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# GESU CHURCH, RECTORY AND SCHOOL

118-170 N.E. 2 STREET

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## Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF  
GESU CHURCH, RECTORY AND SCHOOL  
118-170 N.E. 2<sup>nd</sup> STREET  
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton 10/15/82  
Historic Preservation Consultant Date

Accepted by Charles E. Chase 10/26/82  
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board Date

Designated by Miami City Commission  
Ordinance No. 9581  
Date 3/24/83

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**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

Historic Names:

Gesu Church, Rectory and School  
Church of the Holy Name  
St. Catherine's Academy

Current Name:

Gesu Church, Rectory and School

Location:

118-170 N.E. 2 Street  
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy  
The Archdiocese of Miami  
6301 Biscayne Boulevard  
Miami, Florida 33138

Present Occupant:

Gesu Catholic Church  
118 N.E. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Miami, Florida 33132

Present Use:

Religious

Present Zoning District:

C-3

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Lots 2 through 10 inclusive, less the south 45 feet of lots 8 through 10, except the east 4.5 feet of the south 45 feet of lot 8, and less the north 5.85 feet of the south

50.85 feet of the west 17.58 feet of lot 10, Page 41, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

HC Zoning Classification:

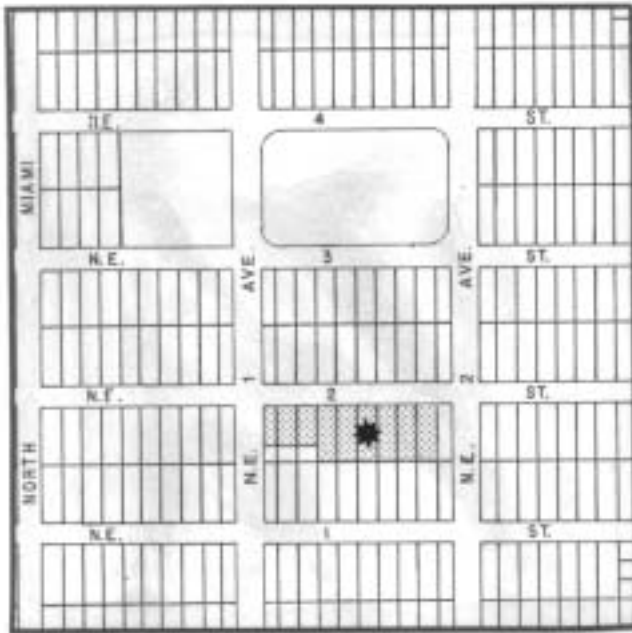
Historic Site

Dade County Historic Survey Rating:

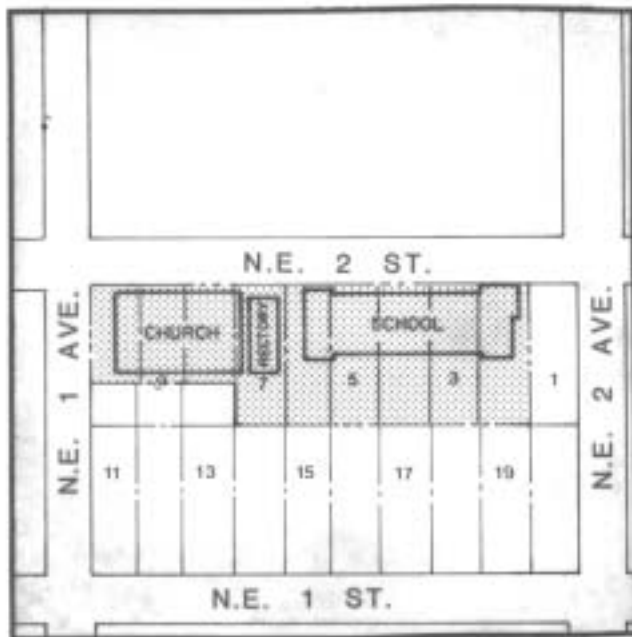
	<u>Church</u>	<u>Rectory</u>	<u>School</u>
Architectural Significance	1	2	2
Historical Significance	1	1	1
Contextural Significance	1	1	1

# GESU CHURCH, RECTORY AND SCHOOL

118-170 N.E. 2 STREET



location



site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Statement of Significance:

Gesu Church, Rectory, and School are significant for their important role in the religious history of Miami and as a reflection of the City's growth and development. In addition, the buildings are excellent examples of religious architecture and are noteworthy for the excellence of their design, craftsmanship, and detailing.

Gesu is Miami's oldest Catholic parish and has served the religious and humanitarian needs of the community for over a century. The growth of the parish closely parallels the development of the City of Miami, with the construction of three new Church buildings during the boom years particularly reflecting the City's expansion at this time. The three buildings are a historically-related complex and were built on land donated by Henry Flagler for a Catholic church and school.

Gesu Church is an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival Style architecture and is the focal point of an outstanding complex of church buildings. The three buildings embody the characteristics of several early twentieth century revival styles and form a cohesive architectural and design grouping. The excellence of the buildings' design, craftsmanship, and detailing is particularly evident in the colossal arches and tower of the church, the three story portico and classical details of the school, and the finely articulated façade of the rectory.

### Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

Gesu Church, Rectory, and School are eligible for designation under the following criteria:

1. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

Gesu is Miami's oldest Catholic parish, and its growth and expansion during the 1920s reflect the development of Miami during the boom years.

2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

Gesu Church, an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival style architecture, is the focal point of an outstanding complex of religious architecture including the church, rectory, and school.

3. Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

Gesu Church, Rectory, and School are particularly noteworthy for the excellence of their craftsmanship and detailing, embodied in such features as the colossal arches and tower of the church, the three story portico of the school, and the finely detailed façade of the rectory.



### III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### Date of Erection:

Church - 1922-1925  
Rectory - 1922-1925  
School - 1926

#### Architect:

The architect for Gesu Church and Rectory was Orin T. Williams. J.C. Gault designed Gesu School.

#### Builder/Contractor:

St. John Construction Company

#### Historical Context:

Miami's first Catholic service was conducted in 1872 when Father Dufau, who had been sent to South Florida by the Bishop of St. Augustine, celebrated Mass and confirmed the pioneer family of William J. Wagner. Wagner constructed a small wooden church on his homestead in 1875, and this became Miami's first house of worship.

The Holy Name Parish (now Gesu) was organized in 1896, and a new church was constructed in 1897 on land donated by Henry Flagler. As Miami's population and the Holy Name congregation expanded, the need for a larger church became evident. A cornerstone was subsequently laid on December 10, 1920, on the site of the earlier church, and the new building was dedicated in 1925. Gesu School was added in 1926, replacing an earlier school building constructed in 1905.

Gesu Church continues to serve as one of the only three downtown churches and was recently restored to its original appearance.

#### IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

##### Description of Buildings:

Gesu Church is a rectangular structure of structural steel, reinforced-concrete construction and features exterior walls covered with stucco.

An arcaded portico projects from the west façade of the church and is divided by four massive piers into three bays. The piers and pilasters on the opposite wall rest on cubical pedestals approximately nine feet high. A chamfered molding serves as a capital for each pier and is repeated, at the same level as a belt course running completely around the building. The central bay of the portico projects slightly, and its arch springs from two semi-engaged Doric columns, thus framing the main entrance of the church.

Articulation of the west wall echoes the tripartite divisions of the portico with semi-circular arched portals at each bay. Double doors of wood and glass are recessed within the portal and have dentilled transoms and cartouches above.

The north façade of the church features an elevated basement from which piers rise to the architrave above. Indented panels between the piers contain tall, semi-circular arched stained glass windows.

A tripartite tower complex embellishes the roof. The central tower which is square in plan, rises in a series of steps and contains a belfry with arched windows. Two hipped roof towers flank the central tower.

Gesu Rectory is located directly east of the church and is connected to it. This four story rectangular structure is of structural steel, reinforced concrete construction, and its exterior walls are covered with stucco. Its pedimented gable roof is covered with Spanish tile.

The main entrance is located in the center bay of the north façade and features a double door with large lights. The majority of windows are three over one double hung sash. Round arch windows grace the fourth floor.

Gesu School is located east of the rectory. The building is a five story rectangular structure of reinforced concrete construction covered with stucco. A flat roof with parapet tops the building and features a pediment above the main entrance.

The focal point of the building is a grand, three story portico on the north façade. Ionic columns support the portico and are repeated in pilasters separating each bay. The main entrance features a colossal semi-circular arch with double doors.

Description of Site:

Gesu Church, Rectory, and School are located in downtown Miami and front directly on the street. The church faces west, while the rectory and school face north. An elaborate metal gate joins the rectory and school and encloses the property.



Gesu Church  
118 N.E. 2 Street  
North and west facades  
1982



Gesu School (left) and Gesu Rectory (right)  
130-170 N.E. 2 Street  
North facades  
(1982)

## V. PLANNING CONTEXT

### Present Trends and Conditions:

Gesu is one of three churches which has honored a commitment to remain in the downtown area. This commitment was underscored by the major restoration of the church, completed in 1974.

Although the church will remain downtown, Gesu School has closed, and plans have been announced for the demolition of the school for a surface parking lot. The loss of the school would be unfortunate for downtown. The facility has provided the only elementary education and day care services in the immediate downtown area, and Centro Hispano has filled an important role in providing social services. The school could be significant to the future vitality of the Park West Redevelopment Area and could function as a multi-ethnic facility for those parents who would choose to bring their children downtown.

### Conservation Objectives:

Gesu Church should be encouraged to remain downtown through such breaks as the recent exemption for churches from the special tax assessment district for the Downtown People Mover project.

The Archdiocese should also be encouraged to reconsider the demolition of Gesu School. Because the school is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it is eligible for a 25 percent investment tax credit for rehabilitation. The Archdiocese should explore the possibility of either selling the school or giving a long-term lease to a developer who would rehabilitate the building and receive the tax credit.

If the Church remains firm in its decision to demolish the school, however, the Heritage Conservation Board would have the authority to review and approve any new construction on the site.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the current zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

## VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

### Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include the entire tract of land owned by the Archdiocese of Miami.

### Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The major exterior surfaces subject to review shall include the north, west, and east facades of the church; the north, west, and east facades of the rectory; and the north, west, and east façades of the school.

### Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

## VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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