



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How are things going with the Cathedral?

This is undoubtedly the most frequently asked question of all. It is very understandable and also positive and welcome that so many are keen to know how progress is in relation to restoration of the Cathedral. Thankfully we are progressing well but it is important that people have an understanding of how complex and intricate a project this is. Hopefully the answers below will help inform you more fully.

2. What started the fire?

Christmas Eve 24th December 2009 was particularly cold with sub-zero temperatures experienced across the entire country. In order to adequately heat the Cathedral in advance of celebrating Midnight Mass, the central heating system ran continually at a higher than normal temperature for 17 hours. The flue serving this boiler connected into an old brick lined chimney which formed part of the original Cathedral construction.

Old combustible material which had accumulated in this old brick lined chimney, unchanged since coal burning days, had dried out and were likely super-heated and glowing.

When the burner was turned off an oxygen supply was restored and now assisted by a natural and maintained draught these old deposits ignited leading to a serious flue fire. Burning embers escaped through old worn inspection hatch doors into the priests sacristy igniting combustible materials therein.

Both the central heating boiler and burner were found in good condition and had been correctly maintained and serviced.

3. What has been happening since the fire?

In the early days after the fire we had to liaise with Garda, Fire Services, National Museum, Insurance Company, various media outlets etc. Emergency and 'making safe' works were undertaken at the Cathedral alongside the provision of alternative facilities for the parish community at St. Mel's College.

We established a Project Committee and undertook a selection process to appoint Project Managers. The successful firm are Interactive Project Managers who are headed up by Joan O'Connor and Niall Meagher.

4. What emergency works have been carried out?

Emergency works carried out since the fire included: fencing of site, hoarding of building, propping of windows and doorways, clearing out of building under direction of conservation architect, numbering and storage of materials (remains of mouldings, frescoes, etc.) wind bracing of wall with steel, installation of temporary roof, making pillars safe, surveying of building etc. These works were completed by mid-July.

5. What alternative facilities were put in place?

St. Mel's College Chapel was given a complete renovation to make it suitable for daily Masses for Longford Parish. A very innovative re-ordering of the College Gym was designed and implemented which allows it to be transformed to a temporary place of worship each weekend. Works undertaken included sound & light systems, seating, storage facilities, stage, altar



furniture, sacristy, painting, emergency lighting, new toilets, re-creation of tapestry / statues / stained glass windows from Cathedral etc. A new Footpath was also put in place, as were teams for Car park stewarding and setup and set down of the temporary facilities.

6. Why was a temporary roof installed?

In fact that question was asked by the engineers and considered. However after the devastation of the fire the priority was to safeguard what was left of the building and to ensure that it would not deteriorate any further. It was very important to protect the building from the weather.

In so far as it will take some time before reconstruction works begin it was therefore decided to install a temporary roof. Some people have asked why not install a permanent roof. However major decisions will need to be made as to what kind of roof will be put in place – it may have to facilitate solar panels for instance and many different constructions and materials

will have to be considered. Also the stonework at high level is very badly damaged and will have to be repaired prior to any permanent roof being put in place.

7. When will restoration work start?

From the start we spoke of a 5 year timeline. This is still what we are working towards. A realistic start-up date would probably be early 2012.

8. What will the costs be?

A Cathedral has never burnt in living memory before so this is a one off unique intricate building project and as yet the costs are unknown. We now have an opportunity to plan the building for generations to come. The needs in the 21st century differ from the 19th and therefore we need to add to what was put in place in the 1840's. We need to enhance what we have inherited for now and future generations. The costs will become more apparent when the Design Team have developed the scope of the works.

9. Aren't insurers paying - why fundraise?

As explained above it is most likely that we will have to carry some costs ourselves to pay for 'enhancement' / 'betterment' to the building and its surrounds. We have not yet launched any formal fundraising drive until we have more clarity as to our possible financial needs. However, we have received many donations for which we are very grateful. All donations are acknowledged and receipted and overseen by the Parish Finance Committee.

10. Will it be same on inside?

The intention would be that the Cathedral will be largely the same as it was familiarly known to us with some liturgical intervention. Most of the main features of the Cathedral will be fully restored to include plaster work, stone work and columns which are an integral part of the architecture of the building.

11. Will the local community have an input?

Dialogue with the local community

will form part of the discernment around the future layout out of the Cathedral.

The Diocesan Art and Architecture Committee, and Liturgy Committee will also be consulted.

12. Will the Pillars remain in place?

The pillars have splintered severely and are extremely badly damaged. Conservation experts will have to decide whether they can be repaired or replaced. The intention is that they will remain as a central feature of the classical design of the Cathedral.

13. What's happening now?

Over the past number of weeks the Project Committee and Project Manager have been engaged in an intensive selection process to form a Design Team. It is hoped that the successful Design Team will be announced in the very near future.

14. Who is on the Design Team?

To plan and implement the future restoration of the Cathedral we will need to bring together a number of professional people as follows – Architects (with Conservation and Liturgical expertise), Structural Engineers, Mechanical / Electrical Engineers, Quantity Surveyors.

Selection of the Design Team is possibly the most crucial element of the project. It is being done with a view to assembling the most qualified and experienced of professional people. We are confident that the Team which will be announced at an early date will be highly competent to fill these key roles for the restoration project.

15. What happens next?

When appointed, the Design Team will have to plan the reconstruction in a manner that will recreate its beauty and create a worthy space for worship for generations to come. Because the Cathedral is a listed building we will have to dialogue at all times with the Dept. of Heritage.

16. When will it be reopened?

It is envisaged that the Cathedral Restoration Project will be completed by the end of 2014.

17. It doesn't look too bad on the outside - why not start work soon?

Thankfully the familiar outside facade of the Cathedral is intact. It would have been extremely distressing if this had been damaged.

However the outside appearance betrays the shocking damage that the fire did to the inside of the Cathedral and disguises the complexity of the restoration works. Photographs on the parish website www.longfordparish.com give a truer impression of the extent of the interior damage.

18. What about the Stained Glass Windows?

The two most prestigious stained glass windows survived best. They were supplied by the Harry Clarke Studios 1932. Because of their importance and beauty the Project Committee instructed that they be restored without delay. This restoration has been completed.

19. Where can I find further information?

Longford Parish website www.longfordparish.com is frequently updated on developments on the restoration project.