



Pillars being secured as part of the emergency works.



Extensive steelwork is put in place to safeguard the building as part of the emergency works.

Generous amount of donations greatly appreciated

By Fintan Duffy

As the enormity of the impact of the Christmas Day fire at St Mel's Cathedral was beginning to dawn on all of us, many minds turned to fundraising. The natural reaction for so many people was to make a donation to a restoration fund which hadn't even been set up yet. Fr Tom Healy tells the story of a knock on the door of the Presbytery on the evening of St Stephen's Day. A group of young people had spent the day on the traditional 'Wren' collection and they offered the proceeds of their efforts to help restore a still smouldering Cathedral. That kind of generosity was replicated many times over from people throughout the midlands region and much further afield.

There was the couple in England who asked their guests at the celebration of their 25th wedding anniversary to donate money to St Mel's Cathedral instead of bringing a gift; money arrived from groups and individuals in the United States, Australia and across the UK, and that was before any appeal for funds had been made.

The Cathedral Restoration Reserve Fund was established to deal with such donations. Fr Tom Healy said, as of now, there is no official fundraising campaign underway, but these monies will be vital when it comes to completing the restoration of the Cathedral.

"The funds that have been collected will be used to cover any of the costs that are not included under the insurance policy," he said.

"We will need to resort to our own resources to cover any updating of the facilities in the Cathedral and when we know what our needs are we will then make those known."

Overwhelmed by the outpouring of goodwill and support in the aftermath of



One of the damaged pillars.

the grounds of Longford Town Football Club was a huge success, raising over €12,500. In total just over €315,000 has been donated since the fire. These donations are all receipted and acknowledged and are managed by the 'Friends of St. Mel's Cathedral' (Parish Finance Committee):

Pat Chapman, Mary Donlon, Francis Hanley, Fr. Tom Healy, Tom Mulligan, Evelyn Quinn

Many more events have already been held and many more donations, large and small, have arrived in the post.

"After the devastation of the events of Christmas Day is heartening to experience the goodwill and enthusiasm that people showed towards ourselves here in the parish and we hope that over the next five years or so, as the restoration of our Cathedral is undertaken, that we can harness that support to help us meet the costs of making St Mel's a place of prayer of which we can once again be proud" Fr Tom said.

the fire, Fr Healy said many fundraising proposals were put forward from both at home and abroad.

"We are very conscious that these are difficult times to be asking people for financial help, so in the interests of everyone, including those raising money for other good causes in Longford, we would ask people to be patient with us and when we can definitively say what we need over a specific timeframe, we will be happy to work with all offers that come forward as part of an official fundraising campaign."

To date the largest single fundraising event was the Flancare Family Day which was the brainchild of Paschal Flaherty and Pdraig Farrell. The country music day in

BISHOP COLM O'REILLY SPEAKS...

HERITAGE

The Cathedral is not just a church, in terms of the heritage of the country it's also a treasure and we want to keep it that way. So there's a legitimate interest in it from that view point. St Mel's Cathedral was in a class apart in the country – it was one of those buildings that Heritage has a perfect right to have a special interest in it. We were always flattered by the fact that they're so keen on it. The Liturgists look at a building and they say well how we can make it user friendly for Sunday Mass and rightly so.



The extent of the damage to the right side aisle.