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City of Johannesburg  
Community Development  
Directorate: Arts, Culture & Heritage  
Immovable Heritage

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## IMMOVABLE HERITAGE INVENTORY FORM

**Name of site:** Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen:

**Other Names (if any):** Greek Orthodox Church

**Location:** Wolmarans Street, at the corner of Claim and Nugget Streets,  
Joubert Park

**Stand no:** 2161 and 2162

**Street address:** 48 Banket Street, Johannesburg, 2001.

**District/Province/Region:** Johannesburg, Gauteng

### Ownership:

**Previous Owner:** N/A

**Present Owner:** Hellenic Community of Johannesburg and Transvaal.

**Site Type:** Church / Place of worship

## Photos





Picture credit: Lucille Davie, Joburg Website

## **Description**

The domed, Byzantine Greek-orthodox-styled church is modelled on the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The classic Greek church exterior features four levels of differently angled domes. In contrast to the relative simplicity of the exterior, the interior of the church is richly decorated, including a carved wooden pulpit and bishop's chair, green marbled columns across the three-metre high Parthenon-shaped altar, and brass chandeliers suspended from the high ceiling. The ornamentation is set off against crisp white walls lined with religious icons, and the blue painted dome above.

### **Hellenic Cultural Centre**

Adjacent to the Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen is situated the Hellenic Cultural Centre, which was built in 1967. The Hellenic Cultural Centre occupies stand number 4540 and is used for church functions.

## **State of Conservation:**

The church precinct remains well-preserved and carefully looked-after.

## **History:**

In the years before the Cathedral was built, the Greek community in Johannesburg numbered around 2000 persons, many of whom worshipped in Anglican churches. It was only when monk Archimandrite Nicodemos Sarikas arrived in 1907 that an active campaign was launched to raise money for the church and adjacent community hall, and to secure the services of the architect Hermann Kallenbach.

The cathedral opened in January 1913, designed by Kallenbach. It was the first example of a building with a pendative dome in South Africa.

Hermann Kallenbach was a close friend and supporter of M.K. Gandhi. While guiding the work on the Greek Cathedral, Kallenbach lived with Gandhi and other residents at Tolstoy Farm, from 1910 to 1912. A Lithuanian-born Jew, Kallenbach trained in Germany, before establishing a successful architectural practice in Johannesburg.

For many years, the church drew a large congregation was drawn from Greek immigrants living in surrounding areas such as Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville. Worshippers also came from further afield on the Witwatersrand. The large parking was often overflowed, particularly on Easter celebrations, with cars parked right around the block.

More recently, many members of the Greek community moved away from the inner city, and a number emigrated, some returning to Greece. Currently, the church draws a combination of new congregants together with old ones (some of whom travel from a wider area). With new migrant communities settling in the inner city, some Ethiopians of the Coptic Faith have recently come to worship here.

## **Statement of Significance:**

The Greek Orthodox Cathedral has been at the heart of Greek religious and community life, and serves to commemorate the role of the Greek community in Johannesburg, and its place in the wider Greek diaspora. The church highlights the cosmopolitan and poly-glott make-up of early Johannesburg. A landmark of the historic inner city, the building is distinguished by its fine architecture associated with the life and work of the architect Hermann Kallenbach.

The site is of special heritage significance in terms of criteria set out in Section 3 (3) of the National Heritage Resources Act:

- Its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history;

- It's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
- It's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- It's strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation, of importance in the of importance in the history of South Africa.

## Legal Status (Decree Act)

Provisional Protection under Section 29 of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA, 1999). Provincial Gazette Extraordinary vol. 18, no. 164, 13 June 2012.

## Authority Responsible

Provincial Heritage Resources Authority - Gauteng

### Use:

**Previous:** Religious worship

**Current:** Place of worship.

## Documentation/Research

Photos ☒ Maps ☐ Site Plans ☐  
 Others.....

## Source(s) of Information

- Davie, Lucille. 17 January 2007 "Great Churches serving small congregations". Available at: [www.joburg.org.za/2007/jan/jan17\\_churches3.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/2007/jan/jan17_churches3.stm).
- Ufieda Ho. 25 March 2011. "Church full of memories also reflects reality of the new SA". The Star.
- Hecules Symeonidis – personal communication (15 August 2011).

## Name & Address of Recorder:

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**Position:** Deputy Director: Immovable Heritage

**Signature**

29 July 2011