

Renovations at the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King

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For over four years, the congregation at the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King has been working on a building repair and refurbishment program that combines both cutting the cost of the buildings maintenance and managing the parishes lean budget. The African Methodist Episcopal congregation built the church in 1856, occupying the building from 1856 to 1981. The exterior brick and stone structure is crumbling and is in constant need of repair. The interior space was designed with high plaster walls and wooden wainscoting in the worship space, two-story high windows in the sanctuary to provide light, and the entire inside was painted white.

The building is now more than 150 years old and is designated as a National Historic Site. The Cathedral Parish is located in a residential setting in the historic Georgetown neighborhood of Washington DC. Parish members debated among themselves about which of the many repair projects should be done first. All agreed that the most important concern should be safety and that the money collected should be stretched to go as far as possible. Small openings were made in walls to see what was hidden behind them and windows were tested for leaks.

Occupying a building that is listed as a National Historic Site, under the watchful eye of the federal government in Washington DC, can be a challenge as well as a blessing. The age of the building, and its deterioration, has continued to raise the cost of the Cathedrals upkeep tremendously. However, the faithful congregation that occupies it has successfully struggled to meet its financial obligations. With the collections at services saved and managed more frugally, the repair project began with a walk-through of the building to identify structural damage from recent weather events and the earthquake of 2011.

Father Russell and Father Starr conducted an assessment of the historic building, both its exterior and interior, to establish what needed to be done to improve the structural integrity of the building while making it safe and beautiful for worship services. The first step in the project was to discuss the cost of various projects with a local contractor to establish how much each project would cost and make the choices more tangible for the congregation and weigh the priorities based on the immediate needs and affordability of each project. The resulting list of projects was long and overwhelming. Prioritizing the projects was the next step.

The safety of the building was tantamount. The first project to be addressed was the exterior gutters and downspouts, on both sides of the building, since they needed to

be replaced immediately to make the building safe for occupancy. Unexpected heavy snows had destroyed the gutters in previous years but replacing them required adherence to the historical building design code mandated by the District of Columbia. Water damage from the gutters spread throughout the sanctuary, rotting the wooden wainscoting and staining the paint on the walls. The design of old historic buildings does not take modern day engineering advancements into consideration for renovation however the look of the building needed to remain historical. Once the outside structure was determined to be sound, the interior projects could begin in earnest.

In the basement church hall, and on the stairs leading up to the sanctuary, the crumbling stone foundation was repaired to make it structurally safe. New lighted exit signs were installed to improve the safety, old pipes in the plumbing were replaced, and the walls of the bathroom and sacristy were plastered and freshly painted. Even a simple church needs to be cleaned and painted occasionally. Floors were refinished and polished to gleam brightly where before they were dingy. The walls are smooth and clean where before they were pitted and discolored. The hard work of the Cathedral Parish is paying off with many great improvements.

In some ways the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King offers church members and visitors an opportunity to step back in time and have worship services in a simple church in a downtown neighborhood of a major city. In other ways it offers a new beginning with a bright future for traditional Anglicans in our nations capital. With careful management of the finances, Father Russell and Father Starr were able to show visible results just in time for the Christmas season festivities. The interior spaces were brightly painted, polished and gleaming, ready for parish members to enjoy their old cherished church and plan a new beginning with a bright future on the horizon.