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Bishop Jorge H. Rodriguez blessed the capstone of the west spire of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception April 7, after an emergency restoration to the façade of the Cathedral began. The blessing took place nearly 107 years after Bishop Nicholas Matz (inlay) blessed the final stone of the Cathedral on Nov. 10, 1910, after its initial construction. PHOTO BY ANYA SEMENOFF; FILE PHOTO (INLAY)

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Cover Story

Invest in the Cathedral's future, pastor urges



BY AARON LAMBERT
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Of the spires atop the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Cardinal J. Francis Stafford once described them as two exclamation points of faith in the heart of Denver.

Presently, the spires are being slowly revived and unveiled as hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of scaffolding is removed. Repairs to the iconic Denver church have been underway since last year, but there's still much work to be done. \$2.3 million worth of work, to be exact. Though the Cathedral's cash reserve and a steady stream of generous donations continue to fund the restoration, pastor Father Ron Cattany frankly discusses the reality of the situation.

"The money's going to run out come April 1," he said.

The original estimate to repair the exterior of the Cathedral was over \$4 million. It has since been revised to \$3.8 million. To date, \$1.5 million in work has been completed; the scaffolding alone cost \$985,000.

As the scaffolding comes down, freshly carved gothic stonework and refinished limestone can be seen from Colfax Avenue and beyond. While the magnificence of the restoration can't be seen in detail from the street, the sheer amount of work Lawrence Holland and his crew of 11 with Summit Sealants has done is astounding.

The Cathedral hasn't looked as pristine in perhaps 105 years.

IT STARTED WITH A GRAPE CLUSTER

As the *Denver Catholic* reported last year, it all started last March when a stone grape cluster fell from above the Holy Doors. Upon closer inspection, it was determined that the entire exterior of the Cathedral was in dire need of repair. So what happened after all these years?

Colorado's unpredictable climate is very hard on these types of buildings, Holland explained. The Cathedral, in its 105-year lifespan, has not been immune to problems caused by freeze-thaw cycles

and different temperature extremes.

"[The Cathedral] has self-destructed, as all buildings in Colorado do," Holland said. "These buildings expand and contract and therefore tend to fall apart on their own."

As Holland and his crew began repairs on the Cathedral spires, they made new discoveries about the extent of the damage, "which are inherent in projects of this magnitude," he said.

They discovered that the stones at the top of the Cathedral had mild iron rods holding them in place, which have corroded over the years and grown in size. This growth over time emits a force strong enough to split stone, which happened to many of the stones on the spires. One of the ways they are attempting to control this over the next 100 years is by implementing a maintenance program.

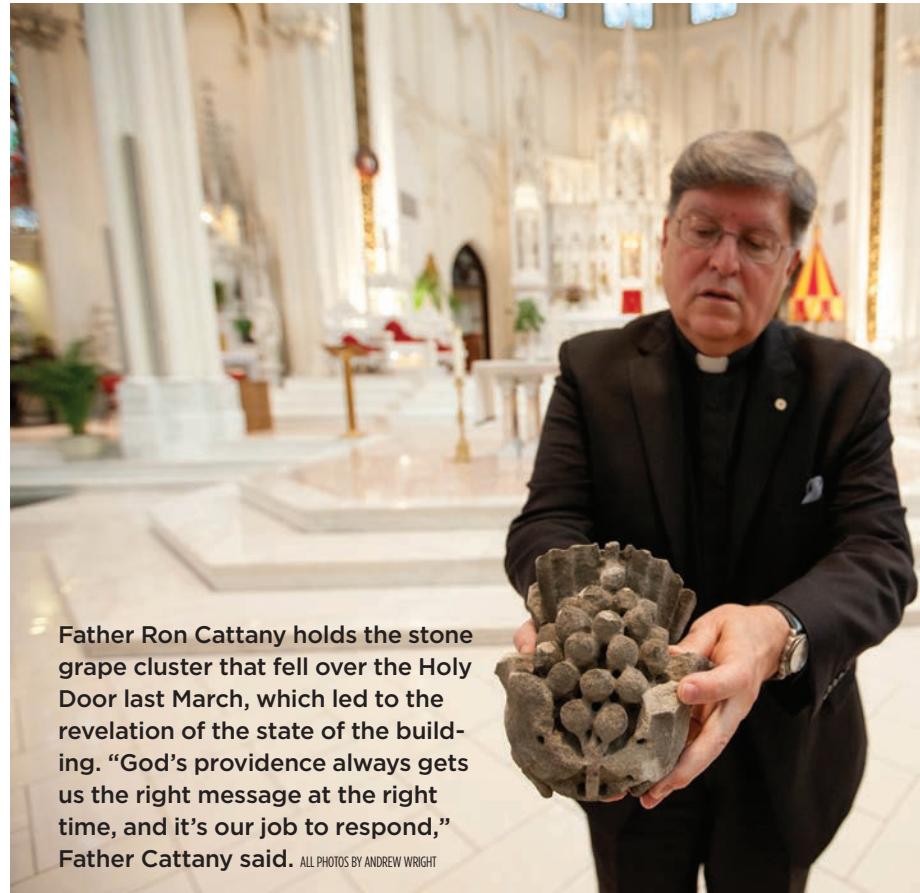
"Buildings like the Cathedral don't have very many expansion joints within them, and because of that they just tend to break and move wherever it decides to do that, so there's no way of controlling that other than through a maintenance program," Holland told the *Denver Catholic*.

