico, and China.

Maginnis gained widespread recognition--and his first church commission--when he penned an article in a church magazine which was highly critical of current church design. Although Maginnis was then head draftsman for the City of Boston, a parish priest hired him to design a new church for St. Patrick's in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. The design reflected the Lombardy stylistic influence. Two early influential Maginnis & Walsh designs were St. Catherine's in Somerville, Massachusetts, and St. John's in North Cambridge, Massachusetts. On the occasion of receiving the Benjamin West Clinedinst Medal for outstanding achievement in the field of art in 1948, newspaper accounts stated that Maginnis was "one of the world's most honored architects, who revolutionized Roman Catholic church architecture in the United States."

Examples of the firm's work appear frequently in church design books of the period, including at least two of Cram's books. In the Witneys' Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), they are described as "nationally famous as designers of numerous Roman Catholic churches and institutional buildings." Among their designs are the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., collegiate buildings for Notre Dame and for Boston College, and the Carmelite Convent in Santa Clara, California. For the last-named commission the firm received a gold medal from the American Institute of Architects for excellence in ecclesiastical design.

Although Maginnis & Walsh were responsible for the design (both exterior and interior) of St. John's, Father McNamara took an active role in influencing that design. According to a former assistant of McNamara's at St. John's,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      5

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Monsignor Bart Kane, McNamara was familiar with Roman Churches from trips there. A 1924 article about McNamara's former parish in Stuart, Iowa, discussed his 1908 trip to Italy to make arrangements for the new church in Stuart. Maginnis & Walsh were reportedly the architects of the Stuart church.<sup>1</sup> (All Saints Catholic Church in Stuart (extant in 1970) was built in 1907-08.)

Correspondence between McNamara and Maginnis & Walsh reveals his active participation in St. John's construction—including soliciting bids, commenting on designs, and requesting a design following the lines of another Maginnis & Walsh design, St. Catherine's Catholic Church in Somerville, Massachusetts. A drawing of this church is used to illustrate good examples of period design in Carole Rifkind's Field Guide to American Architecture.

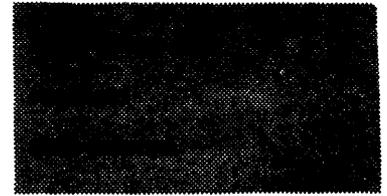
Indeed, comparison of St. Catherine's and St. John's reveals certain obvious points of similarity. While Maginnis & Walsh cautioned McNamara that the proportions and size differences made a copy of St. Catherine's impossible, they wrote, "the spirit of St. Catherine's, of course will control." Like the earlier church, St. John's has a dominant gabled nave, rose window, round-arched entries and windows (some in series), and restrained ornamentation (notably statuary around the entry and dentilled panels). Also similar is the clerestory with side aisles. The Boston architects were sufficiently professional, however, to do more than copy previous successes, and St. John's has its own distinct identity.

Parish histories for St. John's consistently mention that their church was patterned after St. Paul's Outside the Walls (San Paolo Fuori le Mura) in Rome. And there are some similarities—a corner squared bell tower divided by courses and a series of interior medallions. The medallions, at St. John's (and also St. Catherine's) are simple, highly polished colored stones. According to Banister Fletcher St. Paul's Outside the Walls "is the largest and most impressive of all basilican churches." In the nave are 80 columns, with mosaic mural medallions of the Popes above. S. Paolo was founded in 380, destroyed in 1823 and rebuilt following the original design.

Also similar to S. Paolo was the intention to have a large section perpendicular to the sanctuary. Father McNamara initially intended to have a large side chapel built perpendicular to and east of the sanctuary. It would have seated 306 worshippers, with space for 200 more in a large balcony section. Because of high costs and money shortages, the architects suggested that chapel construction be delayed, but the plans were drawn to accommodate this future addition. This plan for a later side chapel accounts for the shape and plan of the priest's sacristy.

<sup>1</sup>But office records now at the Boston Public Library list no such commission, and it does not appear that they designed the Stuart, Iowa church.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet    Description    Item number    7    Page    6

---

It appears that S. Paolo influenced the design of St. John's through its influence on St. Catherine's and also as a basic basilican model.

The present church was built at the site of the basement and foundation for an earlier St. John's, but this early basement church had little effect upon the Maginnis & Walsh design. Blueprints show that the present church extends several feet beyond the original foundations, and that window and door openings had to be bricked up. Maginnis & Walsh noted in correspondence with Father McNamara that the existing basement "helps us comparatively little, not only because of its inadequate area but of its inadequate structural character." The Des Moines architectural firm of Proudfoot, Bird, & Rawson prepared plans for the basement in 1912. Presumably they hoped to design the above-ground church when the parish could afford it.

