

STONINGTON — With new trusses, structural steel walls and a roof, St. Michael the Archangel Church is starting to look like a house of worship again.

The church building, located at 60-62 Liberty St., was demolished last August, four years after engineers had deemed it structurally unsafe.

For a long time, little activity could be seen because excavation and concrete work were being done below ground level, said the Rev. Dennis Perkins, pastor of the church.

From this section:

<http://www.thewesterlysun.com/news/stonington/10481602-154/story.html.html>

"It's very much visible now, but for a long time a lot of work went on underground in the basement," Perkins said. "The first truss was installed April 3 and that's when the above-ground work began."

The landmark church was built in 1861, and had an addition put on six years later. The roof was problematic from the beginning, and in 1872, columns were installed from the basement to the main ceiling to stabilize it.

The front entrance of the church was altered about 80 years ago by removing the windows around and over the door.

"The front of the building faces northeast, so I suspect all those windows leaked so it was all closed up," Perkins said.

The church will be restored to match its design from the early 20th century, including tall lancet windows on either side of the front entrance, smaller lancet windows above the door ascending to a round window and topped by smaller lancet windows pointing to the steeple.

"We found some of the glass of the same pattern up in the attic in the sacristy. These are going to be used as a basis for the fourteen-foot windows in the front," Perkins said, pointing to a photograph of the church taken in approximately 1910. "We're going by what the church looked like 100 years ago."

Now, the roof is closed in, the trusses are in place and the walls are being framed out. This summer, the roof will be shingled and the walls will be closed in with siding.

The church's stained glass windows were sent to Bovard Studios in Fairfield, Iowa, for restoration and are expected back in mid-July, Perkins said. The studio is also constructing custom, energy-efficient aluminum frames with two panes of insulated glass surrounding the stained glass.

An added bonus of the newly-constructed walls is the revamped windows will line up with the new trusses, Perkins said.

"The old spacing of the windows was not going to line up with the new trusses— now with the trusses in there, we can place the windows more symmetrically," Perkins said.

By end of July a prefabricated steeple is expected to arrive from Campbellsville Industries in Campbellsville, Ky., he said.

The original floor was kept and the ceilings in the church will be higher because there will be no attic. The columns will be removed, creating wider aisles.

An addition of about 800 square feet will accommodate an elevator accessible directly from the handicapped parking area and restrooms on the basement and first-floor levels.

In the basement where the church hall is, the floor has been lowered by two feet, creating a higher ceiling. Perkins said he is hoping to keep two walls of the foundation, made from pieces of Westerly granite, exposed.

Since their church closed, St. Michael parishioners, many of whom are worshipping at St. Mary Church in Stonington Borough, have worked on a capital campaign to raise the funds to restore the building.

The entire project is expected to cost \$8.2 million and is being done in two phases — phase one is the exterior shell and phase two will be everything inside, such as electrical, plumbing, insulation, drywall and furniture, Perkins said.

"We did two capital campaigns, one in October 2011 and another one in 2014, and the people responded well," he said. "We've already done more than half of it and we'll be finished with phase one at the end of the summer."

Phase two will cost about \$3.8 million and will require more fundraising, he said.

"We broke the project into two phases because, when we embarked on this, we thought we were in a position to get phase one done, and the longer you wait on a project the more expensive it gets, so we said let's get phase one done first," he said. "It's also created a lot of excitement and happiness on the part of the people to see the progress being made after five years — we wanted to get that done and give some encouragement for the second part of the fundraising."

To donate to the St. Michael capital campaign, go to <http://www.stmichaelpawcatuck.com/capital-campaign>

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