



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE PHOTOS / BYRON SMITH

Restoration work to the cupola at Lancaster's First Church of Christ — also known as the Bulfinch Church — has begun.



Jason Murray, left, and Matt Buckley, of Murray Brothers Construction Co., talk about the church bell, made in the early 1800s.



An interior view of Lancaster's First Church of Christ.

## Praying for more help to complete Lancaster church restoration

By Kevin Doherty  
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**L**ANCASTER — The first phase of restorations to the historic First Church of Christ Unitarian — known by many as the Bulfinch Church — is under way, according to Martha Moore, spokesperson for the Bulfinch Fund.

After raising about \$180,000 through grants, donations and fundraising, the Bulfinch Fund is in the first phase of the "restore the cupola campaign," which includes restoration to the dome of the church, the columns, steeple, bell cradle and

eaves, said Moore.

The church, located at 725 Main St., on the Town Green, is in desperate need of repair, she said.

"The columns holding up the dome of the cupola have quite literally started to rot away, and in some cases, are strapped together to keep them from falling to the ground," she said.

Moore said the church is a symbol of early American history.

"Everyone knows the church and everyone loves

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it," said Moore. "It's really a reflection of the local character and history of the town. It's also a National Historical Landmark."

Nineteenth century American architect Charles Bulfinch designed the First Church of Christ Unitarian, located on the Town Greens on Main Street, in 1918, said Moore.

"Bulfinch was the first born professional architect in American," said Moore. "Bulfinch also designed the U.S. Senate Building, the original Mass. General Hospital and parts of the White House. ... This is one of only two remaining Bulfinch churches, and the most pristine of the two."

The Bulfinch Fund is looking to raise an additional \$350,000 to complete the cupola restoration, said Moore.

"We are applying to more federal and state grants to try to reach our goal, but we do need the help of the community, too," said Moore.

The First Church of Christ Unitarian has received a grant of \$50,000 from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Preservation Project Fund,

The pipe organ at the First Church of Christ — also known as the Bulfinch Church — in Lancaster.



Underneath the bell tower from left, John Spencer, building and grounds committee member of the First Christ Church; Matt Buckley and Jason Murray, of Murray Brothers Construction, talk about renovations to Leominster's First Church of Christ.

said Moore.

For a donation of \$500, a resident can have his or her name inscribed on one of the large pins that will hold up the bell in the cupola.

"You will quite literally be supporting the bell for the next 200 years," said Moore.

The last restoration project happened more than 100 years ago, said John Spencer, caretaker for the church for more than 30 years.

"There's been little repairs and work done here and there, but the last major renovation happened in 1904,"

said Spencer.

The church's bell also has historic significance, he said.

The 1,000-pound cast-iron bell, which still tolls on top of the church, "was built by the Paul Revere foundry in 1822," said Spencer. "It's even more unique because it's a replacement bell. Some say the first one was cracked, some say it was simply replaced because it sounded bad."

The church still celebrates Mass every Sunday from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., said Spencer. There's about 125 members in the church.

Town Administrator Orlando Pacheco said the project fits into town officials' "philosophical endeavor" to preserve and restore the historical buildings on the Town Green.

The Prescott building, Memorial School building and the Tercentenary building are all currently undergoing renovations.



A view from the pulpit at the First Church of Christ in Lancaster.

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"It's going to be one beautiful campus when it's all done," said Pacheco. "I think it's critically important to preserve these historic landmarks in town."

The restoration project will be done by local antique-restoration experts, Murray Brothers Construction of Leominster.

The restoration project is scheduled to take about

of Murray Brothers Construction.

The Bulfinch Fund will hold a "Preservation Celebration" on Sunday, June 30, at the church from 1 to 5 p.m., said Moore.

Donations to help restore the historical church can be made online at [www.TheBulfinchFund.org](http://www.TheBulfinchFund.org) or sent to The Bulfinch Fund, PO Box 194, Lancaster, MA 01523.