The initial plans dated April 1925 called for a brick church with stone trim. Maginnis & Walsh clearly doubted that Father McNamara could afford stone. They wrote on August 1, 1924:

We would not dream of suggesting stone for the building if you are confining yourself economically to the limit you suggest (\$150,000). We cannot easily credit the idea that Slab Bedford marble can be had for the cost of Pressed Grey Brick with terra cotta or concrete stone trimming.

Yet Father McNamara was able to use stone, just as he had in Stuart. (Total cost estimates for the church vary; in 1926 the church was valued at \$225,000 for insurance purposes, and Maginnis & Walsh records show \$204,173 for the cost.)

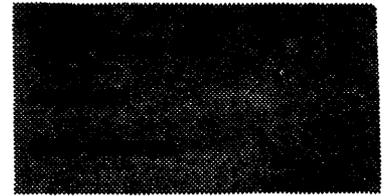
The plans, revised March 20, 1926, continued to call for brick, but also included a sketch "showing stone (in a random ashlar pattern) to replace brick for alternate price." Since Des Moines architect John Normile was the supervising architect for the project, changes to the March 1926 blueprints were overseen by him.

Surviving correspondence (useful but incomplete) regarding church construction reveals considerable participation by Father McNamara. He and the architects discussed design changes in the months before and during construction. For example, in a July 9, 1924 letter Maginnis & Walsh suggested having a "tall semi-tower . . . or glorified type of belfry" to balance the composition. With the addition of the side chapel which McNamara wanted, they felt the need of a vertical note such as the tower could provide. McNamara also dickered about the costs, hoping the architects would commit to a set fee.

In addition, McNamara was active during the actual construction phase. He solicited bids from six general contractors--charting their estimates--and wrote to specialized, contractors and suppliers as well. He selected Charles Weitz' Sons, although with \$174,000 they did not have the lowest bid.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet    Description    Item number    7    Page    7

With the considerable exception of substituting stone for brick, it appears the cost considerations influenced some aspects of the design. These primarily involved small elements or use of less costly materials, not overall concepts. For example, the proposed marble in the apse and narthex was not used. Some tympanum were never carved. The entry porch was made smaller than on earlier designs. And some expenses were delayed, notably the stained glass windows and bells for the tower.

**Alterations.** With new rules from Vatican II, a second altar was ordered built, one where the priest would face the congregation when offering Mass. St. John's initially used a mahogany plywood altar, beginning in 1964. But on June 5, 1983 a new white Botticino marble altar was dedicated. The 39" high altar is 8' long and 32" wide with a 6" thick table. No additional supports were necessary, despite the added weight of the 1,700- pound altar. In addition to the steel "I" beams originally installed beneath the altar, a 16" beam was added in 1950 when a marble communion rail was added.

Bringing Mass closer to the congregation resulted in extending the raised altar area by about ten feet. A curving platform replaced the original straight steps, and the inhibiting communion rail has been removed, as have a few pews to accomodate the expanded altar.

Photographs dating from the late 1920s, when the church was built, show an interior all but unchanged from that of 1987, with the exception of the altar rearrangements mandated by the Vatican. The most dramatic change over the decades has been installation of the 10 nave and 36 clerestory windows. Based on correspondence in church files, Father McNamara's obituary, and the original blueprints, it is clear that the church was designed to have stained glass windows. However, the parish could not afford them in 1927 or during the 1930s Depression, and plain frosted panes were installed as temporary windows. Stained glass windows in the priest's sacristy date from 1965.

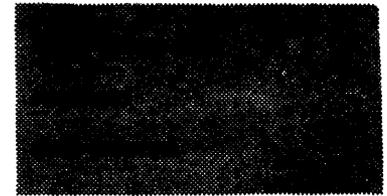
Early black-and-white photographs show a light color scheme similar to or matching the present light tan; gold highlights are also apparent in the early photos. The apse below the gilt mural had what appears to be small-patterned wallpaper.

One wood confessional has been removed--there were no structural changes--and a niche with statuary is in its place. Part of the confessional was used to construct the reconciliation room in the sacristy, another Vatican II requirement. Pews, which have dentils and paired ornamental arches recalling the clerestory windows, are original. Jaeger Manufacturing of Des Moines received authorization to make them of plain red oak in August of 1927.

