
CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

500 N.E. 1 AVENUE

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH
500 N.E. 1ST AVENUE
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

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Historic Preservation Planner

Accepted by Arthur King
Chairman, Heritage
Conservation Board

Designated by the Miami City Commission
Ordinance No. 10496
Date 10/27/1998

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I. **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Historic Name:

First Baptist Church
Central Baptist Church (preferred)

Current Name:

Central Baptist Church

Location:

500 N.E. 1st Avenue
Miami, Florida 33132

Present Owner:

Central Baptist Church of Miami, Florida, Inc.
500 N.E. 1st Avenue
Miami, Florida 33132

Present Use:

Religious

Present Zoning District:

CBD-1/9

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0106-030-1010

Boundary Description:

Lots 1, 2, 3, 17, 18, 19, and 20, less the easterly 10 feet of Lot 1, and less the southerly 10 feet of Lots 17 through 20, of Block 63 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH (PB B-41)

Classification:

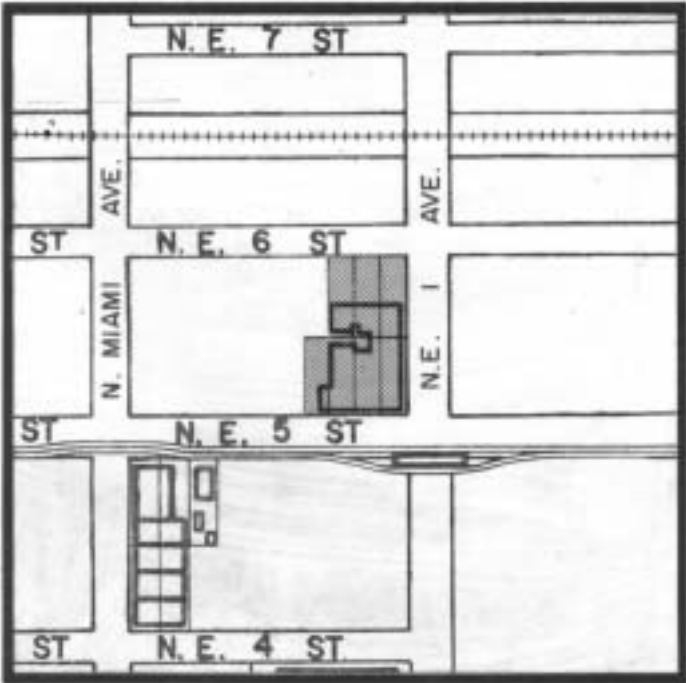
Historic Site

CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

500 N.E. 1 AVENUE



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1926

Architect:

Dougherty and Gardner

Statement of Significance:

Central Baptist Church is architecturally significant because it represents an excellent expression of the Neo-Classical style of architecture in downtown Miami. The Central Baptist Church building is also significant for its important historical associations with the city's religious history.

The exterior of Central Baptist Church embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Neo-Classical architectural style, a popular design expression for the 1920s institutional buildings in Miami. The excellence of the building's design, craftsmanship, and detailed articulation is particularly evident in the treatment of the projecting porticos, the distinctive roofline, and the decorative ornament found throughout the interior of the sanctuary. The configuration of the church elevations is noteworthy for its adaptation to the area's climate through the placement of the deep porticos and the tall ceiling in the sanctuary. Furthermore, the circular configuration of the sanctuary allows for natural ventilation to the keep the interior cool throughout the hot summer months.

Central Baptist Church houses Miami's oldest Baptist congregation and is the third church structure to occupy the same site. Organized two days before the City of Miami came into existence in 1896, the congregation was known as the First Baptist Church until renamed the Central Baptist Church in 1936. The Baptist Church has served the religious and humanitarian needs of downtown Miami for 90 years, and coincidentally the growth of the Baptist Church closely parallels the development of downtown Miami.

The first church building stood on lots donated by Henry M. Flagler, the man responsible for establishing a railroad link to South Florida. The first wooden church building was then replaced with a masonry structure on a larger site just a block away, the present site of Central Baptist Church. That masonry structure was demolished in January 1926, at the height of Miami's Boom, to make way for a larger construction project which was to house a mix of uses.

