



Name of Property: First Presbyterian Church
City, State: Stamford, Connecticut
Period of Significance: 1956–1968
NHL Criteria: 4
NHL Exception: 1
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. architecture
VI. Expanding Science and Technology
2. technological applications
Previous Recognition: n/a
National Historic Context: XVI. Modern Architecture
Z. Mid-Century Modern

NHL Significance:

- First Presbyterian Church, also known as the “Fish Church”, is an important and singular work by Wallace K. Harrison (1895–1981), a major American Modern architect. The church, considered by Harrison to be his most successful accomplishment, exemplifies both the architect’s strength as a master planner and his personal approach to Modern design that introduced significant innovations in construction technology to American architecture.
- The sanctuary’s expressive form, integral structure, and strong emotive aesthetics are the



product of collaboration among Harrison, British structural engineer Felix Samuely (1902–1959), and French stained-glass artist Gabriel Loire (1904–1996).

- The sanctuary’s high-profile use of *dalle de verre* stained glass was the largest and most publicized installation in North America when constructed and popularized the material during the postwar building boom at mid-century. Its inclined, folded-plate thin-shell technology is an early, if not seminal, use in a non-industrial American building.
- The soaring carillon tower complements the sanctuary and brackets Harrison’s accomplishments in creating iconic sculptural structures beginning with the Trylon and Perisphere at the 1939 World’s Fair.

Integrity:

- First Presbyterian Church has a high degree of integrity due to continuity of ownership and strong stewardship. The property’s state of preservation clearly evokes the built environment and spirit of the moment of its creation.
- Changes to First Presbyterian Church have been minimal and respectful of the property’s architecture and setting. In-kind replacement of failed *dalle de verre* panels on the south and east elevations with closely matched replicas and the sale of a rear parking lot for residential development protected the property’s original setting, massing, plans, exterior finishes, and most interior finishes.
- The buildings, carillon tower structure, and landscape have been well-maintained and are in good to excellent condition.

Owner of Property: First Presbyterian Church of Stamford

Acreage of Property: 6.58 acres

Origins of Nomination: The Highland Green Foundation, an organization whose mission is preservation of the Fish Church and development of arts and education programming at the church initiated the National Historic Landmark nomination with the support of the church. The nomination was prepared on a volunteer basis by the Foundation’s Director of Preservation who has experience with the NHL program.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation as an NHL will recognize a place important in shaping twentieth-century American architecture and construction technology.
- Designation would also advance the preservation and conservation management of an exceptional landmark and improve the property’s interpretation and visibility to the local community as well as visitors from outside the area.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None is known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of September 9, 2020):

- Senator Richard Blumenthal – 8/31/2020
- Senator Christopher Murphy – 8/31/2020

- Representative Jim Himes – 8/31/2020
- State Historic Preservation Office – 9/1/2020

National Historic Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Add why the landscape is not contributing to the nomination.
- Remove the use and discussion of criterion exception 8: the less than 50 years rule.
- Discussion of comparison churches should be added.
- Identified issues regarding certain stylistic terms which will be addressed in the revised nomination.

National Historic Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Connecticut, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation:

The National Park System Advisory Board finds that the First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Connecticut, meets the criteria for designation as a National Historic Landmark and recommends that the Secretary of the Interior designate this property as a National Historic Landmark once any additions and corrections suggested by the National Historic Landmark Committee of the Advisory Board have been addressed.