

Shawnee congregation to hold final service in historic church building

Echoes of music from the historic pipe organ at United Presbyterian Church, 330 N. Beard, will sound for the last time from that location today as the congregation holds its final service in the more than 100-year-old building.

By Kim Morava

Posted Aug. 23, 2015

United Presbyterian Church (Photo below) which was formerly First Presbyterian; then merged with Central Presbyterian to become United Presbyterian.

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ED BLOCHOWIAK STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



The congregation of United Presbyterian Church will meet for services for the last time today at 330 N. Beard.

The history of United Presbyterian Church

United Presbyterian Church was formed with the merger of First Presbyterian Church and Central Presbyterian Church in 1999. Both churches were established around the turn of the 20th century.

First Presbyterian Church began in south Shawnee in 1892 as a Union Sunday School and was officially organized as "The Shawnee Presbyterian Church" on May 17, 1895. Services and meetings were held at different locations until 1896, when a church building was erected. The current building (330 N. Beard) was dedicated in 1916. During the flu epidemic of 1918, the basement of the building was used as an auxiliary hospital. A major renovation to the building was made in 1953, and in 1978, the church dedicated a 25-rank Casavant Freres Pipe Organ.

Central Presbyterian Church was organized on January 15, 1908, with 13 charter members. The first services were held in City Hall, and work on a new building began in 1909. By 1911, Central Presbyterian had 180 members.

First and Central merged on February 14, 1999, to become United Presbyterian Church.

Echoes of music from the historic pipe organ at United Presbyterian Church, 330 N. Beard, will sound for the last time from that location today as the congregation holds its final service in the more than 100-year-old building. Service time is 10:45 a.m. today, with 15 to 20 minutes of organ music preceding that service time.

In what many are calling a leap of faith, the 35-member congregation will bid farewell to the building and move to a new location.

“The church is in disrepair — it’s getting to the point we don’t have the resources to repair it,” said Rev. Amy Busse, who estimated a renovation would be about \$1 million.

As a result, she said the congregation made a “brave decision” and will move the church family to a temporary home in the former Sips, 114 E. Main.

Moving “gives us a chance to breathe” without the concerns about the building and continued repairs, she said.

The final service — a celebration and fond farewell to the historic building — will be held today in what promises to be an emotional day, she said. “It will allow people to grieve and say good-bye,” Busse said, adding that people do get attached to a building and they want to honor that as they make their way to their new home.

And while the move to Main Street is hoped to be temporary, the ultimate goal is to possibly build a new church someday, she said. Either way, the congregation is looking at this as a new beginning.

“People are committed and faithful...we’re small, but we’re also tough,” Busse said about the congregation and its move, adding this will be a new opportunity for them to “follow God in a new direction and rediscover who we are.”

United Presbyterian Church was formed in 1999 when two churches that formed in the early 20th Century — First Presbyterian and Central Presbyterian — merged.

Church member Pauline Young, whose grandfather W.W. Ives joined the original First Presbyterian Church in 1905, said the current building opened in 1916 and saying good-bye is going to be sad.

And while the congregation has talked for years about the building and what to do, after this spring's rain and other issues, "The Lord said it's time to move," Young said, "and gave us a nudge."

And while the building has issues, "that's home," she said, remembering how every pew was full when she was a child.

While there is still moving to do, the sale of the building won't happen immediately. Busse said the congregation does have plans to save the pipe organ and move it to wherever they end up permanently. Busse said once it sells, they also hope the building can still be used as a church.

"We so grateful for all of the years in that building," Busse said, adding she's proud of the congregation and their "faithful decision."
Young agreed.

"The Lord's behind it — it's time to do something else," Young said.

Photo of Central Presbyterian Church, Shawnee, OK, before it merged with First Presbyterian:



From the United Presbyterian Church website, 2016:

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