

Scaffolding in St. Peter in Chains sanctuary reaches 55 feet to the ceiling, which was discolored by soot.

Long cleanup takes faith

Costs rise from \$200,000 to \$1 million

BY PHILLIP PINA
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Cleanup from the fire that damaged Cincinnati's St. Peter in Chains Cathedral has turned out to be more expensive — and extensive — than expected.

The June 8 fire was contained to a chapel confessional being used as a storage closet. There was no hidden damage, but the intense smoke has created a nightmare for the church's caretakers. It left a layer of soot throughout the cathedral. Built in 1845, it is the principal

church of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

Repair work on the Greek classical revival church will likely continue into March, with a break planned for the holidays. And cleanup costs have risen from an estimate of \$200,000 to more than \$1 million.

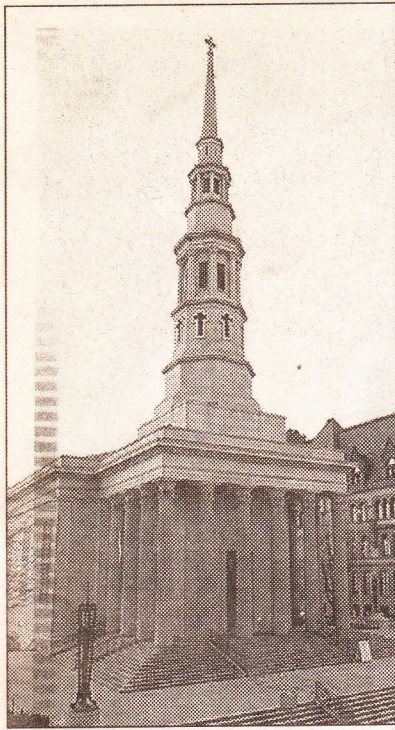
"I wish we were done," said the Rev. James Bramlage, pastor of the cathedral at Eighth and Plum streets downtown. Scaffolding still dominates the church interior as repair crews work on the discolored ceiling 55 feet above the sanctuary. And a number of projects remain.

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Photos by Michael E. Keating/The Cincinnati Enquirer

JoAnn May of Weibold Restoration applies a plaster compound to a cathedral wall.



The Cincinnati Enquirer/Michael E. Keating

St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, 154 years old, is the principal church of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

Cathedral: Cleanup takes more time

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But attention is being paid to detail, he said. At first, caretakers had hoped the cleanup would be limited to wiping the soot from every open surface area in the church. In a 154-year-old structure, that can get complicated, said Brian Klei of Ron Klei & Sons Inc. contracting firm, one of several working on the cleanup.

Some paint, applied about four decades ago, began streaking and peeling as workers used cotton balls and a cleaning solution to remove the soot, he said. And large murals on canvas applied to the cathedral walls had to be reapplied in portions. The gold leaf found throughout the church had to be polished, and some of it regilded.

Much of the ceiling work has been done, as have treatments to the cathedral's detailed woodwork. The confessional where the fire started should be completely repaired by Dec. 15. But workers still need to clean each of the organ's 3,000 pipes and polish a mosaic that takes up an entire wall.

Father Bramlage has been able to hold Mass in the cathedral since June

with few disruptions. Weekday Masses have been moved to adjoining halls a few times, he said. On Sunday, he plans to set up a temporary altar in front of a wall of scaffolding that has been erected around the church's sanctuary.

But the Christmas season is a busy one at the cathedral, and work will be suspended about Dec. 15, said Dan Andriacco, spokesman for the archdiocese. Officials wanted to make sure the cathedral is free of construction in time for the Dec. 19 anniversary celebration of Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk's ordination.

The Christmas decorations will be pared this year because little time exists between when work will be suspended to when it is expected to resume, after the New Year's weekend, Mr. Andriacco said.

The work has not been too much of a distraction, said parishioner Sheila Murray of Covedale. But most members are anxious about seeing the church restored to its regular splendor.

"People who walk in are just so overwhelmed at the beauty," said Ms. Murray, who volunteers with her sister Mary Murray to give tours to cathedral visitors. Visitors these days must envision that beauty through scaffolding, she said. "It will be nice when it is gone."

Father Bramlage has kept parishioners updated with weekly reports in the church bulletins. Firefighters determined the fire was started by an electrical problem.

Most of the cleaning and restoration expense is being picked up by insurance.

One of the last tasks will be the cleaning of the the church organ. Each of its pipes will be taken to a Columbus shop to be cleaned and polished, Father Bramlage said. But parishioners may not even notice. The work will be done a few pipes at a time, so the organ will remain operational, minus a few keys, for services.