

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**  
**APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION**

New Designation     X      
Amendment of a previous designation       
Please summarize any amendment(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Property name     Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church      
*If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.*

Address     4300 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20011    

Square and lot number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission     4A08    

Date of construction     1926-28     Date of major alteration(s)     1955 (Parrish House Addition)    

Architect(s)     Corbusier, Lenski & Foster     Architectural style(s)     Neo-Gothic Revival    

Original use     church     Present use     church    

Property owner \_\_\_\_\_

Legal address of property owner     4300 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20011    

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) \_\_\_\_\_

*If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.*

Address/Telephone of applicant(s)     4300 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20011      
\_\_\_\_\_

Name and title of authorized representative \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of representative \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name and telephone of author of application     Betty Bird 202-588-9033    

Date received \_\_\_\_\_  
H.P.O. staff \_\_\_\_\_

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

other names/site number N/A

## 2. Location

street & number 4300 Sixteenth Street, N.W.  not for publication

city or town Washington, District of Columbia  vicinity

state District of Columbia code DC county N/A code 001 zip code 20011

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  
\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/late

Gothic revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE/limestone

walls: STONE/limestone

roof: SLATE

other: N/A

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church is a Gothic Revival-style stone church building located at the northwest corner of 16th and Varnum Streets in the Crestwood neighborhood of upper northwest Washington, D.C. The property, sited upon a slight hill rising several feet above street level and landscaped with large bushes and mature shade trees, includes the stone church sanctuary building, constructed in 1926-1928, an attached stone parish hall, completed in 1955 and connected to the church by a single-story stone hyphen, and an open courtyard area between the two. A side yard with mature shade trees is located to the north of the parish house offering ample ground between the church building and the adjacent residential buildings.

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### Narrative Description

#### Exterior Description

The Church Sanctuary: The church sanctuary is a basilican-plan structure with a soaring four-story central tower facing 16<sup>th</sup> Street with a cross-gable transept located at the opposite end. A gable-roofed nave projects from the rear of the tower and extends six bays deep, running parallel to Varnum Street. A two-story minor transept offering flanking stairwells in the entry narthex projects from both the north and south side walls of the front tower. Set upon a low stone foundation, the building is constructed of steel and covered with random ranged and variegated quarry-faced ashlar with smooth limestone trimming. The church's exterior is characterized by its Gothic form and detailing, namely pointed-arch tracery windows, turrets with crested finials at the corners of the central tower and deep pointed-arch door reveals. The front façade faces 16<sup>th</sup> Street and is reached by a set of wide stone steps leading from the sidewalk up to the central entry in three flights with wide landings between each flight. The façade is three bays wide with the central tower forming the principal bay and the flanking cross wings forming the other two. The main entrance is located on-center of the tower, recessed from the main wall plane, and is clearly articulated by its pointed vault surround. This vaulted arch is formed by a series of rib arches rising above and protecting the Medieval-looking double wood door. These doors, with strap hinges and small, diamond paned stained glass windows in the upper panels, together form a slightly pointed arch, framed by a smooth-cut stone voussour. The tympanum between the door head and the vault is similarly formed of smooth-cut stone with a recessed roundel is centrally located beneath the pointed arch. A cross is carved into the recessed roundel. The extrados of the arch is ornamented with stone carvings, deeply recessed and framed by a stepped stone surround, or label mould, which terminates on either side of the door with label stops. The label stops are carved stone shields ornamented with a raised cross bas relief. Finally, the entrance bay culminates at the top, with the name of the church carved in Gothic lettering filling a recessed stone panel centered above the entry vault. The signage reads: GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH.

Two stone shields devoid of carving flank either side of the inscribed panel, while a projecting cornice with sizeable stone modillions, divides the first story of the central tower from its upper levels. The entry door is framed to either side by stone buttresses, capped at the beltcourse by pyramidal stone roof forms.

