

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

Historic Designation Advisory Board

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FINAL Report

Apostolic Way Church of God/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church



By a resolution dated May 5, 2015, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB), a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Apostolic Way Church of God/Greek Orthodox Church Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The Apostolic Way Church of God/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church Historic District is composed of 2 buildings located at 11000 Charlevoix, just west of the Conner Creek Greenway. The proposed district is 1.5 miles north of Belle Isle (NR-listed), and east of the locally designated Ossian Sweet House on the corner of Garland and Charlevoix.

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the proposed Apostolic Way Church/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church Historic District, shown in bold lines on the attached map, are as follows:

On the north, the centerline of Charlevoix Avenue;

On the east, the centerline of the north-south alley running between Charlevoix Avenue and East Vernor Highway;

On the south, the southern boundary line, extending east-west, of Lot 6 of the Richard Lemay Subdivision, Liber 239, Page 559, Wayne County Records;

On the west, the centerline of Fairview Avenue.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is defined by the public streets or alley located on the north, east and west; and the lot line on the south of Apostolic Way Church of God/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church proposed historic district.

Detroit's Greek Orthodox Community

Following the end of its war of independence (1821-1832) Greece faced a series of economic challenges, such as declining crop values and a slow rate of industrialization that encouraged Greeks to migrate in search of better opportunities. Greek immigration to the United States began in earnest in the 1880s, and increased around the turn of the century. Many of the Greek immigrants who arrived in Detroit settled in the area between Brush and St. Antoine Streets, which was originally part of the Beaubien Farm.

Jean Baptiste Beaubien was one of many early Detroit residents who owned a parcel of land referred to as a ribbon farm because its long and narrow shape provided frontage on the Detroit River. After his death, Beaubien's estate was divided among his fourteen children who gradually sold off portions of their inheritance as individual lots.

Although real estate sales were slow, the trend to sell individual lots of former ribbon farms coincided with the first organized wave of German immigrants to Detroit in the mid-1880s. While many of these early immigrants were laborers and mechanics, they were soon followed by skilled craftsmen and professionals who took up residence on Lafayette and Monroe streets. As these new immigrants established businesses on Monroe Street and Gratiot Avenue, these two major commercial zones came to be known as 'Dutchtown' or the 'German Quarter.'

According to the 1880 Census of Detroit, the area bounded by Lafayette, Monroe and Gratiot was populated by other ethnic groups, including Jews and African Americans (who established

synagogues and churches, such as Second Baptist Church), but Germans remained the predominate ethnic group until the early 1900s. The gradual departure of German immigrants from the area coincided with the city's continued expansion and the infiltration of factories and warehouses on residential districts near Detroit's downtown. By that time, German residents had grown prosperous enough to move their families and businesses to less congested parts of the city, primarily on Detroit's east side.

The arrival of Greek immigrants at the turn of the century coincided with the departure of German residents from the area formally known as the German Quarter. Just as the Germans had before them, Greek immigrants settled on Macomb Street near Randolph. The area offered relatively low rents due to its mix of commercial, industrial, and residential buildings. As the Greek community continued to thrive, they took up residence on Lafayette and Monroe Avenues, and opened up bakeries, coffeehouses and restaurants.

In 1911, the Greek community built the Annunciation Church on Macomb Street, which was the first Greek Orthodox Church in Michigan. The establishment of the church was intended to serve as the hub for Detroit's growing Greek community. By the 1920s, due in part to the implementation of U.S. immigration quotas such as the National Origins Act of 1922, Greek immigration slowed to a halt. But certain areas of Detroit, such as the predominately Greek neighborhood that eventually became known as Greektown, had already succeeded in attracting a diverse immigrant community. A 1920s survey of the children attending St. Mary's School, on the southwest corner of St. Antoine and Monroe Avenue, revealed the multi-ethnic character of the area—the families whose children attended the school were Polish, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Latino and African American.

As the city grew more congested, Greeks followed the trajectory of German immigrants before them and moved their families to residential neighborhoods far from Detroit's bustling downtown. While the move away from the downtown had its advantages, it had its disadvantages as well. Members of the Greek community were now quite a distance from their home parish on Macomb Street.

