

# Rustic 19th century chapel offers unique wedding venue

**W**e've probably all heard of Las Vegas as a popular place to get married. But did you know that the Hocking Hills also does a booming wedding trade?

"Oh, very much so," confirms the Rev. Randy Strickland, pastor of the non-denominational Hocking Hills Chapel. Strickland reports that he personally has presided over some 700 nuptials, at locations all over the region.

For several years now Strickland – who had to step away from the tourism business after suffering a serious injury – has been restoring and renovating an historic old church, which when it is back in tip-top condition, will offer a unique setting for couples to tie the knot. The church, at 24427 Brown Road in South Bloomingville, was originally a United Brethren house of worship, and was built in 1836. Strickland acquired it around 2010, and has been working steadily to restore it.

The roof was replaced in 2019, followed by replacement of the old electrical system. When the siding was removed in 2020, it revealed the impressive timber construction beneath it, as well as an altar window

that had been covered up when the siding was installed.

"When they initially built the church, they built it with timbers," Strickland noted. "The timbers are like 14 inches by nine inches. And there are some 30 or 32 feet long."

In 2021 the building was enhanced with new timbers to match the existing timber structure. The next year it got a new front porch, donated by Brandon Justice Concrete, whose crew also installed new windows. In 2023 local contractor Eric Garrett installed old-style soffits on the building, and a youth group from the Painesville (Ohio) United Methodist Church helped paint the interior. More recently a new altar window and front door have been installed, with a stained glass Good Shepherd with support from the Newtown (Ohio) United Methodist Church.

As should be clear from the above, the effort to restore the church has been not only a labor of love, but a collective effort with help from many supporters including Strickland's son Keith, and Joe, Craig and Dustin Eveland.

Though all the finishing touches haven't been added, Strickland said the



*The Brown Road Church was built of sturdy timbers, chinked with clay and horsehair.*



*In one of the first steps of the restoration, Dustin Eveland and Keith Strickland remove and replace the metal roof.*

chapel ready to play host to weddings now, and should start doing them soon. (He noted that he just does weddings, not services such as catering.)

"It will be this year," he promised. "It's already good enough now – secure enough and that kind of thing." He noted that last July or thereabouts he did a wedding on the front steps, and has also done a renewal of wedding vows at the altar while it was still under construction.

Undoubtedly the chance to formalize



*A stained glass image of the Good Shepherd adorns the church.*

one's marriage vows in a rustic, nearly 200-year-old log chapel set in the beautiful Hocking Hills will prove an irresistible draw to many couples. The church already literally stops traffic sometimes, Strickland reported.

"I've had people actually just stop and lock up the brakes, back up and come in," he recalled. "And they're just like, 'Oh my God, I've never seen anything like this.'"

For more information visit <https://www.hockinghillschapel.org/>.