The upper level of the tower consists of the main tower shaft and the belfry. The shaft is framed by a continuation of the end buttresses and is pierced on the façade by long and narrow tri-partite stained glass windows with pointed Gothic arches. Each of the pointed arches is framed with smooth-cut limestone that differentiates the window from the rough-cut stone of the wall plan. Above the narthex stair towers, the side walls of the tower shaft are lit by narrow, rectangular stained glass windows, similarly trimmed with smooth-cut limestone.

The belfry, set apart from the shaft by a limestone beltcourse, offers less solid and more void. Here a central, Flamboyant-style pointed-arch tracery window, occupies the center of each of the tower's four sides. The window opening features a pair of pointed-arch stained glass windows, separated by an attenuated stone column on-center. Above this

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column, the stone intrados of the arch is decorated with an incised quatrefoil. The Flamboyant-style pointed arch surround features a central spire and crockets. Above the belfry windows rises a Medieval parapet wall with turrets at the four corners. These turrets are highly decorative with central spires, finials and crockets.

The nave of the church sanctuary extends six bays deep along Varnum Street. Each bay is separated from the other by stone buttresses and consists of a tri-partite arrangement of long and narrow pointed-arch stained-glass windows. As on the façade, these windows are trimmed with smooth-cut limestone differentiating them from the darker rough-cut stone walls. The nave is covered with a gable roof, sheathed in slate, with iron cresting at the ridge line.

A flat-roofed cross transept extends to either side of the nave at its western end. This end opens onto an alley with the gable end wall of the nave projecting slightly in front of and higher than the transept walls, but both rising above a raised foundation level, separated from the main wall by a molded stone watertable. This basement level features three sets of square window openings recessed into the stone wall and providing ample light to the basement-level Sunday School.

The windows are arranged with a group of three on the center of the wall and end wall of the nave, and two to either side and end walls of the transept. The upper levels of this end wall have pointed-arch stained glass windows, all trimmed with smooth limestone surrounds. The windows are grouped with three in the nave wall and two to either side. A shallow pent roof rises above the windows in the transept walls, shedding water away from the surface.

Parish Hall: In 1955, a stone parish hall was built at the north end of Grace Lutheran Church. The parish hall is a low, one-story structure set apart from the church, but connected to the north side of the tower by a side wing and main entrance vestibule to the parish hall. The hall extends towards the rear of the lot, running parallel to the nave, and thus forming an open court area between the two structures. The parish hall features a rough-cut ashlar stone with variegated coloring in keeping with that of the church sanctuary, though the colors are not identical. Although not designed in a Gothic Revival style like the church, the parish hall is sympathetic to it, in both its use of stone cut and coloring, and in its use of smooth-cut stone trimming and limited use of decorative stone carvings having Gothic inspiration. The parish hall is entered through the front wing connecting it to the church, reached by a set of stairs leading up to the door from the sidewalk. A wide, double wood door with an overall Medieval appearance is located on-center and framed by an arched opening, framed by a smooth-cut limestone surround. The doors, like those of the church sanctuary, have large strap metal hinges and small lead-paned windows in the upper part of the otherwise solid wood door. The doors are recessed from the stone surround with deep reveals. The extrados of the stone arch is carved with a vegetal motif and the whole opening capped by a projecting stone door cornice with modillions. Single windows with leaded panes flank the central opening and are capped by broad stone lintels. Quoined side panels and stone sills complete the window frames. The parish hall proper projects in front of the hyphen, presenting its front gable wall to the street. This wall, set upon a raised foundation level features a single, wide window opening on-center of the stone surface, trimmed with smooth-cut limestone. The opening is comprised of a set of three, tall casement windows, all with small leaded glass panes, and separated by bold wooden stiles and surmounted by squarish transoms, also with small leaded glass panes. The entire opening is framed with smooth limestone with a stepped keystone at the center of the window frame. A stone beltcourse separates the raised basement level from this main floor, while a secondary beltcourse extends across the façade to connect to the cornice line of the entry wing. Above the window in the gable end is an oval-shaped vent, also trimmed with smooth limestone. The gable roof, covered with variegated asphalt shingles, extends back to an intersecting gable roof at the rear of the lot.