The narthex has painted borders around the doors to the nave which do not appear to be original, but they are in keeping with the patterns seen throughout the interior and may date from the fire damage of 1961 or 1970. Asphalt tile covers the church floor, which, although not original, is

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      Page

---

consistent with original coverings. Correspondence in church files includes bids for "Stedman naturized (sic) reinforced rubber flooring" and "Gold Seal Treadlite Tile."

Fires on February 18, 1961 and February 6, 1970 brought smoke and water damage to parts of the church, but no serious or structural damage. In 1961 lightning struck the bell tower, traveled down it, and set fire to the ceiling in its small hallway. The basement was also damaged, and it is likely the church was repainted at this time. The organ had to be taken apart and cleaned following the second fire, which started in the basement. The fire occurred on a Tuesday, but the church was ready for regular Mass on Saturday.

Bids were due on June 2, 1983 for the "Handicapped Entrance," designed by Higgins, Shirk & Colvig, Des Moines architects. Like the church, random ashlar limestone, a tile roof, and copper gutters were used; the foundation is concrete. The hallway leads from the east end of the narthex, opens to original stairs to the basement, then widens to form a vestibule. Outside, a curved concrete ramp leads to addition's double doors, which are located on the north side. The addition connects with the rectory, beginning at the secretary's office.

The rectory for St. John's is included in the nomination since it is physically connected to the church by the addition. It is treated as noncontributing element and as an addition dating from the 1983 addition.

The rectory and adjacent school predate the church. Since Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson designed the plans for a "provisional Building for St. John's Church," (the church basement), it is possible the firm also designed the rectory (c. 1912) and school (1905-06). The brick 44x63' two-and-one-half story rectory has Flemish Gothic elements, including raised parapets on the cross-gables, a decorative buttress off the front porch, pointed arches on front windows and door, and brick drip molds. The red flat-tile roof (Ludowici-Celadon Company's Imperial English) was applied over wood shingle in the spring of 1927 to blend with the rounded Spanish (and more costly) tiles of the new church. Window sizes and arrangements vary, with three-part, paired, and single representations; drip molds unite the combinations.

On the first floor are offices for the secretary and priest, half-bath, dining room, lounge or living room, kitchen, and housekeeper's quarters. The large priest's office has a brick fireplace with wood mantel. It is likely that another fireplace is in the lounge but has been covered over with wood paneling. The south wall of all major rooms has received this paneling (and acoustical tile ceilings), which may date from 1965. Upper floors contain living quarters for priests.

In 1954 Des Moines architect Amos B. Emery designed alterations to the rectory porch, including changes in the windows and probably the application of lannenstone to change the entry. In 1965 the interior was remodeled and the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet      Description      Item number 7      Page 9

housekeeper's quarters added to the northeast corner using plans by William R. Meehan of Des Moines. This addition, flat-roofed like the front porch, carries on the materials and motifs of the original.

**Site.** St. John's Church, the rectory, and school are situated on a raised block and surrounded on three sides by busy streets. The high site provides a measure of isolation from traffic noise. Behind it is a steep drop in grade, to extensive paved parking for a former grocery store (now a senior citizens' center). St. John's is just seven blocks from Drake University campus and on the eastern fringe of the campus commercial area. North and east of it are modest houses, many of them converted to apartments. A gas station is across the street, on the northwest corner once also a church site. The area is of mixed use with small-scale commercial structures and two-story housing from the 1890s-1920s. With its high site and corner location, the massive church stands as a familiar landmark to motorists heading south to the nearby freeway.

The topography appears relatively unchanged from the time of church construction. Then 260 cubic yards of earth were removed in grading the site for a driveway north of the church. The east church basement windows are partly submerged, while the west ones are not, evidence of the slope of the site. In the late 1930s both streets were widened a total of about ten feet, and the stone church steps had to be relaid.

Photographs in St. John's archives apparently date from around 1927 and they were probably taken from atop the church or the rectory. They show a typical residential area with a relatively heavy tree canopy and probably show the area to the north and east of the church. The freeway three blocks south and creeping commercial construction, especially to the west and north, have altered the use and pace of the area. The scale, especially compared with the massive church, has not changed.

Aligned with the rectory is St. John's School, an altered brick building not part of this nomination. Asphalt surrounds the school and extends to the rear parking area for the church. Across Harding Road, just west of the church, is the convent built in 1963. Also by William Meehan, the two-story brick building accommodates twelve and resembles a small office building. It is not part of this nomination. The present convent replaces the first one on the site, a large house used around 1907.