Maintenance is an important part of an emergency repair such as this. Holland and his crew are being mindful of the future of the Cathedral as they make repairs to the stonework.

"To mitigate this down the road, we've installed lead-coated copper flashes, which are permanent," Holland said. "We've added that in all the back sides of the gables, in all these areas that tend to harbor ice and snow and cause these huge damages that we've seen."

Holland has managed to reduce costs by having a full-time stone carver on-site to carve replacement stones or repurpose some of the damaged ones. Because of the delicate and specialized nature of stone carving, one stone can cost thousands of dollars to carve. Even so, having an on-site carver reduces the costs associated with outsourcing the work.

"By having him on-site all the time, we're not paying these astronomical fees," Holland said. "They're reasonable costs, they're just high. Stone restoration is extremely expensive. There's only a handful of people that really even do this stuff [anymore]."



Father Ron Cattany holds the stone grape cluster that fell over the Holy Door last March, which led to the revelation of the state of the building. "God's providence always gets us the right message at the right time, and it's our job to respond," Father Cattany said. ALL PHOTOS BY ANDREW WRIGHT

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

The repairs started at the tip top of the Cathedral and are working their way down. Coincidentally, most of the work has been at the top.

"The top 20 feet [of the spires] has virtually been replaced completely in its entirety with new and salvaged stone with high grade connecting stainless steel that will not corrode," Holland said. The good news is that as they continue moving down, the stone repairs become more minimal.

"We're very optimistic that we're not going to be blowing through tens of thousands of dollars in stone carvings," Holland said.

While there have been a few delays in the work, including troubles with vandalism, Father Cattany says they haven't been a big issue.

"This is one of those things where you do it once and you do it right," he said. "There have been brides who are disappointed because they can't get their front steps of the Cathedral shot, but the thing is, this has got to be done right."

The Cathedral is not only the mother church for the Archdiocese of Denver, it is embedded in the very history of Colorado. It serves hundreds of thousands of people each year, whether through outreach or just being a beautiful place to visit, and because it doesn't have a large number of registered parishioners, financing projects such as this emergency repair can be difficult.



Lawrence Holland explains to Father Cattany some of the work his crew has been doing near the top of the Cathedral.

The building is 105 years old, and Father Cattany urges those in the archdiocese to whom the Cathedral means something to consider investing in its future so it can stand as Denver's mother church for many years to come.

"It's a good look at reality for a 105-year-old building that, in a very wonderful way, is very well-used," Father Cattany said. "[We] need to keep it functional, [we] need it evangelical in terms of serving people, and [we] need to keep it safe so people feel comfortable to come here."