The north side wall of the parish house is irregularly arranged with two, long and narrow window openings in the front bays, and a door opening in the bay before the intersecting gable wing. All of these windows are trimmed with smooth limestone with quoining on the sides. A round window opening rises above the door opening on this wall. The projecting wing features a set of three, single windows in the north end wall, and single openings in the side walls. As constructed, the parish house was designed to accommodate 12 classrooms, three church offices, a lounge and a seven-room parsonage.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1926-1956

**Significant Dates**

1926, 1955

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Corbusier, Lenski & Foster

John William Cresswell Corbusier

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance encompasses the date of construction of the church (1926-28) and the addition of the Parish House (1955-56).

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Grace Lutheran Church, designed in 1924 and completed in 1929, is an exquisite stone church built as a response to the national church movement in Washington. Designed by noted ecclesiastical architect, John William Cresswell Corbusier (1877-1928), the church is a superb example of the neo-Gothic style. Grace Lutheran Church meets Criterion A for the manner in which it illuminates the Lutheran denomination's response to the national church movement. The church, which is locally significant, also meets Criterion C as an excellent example of Corbusier's work and as a fine example of neo-Gothic architectural style. The period of significance extends to 1956 when the church dedicated its parish house, a sympathetic stone addition that completed Corbusier's original concept for the building.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

The National Church movement in Washington, D.C.

The national church movement, a singular aspect of church building in Washington, had its roots in the late 18th and early 19th century. Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the federal city included sites for a non-denominational "national" church dedicated to house religious services and a non-denominational pantheon for state functions. Presbyterians were the first to propose constructing a national church. The national character and mission of the church was congenial to visitors and part-time residents since they could worship without paying pew fees.

The issue of slavery and the aftermath of the Civil War provided new impetus for the movement. The pulpit of Washington, D.C. churches offered an opportunity to influence public policy on a variety of issues. Many Protestant denominations split into separate conferences over the issue of slavery and the slave trade, compounding the multiplicity of denominations that liturgical and doctrinal dissent brought about. The construction of national churches became an exercise in moving toward denominational unity. National churches provided a means of establishing orthodoxy within individual denominations, influencing public policy, and affirming status. Denominations could establish national churches through their central governing body or through the self-identification of existing individual congregations.

In her study of the national church movement, Pamela J. Scott has identified characteristics that national churches and the building campaigns that created them have in common. These characteristics are:

- Self-identification as a national church
- Desire to serve as the denomination's focus for influencing public policy
- Selection of nationally renowned architects
- Incorporation of distinctive architectural features characteristic of denominational architecture.
- Involvement of national denominational leadership in the church's fund-raising and construction.
- Appeal to members throughout the country for fund-raising.

Examples of national churches standing in Washington include the Washington National Cathedral (Episcopal), the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (Roman Catholic), Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church (Methodist), the National Presbyterian Church, the National City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgians).

While the national church movement resulted in these striking edifices, it also profoundly influenced the character of other Washington church buildings that were less noted as the Washington embodiment of their denomination. The selection of

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major architects and architects specializing in church design for national churches raised the standard for subsequent individual churches in the District. It also influenced how congregations developed and conceptualized themselves. Grace Lutheran Church exemplifies how different denominations approached the national church movement as well as how the national church movement impacted individual congregations. The building campaign that resulted in their present 16th Street church illuminates the complex set of circumstances and cultural forces that came together in an effort to establish a national church.

#### The Lutheran Church and Lutherans in Washington, D.C.

Until the early 20th century, the Lutheran Church in the United States was subject to myriad forces working against denominational unity. Diversity within the denomination shaped the Lutheran expression of the national church movement and the manner in which Grace Church participated in this movement. This fragmentation explains why Luther Memorial Church, Grace Church, and St. Paul all laid claim to being a Lutheran national, or with typical Lutheran modesty, "representative" church. Various branches of the Lutheran church eagerly tried to establish a national church as a manifestation of increasing denominational unity in the early 20th century.

