

Fire Recovery Update January 2017

Early on March 29, 2016 Tim Devine received a phone call that the church building was on fire. Coming to the building, we discovered smoke still pouring from the building. Later investigation showed that the fire most likely started in the furnace. But because the furnace was running and in a pressurized system, it pumped smoke throughout the building, including electrical conduits and fixtures, and behind walls. In addition to the furnace room and Sanctuary floor, there were several "hot spots" with fire and flame damage. The damage was significant enough that the insurance company had to call in a regional adjustor. We have been blessed to have the fire recovery work overseen by Belfor Property Restoration, a disaster recovery firm with whom the UCC Insurance has contracted for help in situations such as ours.

Asbestos abatement and cause investigation took several weeks before building fire recovery work could begin. In the meantime, we moved our Sunday worship to Ballard First Lutheran Church, thanks to their warm hospitality. Most recovery groups found homes in other churches in Ballard or Phinney Ridge, although a few went on temporary hiatus or disbanded.

The Church Council OK'd some additional security work to be done, from a list created by an ad hoc group charged with looking at ways to improve security. Additional items that the Church Council authorized to be done as part of the fire recovery work, and likely paid for by St Paul's, included installation of a small kitchenette in the NW corner of the (former) Library. Other items included: addition of a small vestibule and door at the bottom of the interior stairs in order to be able to separate the building into two separate areas: upstairs and downstairs, additional keying throughout the building, changing the three small upstairs restrooms into two accessible restrooms, and upgrades to the electrical capacity in the kitchen downstairs. Also, the Council OK'd adding awnings to the library and parking lot exterior doors and Ethernet cabling throughout the building and A/V wiring in the Sanctuary.

Responding to the information that the insurance company would not pay for the cleaning and restoration of the red pews, the Church Council authorized the purchase of dark blue chairs for sanctuary seating. The Church Council also approved an upgrade to the carpeting replacement that insurance would cover, in order to have a highly durable, easily maintainable carpet that can take the kind of use it will receive in our busy building. Funding for the kitchenette, restrooms and upgrades was available from "Fire Recovery" donations as well as the "Upstairs Renovations" fund-a-need from the 2015 auction.

Over the next months, building recovery work progressed. By September we were able to return to Foster Hall for worship, although the rest of the building was still under construction. We had a wonderful homecoming Sunday on September 11. Installation of the new heating system was delayed due to the large number of construction projects in Seattle, which slowed down the Seattle approval process as well as making it more difficult for Belfor to find qualified workers and subcontractors. Additional work continued, though the hoped-for return to the Sanctuary by Christmas was not possible. Another significant milestone was being able to host the annual Thanksgiving and Christmas alcathons in Foster Hall.

On January 8, 2017 we had a marvelous homecoming to the Sanctuary as we returned to worship there for the first time since Easter 2016. And the recovery groups are returning; most will be back before the end of January. Work continues, and as of mid-January the most significant part still left is electrical: 110-volt as well as Ethernet and networking to allow internet access.

Work, and the accounting for work, reimbursements, and insurance payments will take several more months to settle out. In the meantime, we are blessed with a healthy and engaged congregation, ongoing ministry, and a restored building that will help serve our mission for the next generations.

Thank you for your help, prayers and support!

-David Anderson, volunteer liaison to the insurance company and fire recovery process.