

**Historical Evaluation – Congregational Church, 225 Tilton Avenue
City of San Mateo
November 15, 2011**

Introduction

In 2010, Architectural Resources Group (ARG) was retained by the Congregational Church of San Mateo to design disabled access and interior improvements for their main Sanctuary Building. As part of the work on this historic building, ARG has prepared the following evaluation of the project for compliance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. Included in this evaluation is a brief summary of historic background for the neighborhood and the church.

Neighborhood Overview and History

San Mateo Heights, the neighborhood of the Congregational Church, is characterized by a relatively small scale and narrow lots and building facades, with infill buildings of later dates. First subdivided in the mid-1890s as San Mateo Heights, this area sat on slightly elevated land north of the town's city limits during the late 19th century. The neighborhood developed quickly as it was located close to the San Mateo train station and the central business district. The village of San Mateo incorporated in 1894 and large estates gave way to the expanding town. By the end of the 19th century, this neighborhood changed as the town became prosperous and the neighborhood's rural character faded further when cement sidewalks were installed in 1903. Between 1897 and 1908 a large number of houses began to fill these subdivided lots and the church membership grew, influencing the expansion of the Congregational Church throughout the 20th century.

An eclectic mix of structures surrounds the project site. Tilton Avenue and environs is generally comprised of long stretches of low-scale, one- and two-story residential buildings, and other single or multi-story structures, such as apartment houses, medical offices, and religious or institutional buildings. Three- and four-story apartment and condominium complexes are now located amongst historic single-family houses of the Colonial, Tudor, and other period revival styles.

The simplicity, scale, integrity, and original architectural detail of the Congregational Church, together with its mature landscaping, contribute favorably to the general character of the neighborhood.

Resource History

The first church building on the site was erected in 1869, five years after the congregation was founded. The total cost of the new building was \$3,500 with an additional \$950 for furnishings.¹ Sanborn Maps indicate the building was located in a mid-block site on Tilton Avenue between

Ellsworth and Griffith, later San Mateo Drive. Sanborn Maps also indicate a small framed building facing Griffith, near the corner of Tilton that may have been the parsonage. The first church was a wood-framed building in the Victorian vernacular with a steeply pitched gabled roof and a gabled bell tower, a deep eave and exposed rafter ends. An extruded entrance porch with a hipped roof and two arched doors was accessed over four wide steps above the sidewalk. In 1876, the churchyard was enclosed by a picket fence.

In 1922 work began on a new Sanctuary (now Kloss Hall). Though designed in a different architectural idiom, the Spanish revival style, the building resembled the first church in its orientation, gabled roof and steeple, pyramidal exterior stairs, and raised entrance from the sidewalk. The building was designed in 1922 by James W. Placek of 2014 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, architect of other churches, namely the Glide Memorial Church on Ellis Street, San Francisco. The new Sanctuary was constructed by Leadley Wiseman, a local builder. A small addition and garage followed in 1923-24. The garage was a wood framed building with shiplap siding. It was constructed by John Stierlen, a contractor from San Francisco.

Within five years of its construction the main Sanctuary (now Kloss Hall) was deemed too small for the growing congregation and plans were drawn up by architects Kent & Hass for a new sanctuary on the west side of the lot, designed in the classical Spanish tradition, an exuberant, ornate baroque style known as Churrigueresque. The new building was expected to cost \$60,000.² The initial plans were not executed as first proposed and a scaled-back, simplified building was constructed. The contractor for the addition was H.H. Larsen Co. located at 64 South Park in San Francisco. The new Sanctuary was completed in 1931. By 1950 plans for another campaign of building works were underway and during that decade Kloss Hall was renovated. On the east end of the lot, the Christian Education and Youth Building was designed by the renowned architect Scott Haymond of Ratcliff Architects. The completion of this building extending the Congregational Church complex toward the east, filling in the rest of the Tilton Avenue frontage to Ellsworth. The parking lot at the building rear was added to the complex in the 1950s.