The steep south grass-covered banks of the church property have entry steps. Landscaping on the relatively small amount of soil is minimal and includes low junipers and a small deciduous tree. The small fenced rear rectory garden also has landscaping and the only freestanding statuary on the site. Also at the rear of the rectory is a small brick two-car garage, probably dating from the 1930s. Its small size, location, unpretentious design, and similar material assure that it does not intrude strongly into the area; it is not part of the nomination.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet    Description    Item number    7    Page    10

**Context.** St. John's Catholic Church has no peers in Des Moines. Two other church complexes in the city (St. Anthony's Church and St. Augustin's Church and Rectory) were designed by the eminent architectural firm of Maginnis & Walsh, but using different styles, designs, and materials. St. John's is the only smooth stone (vener) Catholic Church in the city from the period revival time of the early twentieth century. No other Des Moines Catholic churches are known to have been done in the Lombardy Romanesque Revival Style.

Records for the architectural firm (at the Boston Public Library) show five Iowa designs in addition to St. John's. They are:

- Dubuque        church for Bishop Keane (commission #474)
- Dubuque        Mt. St. Joseph's College (#492)
- Des Moines     St. Anthony's Church (#491)
- Des Moines     St. Augustin's Church and Rectory (#581)
- Des Moines     Rectory--Father Noonan (#683)

Other records at the Boston Public Library seem to indicate that no building was actually constructed for the two Dubuque designs or for the Noonan Rectory. There is also no record there of the Stuart church as having been a Maginnis & Walsh design. Father McNamara was also responsible for this smaller church, built in 1907-08 before he came to St. John's. It is not executed in the Lombardy Romanesque Style with which Maginnis & Walsh are so strongly associated. St. Anthony's and St. Augustin's are both brick churches with stone trim, the former in a simplified period Romanesque style, the latter Gothic Revival.

Archivists for the Des Moines diocese and the Dubuque archdiocese found no evidence of Maginnis & Walsh churches. It has not been determined if they designed the church in Stuart. Sioux City and Davenport diocesan archivists have not yet responded to inquiries.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet      Significance      Item number 8      Page 2

**Building Construction.** The parish that St. John's serves was established in 1905 to serve the growing populace on Des Moines' north side. The first pastor, Rev. Daniel F. Mulvihill, purchased the site of the present school, rectory, and church in 1905. His first priority was building a school, which also doubled as a chapel. The first mass was held on Christmas 1905 in the partially completed (present) school. Classes opened for 164 students in September of 1906. The present rectory was built around the same time, probably in 1912. The school had both elementary and high school classes between 1907 and 1918 when citywide Catholic high schools for boys and girls opened.

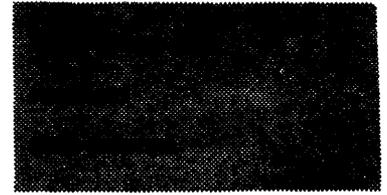
St. John's Catholic Church was formally organized with Articles of Incorporation dated December 16, 1912. A basement for the church was built in the summer of 1913, and services held there. Father Mulvihill, who had overseen the establishment of the parish, served until 1920 when Rev. Martin S. McNamara replaced him. It was under his direction that the present St. John's Catholic Church was built. The church is on the site of the 1913 basement, but under Father McNamara's direction the size and design were enlarged and changed.

St. John's Catholic Church was constructed in 1926-27. Blueprints were originally dated April 1925 with revisions dated March 20, 1926. A collection of correspondence (not complete) in St. John's archives covers construction-related topics from 1926 to 1927. From it can be determined that Des Moines architect John Normile was the supervising architect and Charles Weitz' Sons the general contractors. Tri-Cities' Stone Company of Davenport, Iowa probably supplied the Indiana limestone veneer used on the exterior. Rowat Cut Stone Company of Des Moines, Iowa provided all the cut stone trim. The Conrad Pickel Studio, then of Waukesha, Wisconsin and now of Vero Beach, Florida, designed the 10 nave windows and the 36 clerestory windows. (The Pickel Studio also designed the stained glass windows for the east addition access for the handicapped around 1983.)

The correspondence is also helpful in tracing construction progress. A driveway was excavated north of the church in July 1926 (John Normile, certification of payment, July 27, 1926). Bids for stone were received in June and July of 1926. Between August 4 and 21, 1926, Rowat Cut Stone Company delivered five carloads of stone (T.W. Rowat to Charles Weitz' Sons, August 21, 1926). By October 9, 1926 the steel work of the main roof was in place, and men were riveting parts together (McNamara? to Maginnis & Walsh, October 9, 1926).

