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Restoration group to open office

TERRY LEE GOODRICH

STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

A national resource organization that helps congregations care **for** older, historic **sacred** properties will open a Texas regional office in Fort Worth today.

Officials with Philadelphia-based **Partners for Sacred Places** say that many churches, synagogues and mosques face huge repair bills and need money, or face being closed or demolished. The regional office will be the organization's first and will occupy a leased space at United Community Centers office on East Maddox Street.

Thirteen Texas churches, most of them in Tarrant County, have joined the effort, organization officials said.

"We wanted a **place** that was really ripe **for** this: historic buildings, great historic neighborhoods and committed community leaders," said A. Robert Jaeger, the organization's national executive director. "Fort Worth is it."

The interfaith, nonprofit **Partners for Sacred Places** found that 93 percent of historic churches nationwide host community activities as well as religious services. The estimate was based on a survey in 1998 of 115 historic churches in New York, Philadelphia, Mobile, Ala., Chicago, Indianapolis and San Francisco.

Leading the regional team will be James R. Nader, owner and principal architect of Nader Design Group, a Fort Worth architectural firm. He said he had planned to form an organization to restore a gym, built in 1915, at St. Andrews United Methodist Church in Fort Worth but then learned about **Partners for Sacred Places**.

"This helped keep us from reinventing the wheel," he said.

Partners for Sacred Places programs train congregational and community leaders to develop local assets as well as obtain grants, conduct capital campaigns and restore buildings, from evaluation through construction. It has helped thousands of congregations and organizations nationwide, Jaeger said.

Nader said buildings must be at least 50 years old to be considered **for** the program but need not be designated as historical, although **Partners for Sacred Places** may assist in obtaining that designation.

"If they serve the community in additional ways [than religious], there's a great possibility the community will want to keep them around and help them," Nader said.

The Rev. Carol Gibson of St. Andrews said she is thrilled about **Partners for Sacred Places'** aid **for** the church, which was built in 1904.

"The gym is a starting point **for** us to rehabilitate and reach out to the community," she said. "Our building has distinctive architecture, and this gives us an opportunity **for** renovation. We have an aging congregation and a glorious history. We want to bring in younger people and keep moving forward."

For more information, call 817-965-5072.

www.sacredplaces.org

IN THE KNOW

Participating area churches

Fort Worth

St. Andrews United Methodist Church

Arlington Heights United Methodist Church

Azle Avenue Baptist Church

Diamond Hill Baptist Church

Grace United Methodist Church

Handley Baptist Church

St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church

University Methodist Church

West Mount Moriah Baptist Church.

Others

First Baptist Church of Everman

First Baptist Church of White Settlement

Central United Methodist Church of Brownwood

First United Methodist Church of Hutto, in Williamson County north of Austin

Terry Lee Goodrich, 817-685-3812 tgoodrich@star-telegram.com

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