

NEWS NORTH DAKOTA

Volunteers, former worshippers work to restore historic Grue Church in Buxton

The church shut down in 2020, but former worshippers quickly decided to make use of the historic building.



The Historic Grue Church in Buxton, North Dakota. Ryan Longnecker / WDAY News



By **Michael McGurran**

June 18, 2024 at 10:43 PM

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BUXTON, N.D. — Like many churches, Grue Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church is filled with history.

Mancur Olson, a world-renowned economist and political scientist, was a congregant here. In fact, he's buried right behind the church.

Former worshipers have fond memories of their times here.

"We were married here back in '97 and our kids were baptized here," said Bobbi Hepper Olson, board chair for the church. "My mother-in-law played the organ and piano here for years, too."

Volunteers, former worshippers work to rest...

So when it shut down in 2020, people with history here knew they couldn't just let it deteriorate. They had to honor the 63 families that began the church in the latter half of the 19th century.

"Those 63 families that came here from Norway, it's just nice to highlight them and to keep their hard work into the future generations, too," Hepper Olson said.

So volunteers and former worshipers started bringing it back to life. The long-term goal is to convert the old church into a vibrant cultural and event space.

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"It was kind of the center of activity back in the day," Hepper Olson said. "So we thought, 'Why not try to do that?' So the church agreed to let us take possession, and then we started right away."


They're taking it one project at a time. They fixed the roof, so no more leaks. North Dakota State University students are working on restoring the large window at the front of the church through the Freedom by Design program.

It'll take more than a fresh coat of paint. They still have several years of work ahead of them.

But things worth doing often take hard work. And keeping old history alive is less work and more pleasure for the volunteers.

"We're just seeing a lot of the rural churches disappear off the countryside," Hepper Olson said. "We can't save every one, every church that's out there. But this one I thought was worth saving. Once we get all the hard work done, then it'll be a place for everybody to enjoy."

Outside the church on Sunday, June 23, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., volunteers will host their fourth annual lefse and lemonade fundraiser. The event includes live music, and funds raised will go to continue restoration of the church.

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