



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ginger Heidel
912-401-5401 | ginger@fbc-sav.org

Historic House of Worship Overcoming New Challenges

SAVANNAH, GA – Enter the 176-year-old sanctuary of First Baptist Church of Savannah, and you’ll see a study in contrasts. If you look toward the altar, the warm scene before you is filled with Chrismon trees, advent candles, and the festive garland of the season. But look behind you, and you’ll see bare metal scaffolding, plastic tarps, and the signs of reconstruction.

“This is a wonderful, historic building,” says Senior Minister Dr. John Finley. “It survived an earthquake, hurricanes, and even remained open each Sunday during the Civil War. We have a great tradition of overcoming obstacles, and we’re proving we can do it again.”

This latest challenge first presented itself last year when choir members noticed that a new crack had appeared in the plaster ceiling at the rear of the church. An evaluation by a structural engineer uncovered a problem with the roof trusses. When the sanctuary was expanded in 1922, additional weighty materials were added to the roof. Now, 87 years later, the roof is showing fatigue and must be strengthened.

Fortunately, the investigation did not reveal an immediate danger for worshipers, but it was deemed necessary for a restoration project to begin right away. The project will be costly and inconvenient, but Dr. Finley says church members are choosing a different focus. “This is our opportunity to take care of a building which has served us so well for so many years,” says Dr. Finley. “It’s our way to honor our past and preserve our church’s future.”

The church will remain open during most of the reconstruction. The sanctuary will only close for four weeks in January. However, this closure gives First Baptist an opportunity to strengthen another unique relationship – one with the Congregation Mickve Israel. First Baptist will hold services in Savannah’s oldest synagogue during those few weeks when its own sanctuary is closed.

First Baptist Church of Savannah would like to invite members of the press to visit our sanctuary at 10 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 16th at 223 Bull Street in downtown Savannah.

Come see the reconstruction effort and talk with church staff and church members about this important time in the history of our church. This sanctuary is a well-known historic landmark on one of Savannah's most beautiful squares. We'd appreciate your help letting the community know about the restoration taking place behind our walls, and the way our faith community is coming together during this challenging time.

Facts about First Baptist Church of Savannah

- The sanctuary building, Savannah's oldest standing house of worship, was completed in 1832 or early 1833.
- The designer was Elias Carter, noted New England builder and one of the first architects in this country. Carter built a number of churches in New England and several buildings in Georgia.
- The church building survived the Civil War, keeping its doors open throughout. One Sunday in December 1864, the congregation included Confederate soldiers. The next Sunday, after Sherman "gave" the city to President Lincoln, the congregation included Union soldiers.
- The Great Charleston Earthquake of 1886 cracked the walls so severely they were not repaired for two years.
- During the 1890s, major hurricanes struck the Georgia coast, damaging the church. The hurricane of 1898 ripped off part of the roof and damaged the interior as well.
- The current reconstruction project stems in part from expanding the church in 1922, when additional weight was placed on the roof truss system.
- The sanctuary has hosted many important events, including one of the first gatherings of Christian, Jewish and Muslim worshippers ever held in Savannah, marking the one-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks.
- Worship services will continue to be held in the sanctuary through the Christmas season.
- First Baptist Church will hold Sunday services at 11 am at Mickve Israel, from January 10 through January 31.
- Worship services will resume here in February, and we hope scaffolding will be removed before Easter.
- Contractor: J. T. Turner Construction Company, Inc. of Savannah
- Structural Engineer: 4SE, Inc., of Charleston
- Estimated Time of Completion: Five to six months
- Major Focus: Strengthening roof truss system by shoring up and reinforcing components.
- Capital Campaign Goal: \$1.5 million
- Capital Campaign Slogan: "It's Our Time: Preserving the Legacy, Continuing the Witness"