

Historic Oklahoma City church celebrates centennial, still centerpiece in revived MidTown community

Oklahoma City's Frontline Church will have to wait a little while longer before moving into the historic First Christian Church in MidTown.

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Saturday marked the centennial of one of downtown's most historic church buildings, the former home of First Christian Church at NW 10 and Robinson Avenue. And when it was put up for sale by City Church a couple of years back, there were those who wondered if it would eventually end up empty and forlorn like another nearby landmark two blocks north, the former home of the First Christian Scientist.

The congregation of the growing Frontline Church took the challenge of buying the old First Christian Church and spent weeks on repairs. They turned a dark, gloomy basement into colorful and airy classrooms. They sealed up leaks in the steps out front, renovated and reopened restrooms, repaired plaster and added life back into the grand old building just in time to celebrate its centennial with their first service there on Sunday.

When I toured the building on Saturday, I saw a glimpse of the downtown neighborhood's future. Inside the church I saw dozens of congregation members cleaning, finishing final fixes and preparing for the next day's service. Across the street one can see renovations under way on an old office building being turned into the home of a law firm, and ongoing renovations to the former Packard dealership and Guardian garage that will be turned into retail, offices and housing. The MidTown neighborhood is making a full comeback, and the Frontline Church appears to be a good addition to the mix.

But old buildings, even grand ones like this designed by legendary architect Andrew Solomon Layton, tend to have their share of surprises. In this case, a section of plaster came crashing down on the sanctuary from the mezzanine balcony on Saturday night. The good news it didn't happen during the inaugural service on Sunday. The bad news is it delayed this congregation from moving into its new home.

Repairs are already getting started, and it won't be long before Frontline makes their belated move. Their hard work and patience is a gift to downtown, preservationists and the city's architectural community.