EXTERIOR FAÇADE WORK

Revised estimate:

\$3.8 million

Paid to date:

\$1.5 million

Remaining work:

\$2.3 million

Contributions received:

\$163,000

CATHEDRAL BY THE NUMBERS (ANNUALLY)

LITURGICAL FUNCTIONS

Daily Mass:

23,400 people

Weekend Masses:

70,000 people

Confessions:

1000 hours

Weddings:

32

Funerals:

18

Baptisms:

37

The top 20 feet of the spires on the Cathedral have been virtually replaced in their entirety with new stonework since repairs began.



A look at some of the damage

While this is by no means an extensive look at the damage that has occurred to the Cathedral over the years, here are a few trouble areas they've discovered.



CRACKS

Much of the stone on the exterior has cracked over the years from rapid freeze-thaw cycles, as can be seen here on this piece.



CORROSION

This piece from the east spire is an example of how corroded iron rods have caused some of the stones to split from the inside out, making them very unstable.



DISCOLORATION

Some of the rich color of the stone has faded over the years, making it appear very worn. Holland and his team will remedy this using a product called liquid dirt to bring the stone back to life.



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Get ready for the
Christmas season



In-Depth

Denver's iconic Cathedral Basilica to undergo extensive repairs



BY AARON LAMBERT

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What stands at 210 feet, contains ornate stonework dating back to the early 1900s, and is covered in \$985,000 worth of scaffolding in order to be repaired?

The Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception is one of Denver's dearest landmarks, and it is in desperate need of repair. Father Ron Cattany, Pastor and Rector of the Cathedral, launched a capitol campaign Oct. 22, the feast day of St. John Paul II, to raise \$2.4 million to repair the spires and Colfax facade of the Cathedral, which are in dire shape. Construction of the scaffolding began Sept. 19, and the project is well under way.

A seemingly random event that occurred in March led to the revelation of the state of the building, one that required Father Cattany to act immediately.

"One of the grape clusters fell over the Holy Door," Father Cattany recounted. "I thank God that when it fell between Sunday Masses, it fell at a time when nobody was there to get hurt. God's providence always gets us the right message at the right time, and it's our job to respond."

Father Cattany contacted Summit Sealants, a company based in Montrose, Colo., that has done several repairs to the Cathedral over the years, including in 1998, when the east spire was struck by lightning. The original plan was to have workers rappel off the building and tapping the exterior to identify

the pieces of stone that needed to be repaired.

"They started on June 1. On June 10, they stopped," Father Cattany told *Denver Catholic*. "What they discovered was that some of the pieces were so loose that they were concerned both about the safety of their workers and the safety of the people."

As a precaution, Summit Sealants asked Father Cattany to close the west entrance to the Cathedral and put fencing around the west side of the building to prevent passersby from getting too close. Summit Sealants submitted a new design process for the repairs, which featured words that were "shocking" for Father Cattany to hear.

"The direct quote, and that was when my heart stopped, was, 'The entire building is in desperate need of repair, and it needs a full restoration,'" Father Cattany said. "Originally, it was anticipated that the job was going to be one month, and about \$100,000. It's now going to take six to eight months, the base cost is \$1.7 million, and on top of that will be time and materials for anything that needs to be remade."

The total cost is expected to be \$2.4 million for this phase and an additional \$1 million for the remainder of the structure for a total of \$3.4 million, Father Cattany said.

The scaffolding alone, which the workers will use to access the exterior of the Cathedral and the spires and conduct the repairs, will cost \$985,000. The four beams that will support the scaffolding weigh a total of 36,000 pounds.

In an email to Father Cattany from Lawrence Holland, project manager for

Summit Sealants, the immense scale of the project was outlined rather succinctly: "I must emphasize again the complexity of designing and building a system that is virtually building a building over a building all the while maintaining the day-to-day operations of the parish."

As a 104-year-old building, the Cathedral has undergone a number of renovations during its lifespan. Though the damage to the exterior can be attributed to normal deterioration, Father Cattany said that the building was sandblasted in 1963, and due to the harsher, more invasive sandblasting technology of the time, it left pock marks all over the stonework on the outside of the building. Father Cattany said that after 50 years of freezing and thawing, some of the carvings have now cracked, which is part of the trouble.

The repairs conducted by Summit Sealants in 1998 involved replacing some of the stone carvings on the exterior of the Cathedral.

