

Phoenix Art Museum

For Immediate Release



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Desert Southwest Conference, Phoenix Art Museum, and Phoenix Theatre Company Announce Historic Partnership for Cultural Campus Expansion

Three Arizona-based entities announce century-long collaboration to preserve historic church, expand cultural amenities in Central Phoenix Arts Corridor

Phoenix, AZ—The Desert Southwest Conference of The United Methodist Church, Phoenix Art Museum, and Phoenix Theatre Company announce a landmark collaboration to embark on a 99-year lease of the existing Central United Methodist Church property located at 1875 North Central Avenue in Phoenix. The partnership, now entering its final negotiations, will ensure the preservation of the historic church property located adjacent to the shared cultural campus occupied by the Theatre Company and Museum while providing for an opportunity to expand parking availability for cultural patrons and to expand the historic cultural campus at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and McDowell Road. The long-term lease provides for the care of the church sanctuary to remain accessible to the community, and enables the Theatre Company and Museum to revitalize the property to expand cultural offerings in the region. The Conference, Theatre Company, and Museum have retained the services of Gensler to create a strategic vision for the future of the campus. The three organizations will communicate more extensive details regarding future plans for the campus in the coming months.

“The planned lease creates a foundation for generational impact, allowing for programming, performance, education, and public engagement that will uplift the spirits of creativity and inclusivity for decades to come,” said Vincent VanVleet, executive director of Phoenix Theatre Company. “This lease cements our collective vision for a vibrant, collaborative arts campus that not only honors the legacy of the space but also ignites new opportunities for creativity, accessibility and shared community. It’s a rare and powerful moment to build something today that will serve generations tomorrow.”

“This extraordinary partnership allows us to shape a cultural ecosystem where art, performance, and the city’s spiritual heritage intersect. This collaboration represents and reflects our deep belief that collaboration is essential to sustaining and enriching the cultural fabric of Phoenix, while ensuring a

meaningful and positive visitor experience and increasing access to visitors from across the county and beyond,” said Jeremy Mikolajczak, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum.

The Central United Methodist Church has been a neighbor to the Phoenix Civic Center, the campus that includes Phoenix Theatre Company, Phoenix Art Museum, and previously, Central Library. The Civic Center was made possible through the donation of 6.5 acres located at Central and McDowell by Marie Bartlett Heard and Dwight B. Heard, who envisioned a civic center that would serve as the cultural heart of the growing city. Phoenix Theatre Company, originally Phoenix Little Theatre, was founded in 1920, and moved to its present location in 1924. The Phoenix Civic Center municipal cultural complex was first established in its current form in 1951 with the opening of Phoenix Theatre Company’s mainstage theatre. Phoenix Art Museum completed construction and first opened on the site in 1959. The history of the Central United Methodist Church spans across three centuries. The first Protestant church in Phoenix, the congregation first met under mesquite trees along the Salt River, before moving to a building in 1904, an expanded campus near Downtown Phoenix in 1926, and finally to its present home since 1950. In 2024, the congregation concluded its service, following the official vote of closure by the Desert Southwest Annual Conference. Since that time, the Desert Southwest Conference has explored a new path forward to preserve the campus’s rich heritage, and to utilize the campus to continue to enrich the lives of its community. The result of those efforts culminates in the announcement of this forthcoming partnership.

“This partnership is a reflection of what’s possible when faith, arts, and community come together,” said Rev. Rachel Gilmore, Director of New and Vital Faith for the Desert Southwest Conference. “It honors the legacy of Central United Methodist Church while reimagining its future as a sacred and creative gathering place for generations to come.”

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About Desert Southwest Conference

The Desert Southwest Conference of The United Methodist Church is a community of believers seeking to live out Christ’s call through discipleship, transformation, and witness. With churches and ministries throughout Arizona and southern Nevada, we strive to serve God by embracing diversity, fostering spiritual growth, and engaging communities with compassion and justice. Learn more at <https://dscumc.org>.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Since 1959, Phoenix Art Museum has provided millions of guests with access to world-class art and experiences in an effort to ignite imaginations, create meaningful connections, and serve as a brave space for all people who wish to experience the transformative power of art. Located in Phoenix’s Central Corridor, the Museum is a vibrant destination for the visual arts and the leading art museum in the southwestern United States. Each year, more than 300,000 guests engage with critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions and the Museum’s collection of more than 20,000 works of American and Western American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed for visitors of all ages, along with vibrant photography exhibitions made possible through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

About the Phoenix Theatre Company

Founded in 1920, The Phoenix Theatre Company is Arizona’s first arts organization and the largest professional regional theatre company in the state. With nearly 600 performances annually across multiple stages, it plays a vital role in the cultural fabric of the Valley and is a proud founding member of the Central Arts District. Dedicated to enriching lives through the power of live theatre, The Phoenix Theatre Company’s mission is to create exceptional theatrical experiences that inspire hope and understanding. To learn more about upcoming productions, outreach initiatives, and ways to get involved, visit www.phoenixtheatre.com.