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Darrow Kirkpatrick, a reader at the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, discusses the historic church's structure in Washington. It can be demolished because its upkeep is so expensive it would eventually bankrupt the congregation, a city official has ruled.

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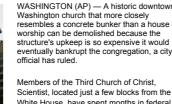
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D.C.: Modernist church can be demolished

WASHINGTON (AP) - A historic downtown Washington church that more closely resembles a concrete bunker than a house of worship can be demolished because the

Members of the Third Church of Christ,

modernist church they say is unwelcoming and impractical because of its huge concrete faces, sharp angles and few windows. But preservationists say the church, which forsakes a traditional steeple and nave, embodies the 1950s and '60s architectural style and should remain intact.



Scientist, located just a few blocks from the White House, have spent months in federal court fighting for a permit to raze the boxy

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In a decision filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court, D.C. planning director Harriet Tregoning said despite the building's designation as a historic landmark, church leaders should be allowed to replace it. Church members have welcomed the

The decision has "basically freed us from the bunker," said Eric Rassbach, an attorney for the church.



FAITH 8

The church was built in 1971 and is based on the design of architect Araldo Cossutta, who worked with the firm of the famed architect I.M. Pei. Pei's Washington buildings include the widely admired East Wing of the National Gallery. But the church's design was mostly the work of Cossutta, who also designed the Christian Science Mother Church building in Boston

Tregoning, acting on behalf of D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty, cited several problems with the church's construction, including the use of uninsulated concrete and defective workmanship. The congregation would need to pay for ongoing repairs to keep it functional, she said.

The situation could drain the church's funds and lead to its demise within eight years. Tregoning wrote. The complicated design also makes it difficult to convert the church to be used for something like a museum.

There's one caveat to the city's ruling: The church must first obtain a building permit for its new structure at the same site before it receives the demolition permit. Darrow Kirkpatrick, chairman of the church's redevelopment committee, said church officials will now work with architects to develop construction plans

The congregation has sued to fight the historic landmark status, saying the designation limits members' ability to freely practice religion

Rebecca Miller, executive director of the D.C. Preservation League, said there are unexplored alternatives that would maintain the historic building. The group will likely appeal the decision, she said.

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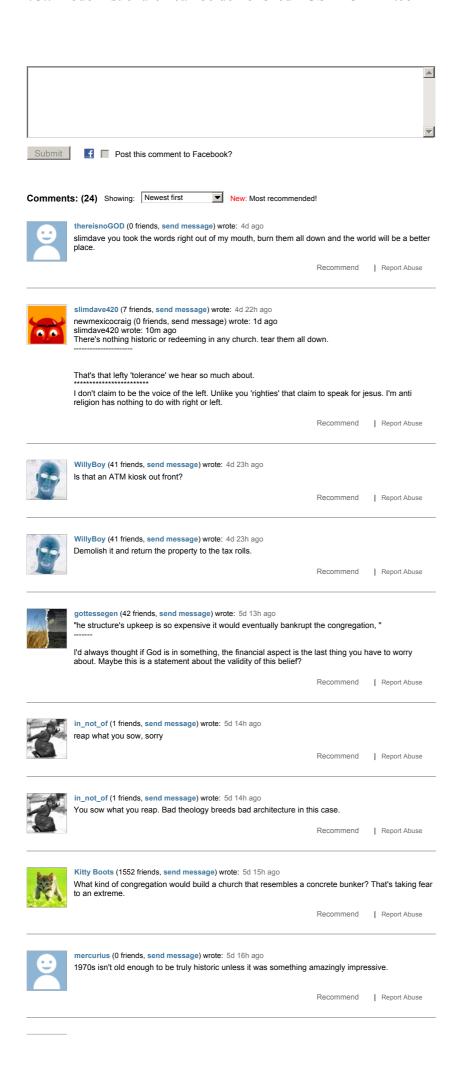
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