News



St Patrick's Catholic Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2017 (Steve Branyon)

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St. Patrick Church, the last remaining Black Catholic parish in the city of Charleston, South Carolina, has received a $500,000 matching grant to preserve its historic 19th-century building.

The National Fund for Sacred Places, a partnership between Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, announced the news on Oct. 21. St. Patrick's is one of 30 places of worship in the 2025 cohort of grantees — the largest in the program's history.

"We are so blessed to be one of the 30 churches chosen from a pool of 319 applicants," the parish said in a statement.

"Our hope is to have this grant cover the cost of the steeple repairs as part of our Capital Campaign to restore, renew, and revive our church and its spiritual and historical significance within the community."

Preservation grants

St. Patrick's in Charleston, South Carolina, is one of 30 religious congregations to win 2025 grants from the National Fund for Sacred Places. These historic Catholic buildings also received grants:

- St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Marshalltown, Iowa
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Cleveland, Ohio
- St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Pittsburgh
- San Juan Cathedral, Puerto Rico

Founded for local Irish Americans, the community of St. Patrick's built its original church in 1838, with separate galleries for Black and white churchgoers. It later expanded to the current downtown building, designed by the prolific architect Patrick Keely, after the devastating 1886 Charleston earthquake.

St. Patrick's became a largely African American congregation after a merger of two historically Black parishes into the community during the era of desegregation and white flight. The community received the diocese's first Black priest and pastor in 1978, Spiritan Fr. Egbert Figaro.

St. Patrick's is the only remaining Black Catholic parish in the city of Charleston; many of its congregants are from several closed African American parishes in the diocese. The most recent was Our Lady of Mercy, which shuttered in 2014. Its well-known gospel choir is led by recording artist Charlton Singleton of the Grammy-winning Gullah music ensemble Ranky Tanky, and the parish is one of few nationwide to host jazz Masses.

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In recent years, the parish has begun plans for an African American heritage center, which would celebrate Black history, music, worship and dance as part of an outreach to the larger Charleston area. A related renovation effort aims to upgrade the church's accessibility offerings, convert the parish hall into a sanctuary, and refurbish other elements of the parish complex.

The new NFSP grant — which requires the parish to raise half a million dollars in matching funds — will help the church repair its steeple and exterior.

"Sacred places hold a profound role in the American landscape, embodying both heritage and hope," said Carol Quillen, president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"Through the National Fund for Sacred Places, we are ensuring these spaces remain vibrant hubs of community life, sustaining connection, creativity, and service for generations to come."

St. Patrick's is one of several Catholic churches in the 2025 NFSP cohort, including the Cathedral Basilica of San Juan de Bautista in Puerto Rico and Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Cleveland, among others. One synagogue, Temple Beth Hatfiloh in Olympia, Washington, won a grant this year.

The cohort's total disbursement of $8.73 million in funds is set to be the largest in in the history of the National Fund, which has operated since 2016. Those interested in contributing to the St. Patrick's capital campaign can do so online or find more information on the church's website.

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