In contrast to other American Protestant denominations that splintered into separate governing bodies during the Civil War, during the 19th century the Lutheran Church was segmented along ethnic, doctrinal, and liturgical lines. The development of the Lutheran Church in the United States was heavily influenced by the ethnicity of various immigrant populations. Individual congregations joined governing bodies, known as synods, that presided over congregations from Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Slovakia. Further segmentation occurred as second and third generation immigrants established congregations conducting services entirely in English, rather than in their language of ethnic origin. Theological and doctrinal concerns created additional differentiation as synods splintered along doctrinal lines. Between 1840 and 1875, there were 58 individual synods, which began to consolidate along ethnic lines during World War I.

The absence of a common liturgy (sequence of worship and participation in worship) and hymnal further complicated matters. For over a century, various synods and organizational bodies in the United States struggled to reach a consensus that would unify Lutherans. The Lutheran Church in America, which grew out of Roman Catholic worship practice, lacked a common order of worship or liturgy. With over 40 different liturgies in use during the 19th century, there was no consensus about level of congregational participation, responses, service order, and church calendar. The church that boasted the musical richness of Bach cantatas and some of the most magnificent hymns in Christendom didn't possess a common hymnal or general service until 1917, the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. In addition to linguistic and liturgical fragmentation, congregations and synods held strongly divergent views on the role and precise nature of the Augsburg Confession, a 16th century document that constituted the articles of faith for the denomination. Throughout the 19th century, various synods felt they were losing people of Lutheran heritage to more unified denominations that offered standardized worship practice and doctrine.

The outbreak of World War I proved a powerful force for cooperation among synods within the denomination. The Lutheran Bureau, the National Commission for Soldier and Sailors' Welfare, and joint National Lutheran Council were all formed in the early decades of the 20th century. Cooperative bodies were in place to plan celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of the Reformation in 1917, but the outbreak of World War I accelerated this development. The denomination's historic ties to Germany, especially the persistence of German language worship, made Lutherans an easy target for anti-German sentiment. It was imperative that the denomination represent the needs of its members through official presence in Washington.

#### Grace Lutheran Church and the Ohio Synod in Washington

Washington, D.C. boasted a long-time Lutheran presence. Georgetown Lutheran Church, organized in 1766, was the first Lutheran church in what is now the District of Columbia. During the 19th and 20th century, several Lutheran synods were represented here. St. Paul's Lutheran, founded in 1842 as an English-speaking congregation, spawned Reformation, Luther Place, and St. Mark's – all originally affiliated with the Maryland Synod. Trinity German Lutheran Church, founded

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in 1851, was affiliated with what became the Missouri Synod. Grace Lutheran Church was born in 1876 when American-born members of Trinity established Grace English Lutheran Church, an English-speaking congregation that joined the Ohio Synod the following year.

Grace appears to have become the focus of the Ohio Synod's presence in Washington from the outset. 1881 church minutes note "that the Joint Synod passed a resolution calling on all the Pastors to take up a collection in their respective congregations to aid us in our work here in Washington. It was resolved that Rev. Tressel [the first pastor at Grace] communicate with each Pastor of Joint Synod asking their hearty cooperation in this matter."

Within the Ohio Synod, Grace played an important role promoting the Synod's interests through its mission work. Grace established St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran in the 1000 block of D Street, NE (1894), St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran (1901) at Redlands in Montgomery County, and St. James Lutheran Church (1925) in Takoma Park. Similar to a pattern seen in other denominations, Grace Lutheran campaigned to the synod to become its "Memorial Lutheran Church" in Washington. In 1924, the Joint Synod passed a resolution endorsing Grace Lutheran's plan to designate their new church as the body's national church. The November issue of the Lutheran Standard, the monthly publication of the Ohio Synod, noted:

A plea is made for a "representative" church, a church that will properly represent our Synod and the great Lutheran church in the capital of our country. The motive is not a selfish one, as though Grace Lutheran congregation of Washington were asking something special for itself, or for something which it would not like equally as well to see others get. The purpose is to have a church building there that will commend the Lutheran church and our Synod and that will attract visitors rather than repel them.... Yet there are special reasons why such a church is desirable in the capital of our nation, to which people from all the world are constantly going in great numbers and where many Lutherans and people of our own Synod are visitors in their tours of the Atlantic coast.... At its last meeting Joint Synod endorsed the move to build such a church at Washington, D.C. and made arrangements for contributions toward that end.

