

## Immanuel Presbyterian

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### **Immanuel Presbyterian also Connects to:**

- North Presbyterian
- First Presbyterian
- Calvary Church
- Olivet Church

### **Historical Overview**

The Immanuel Presbyterian Church was built in 1873 and opened to the congregation on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1874. This church was formed as a merging of two congregations, First Presbyterian and North Presbyterian. These congregations merged when wealthy members of the congregation left to form Calvary Church on Milwaukee's West Side. The new congregation was aided with the dismantling of Olivet Congregational, a small but wealthy church, whose members transferred over to Immanuel when Olivet was closing. The exterior of the church has remained the same since its original construction, save for a single addition in 2014 that was designed to match the original architecture. The interior, however, has changed drastically. In 1887, a devastating fire tore through the building. The remade interior was much less ornate than the original but was designed by the same architect who created the original church interior, Edward Townsend Mix. Another change to the interior was the remodel done in the 50s, in an attempt to 'modernize' the interior. This has since been removed and restored closer to the post-fire interior. The church bought up houses around the area of the church grounds and have since torn one down and converted another into office spaces for church staff and the pastors. The space where the other house had stood has since been converted into a parking lot for congregation members.

Immanuel Presbyterian falls into the category of a social congregation as described in Holifield. The congregation is a close-knit community, with the majority of worshippers living within the area. According to recent survey of the church, the average commute to the church is around 6.5 miles, which indicates that many worshippers do live in the surrounding community. Additionally, the church is multigenerational and inclusive of all walks of life. According to staff, the apartment buildings across the street from the building house a large number of congregation members. This creates a tight knit church community, which is vital to the future of a congregation. The church is located in an upscale community, and the congregation and its relics reflect that. There is a significant number of relics, new items and technology that have been updated recently. By studying the history of Immanuel Presbyterian, one can understand the demographics of the neighborhood, as well as the overall influence of the church on the nearby community. The most recent change in the history of Immanuel Presbyterian is the open acceptance of LGBTQ+ members and leaders. A split occurred within the congregation about the support of peoples of the LGBTQ+ community. When Immanuel Presbyterian continued to support these members, some

members of the congregation did leave, but the church stuck to its original plans and continues to thrive.

### **Timeline**

- 4/11/1837 Rev. Moses Ordway and Rev. Cutting Marsh create First Presbyterian Church.
- c. 7/1837 Congregation built the first church in Milwaukee near the corner of Second St. and Wells
- c. 1/1844 First Presbyterian moved into the “Little White Church” on the corner of Milwaukee and Mason.
- c. 1/1849 John Buchanan created an “Old School” Presbyterian congregation called North Presbyterian Church.
- 12/7/1870 First Presbyterian and North Presbyterian Church merge together and form Immanuel Presbyterian Church.
- 1/3/1875 Immanuel Presbyterian moved into their new (and current) location on Astor St.
- 12/30/1887 A massive fire broke out in the church and destroyed the roof and much of the interior.
- 3/3/1889 After only fourteen months the church was rebuilt and rededicated.
- c. 1918 The church choir changed from a professional quartet to a congregational choir as a part of the ‘community singing’ movement that spurred during WWI.
- c. 1920 Congregation celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of become Immanuel.
- 9/25/1938 The church underwent a massive remodeling project that added the present chapel and parlor on the north side, sealed off the church balcony, and added modern amenities.
- c. 12/1951 A committee that was formed to determine the future of the church decided not to move the congregation out of the growing city.
- c. 4/1953 The congregation purchased the ‘Waverly House’ next to the church and turned it into the headquarters of Immanuel’s church school and guild quarters.
- 1/8/1978 Deborah Block, the first female pastor at Immanuel was called upon.
- c. 1987 Immanuel Presbyterian celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Presbyterian

congregation in Milwaukee.

- c. 1998 The congregation purchased the house directly next to the church and turned the space into an office building for the church.
- c. 2014 Church underwent another remodeling project that upgraded the basement to be used as the new Sunday school classrooms.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Block, Deborah A., personal interview, conducted on April 17, 2019.

Deborah Block has been pastor at Immanuel Presbyterian since 1978 and was the first female pastor called upon in the congregation. She is a graduate of Carroll University with a Bachelor of Arts in religious studies.

Gurda, John. *Keeping Faith in the City: a History of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*. The Church, 1987.

This is a book written on the history of Immanuel Presbyterian in 1987 for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Presbyterian congregation. John Gurda is a Milwaukee writer and historian whose book, *The Making of Milwaukee*, was turned into an award-winning documentary.

Hope, Andrew. "Immanuel Presbyterian, 1873." Architecture of Faith. Accessed March 24, 2019. <http://architectureoffaithmilwaukee.info/III-Gothic-Revival/28-Immanuel-Presbyterian.aspx>.

This website, created by Andrew Hope, covers the history and architecture of many places of worship within the city of Milwaukee. Hope's website provides valuable information and is the crowning achievement of Andrew Hope's academic career.

Thiel, John, and Mary Ellen Young. "Historic American Buildings Survey: Immanuel Presbyterian Church." *Historic American Buildings Survey Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*, n.d., 10.

The Historic American Buildings Survey provided the majority of the background information for this Place of Worship. The information up until 1970 about the changing interior and exterior was all provided by this survey. The work of the authors was invaluable to the understanding of the Immanuel Presbyterian Churches' past.

### **Spatial History**

- 4/11/1837 Rev. Moses Ordway and Rev. Cutting Marsh create First Presbyterian Church. (Location: Little White Church)

- 12/7/1870 First Presbyterian and North Presbyterian Church merge together and form Immanuel Presbyterian Church.
- 1/3/1875 Immanuel Presbyterian moved into their new (and current) location on Astor St. (Location: Church)
- 12/30/1887 A massive fire broke out in the church and destroyed the roof and much of the Interior. (Location: Where they relocated during rebuilding-Women's Club on Kilbourn)

Add something about prohibition or building churches

- c. 1951 Building of Waverly House
- 1/8/1978 Deborah Block, the first female pastor at Immanuel, was called upon.
- c. 2014 Church underwent another remodeling project that upgraded the basement to be used as the new Sunday school classrooms.