

NPS Form 10-900
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

AUG 24 1987

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only 25% or greater cotton content bond paper.

1. Name of Property

historic name Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 2235 West Greenfield Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Milwaukee vicinity N/A

state WI code WI county Milw. code 079 zip code 53202

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

No. of contributing resources
previously listed in the
National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this xx nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property xx meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Jeff Dean
Signature of certifying official

2/19/87
Date

WI State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

**Entered in the
National Register**

entered in the National Register.

 See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Sharon Byer

9-25-87

Signature of the Keeper

Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

 Religion/religious structure

 Religion/religious structure

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number OWNER Page 1

CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, Milwaukee, WI

Owner of Property:

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
2232 West Greenfield Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53204

7. Description	
Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Materials (enter categories from instructions)
Gothic	foundation Limestone
	walls Brick
	roof Asbestos
	other Limestone
	Metal

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Description

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church is located on the southeast corner of South 23rd Street and West Greenfield Avenue. Blocks of working-class, mostly wood, 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 story houses and cottages surround the church. West Greenfield Avenue in the vicinity of the church contains a mixture of residential and small commercial structures. The church is about four miles southeast of the city's central business district.

The church is a symmetrical, gable-roofed, red brick, rectangular, late High Victorian Gothic building. A soaring tower is centered on the main facade abutted by two semi-octagonal corner towers capped with short faceted spires. The rear, or south elevation, features a semi-octagonal apse. There are no transepts. The heavily buttressed building is trimmed with dressed limestone, has rusticated limestone foundations and features extensive ornamental sheet metal work. Frederick Velguth was the architect for the church, which was dedicated in 1901.

The main facade facing West Greenfield Avenue is dominated by the 182 foot high central tower. It consists of four square stages, capped with a spire that terminates in a sheet metal cross. The first stage contains the pedimented main entrance. The pediment over the door is made of ornamental sheet metal stamped with a large quatrefoil design. Open, sheet metal pinnacles top the brick buttresses flanking the entrance. The second stage of the tower contains a tall, pictorial stained glass window with wooden Gothic tracery. This window was not designed to be seen from inside the church, but rather is backlit during the evening hours to ornament the facade. The louvered belfry is located in the third stage. The fourth or attic stage forms the transition between the square tower and the faceted spire. It is gabled on each side and has a massive pinnacle at each corner. There is a clock face in each gable.

Flanking the main tower on the lower facade are two semi-octagonal corner towers capped with short spires. Each small tower contains a traceried stained glass window on the first level and a band of small Gothic lancet-arched sash windows on the second level.

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The east and west facing side elevations are similar to each other in design and are articulated by a series of bold brick buttresses that define five bays, each containing a traceried stained glass window.

The rear or south elevation has a polygonal apse as its principal feature. It is girded with the same bold buttressing found on the side elevations.

The exterior is in nearly original condition, although there have been some alterations. A large finely detailed copper fleche has been removed from the ridge of the nave roof, the corner pinnacles on the main steeple have been simplified in detail and a composition shingle roof has been substituted for the original slate. The red brick vestibule attached to the apse was added shortly after the church was built.

The church is entered from Greenfield Avenue through a small, square vestibule. The nave has a wide center aisle and two narrower side aisles. The semi-octagonal apse is the focal point of the interior. In the rear corners of the nave there are two identical open staircases with turned wood balusters and large newels leading to the organ/choir loft that stretches across the back of the church. A large pipe organ is centered in the loft. Stairs located under the loft staircases lead to the basement social hall.

A modified tunnel vault forms the nave ceiling and creates a single, open space. Round, segmental transverse arches span the entire width of the nave and four-part plaster vaults fill the space between them. Throughout the interior there is a quality of restrained elegance. Rectangular wall pilasters feature plaster capitals with cherub faces. A band of Baroque style plaster ornament frames the arch of each Gothic window. The finely detailed Gothic oak doors in the vestibule and gallery are particularly remarkable and are a trademark of architect Velguth's church work. All of the windows are original and are glazed with Gothic style stained glass. The interior is in exceptionally good condition and has recently been sensitively redecorated. All of the interior elements are original with the exception of the reredos, pulpit, and organ case, which were replaced in the 1950s. In spite of these latter changes, the interior largely retains its original character.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: nationally statewide X locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B X C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) X A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions) Period of Significance Significant Dates

 Architecture 1901 1901¹

 Cultural Affiliation
 N/A

Significant Person Architect/Builder
 N/A Architect: Velguth, Frederick²

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and period of significance noted above.