By the late 1920s, the eastside Detroit Greek community near Charlevoix had become firmly established and needed a local parochial school and place of worship. In 1928, seven men from the eastside community met to discuss the feasibility of a new church. As word quickly spread throughout the Greek community about the impending plans for a new church, eastside Orthodox Greeks contributed their time and resources toward fundraising efforts. The seven initial founders set a high precedent of contributing \$5 each, and even appointed a temporary treasurer, but their fundraising efforts fell far short of raising the funds required to erect a new eastside church for the Orthodox Greek community.

The following year, they settled on a far less ambitious solution. The founders rented a "rickety old wooden structure" on the corner of Hillger and Kercheval. The building had been a saloon prior to Prohibition, but took on a new life as a Church and a new home for a Greek School named "Socrates." Mr. Constantine Kokalis was the first Greek School teacher, and thirty-five families enrolled their children in school as the community continued their fundraising efforts for a new church. Calliope Hadgikosti was among the early attendees of the Greek School, and she

recalls, “The basement floor was still dirt and sand. Space heaters were brought in to eliminate the dampness on the cold and sandy floors.”

Despite their humble beginnings, the first Church Council established the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in 1930. Since the meeting with the seven founders was held a few weeks after the fast of Koimisis, the Board of Trustees voted on the name “Koimisis Tis Theotokou” meaning Dormition (falling asleep) of the Virgin Mary.

The following year, as fundraising efforts for a new church continued, the Assumption Church and Socrates School was moved to the second floor of the International Odd Fellows Hall on Hart Street, just south of E. Jefferson. During the Depression, fundraising efforts continued. Mr. Nicholas Manos, president of parish, cashed an insurance policy and loaned \$1,200 to the church. This was quite a hefty sum which amounted to a yearly wage. The loan helped to fund the purchase of a lot at the corner of Beniteau and Vernor Highway, and inspired other acts of generosity. By the spring of 1933, sufficient funds had been raised for a new church.

Over the years, the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church became the hub of the eastside Greek community. The Socrates School soon outgrew its location at Beniteau and classes had to be moved from the church building to Foch Intermediate School, a public school a few blocks away. The Ladies “Socrates” Auxiliary was formed, whose members provided additional fundraising support for the school and church, and the Youth Group took regular trips to Belle Isle to go ice skating and canoeing, and dancing at Eastwood Gardens at 8 Mile and Gratiot. During World War II, members of the church participated in “home front” activities such as rolling bandages for the Red Cross and donating money to the Greek war relief. Despite the turbulence of the time, the church treasury was increased by \$80,000, one third of which was raised by the Ladies Socrates Auxiliary.

It wasn't long before the eastside Greek community outgrew the church on Beniteau. By that time, the majority of the households in the neighborhood were Greek and the area had come to be known as a miniature Greektown, with its own businesses including funeral homes and grocery stores. As plans were made for future expansion, it was widely acknowledged that the new church would do well to remain close to its current eastside location. In 1946, land was purchased for a new church on Charlevoix, two blocks away from Beniteau, and once again fundraising efforts went into full swing.

The Assumption (KOIMISIS) of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Church was constructed in stages, starting with the concrete footings and foundation which were constructed in October of 1948 under permit #30801 for a cost of \$175,000. In April of 1949, permit #40340 was pulled to complete the masonry and other above grade elements of the church for an estimated cost of \$250,000. Once the new church was completed, the main floor of the former church on Beniteau was converted into a basketball court. When there weren't basketball games, the main floor was used to hold dances. The basement continued to be used for Greek School classes and youth meetings.

As the community continued to grow, they recognized the need for a community center. After only a year of fundraising, the Assumption Community Center was constructed in 1957 next

door to the church. Building permit #73489 describes the building as a “community house.” The estimated construction cost of the brick and stone community house was \$152,000.

In 1966, Stelios Maris, a well-known iconographer from Athens, was commissioned to complete the iconography of the Greek Orthodox Church. He produced painted religious images, called "icons", in accordance with the conventions of Byzantine and Orthodox Christian tradition. The work of Stelios Maris could be found in Greek Orthodox Churches throughout the United States, such as the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Dayton, Ohio, and the St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Miami, Florida. The iconography at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church on Charlevoix was completed the following year, to great fanfare, but their excitement was short lived.

In 1967 the Detroit uprising broke out, and the resulting social unrest rattled the Greek Orthodox community. The transition was gradual at first. That same year, the church offices were moved to rented office space in St. Clair Shores. Greek families soon followed suit, as they moved their children from Southeastern High School to Finney, then to Grosse Point Park. For nearly ten years, the administration of the parish and all council meetings were held at the St. Clair Shores location, and Greek families who had, at one time, made up the majority of families in the area, eventually abandoned their home parish.

