



Urban forestry workers remove branches from a redwood tree as they prepare to cut it down next to the Wayfarers Chapel, a sanctuary by architect Lloyd Wright, also known as "The Glass Church," in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif., Wednesday, May 15, 2024. The modernist chapel features organic architecture with glass walls in a redwood grove overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Part of the Swedenborgian denomination, the church's followers share in 18th-century Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg's "quest for a religion that interconnects all of life, and for a system that allows reasoned questioning of life's deepest religious issues," the chapel's website says. (AP/Damian Dovarganes)

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Rancho Palos Verdes, California — May 20, 2024

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A decades-old landslide that's rapidly accelerating has forced the dismantling of Wayfarers Chapel, an iconic Southern California church that was designed by one of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright's sons and built among soaring redwoods and sweeping Pacific Ocean views.

The earth beneath the chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes is moving an unprecedented 2 feet (61 centimeters) or more each month. Intended to celebrate the natural world, the chapel is instead being destroyed by it.

"It's actually dangerous to even walk on the grounds now because everything is breaking," the Rev. Dan Burchett, the chapel's executive director, told The Associated Press on Thursday. "Nature, in one sense, is showing her power."

The chapel was designed by the son, known as Lloyd Wright, who also worked on the Hollywood Bowl in 1927. "The Glass Church" and its grounds opened to the public in 1951 and epitomizes "organic architecture" that seeks to put buildings in harmony with the nature around them.

"The transparency of the glass would usher you into a place of nature that the structure would disappear in," said Burchett, who has also been a chapel officiant since 2000.

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An attractive location for movies and weddings, the cliffside spot on the Palos Verdes Peninsula has also contributed to its downfall. The chapel was designated as a National Historic Landmark in December 2023 but closed just two months later, according to the chapel's website, from the worsening effects of the 1956 Portuguese Bend landslide, part of a larger ancient landslide complex in the area.

The damage includes a long crack in the 1949 cornerstone, a buckling asphalt parking lot and fractured 15-foot- (4.6-meter-) tall glass panels, as well as torqued metal framing in the chapel's ceiling and walls.

Crews raced to disassemble the chapel this week so the original materials — many of which cannot be replicated — can be preserved and used to rebuild, either at the current site if it can be stabilized or somewhere else nearby.

Reconstruction is expected to take four years and cost at least \$20 million — a price tag that does not include a new plot of land in a very expensive area. The church had started raising money toward a \$10 million restoration slated for 2025, but has been forced to pivot and double its efforts.

“These are hard days; these are days to grieve, no doubt,” Burchett said. “But we will celebrate again, we are sure of that.”

Part of the Swedenborgian denomination, the church's followers share in 18th century Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg's “quest for a religion that interconnects all of life, and for a system that allows reasoned questioning of life's deepest religious issues,” the chapel's website says.

The chapel also served as a national monument to Swedenborg, and hosted regular worship services for wayfarers — “all who come, no matter their faith or status” — until the landslide forced them to relocate to a nearby Episcopal church earlier this year.

“We don't exclude anyone, even if the person says they're an atheist and they don't believe in God but they want to join with nature and have some spiritual experience, they are welcome to do that with the chapel,” Burchett said.

Some 25 miles (40 kilometers) from Hollywood, the chapel has been featured in movies, TV shows and music videos, such as “Beverly Hills 90210,” “The O.C.,” “True Detective” and 1987 sci-fi comedy “Innerspace.”

It's also hosted many real-life celebrity weddings. Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys founder who composed hit song “Good Vibrations,” married [his wife, Melinda](#), there in 1995.

“The vibrations in that chapel were so wonderful,” Wilson reportedly said.

Nancy and Randy Erwin exchanged their vows there in 1987. Now they live in Oregon but visited Southern California family this week. They stopped Thursday for one last look on their way back north.

“It's a landmark in our lives,” Erwin said.