

FAQ How and why are we facing the Bell Tower Project

History and Reason for Bell Tower Project:

Over many years we have noticed water damage to interior wall and ceiling plaster. The damage has been repaired/replaced and repainted only to re-appear at a later time. In 2009, more extensive water leaks appeared in narthex and sanctuary. At this time many of the damaged areas continue in unrepaired condition. Extensive work has been done to identify the locations of the leaks and the cause of the water infiltration sites causing the damage below the bell tower area and along the area of the north parapet wall.

History of the Bidding Process

In 2009 Elder Dick Swem, chairperson of Building and Grounds Committee, initially engaged a regional recognized contracting firm, Karr Tuckpointing LLC, specializing in masonry restoration and preservation. That firm inspected and prepared an estimate with detailed specifications of the scope of work to be completed noting the following: power washing, tuck pointing (damaged mortar joint), remove and replace 1200 bricks in bell tower, seal movement cracks, install flexible caulk around windows and doors, Install metal coping, install flexible caulk in defective lintel joints, install weep holes in lintels, paint steel lintels, install metal chimney cap, surface preparation/cleaning , patch exposed pre-cast concrete masonry, and apply Colorflex coating/sealant to previously painted pre-cast concrete masonry. The total estimated cost was \$56,115.00.

Dick Swem then, at Session's request, obtained another bid for comparison of costs, engaged Mulder Waterproofing & Sealants, Inc., a Kalamazoo based firm, to submit a bid using Karr's Bid Spec Sheet to rebid the project following Mulder's inspection. Mulder prepared and submitted its initial response in late September 2009 following Karr's itemized list of specs with a bid of \$50,500.

In the discussion of the 1200 bricks to be replaced, the Mulder bid commented, "In my opinion the bell tower will be a continuous maintenance item because of its exposure and current roof structure. I would suggest removing the roof structure and the four brick columns down to just above the bell tower base and putting pre-cast concrete on the four brick corners. Then apply a structure from all four corners that would meet in the center and then install a cross that would be up off the roof. I do not

have any cost to complete this suggestion... but ...could... if congregation would request this.”

Session’s concern at this point was to identify the root cause of the leaks and concern that the repairs as outlined would likely stop the leaks but only temporarily. Based on that common understanding, **Dick Swem was asked to pursue with Mulder their additional recommendation and preliminary plan and cost estimate to tear down bell tower and to replace it with new weather tight structure of appropriate design.**

In late January 2010, the Mulder firm submitted a revised, restated estimate following the original outlined scope of work modified to accommodate an enhanced proposal for **tear down and re-construction of a re-designed roof structure, steeple , with cross.** That estimate included their original estimated cost at \$50,500 modified and reduced based on \$4,700 of work they were engaged to accomplish in the east wall of sanctuary in the fall of 2009. To this difference ($\$50,500 - \$4,700 = \$47,800$), \$47,800 was added an additional item bell tower removal with a new cross and roof installation in the amount of \$36,200. Thus, **a total bid amount of \$84,000.** This bid was reviewed by Session and the totals appeared to be overlapping and so Session requested re-itemization of the original bid components plus the demolition and new construction costs.

In early April 2010 Mulder together with general contractor, Pearson Construction..., a Berrien County based general commercial construction and design firm made a joint presentation to Session. That bid presentation consisted of two components: itemized bid for originally identified work to yet be completed at \$27,800 and the second component the cost for replacing the bell tower with new roof and cross design in the amount of \$36,200. The **total bid amount was stated at \$64,000. This bid had a rendering for the design of a new pointed steeple that was shorter than the current bell tower with a metal Roman cross.** Eventually, this design and the rendering were, shared with congregation and comments were elicited.

In the end,

- **based on the proposed costs and the design**
- **the need to better understand the actual condition of the existing construction,**
- **the lack of an architectural drawing,**

- **and the lack of the original architectural plans for the church dating from the 1920's,**

it was recommend and approved by Session to engage reputable architectural firm to provide:

- **an estimate for a construction plan with design alternatives compatible with the church original design and facades,**
- **a professional evaluation assessment of the condition of existing construction ,**
- **preparation of construction specification ,**
- **detailed construction plans,**
- **preparation of specs and plans for contractors' bid submissions,**
- **eventual final construction contract documents ,**
- **reviewing and vetting of potential contractors and reviewing of the bids with recommendations ,**
- **fine-tuning the final construction contract with successful bidder,**
- **obtaining the necessary permits and variances**
- **and oversight of construction to assure the materials and construction techniques actually performed conform to the plans/specs and approve payment to contractor under submitted construction draw requests.**

The fee for this bundle of services with Architectural Design Group (ADG), a highly regarded architectural firm, based in South Bend, IN, was \$9000.00. The lead architect working with us is William Lamie, AIA.