As far back as 1925, the church leaders pondered the idea of keeping the church within downtown Miami, even though the residential expansion was beyond the limits of the central business district. Late in 1925, the church announced that it

was going to stay downtown and construct a combination church and office building, 23 stories in height, and costing \$1.6 million. Upon its completion, the building would have been the tallest in Florida, rising to a height of 336 feet. The Bust came late in 1926 and the plans for such a building were scrapped. In its place, the present church building was erected at a cost of \$500,000.

Today, Central Baptist Church remains one of the last three active churches to hold regular services within the downtown central business district. Its vast seating capacity, at upwards of 2,500 people, makes it one of the largest assembly halls in the downtown area as well.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

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

Central Baptist Church is significant for its important historical associations with the city's religious history. The building houses Miami's oldest Baptist congregation.

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

Central Baptist Church represents an excellent expression of the Neo-Classical style of architecture.

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

The building is particularly noteworthy for the treatment of the projecting porticos, the distinctive roofline, and the decorative ornament found throughout the interior of the sanctuary.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Central Baptist Church is a four-story masonry building executed in the Neo-Classical style of architecture with elements of the Renaissance Revival. The church building was erected in 1926 according to plans provided by the architectural firm of Dougherty and Gardner from Nashville, Tennessee. The church building is a symmetrical block of steel and reinforced concrete construction capped by a polygonal rotunda extending above the four-story height.

The exterior of the church is characterized by two projecting porticos on the south and east elevations. The main block of the church consists of a rusticated first floor, flat walls on the second and third floors, a cornice band between the third and fourth floors, and a row of pilasters delineating the bays on the fourth floor. The projecting porticos consist of a rusticated ground floor, a monumental Ionic arcade extending to the top of the third floor, and a pedimented gable end at the fourth floor level. The Ionic arcade is three bays wide with engaged Ionic columns flanking the arched openings. The roof surfaces of the main block, the rotunda, and the projecting gable ends are all covered in Spanish tile. The gable ends are embellished with masonry urns and crosses which surmount the roof surface. A cupola has recently been resurfaced with gold leaf.

The fenestration pattern of the main block is comprised of a strong horizontal and vertical alignment of windows. The windows are all casement type, and their surrounds are articulated in a different manner on each floor. The windows on the first floor are recessed within deep openings. The windows on the second and third floors are framed with classically styled molding, and the windows on the fourth floor are set into plain openings which are then surmounted by a decorative masonry panel.

The interior of the church is divided into an internal circular core, a circulation corridor running the perimeter of the central core, and a series of rooms extending from the corridor to the exterior walls in a variety of plan configurations. On the first floor are found the church dining room and general maintenance rooms. The sanctuary takes up the central core of the second, third, and fourth floors. Classrooms, choir rehearsal rooms, study rooms, and a library are found on the spaces adjacent to the exterior walls on the upper floors. The main entrances to the church were found beneath each projecting portico, and access to the sanctuary was via a set of double stairs found within each portico.

The interior of the circular sanctuary comprises a very imposing space. The platform altar is located at the northwest corner of the circle and is set within an intricately carved Palladian-style screen. Behind the altar is located the baptistery. Five aisles radiating from the altar serve to divide the sanctuary seating into four

main sections. A projecting balcony adds additional seating to the sanctuary as it rings around the circle in approximately a 270° turn.

The interior walls of the sanctuary are embellished with Palladian-inspired motifs ranging from recessed coffered vaults, decorative plaster panels featuring animal skulls, and ornamental plaster garlands. A row of circular columns, capped with Corinthian capitals, serves to delineate the perimeter of the balcony level. From the interior of the cupola hangs a magnificent glass chandelier which is lowered through a series of pulleys for maintenance and repair. Within each exterior bay of the balcony are found elaborate stained glass windows that depict religious figures and scenes. The ceiling of the sanctuary is characterized by flat tiles arranged in a herringbone pattern about the central cupola.