By the last part of 1927 bids were being solicited for interior finishing, in preparation for the December 1927 dedication. Jaeger Manufacturing was authorized to make the pews in August 1927 (Normile to Jaeger, August 3, 1927). A light fixture company bid on light fixtures (Brandt-Dent Company to St. John's Church, August 3, 1927).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet    Significance    Item number 8    Page 3

Maginnis & Walsh plans are dated March 12, 1928 for baldachinno, which was installed with the high altar in 1929. Early photographs show the sacristy without the baldachinno and altar.

Dedication services were held December 4, 1927. Three Catholic bishops participated in the ceremony. Over one hundred priests from the diocese and elsewhere attended. The church, which could seat 940, was full. The major Des Moines newspapers covered the dedication services.

The first Mass in Des Moines using English was celebrated at St. John's Catholic Church on November 11, 1964.

**Design Documentation.** Maginnis & Walsh designed St. John's Catholic Church. Original blueprints as well as correspondence between the firm and Father McNamara in St. John's archives show that these Boston architects designed the church. In addition, extensive records for this architectural firm are located at the Boston Public Library list St. John's among the Maginnis & Walsh commissions.

Maginnis & Walsh were responsible for some 115 Catholic churches and institutions during forty years of practice all over the country. They were the best known firm specializing in Catholic design in the early twentieth century. Examples of the firm's work appear frequently in church design books of the period. In Withey they are described as "nationally famous as designers of numerous Roman Catholic churches and institutional buildings." Among their designs are the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., Nazareth College in St. Paul, and the Carmelite Convent in Santa Clara, California. The eminent church art historian of the period, Ralph Adams Cram, commented favorably upon the firm and used examples of their designs in his books.

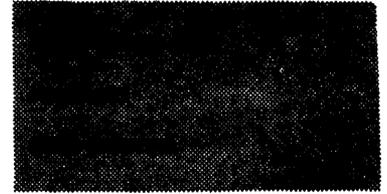
The design of St. John's Church was a collaboration between Father Martin S. McNamara, parish priest, and the Boston architects. Father McNamara had definite ideas about what he wanted (a church like St. Catherine's in Somerville, Massachusetts, and a stone church). Maginnis & Walsh provided the actual designs, including interior details, and attempted to interpret and respond to Father McNamara's wishes. Both sources, in turn, drew upon their knowledge of Lombardy Romanesque basilicas.

**Documentation of Building Use.** St. John's Catholic Church has always been used as a Catholic church, and the attached rectory has always been a rectory. Ownership has not changed. There are no plans to change these uses.

**Documentation of Building Use.** With new rules from Vatican II, a second altar was ordered built, one where the priest would face the congregation when offering Mass. St. John's initially used a mahogany plywood altar beginning in 1964. But on June 5, 1983 a new white Botticino marble altar was

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 4

dedicated. Blueprints are available. One wood confessionnal has been removed, and part of it was used to construct the reconciliation room in the sacristy, another Vatican II requirement.

Peotographs dating from the late 1920s show an interior all but unchanged from that of 1987, with the exception of the altar rearrangements mandated by the Vatican. The most dramatic change over the five decades of the church's history is installation of 46 stained glass windows. Based on correspondence in church files, Father McNamara's obituary, and the original blueprints, it is clear that the church was designed to have stained glass windows. However, the parish could not afford them in 1927 or during the 1930s Depression, and plain frosted panes were installed as a temporary measure.

Fires on February 18, 1961 and February 6, 1970 brought smoke and water damage to parts of the church, but no serious or structural damage. In 1961 lightning struck the bell tower, traveled down it, and set fire to the ceiling in its small hallway. The basement was also damaged, and it is likely the church was repainted at this time.

As part of the increasing national concern for the needs of the handicapped, St. John's has an entrance designed to accommodate the handicapped. Bids were due on June 2, 1983 for the "Handicapped Entrance." Like the church, random ashlar limestone, a tile roof, and copper gutters were used; the foundation is concrete. The addition connects with the rectory.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

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Item number 9

Page 2

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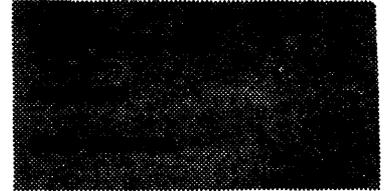
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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet    Bibliography    Item number 9    Page 3

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