The 1927 Lutheran Standard article reporting the church ground-breaking quoted the latest findings of the Lutheran Statistical Association. "It is estimated that there are 7600 members of Lutheran churches in Washington out of 24,403 claiming the faith, or 62% of the Lutherans do not actually belong to the church." Lutherans' concern about losing potential members to other denominations surfaced in the plea below:

Why build a representative church in Washington? We ought not to build such a church merely to gratify pride or to make display.... Yes, the other denominations have representative churches in Washington, splendid edifices indeed and so attractive that many of the Lutheran faith, embarrassed by the poverty of their own churches, have gone there to become both worshipers and members. And further it is true that no conscientious Lutheran minister can view with complacency the languishing of his own work because his members are being won away through the attraction of a million dollar cathedral belonging to some other church body.... We ought to build a representative church in Washington: Because in a big city our methods and our means must be adequate to the task before us. A small church in the colored section of the city may be satisfactory for the faithful few whose love never wanes and whose faith never falters. But such a church...is never going to win the unchurched or even hold our in-coming Lutherans in the church....By thousands, our people visit Washington. If they find their church there a thing to be ashamed of there is no estimating the loss of enthusiasm occasioned. "I guess the Lutheran Church isn't much after all. Why should I waste my time and money on such an unpromising organization?" This is bound to be the reaction from many a Lutheran who comes to Washington expecting great things and who finds his church one of the poorest and saddest in town....To give the thousands who annually visit Washington a worthy respect for the church and its services - that surely is a commendable and a desirable service for us to perform. To give our church a good name - to make her an influence for good in a city whose influence is both nation-wide and world-wide - what more important phase of church work is there for any synodical body than that! .... Many gifts will build a splendid representative church without embarrassment or burden to any.

Terminology calling for a "representative," rather than a "national" Lutheran church was a distinction consistent with the expression of the denomination in the United States. The combination of its ethnic and linguistic fragmentation and a bedrock belief in the separation of church and state made "representational" a more palatable, and appropriate, term for

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the way in which the denomination viewed its Washington church. Indeed, in the 1926 pamphlet "Appeal to the Members of Joint Synod in Behalf of their Church in the Nation's Capital" the author lists the various national churches but without the national church designation. Instead he refers to the "Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul (Episcopal), the Cathedral to the Virgin (Roman Catholic)... [and] "a huge Presbyterian representative [italics added] church."

Lutheran theology established a financial culture that made the difficult task of fund-raising for a national/representative church particularly challenging:

Lutheran theology held that instruction in detailed [financial] obligations of Christian living was risky because of the danger of emphasizing human works over the grace of God, and unnecessary because faith would naturally express itself in grateful and willing dedication of the whole of life. The average pastor was not taught to translate such theological assumptions into concepts of the stewardship of money, nor did the synods have a tightly knit administrative structure to exert financial pressures on the congregation.... Modern church administrative structures and the financial system which they require are post-1900 and, in Lutheranism, largely post-World War I phenomena.....Most synods had no set budgets, each particular treasury being independent of the others and all of them totally dependent on whatever offerings happened to come in.

The appeal to members outside Washington, D.C. was largely successful. In January 1926, the Synod encouraged its members to have special offerings during that month to raise money for the \$250,000 construction cost for the representative church. Grace Church, which numbered 175 members at the time the church was constructed, managed to build a superb neo-Gothic church – if not the parish house designed to accompany it – for \$200,000. The Synod also supported the representative church by donating specific elements of the church. The Women's Missionary Conference of the Joint Synod donated the white marble altar and Mary Troutman of Butler, Pennsylvania donated the pipe organ.

