



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property: Wayfarers Chapel

City, State: Rancho Palos Verdes, California

Period of Significance: 1951-1965

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Criteria Exception: 1

NHL Theme: III: Expressing Cultural Values; 5. Architectural, landscape architecture and urban design

Previous Recognition: National Register of Historic Places (2005)

National Historic Context: XVI. Modern Church Movement, Postwar Organic Architecture



NHL Significance:

- Sited on a rocky outcrop above the Pacific Ocean in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, Wayfarers Chapel is a post-World War II modern organic ecclesiastical complex built for the Swedenborgian church, a Protestant Christian denomination whose beliefs are based on the Bible and originate from the writings of eighteenth-century scientist and philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg. The chapel buildings and landscape were designed by master architect and landscape architect Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. (more commonly known as Lloyd Wright). The period of significance (1951-1965) encompasses the original development of the complex shown in Wright's building and landscape plans.
- Wayfarers Chapel is significant under NHL Criterion 4 for embodying the distinguishing characteristics of postwar organic ecclesiastical design. The chapel is an exceptional and unique example of a modern organic religious complex with a significant designed landscape. After being inspired by a trip to the redwoods in Northern California, Wright developed a design for the chapel based on the Swedenborgian concept of "The Natural Church," which he believed was embodied through a forest grove. He combined locally sourced materials with modern construction techniques to create a design uniquely suited to the mild climate of the Southern California region.
- The chapel's organic design intent is enhanced by Wright's siting of the complex, on an outcrop overlooking Abalone Cove, and extensive landscaping, which reinforce the chapel's intimate connection with its natural locale and distinguish Wayfarers Chapel from other recognized examples of postwar organic religious architecture and of modern ecclesiastical buildings in general. Following its completion, the chapel was widely published in national and international newspapers and journals. It was the only religious building included in the Museum of Modern Art's 1953 exhibit, *Built in USA: Post War Architecture*, and was featured in the National Council of Churches' 1956 list of eighteen Protestant churches cited for architectural excellence.

Integrity:

- Wayfarers Chapel retains a high degree of historic integrity and is therefore able to illustrate its significance as an excellent and unique example of modern organic religious architecture designed by Lloyd Wright.
- The chapel complex retains its original location and sparsely developed setting on the bluffs overlooking Abalone Cove and the Pacific Ocean.
- The overall design of the original chapel complex remains largely unchanged since its period of significance (1951-1965). While the buildings and landscape have undergone some changes, including in-kind material and plant replacement and the addition of a few secondary peripheral buildings, none of the alterations inhibit the ability of the chapel complex to communicate Lloyd Wright's original design intent.
- The chapel site and its contributing buildings, structures, and landscape features retain most of their original materials and continue to possess the physical evidence of the workmanship and labor associated with their construction.
- Because the chapel complex retains its integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and setting, it is still able to convey its original feeling as a mid-century organic religious edifice and association with the post-World War II modern church movement.



Owner of Property: The General Convention of The New Jerusalem in the United States of America

Acreege of Property: 3.528 acres

Origins of Nomination: The General Convention of The New Jerusalem in the United States of America, the owner of Wayfarers Chapel, initiated and funded the National Historic Landmark nomination. The nomination was prepared by a historic consultant on behalf of the owner.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- National Historic Landmark designation of Wayfarers Chapel would increase awareness of the lesser known but exceptionally important work of Lloyd Wright and his contributions to modern organic architecture in the United States.
- Designation of Wayfarers Chapel would also ensure the preservation and maintenance of an exceptional landmark and promote visibility of the chapel within the community and the visiting public.

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

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 21, 2023):

- John R. and Marcia R. Booth, Rancho Palos Verdes
- Lincoln Phipps, Rancho Palos Verdes

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Add some information about Emanuel Swedenborg and Swedenborgianism for additional background.
- Add the 1955 landscape plan and the plot plan from the presentation slide to the nomination.
- Consider acknowledging that this area was Japanese American farmland that was confiscated when the Japanese Americans were put in the internment camps during World War II.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, 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 recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, as a National Historic Landmark.