The Assumption Greek Orthodox Church was one of the first Greek Orthodox Churches to leave downtown and establish itself in the neighborhood and had grown to become the center of the eastside Greek community. The church had helped to keep the Greek culture alive by teaching Greek language and ethnic dancing to children, and members of the congregations were heavily invested in the City of Detroit through charity work and other philanthropic activities. While some members of the Greek Orthodox congregation wanted to stay at Charlevoix and continue to invest in the neighborhood, the majority wanted to move out of Detroit to a brand new community.

By the early 1970s, parish leaders decided to move the congregation to nearby St. Clair Shores. In 1972, they purchased 10 acres for a new campus. This time, fundraising efforts only took a few short years. By 1976, construction began on the new campus in St. Clair Shores and on May 1, 1977, the Greek community attended the final liturgy at the 11000 Charlevoix location. But the church complex soon found a new owner; in the late 1970s, both buildings were sold to a new congregation—the Apostolic Way Church of God.

Origins of Apostolic Way Church of God

The founder and early members of Apostolic Way Church of God can trace their roots to the Clinton Street Greater Bethlehem Temple Church, which began in the spring of 1919 when a preacher named W. M. Gray pitched an open aired tent and began evangelical services. W. M. Gray was soon joined by Elder J.W. Childs of Flint, Michigan, and by June of that year they moved their small tent service to a storefront on Lafayette Street.

Over the next few years, they moved the location of their services to a storefront at 1716 St. Aubin Street, a rented living room on Lafayette Street, a tent on Clinton and Rivard Streets, a

small storefront at 1466 Monroe Street, and eventually the living room of one of the parishioners—Mr. and Mrs. Miller who resided at 628 Napoleon Street.

Although their location moved from place to place, the doctrine of their services remained the same. The young congregation was part of the Apostolic Faith which emerged out of a 1901 Pentecostal revival in the state of Kansas which swiftly spread throughout the United States. The name ‘Pentecostal’ is derived from ‘The Day of the Pentecost,’ the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks which marked an important turning point in the history of the early Christian church. Pentecost was a Jewish feast celebrated fifty days after Passover, which drew thousands of pilgrims to Jerusalem. On what would later be termed the Day of the Pentecost, the twelve apostles were gathered in a house when they saw a spectacular vision—a tongue appeared to come down from the sky and branch off to touch all twelve apostles. The gathering pilgrims were astonished by what happened next. Every pilgrim claimed to hear an apostle speaking to them in their own foreign language, which came to be known as “speaking in tongues.”

The places of worship that emerged as a result of the 1901 Pentecostal revival may have taken different names (such as Apostolic Faith Mission, Pentecostal Mission, Apostolic Faith Assembly, Full Gospel Assembly/Mission), but they all shared a common background of the Pentecostal faith and common belief in the importance of preserving the faith taught to the saints in the days of the Apostles.

It wasn’t until the death of Mr. Miller, whose living room had provided a place of workshop for the small congregation that a concerted effort was made to find a pastor who could help unify and build the church. A few members of their congregation had recently attended church service at Christ Temple Apostolic Faith Assembly in Indiana led by a charismatic Assistant Pastor—Elder Samuel Nathan Hancock. After praying over the best course of action, they decided to contact Elder Hancock.

On December 16, 1921, Elder Hancock arrived in Detroit for what was meant to be a brief visit to help shape his decision on whether or not he would leave Indianapolis. The decision appeared to have already been made by the time he entered the small church. Elder Hancock walked in and took over the service.

That very night, Elder Hancock was appointed as the new pastor. His first step was to find a new location for worship service. He moved the congregation to a building at St. Antoine and Montcalm Streets, but after one year the congregation outgrew the building. In 1923, Elder Hancock purchased two small houses at 2238 Clinton Street. One house was converted into a church building that was able to seat 159 people, and the second house was used as a parsonage.