In February 2011 ADG provided four preliminary designs with approximates for costs of construction. These costs ranged from \$76,500 to \$101,500. This was followed with a Called Meeting of Session on March 19, 2011. In that meeting the four designs were reviewed and discussed. Architect Bill Lamie identified other areas of concern: flashings needed replacement, gable vent on south end needed replacement, three steel lintels needed to be totally removed and replaced, parapet cap north end of building needed to be repaired, power washing needed, and front brick steps need to be replaced.

On March 26 2011, session approved the designed to replace the bell tower with a similar design as presently existing after being assured that this design would last as long as the other designs presented given contemporary building materials and modifications to the design not visible to the naked eye. We also asked for bids for additional improvements of repair/replacement of flashings, repair/replacement of gable vent on south end of building, replace three steel lintels over north basement windows, repair pre-cast concrete parapet on north end of building, power washing as needed, replacement of front brick steps, removal of unused chimney.

Session approved that bids should be obtained from three contractors (Zilkowski Construction, Casteel Construction and Pearson Construction) pre-qualified by ADG. The bid specs and final construction plan details were finalized by ADG in meetings with Tom Gordon and Chris Lee between April and June 2010 with bids to be solicited in July for review in August by Session.

Bids from the three firms were reviewed by Bill Lamie of ADG with Session. The lowest bid was submitted by Pearson Construction in the **base amount of \$95,700. The base bid was more extensive than the original bid from Mulder.** It now included:

- removing the current bell tower and rebuilding the tower with contemporary materials and improved design not visible to the naked eye
- roof repairs
- removing the unused chimney and re-roofing the hole
- repairing and replacing flashings
- repairing the exterior plaster in the entry way
- repairing a gable vent on the south side
- replacing 3 steel lintels
- wire brushing and painting other rusted lintels
- repairing the parapet cap on the front main gable
- roofing the new tower with faux slate instead of asphalt

The bid from Pearson was approved with the following add ons:

- masonry cleaning 4,500
- addition of limestone Celtic cross, 4,900
- replacement of existing front stairs to front doors, 11,000
- interior repair of plaster work and painting inside building and 4,100

- requirement of contractor's performance/surety bond. 700.00

These additions total an additional \$24,500 bring total construction cost to \$120,900. The bids of both Zilkowski (\$173,405) and Casteel (\$182,200) firms were considerably higher than anticipated, in part due possible to this being a small construction project and possibly the level of committed work already in their construction pipeline.

Construction will begin in the spring as soon as weather permits.

Session will make periodic reports to congregation thru a town meeting format, brochures, and power point presentation using these materials to support fund raising to pay back invested funds liquidated to cover construction costs.

The process and the amount of time devoted to the Bell Tower Project spans slightly more than two years. It included the necessary due diligence required to review all aspects of this construction project in order to be able to make informed decisions based on as much factual data as could be made available and upon professional inspection, review and analysis, with recommendations to Session based on current best construction practices, construction design, and most suitable construction materials.

Design and architectural renderings are available for inspection by the congregation and friends. Detailed photos of the present condition of the bell tower and other exterior building elements which are in disrepair are available for viewing both at the church and on the web site (firstpresbuchanan.org)

We need to remember the last extensive repairs and maintenance performed on the building's roughly 80 year old exterior were conducted in the mid -1980's. Those repairs and maintenance served us well over the past 25 years. We have a lot invested in this building, new boilers have been installed, a gift of air-conditioning was made, a gift of additional insulation was made to name only a few recent improvements. All buildings always have repairs and maintenance requirements and such challenges will face us in the future. Such challenges have faced all congregations in Biblical times and throughout history. Together we face such challenges boldly with the confidence and assurance God will provide us with the will and substance to meet this financial challenge, so each of us can respond, " How can I help?"

