

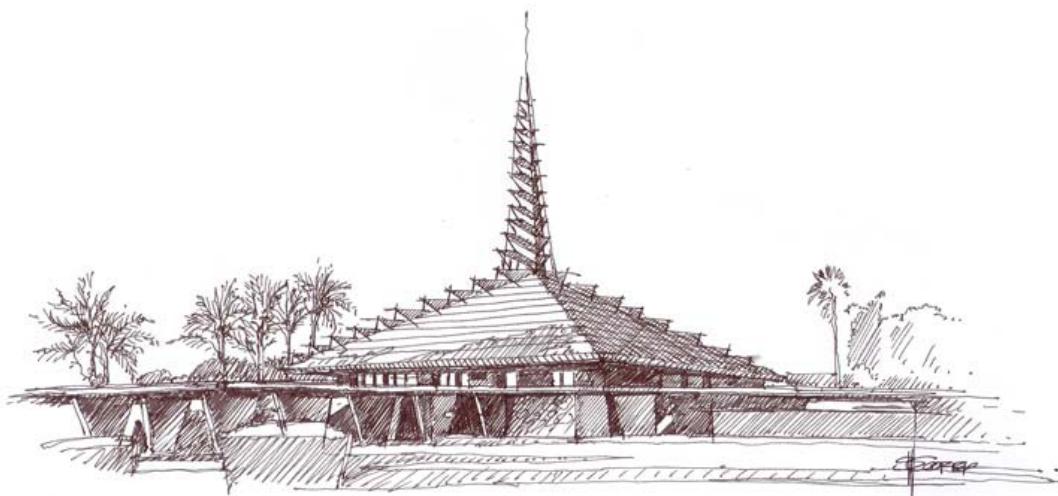


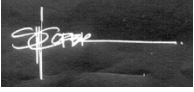
First Christian Church

Phoenix, Arizona

On a northern-central Phoenix property, a late comer to the list of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings quietly sits on a flat fifteen acre site. It wasn't supposed to be there, the church was originally commissioned by the Southwest Christian

Seminary in 1949 as part of what was called a classical university. The original design included administrative buildings, seminar rooms, library, Greek theatre, and faculty homes. The campus was to be 80 acres and the drawings were completed in 1950, but the seminary ceased its operations and as a result the university was never built.





In February 1952 the First Christian Church in Phoenix was founded in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Wright Barlett ultimately beginning with 32 members. Due to its continued rapid growth, the congregation moved from central Phoenix to its present location. The church continued to grow and in the late sixties once again found itself with the need to build, so the search for a new worship center began. The leadership of First Christian Church became aware of the unused plans and obtained permission from the Frank Lloyd Wright's widow Olgivanna and in 1971, First Christian Church instructed Taliesin to finalize the plans. In May 1972 construction began, twenty three years after the original drawings were complete. Construction was completed and the first service was held in February 1973.

In 1978 the church added a 120 foot high Wright designed Bell Tower. Utilizing the triangular plan geometry, the Tower has a diamond footprint which effectively appears to be of triangular form from any vantage point.

Meanwhile, the congregation continued to grow, so did the need for support services and in 1979 the congregation completed the original plans with the addition of the offices, library, meeting rooms, classrooms, and music rehearsal facilities. This two story linear addition to the north helps to anchor the Sanctuary to the whole in typical Wrightian form.





Overall, the plan was developed on the triangular grid to honor the trinity. This also represented an “attitude” of prayer according to Wright. This geometry also makes subtle appearances vertically as well. The Sanctuary rests on 23 natural concrete piers having shallow vertical angles representing “desert trees” according to Wright. They also support a punctured roof that provides welcome shading from the Phoenix summer sun and day-lighting as though you were in a desert forest of mesquite. The siting of the building appears to be 30 degrees from north south in a northwest to

southeast axis, hence it sits dramatically from the street. The triangular theme is evident in the plan and elevation, and also in pyramidal forms and details.

The interior of the Sanctuary flows the double triangle or diamond shape in plan while opening up to the apex that leads to the spire. The layout of pews seat seven hundred while limiting the distance to the pulpit to eighty three feet. Both the flooring and pew seats are covered in blue carpet to tie in the interior and “unite” the Sanctuary. Other than the exposed natural concrete gold acts as an accent color.

Guided tours of the church are available by appointment only, Monday through Friday 8:30 – 5:00 pm.

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REFERENCES:

First Christian Church, Phoenix web-site
Wright Sites, A Guide to Frank Lloyd Wright Public Places

Photos and Sketches by author