

Calvary Baptist Church

2959 N. Teutonia Ave.
AHI #56584

Construction date: 1970
Architect: William Wenzler & Assoc.

Calvary Baptist, Milwaukee's oldest Black Baptist congregation, was established in 1895 as Mt. Olive Baptist Church and took on its current name in 1913. The congregation worshiped in three successive churches, all purchased from former white congregations. The two earliest have been demolished. Calvary's third church, still extant at 1727 N. 4th St., was purchased from the Mt. Olive English Lutheran congregation when that congregation left downtown to build a new church on the far west side (also still extant – and listed in the National Register – at 5327 W. Washington Blvd.) The Calvary Baptist church at 1727 N. 4th St. was the site of Civil Rights-era activity.



In 1966, Calvary Baptist purchased the current parcel along N. Teutonia Ave. and worked with architect William Wenzler to design a new church. The design for the new church reflects a period of growing interest among Black Americans in African history and culture, and the congregation's pride in their own African heritage. Calvary Baptist Church was dedicated in 1971. As described by architectural historian Paul Jakubovich:

This strikingly modern church maintains a tradition of buildings designed to reflect their congregants' ethnicity. Wenzler drew on the building traditions of Cameroon in west-central Africa for this well-established African American congregation; hence the low, irregular shape with tent-like roofs and uneven wall heights. The church's two buildings huddle together, as if to resemble a small village or a traditional clan compound. The gently spreading roof forms low peaks, sheltering the walls with gracefully sweeping eaves. Solid brick walls evoke the lashed bamboo found in Cameroon, and shingles stand in for a thick-woven grass roof. Inside, the plank-and-beam ceiling recalls the bracing long used in Cameroon.⁶⁷

Calvary Baptist Church is recommended as potentially eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* as a good example of the Neo-Expressionist style utilized to embody its congregation's African heritage, culture, and building traditions.

⁶⁷ Paul Jakubovich, in Marsha Weisiger, ed., *Buildings of Wisconsin*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2017), 129.