



Baltimore City Landmark

Designation Report

St. Paul Community Baptist Church

1901 East Federal Street

August 14, 2007

Description

The Saint Paul Community Baptist Church is a Romanesque Revival style stone church featuring arched stained glass windows, granite walls with Indiana limestone trim, slate roofs, and a Moller organ. The church was built in two stages which can be distinguished on the exterior by differences in the stone walls and trim. The original easternmost section features limestone trim at doors, windows, the roofline and water table. The stone walls also appear to be a slightly lighter color.

A Baltimore Sun article of September 1, 1893 announced that the church had broken ground at a lot at the corner of Federal Street and Wolfe Street. Although the site was 60 x 70 feet, the original building was only 28' x 42' "and is constructed in such a manner as to front the rear of a much larger building, plans for which have been made, and which, when constructed, will front on Federal Street." The architect of the building was Mr. L. F. Stutz of Washington, D.C. and John P. Teal was the builder. The larger building was apparently constructed in the late teens or early twenties.

The church has a corner entrance that is capped by a small tower with a pyramidal slate roof. A newspaper article including a photograph from 1930 shows that the church featured a revolving lighted cross on this tower. It was "one of only four revolving crosses said to be in existence in the United States," the article claims. Two walls dormers and end towers define the Federal Street facade as compared to the gable end along Wolfe Street. A long handicapped ramp provides accessibility along the Wolfe Street elevation.

The interior features a large main sanctuary space with balcony along one side. Older stained glass windows feature geometrical designs as compared to later stained glass windows depicting pictorial biblical scenes. A 1930 Moller organ built in Hagerstown survives on the interior.

Significance

This church is primarily significant for the variety of congregations it has served since 1894. The church was originally built for the Faith Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. The congregation began in the autumn of 1892, when fifteen members of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in the Jonestown area received letters of dismission to allow them to organize as a new congregation in northeast Baltimore. In November 1892, a store room was secured at the corner of Oliver Street and Rutland Avenue to hold services. It was here that the first Sunday school session was held November 20, 1892. The congregation was issued a Certificate of Incorporation which was recorded on September 8, 1893 in the charter records of Baltimore. The Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church remained at this location until 1923, when they moved to their present building at North Avenue and Wolfe Street. At their new location, in the late 1960s, the congregation considered moving again, but instead decided to stay on North Avenue. They sought to attract members from the surrounding community. The first African-American members joined the church in 1970, and in 1991 Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church hired its first African-American pastor. Today Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church is a predominately African-American congregation.

In 1923, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints purchased the original Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church for \$12,000. This building became the first Mormon Church in Baltimore. Although Mormons have practiced their faith in Baltimore as early as the 1830s and 1840s, church meetings were held in halls or temporary quarters.

A History of the Baltimore Maryland Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states, "By 1923 there was a great need for a meetinghouse to accommodate the new branch and to serve all the Saints in the Maryland Conference. For some time, consideration had been given to the purchase of a building -- one that could be made into a chapel which would meet their needs and yet could be purchased for a modest price. A well-kept stone and brick structure at Federal and Wolfe streets met those requirements. ... The first conference in the new building was held January 20, 1924, with 276 in attendance. It was a time of rejoicing. On Sunday, September 7, 1924, the chapel was dedicated."

This building served as a Mormon church until 1930. It was sold with the proceeds used to build a new church at Chesterfield and Mayfield avenues – the first chapel built by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Baltimore.

Reverend G. E. Lowman purchased the former Mormon Church and re-dedicated it as the Gospel Tabernacle, an interdenominational church, at Federal and Wolfe streets in October 1930. The Gospel Tabernacle was organized in March 1928 and met in a rented hall at 721 W. Hamburg Street. Within three years, more than 700 persons attended services here.

Reverend Lowman was a popular pastor & evangelist. Although he ministered in Baltimore, radio broadcasts of the Gospel Tabernacle religious services could be heard on many stations throughout the country in addition to local station WCBM. Reverend Lowman also printed

a series of booklets entitled “Phophecies of the Times.” He retired to Florida in 1959 and sold the church to the Saint Paul Christian Community Church.

The St. Paul church was founded in 1950 by Reverend Edward McKeither Revels at 1612 Ashland Street. Starting with three members, Reverend McKeither began the task of “kingdom building.” A talented leader, teacher and preacher, Reverend McKeither served the surrounding community by visiting the sick, starting a Sunday school and holding special healing services. Within ten years, the congregation had grown to an extent that the former Baltimore Gospel Tabernacle was purchased, and on December 13, 1959 the congregation marched from Ashland Street to their new home.

Following the tradition of the former Baltimore Gospel Tabernacle, Reverend Revels broadcasted services on radio for sixteen years. After twenty-one years as a Christian Community Church, Saint Paul became a Baptist church in 1971. Reverend Revel served as pastor of the church he founded until his death in 1978.

Since 1980, Reverend Gregory Perkins has led the church. The church has continued to grow and membership has nearly tripled under Reverend Perkins leadership. Reverend Perkins has also served as the President of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance from 2000-2003. The church reactivated a radio ministry in 1999. It also serves the community with a youth ministry, scholarship fund for college students, weekly Bible study, a deacon’s training program, and transportation services for the elderly. In 2009, St. Paul Community Baptist Church will celebrate fifty years of religious worship at Federal and Wolfe streets.

For over 100 years, this building has served as the home of four different religious congregations, attesting to the rich variety of Christian denominations in Baltimore City. It has been a Lutheran Church, Mormon Church, Interdenominational Gospel Tabernacle and

Baptist Church. The building is also representative of changing demographic patterns among members of various religious denominations. The building was originally built to serve the expanding needs of Lutherans who had moved from the city center to the growing northwest suburbs. It became the first church used by Mormons in Baltimore, as this religious denomination centered in Utah expanded to other areas of the country. When the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints also moved out to more suburban neighborhoods, it became the home of a popular evangelical leader. With the expansion of the African-American community in this area after World War II, the church was purchased by an African-American congregation. The church is also associated with the use of new technology – radio broadcasts – to minister to a broader community outside of those able to attend services within the building.

Staff Recommendation: the St. Paul Community Baptist Church (1901 E. Federal Street) qualifies for landmark designation meeting the following standards:

- #1 dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore; and
- #2 is associated with the life of outstanding historical person or persons; and
- #5 contributes information or historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the community.