Under Elder Hancock’s leadership, the congregation soon outgrew the house and by 1926, the parsonage was added to the church building which increased the seating capacity to 400. The following year, the Bishop Board of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., ordained Hancock as “Bishop” Samuel N. Hancock. In 1929, a new church was built at 2254 Clinton that had the seating capacity of 1,200. This time, the congregation assisted in the erection of the new church. Bishop Hancock planned and designed the building, and members of the church helped

to dig out the basement, lay the foundation and bricks, set the steel posts and beams, and install the laths.

The congregation's final move took place in 1962, when Bishop Hancock and his congregation purchased the Jewish synagogue, Sharey Zedek located at 2900 W. Chicago Blvd at Lawton Street. The new location had a seating capacity of 1,800 and was located on 2 ½ lots of land which encompassed nearly the entire block. The following year, Bishop Hancock passed away after a brief illness. In the wake of Bishop Hancock's death, several new pastors joined Clinton Street Greater Bethlehem Temple Church, including Eugene Tompkins, who was the future founder of Apostolic Way Church of God.

Tompkins was born on a farm in Bullock County Alabama on October 12, 1931. As the seventh of ten children, he worked for many years to help support his family. While in his early twenties, he attended church service at Detroit's Clinton Street Greater Bethlehem Temple Church and heard a sermon by Bishop Hancock. Although raised a devote Baptist, the message of the Apostolic Faith preached by Bishop Hancock had a profound effect on Tompkins. Soon after his visit to Clinton Street Greater Bethlehem Temple Church, Tompkins was ordained in the ministry.

When Bishop Hancock passed away in 1963, a few months after purchasing the Jewish synagogue, Sharey Zedek, at 2900 W. Chicago Boulevard, Tompkins was called back to his old church, where he stayed as 1st Assistant Pastor for nearly 14 years.

In 1977, Tompkins was among several families who met for an organization meeting at ABC Nursery on the north side of Detroit to discuss the start of a new church. Later that year, they founded the Apostolic Way Church of God. Many of the early church members had belonged to Clinton Street Greater Bethlehem Temple Church and as they began to look for an ideal location for their new church, they used Clinton Street as their guide. They wanted a new church that could comfortably accommodate a large congregation, with ample room for parking. There were quite a few buildings to choose from. Many of the congregations situated in large historic buildings in Detroit were struggling with upkeep and maintenance further aggravated by drastic population loss. As of such, many congregations were selling their properties and consolidating their services. The eastside Greek Orthodox Community had just moved their congregation to a new church campus in St. Clair Shores, and their empty church at 11000 Charlevoix and the neighboring community house caught the eye of several members of Apostolic Way Church of God.

The Apostolic Way Church of God purchased the church and neighboring community center on Charlevoix. Although the church sat across the street from Southeastern High School, parishioners described the surrounding community as being in dire straits. Apostolic Way Church of God launched several outreach programs in an attempt to use the church as an anchor to help stabilize the neighborhood. They purchased HUD properties in an effort to provide affordable housing for local residents, and they opened a food pantry. In 1978, a permit was pulled to convert part of the social hall into a daycare center which provided employment for members of the community. As car theft and other crimes became increasingly common, Elder Tompkins set his sights on solutions beyond the ministry that could help curtail the wave of crime taking place city-wide. In 1989, he patented the Invisible Watchman, which was a remote electronic anti-auto theft device.

If a motorist is roused from their car, they could dial a phone number which remotely shut down the car by activating the anti-theft system.

Despite their best efforts, the neighborhood around Charlevoix continued to decline and so did their church membership. In 1986, a winter storm caused considerable damage to the church dome and the roof of the community hall. And in 2008, due to severe water and structural damage, the church voted to close the main church structure and remodel the hall as the primary place of worship.

Architecture Description

The proposed Apostolic Way Church of God/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church Historic District consists of two buildings located at 11000 Charlevoix—the tall, single storied Greek Orthodox Church (1949) and the neighboring one-story community hall (1957). This two-building complex is unified by similar building materials, stylistic accents, and landscape features. A broad grass-covered lawn sits in front of both buildings, and a wide concrete walkway connects the sidewalk along Charlevoix to each main entrance, with an additional concrete walkway connecting the side entries of both buildings. Framed in buff-brick, the lawn sign is consistent with the color of both buildings. A large surface lot sits to the rear.

Greek Orthodox Church

The Greek Orthodox Church is a thirty foot tall single-story buff colored brick structure trimmed in light beige smooth stone. In plan, it is a Latin cross, with a prominent dome topping the intersection of the cross gables of the red clay-tile roof. Formerly clad in copper, the dome features round-arched windows that encircle its entire drum and a stone cross at its apex.