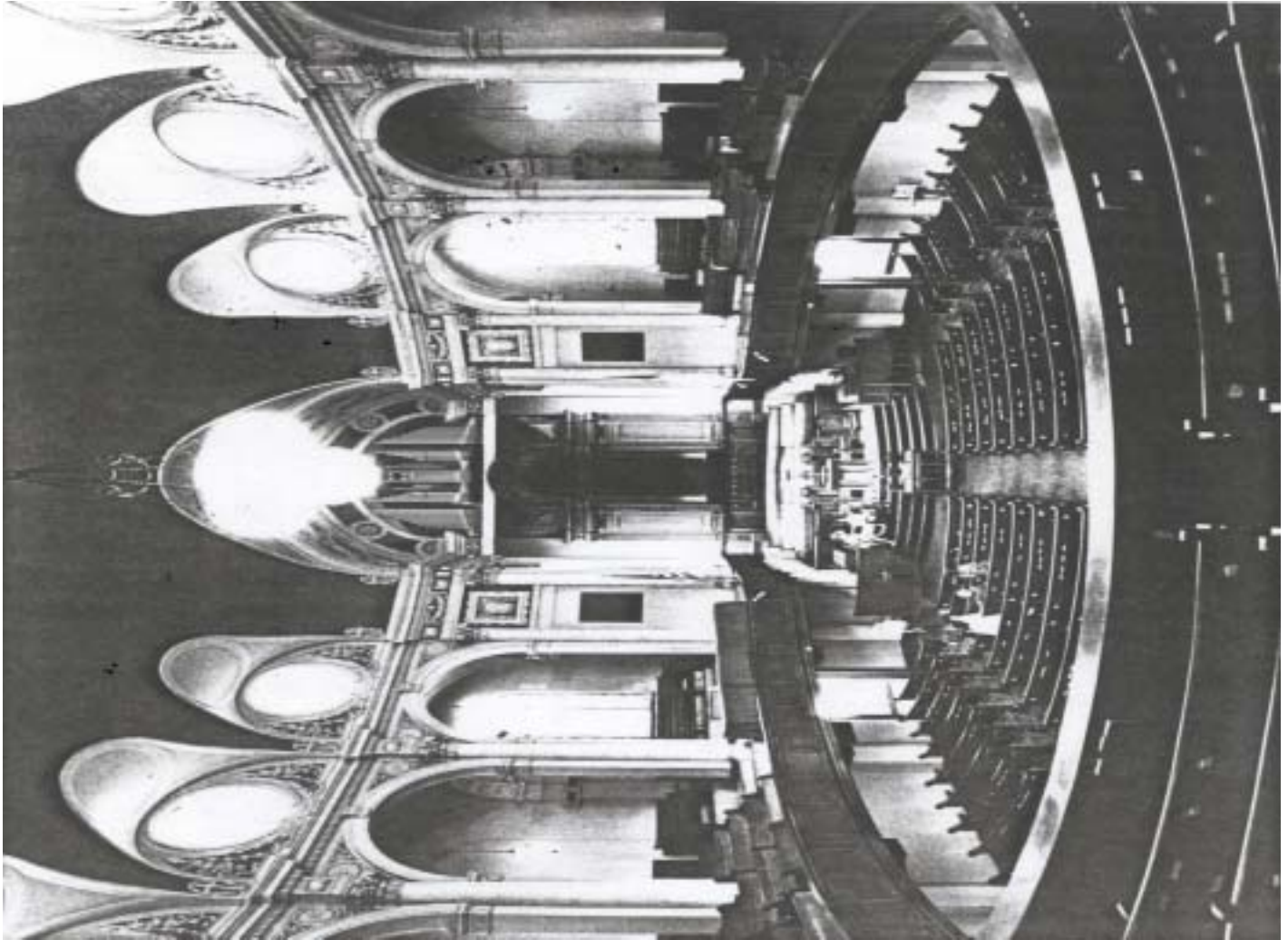
Abutting the church building immediately to the north is an addition erected in 1946. The exterior of the addition was executed in a modified Neo-Classical architectural style which harmonized with that of the church buildings. On the first, second, and third floors, the addition is reached by way of the circulation corridor of the church buildings. The addition comprises a full three-story height and serves to house the church educational functions.

Description of Site:

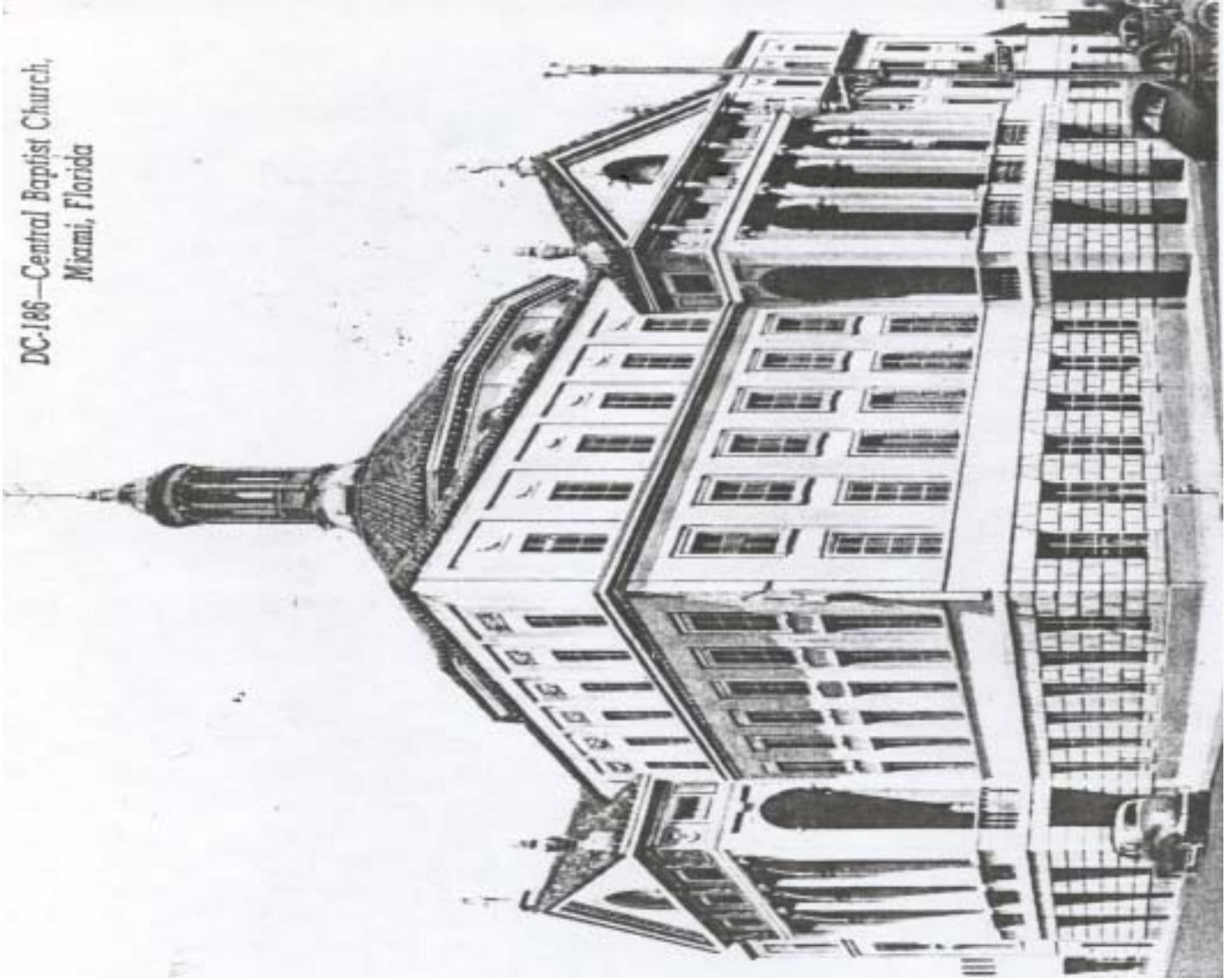
Central Baptist Church is located on the northwest corner of N.E. 1st Avenue and N.E. 5th Street. The building is flanked by parking lots and vacant land on both the west and north sides.



Central Baptist Church
500 N.E. 1 Avenue



Sanctuary
Central Baptist Church
500 N.E. 1 Avenue



DC-186—Central Baptist Church,
Miami, Florida

Central Baptist Church
500 N.E. 1 Avenue

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Central Baptist is one of three churches which have honored a commitment to remain in the downtown core area. The church has played an active role in the community and has supported other downtown groups. The congregation has carefully maintained and preserved the church building over the years and recently restored the cupola with gold leaf.

Central Baptist Church was identified in the Downtown Miami Development of Regional Impact (DRI) as a historic site. The church building has also been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Conservation Objectives:

Because Central Baptist Church is one of downtown Miami's major landmarks, its continued preservation should be encouraged. Any future alterations or additions to the building should respect its historic character.

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

V. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include only those lots on which the historic church building and its addition are located.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four façades shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Interior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The church sanctuary shall be subject to review. Alterations to this space shall be guided by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation."

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

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