

Indy's Cannabis Church finds a home

Bill Levin, founder of the First Church of Cannabis, on the Church's suggested pathways and first service on July 1. Michelle Pemberton/The Star



John Tuohy, john.tuohy@indystar.com 4:59 p.m. EDT June 9, 2015

Cannabis Church is moving into South Rural Street building on Indianapolis' Eastside.



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(Photo: John Tuohy / The Star)

The First Church of Cannabis has found a joint it can call its own.

Church founder Bill Levin said he has bought a church building at 3400 S. Rural St. and will announce the move at 11 a.m. Wednesday at the site.

"It is small and humble facility with love through out every brick," he wrote on his Facebook page." We are HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY!"

Levin, the church's self-appointed "minister of love," said the Eastside building would hold 150 to 200 worshippers.

The church has two rows of pews 10 deep, office space, a kitchen and a large basement for community meetings.

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Here is the new location of the First Church of Cannabis at at 3400 S. Rural St. on Indianapolis' Eastside. The church recently received a tax designation as a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization from the Internal Revenue Service, meaning donors can deduct money sent to the church on their federal tax returns and the church also would be eligible for a property tax exemption in Indiana. (Photo: John Tuohy / The Star)

Levin said one of the offices will be a souvenir store and in the basement, the church will host Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

He said thousands of people have volunteered to help get the church, formerly the location of the Strait Gate Christian Church, into shape or inquired about opening chapters.

By Wednesday morning, Levin hopes to have the church logo on the front sign, a cannabis plant supported by a block with the word "Love."

The Cannabis Church is looking for volunteers to paint and provide maintenance at the building. Levin also is seeking a webmaster and plans to hold the church's first ceremony on July 1, the day the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act becomes law.

It's yet another bit of good news for the church in recent weeks. The Internal Revenue Service, in a letter dated May 21, said it had approved the church's request to make it a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. The designation means donors can deduct money sent to the church on their federal tax returns and the church also would be eligible for a property tax exemption in Indiana. The church also has raised more than \$15,000 for its new home on a gofundme.com account.

Levin formed the church as a means to test RFRA, which offers protections from the government infringing on religious practices. At the first service, Levin said his members will follow blessings by smoking marijuana in what he describes as a religious practice.

RFRA drew national attention because critics claimed it was a thinly disguised tool to allow business owners to refuse service to same-sex couples for religious reasons.



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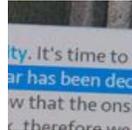
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