### Grace Lutheran and the Neo-Gothic Revival

In the 1890s, a more intellectual and analytical approach to the Gothic style, known as the neo-Gothic, emerged in America. In both England and the United States, the architectural reform inherent in this paradigm paralleled a desire to take various denominations back to their historic roots. The style and its inextricable link with decorative arts of the Arts and Crafts movement, refined church architecture. Neo-Gothic proponents created purer edifices specifically designed for worship only. In America, the westward movement and rural settlement patterns often led to isolation of individual congregations and a pragmatic approach to church buildings and liturgy. The restoration of denominational worship practice that neo-Gothic church design advocated had the additional appeal of solidifying denominational orthodoxy. The overlay of nativist, anti-immigrant, anti-Roman Catholic sentiment affected the design rhetoric of the neo-Gothic movement, which often supported "high church" practice. Neo-Gothicists purged the style of the superficial visual aspects of Roman Catholic appearance in favor of a design methodology that emphasized the unity between architecture and decorative arts. As the style became more acceptable for Protestant churches, it offered a subtle association with long-established English (and, by association, early American) cultural roots.

During a period marked by a search for appropriate historic precedent for contemporary American building, this neo-Gothic revival movement revitalized the manner in which the Gothic style was employed, making it a viable alternative to prevailing neo-classical styles, especially for church and educational buildings – structures that embodied a higher spiritual purpose and rose above material concerns. American neo-Gothic was more closely aligned with A.W.N. Pugin's liturgical approach to Gothic architecture than it was to the decorated Victorian Gothic that John Ruskin espoused. Less eclectic than previous Gothic revival movements, the late 19th century neo-Gothic revival endeavored to reform design and standards of taste. Gothic form and ornament from various periods were no longer combined in an eclectic manner or selected for picturesque effect or emotional religious sentiment. Design was systematic, particularly in regard to the integral relationship between expressed structure, architectural form and massing, and ornament.

The neo-Gothic revival demanded that both exterior and interior decorative features be carefully integrated and subordinated to the overall massing, architectural character, and iconographic program of the building. These stylistic decorative features include pinnacles, crockets, spires, tracery, bosses, gargoyles, and other carved structural elements.

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The neo-Gothic approach required a thorough knowledge not only of architectural detail, but of the historic and liturgical context for architectural form and detail. With roots in the British Arts and Crafts movement, reform in church design encompassed every feature of the decorative arts from stained glass, to reredos, to choir stalls, and interior painting and stenciling. This new, more deliberate and thoroughgoing approach had a profound and enduring influence on church and collegiate architecture in the 20th century despite a growing preference for academic Beaux Arts design and later for European modernism.

The distinctive neo-Gothic architecture of Grace Lutheran Church owes much to its position as the flagship church of the Ohio Synod in Washington. Grace well represents the denomination at a specific moment in time. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Lutheran Church in Ohio flourished. Thriving industries in Ohio's cities boosted the immigrant population drawn from Germany and central Europe, a ready-made source of new members and denominational growth. Wealthy industrialists like the Sieberling family associated with Goodyear Tires and others provided the capital to construct new church buildings.

For much of the 19th century, Lutheran churches employed the auditorium plan, a plan that lent itself to Sunday school classes and other educational uses. A wave of church building, coincident with liturgical reform within the Ohio Synod and the Lutheran church, established a high standard in church design. English-speaking congregations began to adopt neo-Gothic architecture with a plan that included a chancel with an altar, pulpit, and lectern – a significant step for a denomination cautious about Roman Catholic ritual. The architectural renaissance within the Ohio Synod coincided with efforts to purify and reform liturgy, bringing it in line with the historical origins of the denomination. In a manner similar to the way in which the Oxford Movement in Episcopal Church required new neo-Gothic churches spatially suited to proper expression of high church liturgy, the splendid new churches in Ohio brought the Lutheran Church closer to its European roots and away from frontier laxity.

Many of the Ohio Synod's buildings from this flourishing period were designed by noted church architect John William Cresswell Corbusier (1877-1928), a highly skilled architect with an impeccable pedigree in neo-Gothic design. Corbusier would likely be better known but for his untimely death at the age of 49, dancing at the Hudson Country Club. His early death combined with his concentration on church architecture, has led to relative and undeserved obscurity. In his brief career, Corbusier designed over 19 known churches in at least five states. He was the ideal architect for the Ohio Synod's flagship church in Washington, D.C.

