

A Preservation Plan for *St. Paul*

St. Paul United Methodist Church • 1816 Routh Street, Dallas Arts District

Updated September 2026

Why this plan

In 1873, freed men and women gathered under a brush arbor in Dallas to worship. The congregation they built grew at the heart of Freedman's Town, a thriving center of Black culture, commerce, and community. Between 1913 and 1927, church members and their neighbors raised the red brick sanctuary that still holds our worship today.

Freedman's Town was later cleared to make way for what is now the Dallas Arts District. St. Paul is one of only three structures that remain. Our sanctuary is nearly a century old, and it needs a clear, professional plan to carry it into its second century. This plan describes what we are preserving, the condition of the building, and the phased work ahead.

1873

Congregation founded by freed men and women

1913 to 1927

Sanctuary built by members and Freedman's Town neighbors

3 designations

Dallas Landmark (1982), Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (2013), National Register of Historic Places (2016)

What we are preserving

St. Paul is a rare surviving example in Dallas of an early twentieth century, architect designed African American church. Its Collegiate Gothic Revival style, with Romanesque Revival elements, includes:

- The original exterior layout, corner towers, and battlements
- Thirty five original stained glass windows
- Pressed tin ceilings and original woodwork throughout the sanctuary
- The original pews
- Load bearing brick walls, with the brick laid by members still visible in the lower level and on the exterior

Care so far

The congregation has invested in the building for generations. A major restoration completed in 2010 repaired exterior cracks, reinstalled the stained glass windows, repointed masonry, restored historic interior finishes, and added an elevator tower and accessible entrance. A new roof was installed in 2024.

Current condition

Even with that care, the sanctuary is showing its age and needs a professional assessment:

- **Water:** water infiltration remains the most urgent threat to the building.
- **Stained glass:** many windows are fragile, and some panes are at risk from water and mortar loss.

- **Exterior and towers:** the masonry and corner towers show wear and need professional attention to prevent further deterioration.
- **Building systems:** mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems are aging.
- **Interior:** the tin ceilings, woodwork, and pews show moderate wear.

The plan, in three phases

Preservation work follows a proven order: study the building first, protect it next, then restore it. Each phase builds on the one before, and all work will follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

PHASE ONE Assessment and Planning • Historic Structures Report • Conditions assessment • Architectural and engineering studies • Environmental review (water, drainage, hazardous materials) • Accessibility strategy • A phased capital plan with cost estimates and a fundraising plan SEEKING FUNDING	PHASE TWO Stabilization and Repair The priority repairs identified in Phase One, starting with the work that protects the building and everything inside. We expect these to include: • Moisture mitigation and drainage • Foundation and wall stabilization • Exterior masonry, woodwork, and architectural detail repair • Stained glass conservation TO FOLLOW	PHASE THREE Restoration and Renewal Restoring the sanctuary so it can serve the next generation of worship and community: • Interior restoration: plaster, woodwork, doors, trim, and floors • Modernized building systems, with minimal impact on historic fabric • Energy efficiency improvements that respect the building's historic character • Improved accessibility • Tours and interpretive displays that tell St. Paul's story TO FOLLOW
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Phase One at a glance

Item	Plan
Estimated cost	About \$100,000
Length	About 12 months from the start of funding
How consultants are chosen	A request for proposals to at least three qualified preservation firms, evaluated on experience with historic and culturally significant buildings, references, and the ability to work closely with the congregation
Congregation input	Congregation sessions during planning, so members help shape the priorities
What it produces	A technical guide for every repair that follows, and the cost estimates we need to seek funding for Phases Two and Three

Costs and scope for Phases Two and Three will be set by the Phase One findings. We will share them here as they are confirmed.

Who benefits

Our congregation and the families who have called St. Paul home for generations; students at Booker T. Washington High School next door; our unsheltered neighbors served through the Body and Soul ministry; visitors to the Dallas Arts District; and everyone who wants the story of Freedman's Town to be seen and remembered.

Built by many hands. Kept by *many more*.

- **Give or partner:** contact us to learn how your gift, grant, or partnership can help fund Phase One.
- **Share your records:** photographs, programs, and family stories help document the building and the congregation.
- **Spread the word:** follow St. Paul on Facebook and YouTube, and tell partners who care about African American history in Dallas.

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