The Charlevoix façade consists of a monumental entrance wall composed of a beige-colored two-story arched stone relief that contrasts against the buff-brick of the rest of the façade. Five stone steps lead to a plaza preceding the entryway, which consists of three flat-arched door openings, the wider central doorway accented overhead by a projecting triangular stone pediment supported by two columns. Centered above the pediment in the arched relief is a large round window with stone mullions. Detail running along the moldings of the doorway and elsewhere throughout the exterior of the church consist of intricately carved Greek crosses, and almost all of the windows are bordered with intricate, stone arches and columns.

Two square towers topped by domes originally clad in copper are located on either side of the Charlevoix façade. Although nearly identical in plan with narrow, regularly placed arched windows with decorative stone trim, the eastern tower stands much taller than the western one. Atop the eastern tower sits a circular stone cupola featuring narrow, decorative open arches and a dome crowned with a stone cross. The western tower rises to just about the height of the building's cornice. Like its counterpart, it features a dome and a stone cross, but without the cupola.

The side elevations are nearly identical, each with a three-bay, one-story wall situated between the corner tower and transept arm that corresponds with the interior side aisles, which are lit by three sets of narrow arched windows with stone trim between successive brick pilasters. A pitched red clay tile roof connects the one-story projection with the clerestory wall of the church. The clerestory has three sets of three windows directly above the windows on the first level but

much smaller in size and with decorative stone hood molds. A secondary entrance, approached up four masonry steps, leads to a double entry door in the end wall of each transept arm. The doorway is flanked by an arched window with a decorative stone hood molds. Above the tympanum of the door, centered in the transept wall, is a round window with stone mullions, identical in design to the round window centered in the front façade of the church.

Geometric volumes quite common in Greek architecture are explicitly visible at the rear of the church. A tall, half-round cylindrical shape is flanked by single-story cubes, with paired round-arched windows separated by stone half-round columns in between. A small round window is centered above the center of the cylindrical wall. Above the cylinder is an inverted conical shape which forms a small, half-dome in the apse on the interior of the church.

Community Hall

The community hall is a one-story buff brick rectangular structure with a flat parapet roof. Its dimensions are 60 feet wide by 100 feet long by 14 feet tall. The main entry, centrally located, is accessed by three steps leading to a portico with a colonnade of three arched openings, the central one taller and wider. The doors themselves are now filled in with security screens.. The side elevations of the portico have a single arched opening. The portico is crowned with a gable roof. On either side of the portico are two tall arched windows in-filled with glass block. A stacked stone water table with a molded upper course runs along the entire width of the front façade and serves as the sill for the windows to the sides of the portico. Atop and set back from the front façade is an attic story.

The side elevations have square-shaped windows that are primarily infilled with brick or glass block. The rear elevation has two single entry doors with aluminum shutters, with a ramp providing an accessible entry to one of the rear doors.

A high degree of integrity of the site and the exteriors of the church building and its associated community center remain, although since the church has not been used since 2008, its openings have been boarded and copper has been removed from its domes.

Criteria

The proposed historic district meets the first and third criteria contained in section 25-2-2:

- (1) Sites, buildings, structures, or archeological sites where cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political or architectural history of the community, city, state or nation is particularly reflected or exemplified.
- (3) Buildings or structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural specimen, inherently valuable as a representation of a period, style or method on construction.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends the designation of the proposed Apostolic Way Church of God/Assumption Greek Orthodox Church Historic District.

Composition of the Historic Designation Advisory Board

The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine appointed members and three *ex-officio* members, all residents of Detroit. The appointed members are: Kwaku Atara, Melanie A. Bazil, Keith A. Dye, Zené Fogel-Gibson, Edward Francis, Calvin Jackson, Harriet Johnson, Victoria Byrd-Olivier and Kari M. Smith. The *ex-officio* members who may be represented by members of their staff, are Director of Historical Department, the Director of the City Planning Commission, and the Director of the Planning and Development Department. Ad hoc members for this study are Ernie Zackary and Tammell Russell.

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INTERVIEWS:

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Bishop Allan Justice, March 9, 2015.

Bishop Bill Williams, March 9, 2015.

Hilda Tompkins, March 9, 2015.

Iretha Tompkins, March 9, 2015.

