

# Church loses home when Farr Best closes



The Farr Best Theater closed, leaving Galileo Church without a place to meet. | **Amanda Rogers** - News-Mirror

BY AMANDA ROGERS

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When the Farr Best Theater closed, downtown Mansfield lost an entertainment venue -- and Galileo Christian Church lost its home.

"This sucks, but it could be so much worse," said the Rev. Katie Hays, who has led the congregation since it began in June 2013.

The Disciples of Christ church had been meeting in the 98-year-old theater since October. But when owner Charles Morales decided to take possession of the Farr Best on July 2, Discover Historic Mansfield, which had been leasing the building for the past year, moved out. Galileo had been sub-leasing the 153-seat theater on Sunday nights from DHM for \$300 per week, so they were out, too.

Two dozen church members and friends gathered July 2, scooping up candles, glassware, grape juice, music stands and their communion table and moving out their possessions in 30 minutes.

"This place seemed like a gift for us," Hays prayed as church members and friends gathered in the theater's lobby. "It came at just the right time. We can't look back and say that it was a mistake. Help us be strong and dignified in whatever comes."

Discover Historic Mansfield (DHM), a nonprofit volunteer-run group, spent the first few months of its lease renovating the theater, then began hosting live theater, concerts, movies and even birthdays and a wedding. In late May, Morales spray painted the front of the theater at 109 N. Main St. with graffiti noting his displeasure with the city over The LOT, a public-private outdoor amphitheater being built a block south of the Farr Best, and about the city-poured entrance to the driveway at a duplex he owns.

DHM gave its 30-day notice to vacate the theater June 16, and let Hays know she would need to find a new place to hold services. Hays said she thought she had until July 16 to find a new place for services, but received a phone call from DHM President Steve Cosio on July 2 that the owner was taking possession of the theater and the church needed to remove its belongings.

Since forming two years ago, Galileo Church has met in homes, restaurants and on the property of the Seventh Day Adventist Church before settling into the theater nine months ago.

The “quirky” church is for spiritual refugees, Hays said, people who find church “boring, irrelevant, exclusive or painful.” Galileo’s priorities are justice for LGBT, kindness for low-wage workers, beauty for God and real relationships.

“We’re confident we’ll find a place,” said Nathan Berry, a member of Galileo’s leadership team. “This just sets us back and makes us unable to focus on the things we want to do. We’ll get through.”

For the past two Sundays, the church has met at Steven’s Garden & Grill, 223 Depot St. But Hays knows Galileo needs to find a permanent home.

“We need space currently for 60, but we need space to grow to 100,” she said.

Church members enjoyed meeting in the historic theater in downtown, Hays said.

“We love this space,” she said. “We love the way it has felt being in the heart of Mansfield.”

Hays said she hopes Galileo Church can find a new home nearby.

“Mansfield needs Galileo,” she said. “If you’re gay or love someone who is gay, there is nowhere for you to go here.”

Tricia Baumann drives from North Richland Hills to attend Galileo Church.

“I didn’t know that I’d ever go to church again,” she said. “I never expected to join a church again. I was kicked out of my church 2 1/2 years ago. I came out and I wasn’t acceptable.”

In Galileo, she said, she has found a home.

“If you want to know what Jesus’ love is like, come here,” Baumann said. “Katie lives it, so do all the people who become part of our church.

“It’s not about being gay, it’s about love,” she said.

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