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First Baptist Church of Asheville Receives National Historic Preservation Grant: Award Recognizes and Supports Church's Focus on Community

(Asheville, NC) – First Baptist Church of Asheville announced today it is the recipient of a \$250,000 matching grant from the National Fund for Sacred Places, a program of Partners for Sacred Places in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

These grant funds will be used to complete exterior repairs on the 1927 sanctuary building at 5 Oak Street in downtown Asheville. These repairs include the repointing of the brick work and 5,500 square feet of terra-cotta ornamental bands and tile caps traveling the circumference of the building as well as restoration of features in the front portico. The project is expected to cost approximately \$1 million and take a year to complete.

“While the grant will help us preserve our historic buildings, more importantly, it will further strengthen the vital ministries and missions that these buildings house,” said Dr. Mack Dennis, senior pastor of First Baptist Asheville. “We’ve been laying the groundwork to become a regional center for musical arts, theological education, hunger relief and support for young adults with special needs. Additionally, we’re imagining how to use our resources to address several of Asheville’s critical needs, from affordable housing and childcare to job training and healthcare.”

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the sanctuary of First Baptist Asheville was designed by architect Douglas Ellington. It was completed in 1927 and was the first of many notable projects he designed in Asheville, establishing his career and his reputation as a leader in the Art Deco movement. Following this project, he designed the Asheville City Building, Asheville High School and the S&W Cafeteria (his most elaborate work) among others. These structures were highly acclaimed and had a profound impact on shaping the identity of the church and the city.

Since August 2016, Dennis has led First Baptist Asheville in implementing an ambitious vision of practical faith and civic engagement, while preaching sermons that faithfully address the unprecedented challenges and once-in-a-generation opportunities for the church that was founded in 1829. “Our vision is to be the animating center of a constellation of life-giving programs and opportunities in the heart of the city,” Dennis said. “The grant is a catalyst for turning these dreams into realities for everyone in Asheville.”

The National Fund for Sacred Places will be providing more than \$20 million to more than 100 congregations over nine years. These matching grants are awarded to healthy congregations across

the country to help restore their buildings to continue extending their ministries and outreach to the community.

“This year’s grant recipients represent an inspirational range of styles, locations and communities,” said Paul Edmondson, president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “The National Trust for Historic Preservation has been protecting important historic places since 1949. Seventy-one years later, there are no better examples of the transcendent value of historic preservation than these 16 historic religious landmarks and the dedicated congregations that care for them, as they sustain and enrich their communities while lifting the diverse narratives of our country.”

The 2020 NFSP cohort includes 16 congregations from 13 states and from a number of faith traditions. The cohort also includes the Basilica of Saint Lawrence the Deacon and Martyr, located at 97 Haywood Street in downtown Asheville.

About First Baptist Church of Asheville & Architecture

Using Beaux Arts themes as the design foundation, Ellington integrated decorative details reflecting the patterns and geometry in Art Deco design and articulated many details with religious symbolism. Externally, the major materials include brick, granite, clay tile roofing, glazed terracotta, copper and stained glass. The dome, influenced by Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, Italy, is capped by a copper clad lantern with chevrons located on the columns.

At its dedication, the design was described as “one of originality, expressing elegant simplicity and practicability as well as beauty and durability.”

The original 1927 building includes the sanctuary, chapel, offices and classrooms. A children’s wing was added in the 1950s and renovated in 1995. In 1972 the Sherman Center was added, including a gym, game room, kitchen and dining room. 2005 saw a major renovation, including the addition of a large atrium and interior renovations. The church building now has 116,000 square feet of floor space. The Sacred Garden with a labyrinth, multiple water features and columbarium was completed in 2016.

First Baptist Church of Asheville is a caring and compassionate church which, like Jesus, accepts everyone and condemns no one. It is committed to serving its neighbors, the community and the world. More about First Baptist Church of Asheville can be found at www.fbca.net.

About the National Fund for Sacred Places

The National Fund for Sacred Places is a Philadelphia-based grant-making program of Partners for Sacred Places in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately-funded nonprofit organization that works to save America’s historic places. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is committed to protecting America’s rich cultural legacy and helping build vibrant, sustainable communities that reflect the nation’s diversity.