Significance

Christ Lutheran Church is being nominated to the National Register for its local architectural significance under criterion C. It is being nominated as an exception to the criteria as a religious structure deriving its primary significance from its architectural qualities. It is significant as an outstanding example of High Victorian Gothic Church architecture. Designed by Frederick Velguth, an important German-born Milwaukee architect, it provides a link with contemporary church architecture in Germany in the late nineteenth century. Although German Protestant churches in Milwaukee were not identified as a study priority, the Wisconsin Cultural Resource Management Plan states that particular attention should be paid to the special contributions of German architects and the continuation of German building traditions in Wisconsin. Christ Lutheran Church illustrates the strong influence contemporary German architecture had on Milwaukee's German-American architects, both through publications and the close personal ties the Milwaukeeans maintained with the old country, in that it is modeled after two well known late nineteenth century churches in Germany. The period of significance is the date of construction of the church, 1901.

Historical Background

The near South Side is defined as the section of the City of Milwaukee that lies south of the Menomonee River Valley between Lake Michigan and the

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Village of West Milwaukee. The oldest settled portion is the eastern third known as the Walker's Point plat, much of which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Walker's Point Historic District on December 19, 1978. The nominated structure is located directly west of the old Walker's Point plat in a later developed area commonly known as West Walker's Point or simply as the near south side. This area was always a modest working class neighborhood of small, detached, frame, worker's cottages. Its original residents were almost entirely European immigrants who worked in the heavily industrialized Menomonee Valley or maintained small commercial establishments. To a large extent, that is still true today. National Avenue is the principal traffic artery and commercial street in the area. Because of the modest character of the housing, churches, fraternal lodge halls and institutions are the principal architectural monuments in the near South Side.

The near South Side has always been one of Milwaukee's most dynamic melting pot neighborhoods. First settled by a mixture of German immigrants and Yankees from New York and New England in the early 1850s, the neighborhood evolved over the years into one of the most ethnically mixed areas of the city. Eventually communities of Irish, Swedes, Norwegians, Poles and Serbians came to occupy the compact area as well. Although the Germans remained the dominant group for years, the other minorities each developed their own religious and social institutions. The important wave of post World War II immigration from Eastern and Central Europe renewed Milwaukee's nationally known, but then fading, multi-ethnic old world character by bringing significant numbers of European immigrants into the city. Many of the immigrants settled on the near South Side reviving its multi-ethnic character. The neighborhood has continued its historical role as the city's most important melting pot, but today is becoming home to Hispanic and southeast Asian minorities rather than European immigrants.

Christ Lutheran Church History

The congregation, an offshoot of St. Peter's Lutheran Church at South Eighth Street and West Scott Streets, was founded in 1884 to serve the growing south side German population.³ Although other congregations were founded earlier by families that left St. Peter's, Christ was the first splinter parish to be founded with the parent church's approval.

The new congregation purchased land on the southeast corner of South 23rd Street and West Greenfield Avenue and built a two-story frame school building that also served as a church for the fledgling group. Andrew Elleson, a well-

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known south side architect, designed the school building, which cost about \$4,500 to build.⁴ In 1901 the present red brick Victorian Gothic church was built next to the school at a cost of \$33,000.⁵ A modern, brick school building replaced the original wooden one in 1971 and continues to fulfill the parish's commitment to parochial education.⁶

English language services were begun long ago and the 650 member congregation is no longer exclusively German, although regular German language Sunday services were not discontinued until the mid-1970s. That the congregation has strong cultural/traditional ties to the church is reflected in the fact that over half of the membership commutes from elsewhere in the metropolitan area to attend services. The church is affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Architecture

Christ Lutheran Church is architecturally significant as a fine example of a late High Victorian Gothic church displaying the influence of contemporary German late Gothic Revival design. Its architect, Frederick Velguth was born in 1838 in Magdeburg, a city in northern Germany.⁷ Brick churches had been common in that area of the country since medieval times because of a lack of quality building stone. Velguth left Germany when he was twenty years old, probably with many memories of the architecture of his homeland, and came to Milwaukee.

Velguth spent his first eighteen years in Milwaukee working as a building contractor before he felt he had acquired the necessary expertise to assume the title of architect.⁸ This type of self-education was common for professional occupations in nineteenth century America before the advent of rigid professional/educational requirements in the twentieth century. Velguth's design work exhibits considerable skill, perhaps justifying his self-proclaimed title of architect. He also designed Trinity Lutheran Church at North Ninth Street and West Highland Avenue in 1878, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is considered to be one of the city's finest examples of High Victorian Gothic architecture. Besides Christ Church, Velguth is known to have designed at least one other church in Milwaukee, a small building for the Evangelical Lutheran Redeemer Church at 2623 West Rogers Street in 1906, as well as several other churches elsewhere in Wisconsin. Several commercial buildings and residences he designed still exist including his own impressive Queen Anne style house at 817 North 26th Street. A nineteenth century biography of Velguth said he occupied "a leading position among the prominent architects of the Northwest."⁹ Although that is certainly an overstatement, he was nevertheless, a talented professional whose

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best work, such as Christ and Trinity Lutheran Churches, exhibits a good command of the architectural design vocabulary of his era and whose work contributed to the development of the city. Velguth never gave up his contracting business, thus enabling him to offer a turn-key service to his clients, taking a project from design through completion. This undoubtedly gave him a great deal of quality control over his projects and could yield outstanding results, as can be seen in Christ Church.