#### J.W.C. Corbusier

John William Cresswell Corbusier was born in Rochester, New York and educated at the Mechanics Institute and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Corbusier spent two years in Paris studying Gothic cathedrals, moving to Cleveland in 1905. He later went into partnerships with George S. Page and William E. Foster. Known for his church design, Corbusier designed churches throughout Ohio and in Florida, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and New York. He was also an early proponent of historic preservation.

The limited biographical information available on Corbusier reveals experience characteristic of ecclesiastical architects promoting the neo-Gothic style. The priority of religion within his life, his training and experience, and his close association with seminal architects promoting the neo-Gothic style honed his considerable skill and provided a framework for his neo-Gothic design methodology. Unlike other architects in this movement, who became devout Anglicans or Roman Catholics, Corbusier was a Congregationalist. A talented vocal musician, he was in charge of music at the First Congregational Church in Hudson, Ohio.

Corbusier worked with both Henry Vaughan and Ralph Adams Cram, the foremost practitioners of the neo-Gothic style. Vaughan, the original architect of the Washington National Cathedral, was a British architect whose role in establishing the American neo-Gothic movement has been compared to Charles McKim's influence in the triumph of American Beaux Arts neo-classicism. He guided the younger Cram and other architects in Boston, the center of the neo-Gothic movement in the United States. In addition to his churches, Vaughan designed the iconic chapels at Groton School and St. Paul's

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School, firmly tying the neo-Gothic style to educational buildings and campuses. Ralph Adams Cram was far more prolific and self-aggrandizing than the modest, intensely devout Vaughan. He designed churches and schools throughout the United States including the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and Sweet Briar College. More importantly, Cram was the leading polemicist for the neo-Gothic movement in the United States.

J.W.C. Corbusier's association with both Henry Vaughan and Ralph Adams Cram indicates the regard with which he was held within the close-knit group of neo-Gothic proponents. In ca. 1908, Clara Haye and Flora Mather commissioned Henry Vaughan to design a chapel for Adelbert College (part of Case Western Reserve) as a memorial to their father, Amasa Stone. Vaughan affiliated with Corbusier, who likely supervised the design and construction of the chapel. When Ralph Adams Cram needed an Ohio counterpart, his firm selected Corbusier to work with them on the design of the Euclid Presbyterian Church (Church of the Covenant).

Corbusier's early career prepared him well for these associations and for developing a successful practice. Early in his career, Corbusier was lead draftsman for H. Van Buren Magonigle, who designed the logo for the American Institute of Architects. Magonigle, an architect noted for the professional model of his large architectural practice and his consummate skill as an artist, pioneered the use of standardized working drawings in private architectural practice. His noteworthy skill as a graphic designer and artist provided an important training ground for Corbusier. Neo-Gothic design placed a high premium on draftsmanship since an architect needed drawings to direct the highly skilled craftsmen working on the buildings and their decorative program. A talented draftsman, Corbusier won the Gold Medal of the New York Architectural League while working for Magonigle. Corbusier later worked for Cass Gilbert, one of the foremost early 20th century American architects renowned for his three neo-Gothic skyscrapers. The West Building (New York, 1905-07, the Woolworth Building (1910-13), and the New York Life Insurance Building (1925-28) exemplified how this style could be adapted to the high-rise commercial office building.

Corbusier designed over 19 churches as well as residences and college and school buildings. His churches include St. Paul Lutheran (1926-27, Massillon, Ohio), Church of the Savior (1926-28, Cleveland Heights), Grace Lutheran Church (1927, Cleveland Heights), Trinity Lutheran Church (1926, Queens), St. John's Lutheran Church (1927, Zanesville, Ohio) and First Presbyterian Church of the Covenant (1929, Erie, Pennsylvania). St. John's Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Corbusier also designed buildings for Case Western Reserve Academy.

