

Atlanta: Bye-Bye Church, Hello Football

In case anyone was lacking in evidence that the entertainment industry has overtaken the spiritual life of the American public, a church in Atlanta provides all the proof needed.

That's because on May 25, members of Friendship Baptist Church bid a final farewell to their historic building—home to the congregation since 1871—to make way for a new Atlanta Falcons stadium.

Scheduled to open for the 2017 football season, the NFL stadium gave the Baptist church \$19.5 million for the property. Another displaced local church—already vacated—was purchased for \$14.5 million.

But Friendship Baptist isn't your everyday small town church.

The “mother church” of Atlanta was started by 25 former slaves in 1866 who met in an old railroad boxcar, becoming the first autonomous black Baptist church after the Civil War.

In more than 150 years of existence, the church has had only six—you read that right, six—pastors.

Though the building is being forked over, the local church is holding fast. The congregation is planning to meet temporarily at a performing arts center until they secure a new location.

And thus continues the timeless struggle over Sunday afternoons waged between spiritual ceremony and sport (a religion in itself?).