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# Abbey Grill in Frisco may become church again

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A 105-year-old building in downtown Frisco is headed for a revival.

After 25 years as a restaurant, the boxy, brick structure will be returned to its original use as a church, if all goes as planned.

Life-Changing Faith Christian Fellowship is raising money and getting city permits to reopen the building that has housed the Abbey Grill.

"This building needs to be preserved because of its spiritual history, and we want to be the ones to do that," Life-Changing Faith Pastor Dono Pelham said.

Baptist church leaders purchased the land at Main and Seventh streets for \$250 in 1902, before Frisco even had its name. The wooden building with a bois d'arc log foundation opened as the First Baptist Church of Frisco in 1904.

Over the years, the church expanded and was renovated. In 1923, teams of men, horses and mules lifted the church and turned it so the entrance would face Seventh Street. The brick exterior was added around 1939.

The First Baptist congregation eventually outgrew the site and built a new church on Hummingbird Lane in 1974.

After several fits and starts for the downtown property, the Abbey opened in 1984. Its original menu kept the building's spirit alive with offerings such as Reverend Al's 12-ounce rib eye, Sister Cobb's fried corn and Brother Bob's pecan pie.

A sign

Through changes in its menu and its ownership, the restaurant remained popular. For 15 years, the Abbey was run by Morteza Darzi, who decided in December to close. He declined to be interviewed.

A member of Life-Changing Faith spotted the for-sale sign after services one Sunday and alerted Pelham's wife.



LOUIS DeLUCA/DMN  
**'This building needs to be preserved because of its spiritual history, and we want to be the ones to do that,' says Dono Pelham, pastor of Life-Changing Faith Christian Fellowship, which wants to reopen the building that has housed the Abbey Grill.**

"That Sunday, we began negotiations on one of the most historic sites in the city of Frisco," said the pastor, who fell in love with the property's history.

Former Frisco mayor Bob Warren said the building holds special memories for him. His parents' funerals were held at the church. He also first spotted his wife-to-be playing the piano at the church. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at the Abbey.

"I was baptized in the salad bar when I was 13 years old," the 88-year-old Warren said of the area used for baptisms that was converted for the restaurant. "I'm glad it will be a church again."

'In a revival'

A lot is at stake for Pelham, who started the nondenominational Life-Changing Faith only 18 months ago. The congregation, which meets at the Frisco Convention Center, has quickly grown to 225 members.

"I know we're in a recession, but spiritually we're in a revival," he said. "Folks are looking to God more."

Pelham said his congregation has already raised \$65,000 in the first two months of its capital campaign. And he said the church also has a vision for the heart of downtown Frisco. In addition to Wednesday and Sunday services, it hopes to open its doors to the community to offer meals and day-care services for the needy.

The plans are ambitious, given that the church still needs to raise about \$85,000 for the down payment on the property's \$1.45 million purchase price. And \$250,000 more is needed to renovate the building's interior. But the money doesn't faze Pelham.

"If your calculator gets in the way of faith, take the batteries out of the calculator," he said.

The first service at the reclaimed church is scheduled for Dec. 20.

"A church it was, and a church it will be again," Warren said.