

State of California - The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**PRIMARY RECORD**

Primary #  
HRI #  
Trinomial  
NRHP Status Code 6Y

Other Listings  
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Page 1 of 7 \*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder): First Congregational Church

P1. Other identifier: None

\*P2. Location: ☐ Not for Publication ☒ Unrestricted

\*a. County Santa Cruz County

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a location map as necessary.)

\*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Santa Cruz Date Revised 1994 T .11 S. ; R .2 W. ; Mount Diablo B.M.

c. Address: 900 High St.

City Santa Cruz Zip 95060

d. UTM:(give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone 10S ; 584846 mE/ 4092934 mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

north side of High Street between Moore Street and Kalkar Drive. APN# 001-022-40

\*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements, include design, material, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

One of Santa Cruz's most significant modern buildings, the First Congregational Church sanctuary and attached hall and education building is located above High Street, overlooking Monterey Bay and Santa Cruz's Westside. The 1959 design was intended to break away from traditional ecclesiastic architecture by embedding the sanctuary with innovative symbolism related to modern Christian thought, and avoiding imagery associated with the past. In the words of the architect made fifty years ago, "The tower is contemporary in shape, but traditional in the sense that we did use a tower. The sweeping roof provides a feeling of soaring and lift. We selected the materials which related peaceful quietness, such as redwood, stone, and stucco, avoiding strong clashing colors and stern unrelated lines. We've even avoided the starkness of direct lighting. Congregationalism is without ostentation in its religious practices, and we tried to convey this in the building." (Continued on page 4, DPR523L)

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP16. Religious building

\*P4. Resources Present: ☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other (Isolates, etc.)



P5b. Description of Photo:  
(View, date, accession #)  
View facing north, 2009.

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source:

☒ Historic ☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both

1959, news article, 50 years old.

\*P7. Owner and Address:

\*P8. Recorded By: (Name, affiliation, and address)

F. Maggi/L. Dill/J. Kusz

Archives & Architecture, LLC  
PO Box 1332  
San Jose, CA 95109

\*P9. Date Recorded: 5/6/09

\*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)

Intensive

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none".)

Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey - Vol. III, Department of Planning and Community Development, City of Santa Cruz, 2012.

\*Attachments:

☐ None ☒ Continuation Sheet ☐ District Record ☐ Rock Art Record ☐ Other (List):  
☒ Location Map ☒ Building, Structure, and Object Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Artifact Record  
☐ Sketch Map ☐ Archaeological Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Photograph Record

DPR 523A (1/95)

\* Required Information

**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

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\*NRHP/CRHR Status Code 3CS

Resource Name (Assigned by recorder)

First Congregational Church

B1. Historic Name: First Congregational Church

B2. Common Name: 900 High St.

B3. Original Use: Church

B4. Present Use: Church

\*B5. Architectural Style: Modern

\*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

Constructed in 1959 (Bates Elliot, project architect for Leslie Nichols).

\*B7. Moved? ☒ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown Date: n/a

Original Location: n/a

\*B8. Related Features:

Fellowship hall, and two-story educational and youth building.

B9a. Architect: Leslie Nichols

b. Builder: Harrod &amp; Williams

\*B10. Significance: Theme Institutions

Area: Westside

Period of Significance: 1959

Property Type: Religious

Applicable Criteria: (3)

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

The First Congregational Church was founded in Santa Cruz in 1852, and was the fourth Congregational church founded in California. In 1857, the form was established based on the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. The first structure was built about 1858 on Church Street; the church incorporated in 1867. After moving to Center and Lincoln Streets in 1890. The congregation, under Rev. Bernard Cornellussen, constructed this church in 1959, following Santa Cruz's downtown flood. In 1966, the corporate name was changed to United Church of Christ.

The site was once a part of the Cowell Ranch, and received \$300,000 from the Cowell Foundation to construct the sanctuary, fellowship hall, and two-story educational and youth building. One of Santa Cruz's most significant modern buildings, it was designed by the firm of architect Leslie Nichols, with Bates Elliot as the project architect. It continues to function today as the First Congregational Church/United Church of Christ.

(Continued on page 4, DPR523L)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (list attributes and codes) None

\*B12. References:

Congregational Church Historical Committee, *A Century of Christian Witness: History of First Congregational Church*, 1963.  
 Lehmann, Susan. Historic Context Statement for City of Santa Cruz. 2000.  
 Santa Cruz city directories, 1959-1989.

(Sketch Map with north arrow required.)

B13. Remarks: None

\*B14. Evaluator: Leslie Dill

\*Date of Evaluation: May 6, 2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)



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**LOCATION MAP**

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\* Map Name: Santa Cruz, Calif.

\* Scale: n.t.s.

\* Date of Map: 1954 (revised 1994)



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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

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\* Recorded By F. Maggi/L. Dill/J. Kusz \* Date 5/6/2009 ☒ Continuation ☐ Update

*(Continued from page 1, DPR523a, P3a Description)*

Specific design characteristics embedded in the building complex that extends westward from the sanctuary and along the rear parking area include: the angular sanctuary rise to the street (to create an inspirational effect), an implied sense harmony of the secondary structures to the sanctuary, and the use of arches to emphasis human scale. The sanctuary itself was designed to not "over-awe" people, "but to draw them in where they can look and absorb." When entering the narthex, the visitor, under the low ceiling is presented with the cross in the rough. When entering the nave, the visitor is then drawn outward and upward. The head of the chancel was installed as cross-on-the-rock, and to the right and left could be viewed Loma Prieta and the Pacific Ocean.

The embedded symbols include the prayer tower with it's imagery of hands uplifted peaked by a cross, the diamond plan stressing "gathered community," the Arcades which bind together the function units of the complex related to the concepts of work, fellowship, and education, to the spiritual (the sanctuary), the entrance doors with handles of fish, the secret sign from the time of Jesus that provided a way of Christians finding their way, the three entries from the Narthex into the nave representing the three ways to know God (Faith, Prayer, and Service), use of clear glass suggesting "the honest pursuit of truth," and the rock and the cross - a six ton block of limestone from Cowell Ranch and a timber from a 2,000 year-old Redwood tree salvaged from a bridge demolition project in Marin County that symbolize the crucifixion.

In plan, the building complex is an inverted "Z", with a large parking area abutting High Street, two entries from the street, with the most westerly driveway wrapping around the building to provide access to additional parking to the rear. The one and two-story sections extending from the sanctuary contain the fellowship hall, administrative offices, and and classrooms. The wings continue the use of stucco and limestone from the sanctuary structure, and with sweeping horizontal lines and wide overhanging eaves which are "Wrightian" in character.

*(Continued from page 2, DPR523b, B10 Significance)*

SIGNIFICANCE

The property was found eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources. Religious facilities are not normally eligible for the California Register under Criterion (1) or (2). However, the church sanctuary and related complex is a distinctive and exceptional design by architect Leslie Nichols, and appears to qualify for the California Register under Criterion (3).

When considered for listing within the Historic Building Survey of the City of Santa Cruz however, the property meets the following criteria:

1. The building is a significant example of the built environment heritage of the City as a representative of a twentieth century church building; and
5. The building possesses special aesthetic merit and value due to its quality of architecture, retaining sufficient features that show its architectural significance; and
6. The building possesses distinctive stylistic characteristics of the Modern architecture; and
7. The building retains sufficient integrity to accurately convey its significance.

*(Continued on next page)*

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Aerial view showing building complex.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

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\* Date 5/6/2009

☒ Continuation ☐ Update



Administration and education building, viewed facing northwest.