

Air Force Academy Asks Visitors to Hurry it up Ahead of Closure

If you want to see the Air Force Academy's iconic chapel in all its leaky glory, you'd better get a move on.

The academy told would-be visitors Monday to hurry it up, ahead of the chapel's lengthy renovation closure that starts Jan. 1. The chapel will undergo four years of work that includes removing the aluminum skin from its soaring spires and fixing the leaks it has experienced since it opened to cadets in 1963.

"Visitors now have less than two months to visit this registered National Historic Landmark, also ranked Colorado's No. 1 man-made attraction, before the preservation and restoration process begins," the academy warned in a news release.

The chapel will be preserved in exacting detail, with every stick of furniture and each of the pipe organ's 4,423 pipes back in its place by the time work is done.

But the chapel will get one new invisible feature to preserve it for the ages: plastic seals to keep water from seeping under its aluminum skin.

The seals were in the chapel's original plans, but Pentagon cost-cutters replaced them with common caulk to save cash. The result was one of the planet's most iconic churches with unplanned indoor rain showers.

The 150-foot-tall structure features 17 triangular spires designed to remind visitors of the academy's mountainous backdrop and the planes flown by the Air Force. The academy says the chapel draws as many as 500,000 visitors a year.

It also has gained the American Institute of Architect's Twenty-five Year Award, a distinction it shares with other structures including the Gateway Arch in St. Louis and New York's Guggenheim Museum.

But fixing the complex structure while retaining the features that make it so admired is a huge process. The academy has spent a year just figuring out where to store all the pews and religious artifacts in the structure, which is home to Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist worship facilities.

The school's chaplains have planned makeshift houses of worship in gymnasiums, ballrooms and auditoriums. The school's superintendent, Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria, has said he might have to open the living room of Carlton House, his on-campus residence, for cadet weddings during the chapel crunch.

– Tom Roeder, The Gazette, October 29, 2018