

Church to paint over award-winning mural

CityLight Church bringing new look to Madeline St.

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TRANSCONA

A big change is coming to the corner of Madeline Street and Harvard Avenue.

Starting next week, an award-winning, internationally recognized mural of Jesus that adorns the Tabor Baptist Church will be painted over as the church transitions to new leadership.

Pastors at the church, which will change its name of CityLight Church in September, are hoping for a little less fanfare than the last time a painter set up shop on the west side of the church.

“We thought and prayed about the idea of coming to join this congregation here,” said Andre Lederer, one of three pastors of CityLight Church who will be working out of the church at 710 Madeline St. “With that, we have our own look and feel, so we’re going to be painting the building, with a nice electronically lit sign.”

Along the mural of Jesus on the west side, which was named TheMuralsofWinnipeg.com’s mural of the year for 2007, a corresponding mural (The Worshipper) on the east side is to be painted over as well, along with the north and south walls.

“Absolutely, they’re beautiful murals,” said Lederer, who is joined by fellow pastors Boaz Fandun and Brad Williams at CityLight Church, which also has a church at 26 Agassiz Dr. Both the Tabor Baptist Church and CityLight are part of the Canadian National Baptist Convention. “We thought long and hard about what to do, but we decided having that newer look for the new church coming in was a good idea.”

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The artist who painted the murals in 2007, Charles Johnston, said he is disappointed by the decision to paint over his work.

“I think it’s a mistake,” Johnston, who has painted award-winning murals across Manitoba and internationally over the past two decades, said. “I feel it’s a very singular, direct image that embraces the architecture of the building. That doesn’t happen every day, and you can’t bring that back. I think they should reconsider.”

While the incoming church leadership seems set to cover up the iconic mural, Rod Giesbrecht, who has been pastor at Tabor Baptist Church since 2000, wanted to give the neighbours a heads-up that changes were coming.

“We’re hoping people can come say goodbye, rather than hear about it after the paint’s already there,” said Giesbrecht.

“I’m getting older here — believe it or not — so this is part



Photo by Sheldon Birnie

(From left) Pastors Boaz Fadun, Rod Giesbrecht, and Andre Lederer stand in front of the iconic mural on the west side of Tabor Baptist Church (710 Madeline St.), which will officially become CityLight Church on Sept. 8. The award-winning, internationally recognized mural, which was painted by Charlie Johnston in 2007, is to be painted over in the coming weeks.

of my succession plan, to bring in some new leadership,” he explained. “I’ll do some administration as they transition and eventually find myself retired.”

In 2007, Giesbrecht and the church council were looking to put Tabor Baptist Church on the map.

“We had a white stucco building,” Giesbrecht said. “In Winnipeg, that’s not helpful if you want people to find you. The church council thought a mural would work, they draw attention.”

In this case, it certainly did.

“Charlie came, put up a projector to outline the sketch,” recalled Giesbrecht, who was on vacation in B.C. at the time. “The neighbour sees him doing this and phones the police.”

“All of a sudden, I turn into a teenager again, and I think, Hide!” Johnston confirmed. “I hide behind the lift while the police are pointing the spotlight at me in front of the mural of Jesus. They just drove by and left.”

As work continued, the media were notified, and by the time Giesbrecht had returned from holiday, the mural was done, and the story had gone viral.

“We got lots of publicity out of it,” Giesbrecht said. “Our goal was never to antagonize or disparage anyone, it was just to get some recognition of where our building was.”

“Murals are a narrative medium” Johnston said. “They speak to an issue, they tell a story, they’re a public conversation. The controversy was the best way to continue the narrative.”



Supplied image

The new leadership at CityLight Church is planning to paint the iconic murals of Jesus and the Worshipper which currently cover the west and east side of the building. The new colour scheme would be consistent CityLight’s branding.