The complex has been well maintained and altered over time as necessary. A fire in 1987 resulted in the loss of a limited amount of historic fabric. The balcony extension dates to 1953, at which time the Sanctuary building was extended by relocating the chancel to the west and adding a bay to the nave. Alterations were also carried out to the kitchen of Kloss Hall. In 1955 a

condemned stairway was removed and the stairwell patched. Miscellaneous termite and dry rot repairs were addressed in 1961. Roofing works were carried out throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1974 the tile roof over the Sanctuary, excluding the tower, was removed and a new sub-roof installed with the existing tile re-installed. In 1978 the old roof was removed and a new tar and gravel roof applied. In 1982, a project replaced the sub-roof with a three-layer, sub-roof and re-installed the existing roof tiles.

Resource Description and Stylistic Characteristics

The Congregational Church is located at 225 Tilton Avenue between Ellsworth Street and North San Mateo Drive. The complex is comprised of three structures and a parking lot and includes: the Sanctuary Building (circa 1930), the Loggia Building (circa 1923) and the Christian Education and Youth Building (circa 1955), one- and two-story wood frame structures with a stucco exterior, wood lath and plaster interior, and tar and gravel roof with sloping roofs covered in tiles. The building is formed by a group of volumes that has grown organically over time, incorporating additions and extensions. The oldest part of the complex is Kloss Hall of 1922, which serves as an auditorium and social hall. The building contains the main hall, a kitchen, bathroom and second floor caretaker's apartment. In the 1950's the original Tilton Avenue entrance at Kloss Hall was filled in, shifting the main point of arrival to the garden and emphasizing the importance of this area. The original entrance, while no longer functional, retains the elaborate molding around the door opening and the recessed, circular ornament over the door.

The Loggia Building is a long, narrow two-story structure that links Kloss Hall to the main Sanctuary. The Loggia Building contains offices and meeting rooms enfilade. Rooms open onto the Loggia facing Tilton Avenue and to the rear parking lot. The westernmost access from the parking lot is through a narrow passageway with a tiled, shed-roofed entrance porch. The Loggia Building was constructed in phases with the westernmost end completed as part of the new sanctuary works of 1931.

The Sanctuary Building is a long, double height, single-story gabled volume with a bell tower. The main entrance, through carved, double wood doors set into a molded, arched opening, is perpendicular to the street and faces the garden and heritage pine tree. The entrance façade, topped with a side-facing gable, is nicely detailed with a series of arched recessed panels that span the top of the elevation, suggesting an arcaded cornice. Tall narrow arched windows line

the Tilton Street elevation of the building. The most distinctive element of the west façade is the chamfered corner with buttress detailing.

The Christian Education and Youth Building, a two-story white stucco building with red roof tiles, awning-type metal windows and punctured window openings. The recessed main entrance with an elaborated molding opens onto Ellsworth; there is a secondary entrance on Tilton Avenue. The newer building was set apart from the original structure and the remaining interstitial space has been converted to a children's outdoor play area with utilitarian functions intruding. The newer building is connected to the original structure by a low, solid, stucco, gated fence.

The Congregational Church of San Mateo is an example of the Spanish colonial revival style popular in California during the first decades of the 20th century. Spanish colonial in California incorporates elements of the Mission Style fusing the architecture of the Mediterranean, Italian and Spanish traditions, with the architecture of the California Missions. In general this revival style sought to convey the feeling and association of European traditions and the California Missions. The style suited the warm California climate and became a favorite building idiom in the 1920's. Popularized by California architects, the style was most common in two cities, Pasadena and Santa Barbara, however the style is frequently found in Northern California. Innumerable houses and institutional buildings were constructed in the Spanish colonial style in California.

Prominent features of the style include red clay tile roofs, use of balconies, arcaded porches or loggias and bell towers, smooth-stuccoed exterior walls usually white painted, minimal ornamentation, clean lines, arched openings, often an enriched compound arch, molded cornices, buttresses, deeply recessed openings, deep roof eaves with exposed rafters, a low-slung building profile, and a molded, recessed, circular opening over doors or in parapets, here seen in the balustrade at the top of the bell tower.

