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Trinity United Methodist Church celebrates reopening

A Roanoke church has its sanctuary back after a fire in April.

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Photos by Josh Meltzer | *The Roanoke Times*

Corinna English, 89, (left), who has attended Trinity United Methodist Church for more than 75 years, greets her good friend Jo Stafford (right) on her first Sunday back to the church since a fire damaged the sanctuary.

Humble yourselves.

On a day of celebration for members of Trinity United Methodist Church in Roanoke, the message during the 11 a.m. worship service was profound.

"Should we break our arms [patting ourselves on the back] about what we did to get a sanctuary in such fine shape?" the Rev. Steve Hundley asked the congregation of about 60 people. The guest speaker is Roanoke's United Methodist district supervisor.

Basing his sermon on passages from the book of Luke in the Bible, Hundley encouraged the church to be thankful but not to boast about its newly restored sanctuary with its dark green carpet and freshly painted, off-white walls.

Sunday was the first day that services were held at the building at Mountain Avenue and Third Street in six months. The room smelled crisp and new.

On April 16, a downed power line providing electrical service to the church started a blaze at Trinity's breezeway connecting its sanctuary and fellowship hall. The Rev. William Logan was in his office at Trinity when the blaze began.

"It looked like a California fire," he said. "It was just raging."

No one was hurt, but water from firefighters' hoses seeped into the sanctuary, causing extensive damage to the maroon carpet. Some walls were covered with black soot.



United Methodist Church District Superintendent Stephen Hundley preaches Sunday at Trinity United Methodist Church's first service in its newly restored sanctuary.

The breezeway sustained the most damage. The charred area had to be rebuilt and outfitted with fresh paint and carpet.

The repairs cost \$450,000, Logan said. Building Specialists, a local general contractor, handled the repairs.

After the fire, Trinity's congregation, which averages 35 people each week, held a few services at nearby Second Presbyterian Church in downtown Roanoke. Since May, they have had services in the church fellowship hall.

The well-known Third Street Coffeehouse, below the sanctuary, reopened in June. And the church continued to hold its Community Outreach Program for inner-city children and youth at other churches. In September, the program resumed inside the church's own fellowship hall.

Still, some elderly Trinity members have not attended many of the Sunday services because it was difficult for them to climb the steps leading to the fellowship hall. Because of the fire, the church's elevator was not working.

"It's nice to come back," said Corinna English, 89, a member of Trinity since 1930, as she settled into a pew before the service began. This was her first Sunday back since the fire.

Others at the service greeted one another with smiles and hugs. Songs and hymns sung had themes of renewal and celebration, such as "The Church's One Foundation" and "Surely the Presence of the Lord."

"I know the Lord wants to keep this building," Eddie King said to those gathered. "It's our responsibility that we be a congregation to fill it."

King, chairman of Trinity's board of trustees, admitted earlier that he wasn't so sure about the green color chosen for the sanctuary's new carpet. It was such a difference from the maroon carpet that had been there before the fire.

One day, however, some light shone upon the floor through one of the church's stained glass windows. It reflected a soft maroon glow, King said. He changed his opinion on the carpet's color.

"That was a message for me that it was good."

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