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1887 Church in Manatee County Named Preservation Priority by Florida Trust

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A historic 19th-century church in Manatee County, Florida, has been named one of the state's top preservation priorities. The 1887 Church, located at the Manatee Village Historical Park, was recently included in the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 to Save" list, spotlighting significant landmarks in urgent need of restoration.

Originally built between 1887 and 1889, the church has long stood as a symbol of faith and perseverance. Construction was delayed for two years after a devastating yellow fever outbreak took the lives of the pastor and several congregants. Despite the loss, the local

community stepped in to complete the church, which soon became the first Christian congregation south of Tampa on Florida's mainland.

In 1975, the Manatee United Methodist Church donated the building to the United States Bicentennial preservation project. The church was relocated to Manatee Village Historical Park, where it has continued to serve as a meaningful venue for baptisms, weddings, and memorials. Visitors today can still sit in the original wooden pews, admire its vaulted ceilings, and view the stained-glass star window above the altar during museum hours.

Preservation Efforts

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to safeguarding Florida's architectural and cultural heritage, launched the "11 to Save" program to raise public awareness about the state's most at-risk historic sites. Community-nominated locations often reflect the deep roots of Florida's towns and cities.

Now facing urgent repairs to its roof and structural foundation, the 1887 Church is receiving support from the Friends of Manatee Village nonprofit. The group is working in collaboration with the Florida Trust to secure funds and rally community backing to ensure the church's survival for generations to come.

Phaedra Dolan, Director of the Historical Resources Department under the Manatee County Clerk and Comptroller's Office, credited grassroots advocates for the church's preservation journey. "This was one of the first gathering spaces for early settlers along the Manatee River," Dolan said. "Thanks to local efforts, it became part of the Manatee Village Historical Park, where historic buildings spark real conversations about our shared past and future."

The "11 to Save" list also includes several other unique properties from across the state, including the Magic Beach Motel in St. Johns County, Oneida Bungalow Court in Duval County, the Apalachicola Arsenal Officers Quarters in Gadsden County, and the United States Coast Guard Cutter Ingham Maritime Museum in Monroe County.

Andrea Knies, acting president of Friends of Manatee Village, highlighted the church's emotional impact. "Reading about history is valuable, but stepping into a space where people have celebrated life's major moments feels completely different," she said. "It remains a place for reflection and community, and we're grateful the Florida Trust recognized that."

To learn more about the 1887 Church or support its preservation, visit www.manateevillage.org. Details on the “11 to Save” program can be found at www.floridatrust.org/11-to-save.