#### Corbusier's church design

Corbusier's churches are superb exercises in neo-Gothic design. An analysis of interior and exterior photographs of these buildings reveals their consistently high quality and the extent to which Corbusier mastered this style. Regardless of budget or denomination, Corbusier's churches exemplify the organic design associated with the neo-Gothic movement. On the exterior, the graceful form and well-proportioned massing of these buildings enhance the verticality established by prominent central towers. Their design reveals an interplay of mass, scale, and proportion emphasized by careful organization of light and shadow. Wall surface is largely unadorned; buttresses and lancet windows are used in an organic manner. Ornament is employed sparingly and subordinated to overall form and massing. The deeply recessed entrances further enhance the importance of mass and proportion. Churches like the Springfield Presbyterian Church (1922-23) in Jacksonville, Florida, executed in an austere mission revival style, illustrate how the neo-Gothic, organic approach to design was not limited to Corbusier's Gothic revival style buildings or to more liturgical denominations. Scrupulously correct detail, superb craftsmanship, and subordination of ornament are used to great effect in this building. St. John's Lutheran Church (1927) in Zanesville, Ohio, detailed in collegiate Gothic or Tudor style, demonstrates how Corbusier could work well within the constraints of budgets that did not allow for stone.

The spatial characteristics and interior decorative features of these buildings also reveal Corbusier's distinctive neo-Gothic touch and the architectural reform that the movement represented. In plan, the typical neo-Gothic church typology features a cruciform plan with center and side aisles, an articulated chancel with an apse housing the altar, and an open volume of interior space rising to an exposed roof supported by ribbed vaults or open wood trusses over the nave.

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Corbusier's churches are characterized by elongated naves terminating in shallow, rectangular chancels. His use of narrow, low side aisles screened by stone columns emphasizes vertical proportions of the lofty, light-filled nave. The relative darkness of the low, screened side aisles contrasts with the soaring, well-lit character of the nave with its strong visual pull towards the altar. By narrowing the visual width of the nave through this device, Corbusier directs focus toward the altar set within his typically shallow chancel – a device emphasizing the Protestant character of the altar and the connection between the congregation and its pastor.

Photographs of Corbusier churches reveal restrained interiors designed and decorated in accordance with the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement. Pendant lanterns suspended from the exposed ceiling or from the columns light the nave and emphasize the verticality of the space. Wrought iron light fixtures, tile floors, and simple carved altars embody the simplicity and high level of artisanal skill embodied in the Arts and Crafts movement. As with the exterior design, interior photographs (particularly historic photographs) reveal a remarkable consistency in Corbusier's approach.

Grace Lutheran Church is a handsome building that well represents Corbusier's work, particularly his mastery of the neo-Gothic style. It incorporates the skillful massing and proportions and organic use of ornament that are hallmarks of this style. The distinctive hallmarks of Corbusier's churches – central tower with recessed entrance, low side aisles, and shallow chancel – are readily apparent. Its well-proportioned massing enhances the verticality of its central tower. Its wall surface is largely unornamented, relying on buttresses and lancet windows to establish articulation of the façade. Ornament is secondary to the role light and shadow play articulating the mass of the building. The spare ornament – pinnacles, beltcourses, and simple Tudor cornices – is subordinate to overall form and massing.

Despite minor, reversible changes, the interior is equally impressive. A long-time member of the church wrote about "pews that seem to go on forever" – an apt description for the spatial character of Corbusier's sanctuaries. As with the exterior of the church, the interior relies on careful craftsmanship and skillful use of materials associated with the artisan ethos of the Arts and Crafts movement. The stonework, tile floor, wrought iron light fixtures, and simple, carved reredos provide the subtle richness associated with the neo-Gothic style. The narthex and the paneled and leaded glass east wall separating the narthex from the nave exemplify the power of this aesthetic. Grace Church is an excellent example of the manner in which congregational and denominational striving associated with the National Church movement set a high bar for early 20th century church design in Washington, D.C.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: **Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Square 2646, Lot 0807 in Washington, D.C.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The above boundaries constitute the legal description of the property

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs:

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of \_\_\_\_.

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Columbia

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Name of Property

\_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

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**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

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name Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession – Officers  
street & number 4300 Sixteenth Street, NW telephone 202-829-9400;202-278-8029  
city or town Washington, D.C. state N/A zip code 20008

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