"There are carvings where you can remove a whole section like a piece of pie," he said. "It's shocking to see what's happened."

The Cathedral is near and dear to Father Cattany. He grew up attending Mass at the Cathedral with his family, attended Mass there during his 35-year career two blocks away, his grandparents were buried from the Cathedral in 1919 and 1920, and his cousin was baptized in the original baptismal font that remains to this day.

To highlight the significance of the Cathedral Basilica to the city of Denver, Father Cattany turned to the book *Pinnacled Glory of the West*, in which author and first Cathedral Rector Father Hugh McMenamin recounts the day of Oct. 27, 1912 — the Cathedral's dedication date.

"What's fascinating about it is that the concluding lines were, 'And thus ended Denver's greatest day,'" Father Cattany said.

The Cathedral is much more than just the mother church of the archdiocese, Father Cattany said. Each day, over 140 visitors enter through the golden doors to revel in its beautiful architecture and pray in its solemn silence. It's a quiet refuge in the midst of bustling downtown Denver, and Father Cattany wants to ensure it remains open for all to enjoy, even during construction.

"This is a place of prayer, it's a place of praise, it's a place of peace, and it's a place of preservation," Father Cattany said. "This place is a special gift to everyone. It is a place that we want everyone to visit, to enjoy, to celebrate and to love."



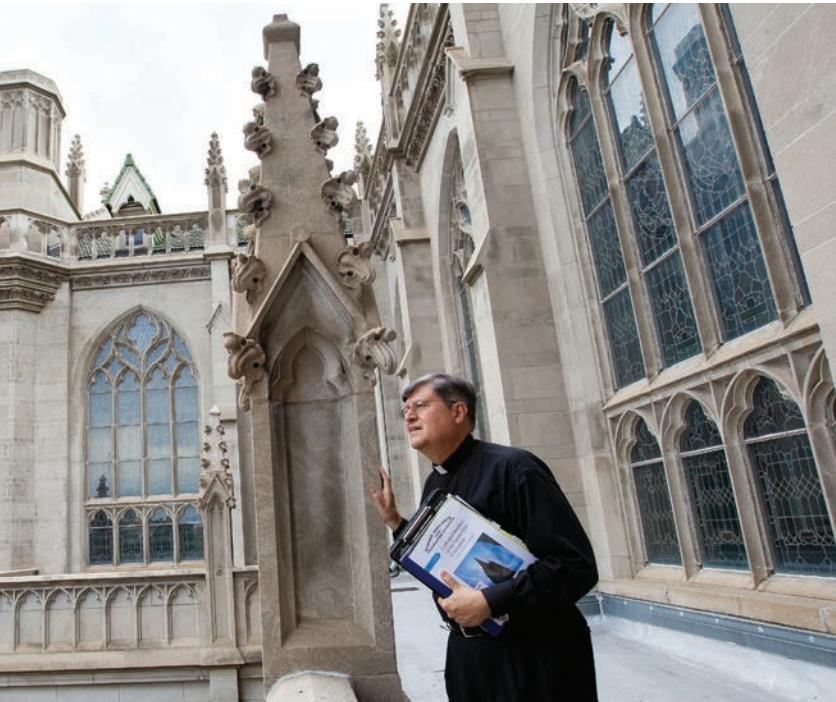
Father Ron Cattany looks at toward the city of Denver from the roof of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

Deterioration of the exterior of the Cathedral during its 100-plus year lifespan has led to a capitol campaign aimed at raising \$2.4 million to repair the spires and façade of the building.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW WRIGHT

“One of the grape clusters fell over the Holy Door. I thank God that when it fell, it fell at a time when nobody was there to get hurt. God's providence always gets us the right message at the right time, and it's our job to respond.”

FATHER RON CATTANY

**CATHEDRAL PRESERVATION FUND**

One-time Donations can be made:

- By check payable to the Cathedral
- By donation online at denvercathedral.org
- By kiosk donation available in the church or rectory

Three-year pledges may be paid monthly or quarterly:

- Online at denvercathedral.org
- By check
- By direct deposit to the Cathedral's bank account
- By check regularly mailed from the donor's bank until pledge is fully paid