

The next chapter: Christ Lutheran Church moves onto former Dana College campus



Christ Lutheran Church members Gail Smith and Vicki Barr paint walls Friday in the former Durham Classroom Center on the former Dana College campus.

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After a decade without a building of its own and months of preparation, Christ Lutheran Church now has a permanent home.

The Blair church, which previously had a lease agreement with Angels Share, Inc., has purchased the first floor of the former Durham Classroom Center and Trinity Chapel on the former Dana College campus. Members of the congregation have spent hundreds, if not thousands of hours, volunteering to ready the facility.

“It was preparation, preparation, preparation. Once we started, it was like a waterfall. It's just like we're nonstop. We just keep going and going. There's actually a light at the end of the tunnel,” congregation president Curt Barr said Friday afternoon as he toured the building while volunteers painted and cleaned.

“Our congregation is thrilled about this and they are very excited. That's reflected in how readily they've been volunteering and using their time and sweat equity to make this place the best we can make it,” Pastor Mark Degner said. “I, personally, am also thrilled and I look forward to pastoring this church into this chapter of our history and helping our church to claim its identity as a church that is in mission for Christ.”

On Saturday, the church officially moved into the building, which will now be known as the New Life Center. In addition to worship space, the church has room for Bible study, Sunday School and fellowship. The second and third floors of the building will be occupied by Angels Share offices and additional nonprofits.

Though the congregation began moving items into the building, the church cannot yet hold services due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, those restrictions are expected to be relaxed after May 4.

“We're going to have the church we've always wanted, we're going to get it all done and the irony of it is that we still can't get in here,” Barr said.

With the exception of new windows, work in Trinity Chapel is nearly complete. Workers were finishing a state-of-the-art sound booth. A new cross, crafted with several varieties of wood by congregation member Bob Ehman, now hangs on the wall at the front of the chapel.

“It says a lot of things to a lot of people,” Barr said. “It's very diverse.”

Additional work to be completed include a new security system, doors separating the common space and a canopy for the new west entrance. Once that work is finished, the church will need to apply for an occupancy permit from the Nebraska State Fire Marshal's Office.

“We've spent a lot of time, energy and money making the place look brand new and making it look beautiful and to make it what we call a ministry center,” Degner said. “We believe that our mission is to reach people and serve people, so we want this place to be a place where Jesus is glorified, where his name is magnified and made famous.”

Barr is excited for the possibilities of opening the building.

“Look at this place. I'm just humbled to be here, proud to be here, excited to be here,” he said. “Not too often in our lives especially in the last couple of decades it's hard to get a win-win. Nobody loses in this. Blair wins, the community wins, Dana alumni win, we win.”

While the congregation sees the building as a significant moment in their church's history, being able to occupy a space that was previously the site of Trinity Seminary also has significance.

“We believe we are extending and maintaining a kingdom of God footprint on that hill as we do Gospel ministry and outreach for the sake of Jesus as our savior,” Degner said.