Stylistically, Kloss Hall, the Loggia and the Main Sanctuary, all built between 1922 and 1931 are the most similar. The Christian Education and Youth Building reflects a clean-line aesthetic typical of the 1950s successfully fused with the basic tenets of the Spanish colonial revival. The complex's separate building elements are physically and visually linked and harmoniously complement each other.

The Loggia is the most important element of the complex, both aesthetically and functionally. Visually, it is the feature that ties all the building elements together as a whole, and it serves as the main circulation spine linking the building's two end elements, the Sanctuary Building and the Youth Building. The Loggia is a loosely defined indoor-outdoor space typical of Mediterranean style buildings and provides a frame to the rear periphery of the garden when viewed from the street. The Loggia is formed by the building's wall plane with arched openings, a garden-facing arcade with wide columns, and raised flooring of scored concrete. Narrow boards form the loggia ceiling with a pair of beams in between each of the arches. Within the Loggia all elements are symmetrical and regular. The west end of the loggia terminates at the base of the squared bell tower which transitions into the main sanctuary.

Project Compliance Evaluation with the Secretary of the Interior Standards

The Congregational Church of San Mateo seeks to provide improved disabled access throughout the Sanctuary Building. This involves an addition on the South Elevation of the building to house a wheelchair lift to provide access to the raised chancel floor. Minor revisions will also be carried out to the existing ramp on the North Elevation to provide access to the Sanctuary entrance from the garden area. Other project components include a new Memorial Garden located on the North side of the building and installation of three new stained glass windows on West elevation of the Chancel.

- **South Elevation Addition**

A small one-story addition is proposed on the South Elevation to house a new interior wheelchair lift that provides disabled access to the raised Chancel floor. Also included in the small addition is a new storage area to support the needs of the Chancel program. The new addition meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards, specifically Standard #9:

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment

It is compatible with the scale and massing and architectural features of the original Spanish Colonial style of the original structure, as it has been designed to reflect the chamfered

configuration of the Chancel, and is finished with plaster to match the existing plaster walls. The design of the addition differentiates itself from the original through detailing such as the use of a belt course, cast stone parapet and stucco bas-relief panels.

- **North Elevation Ramp Modifications**

Minor modifications are proposed at the existing ramp and stairs on the North Elevation to provide disabled access from the Memorial Garden to both the Sanctuary Building and Loggia Building. The proposed work includes removing non-historic steps, relocating the exit door and reconfiguring the existing ramp. Also included is installation of a bay window. This area has been modified numerous times over the years, and the work is not considered to affect historic fabric.

- **Memorial Garden and Garden Wall**

The existing asphalt area on the north side of the Sanctuary Building will be developed as a Memorial Garden in the proposed project. The design of the garden includes new planting, garden paths, a labyrinth and a columbarium. The existing garden wall will be replaced with a new garden wall, relocated to the west to provide a larger garden area.

The proposed garden is a contemporary courtyard design that is compatible with the Spanish Colonial style of the original building complex. The new garden wall also meets the Standards. It does not replicate the wall that is being removed for the new design. The wall is taller, but still compatible in scale with the large Sanctuary Building. The clay tile roof, and replicated gate flanked by plaster piers are reflective of the Spanish Colonial style.

- **Stained Glass Windows**

A group of three arched windows are situated at the center of the west Chancel wall. New stained glass windows are proposed to replace the existing glazing in these openings. Windows on the adjacent chamfered walls of the Chancel have been replaced with stained glass windows. This is acceptable under the Standards, as it was quite common for churches of this era to be built with simple glazing with the specific intention of replacing with stained glass when funds became available.

Conclusion

The 1989 San Mateo Inventory of Historic Resources identifies the building as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Generally, under CEQA, a project that follows *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Structures* is considered to have mitigated impacts to a historical resource to a less-than-significant level (CEQA Guidelines 15064.5). It is the opinion of ARG that the proposed project generally meets *The Standards* and that there will not be substantial impacts to the complex.

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¹ Program. *The Congregational Church in San Mateo, 1864-1964*.

² Ibid.