One outstanding attribute of Christ Church is that it is architecturally much closer in spirit than many other Milwaukee churches to late nineteenth century Gothic Revival churches in Germany. Many Victorian Gothic churches in Milwaukee were far less nationalistic in their eclectic combination of European Gothic design elements. American architects, particularly in the 1880s, were striving for an original American architecture. Experimentation with massing and ornamentation were the order of the day and many Milwaukee churches of the 1880s and 1890s display the confused eclecticism that often resulted from this frantic striving for originality and uniqueness. In the 1890s, particularly after the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, there was a return to a more scholarly application of historic design and a surge in interest in contemporary European architecture. Christ Lutheran church reflects an awareness of the more conservative and scholarly designs of the late nineteenth century German Gothic Revival.

Johannes Otzen, a leading nineteenth century German architect, published a portfolio of his large brick churches in 1889. Christ Church in Milwaukee bears a strong resemblance to several of these churches, especially St. John's in Altona (1873) and Christ Church in Eimsbuettel-Hamburg (1885).¹⁰ Otzen's designs are bold and build on the German Gothic tradition of a very tall central tower flanked by two smaller corner towers. While earlier Milwaukee churches experimented with the three-tower facade, Christ comes closest to duplicating the powerful massing and German Gothic quality of Otzen's churches. The tower of Christ Lutheran Church dwarfs the relatively short nave and imbues the building with a bold upswept verticality unseen in other Milwaukee churches. That he accomplished this monumental effect on the small building site is a testament to Velguth's ability to skillfully manipulate architectural forms.

Numerous comparisons can be made between Otzen's churches and Christ in Milwaukee. They share the odd feature of saddleback roofs used to unify the three facade towers, massive pinnacles buttressing the upper stages of the main towers and red brick construction. Otzen's churches display simplified massing and a soaring verticality and angular quality rarely seen in actual

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medieval Gothic churches. Velguth's Christ Church with its bold, simple buttressing possesses much of this same quality. In spite of the strong similarities, it is impossible to know for sure whether Velguth was actually familiar with Otzen's work, either in person or through publications. It is known that copies of Otzen's portfolio were present in Milwaukee in the late nineteenth century, however. Although the building does exhibit some elements commonly associated with the flamboyant American High Victorian Gothic style, it is, nevertheless, an important building reflecting the changing architectural preference of Milwaukeeans and a renewal of scholarly interest in European architecture.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Golden Anniversary of the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. (1934 church anniversary booklet), pp. 32-34.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 75th Anniversary. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. (1959 church anniversary booklet), p. 4.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 City of Milwaukee Building Permit #281567, dated November 9, 1971.
- 7 Milwaukee of To-Day, the Cream City of the Lakes. (Milwaukee: Phoenix Publishing Company, N.D., c. 1893), p. 153.
- 8 History of Milwaukee. (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881), p. 1501.
- 9 Milwaukee of Today, p. 153.
- 10 Ausgefuehrts Bauten von Johannes Otzen. (Germany: 1889), plates no. 9 and 64.

9. Major Bibliographical Reference

Books

History of Milwaukee. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881.

X See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

 preliminary determination of individual listing (36) CFR 67) been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:
 X State Historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 X Local government
 University
 Other

Specify repository:

 DCD, 809 North Broadway
 Milwaukee, WI 53202

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Les than one acre

UTM References

A 1/6 4/2/3/2/5/0 4/7/6/2/8/9/0 B / / / / / / / / / / / /
 Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
C / / / / / / / / / / / / D / / / / / / / / / / / /

 See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Fitzerald & Becher's Subd. of Lot 2 Etc. in NW 1/4 Sec 6-6-22, Block 15 Lots 1 and 2 & W 15' of Lot 3 in the City of Milwaukee

 See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries include only the land upon which the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church stands.

 See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Les Vollmert/Paul Jakubovich
organization Deptment of City Development Date April 15, 1987
street & number 809 North Broadway telephone (414) 223-5705
city or town Milwaukee state WI zip code 53202

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Section Number 9 Page 1 Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
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History of Milwaukee. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881.

Milwaukee of To-Day, The Cream City of the Lakes. Milwaukee: Phoenix
Publishing Co., n.d., c. 1893.

Portfolio Book

Ausgefuehrte Bauten von Johannes Otzen. Germany: 1889.

Booklets

Golden Anniversary of the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Congregation.
Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House Print, 1934.

75th Anniversary. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church. Church anniversary
booklet from 1959.

Oral Source

Church Secretary. Telephone interview June 27, 1986.

Miscellaneous Source

City of Milwaukee Building Permit #281567, dated November 9, 1971.