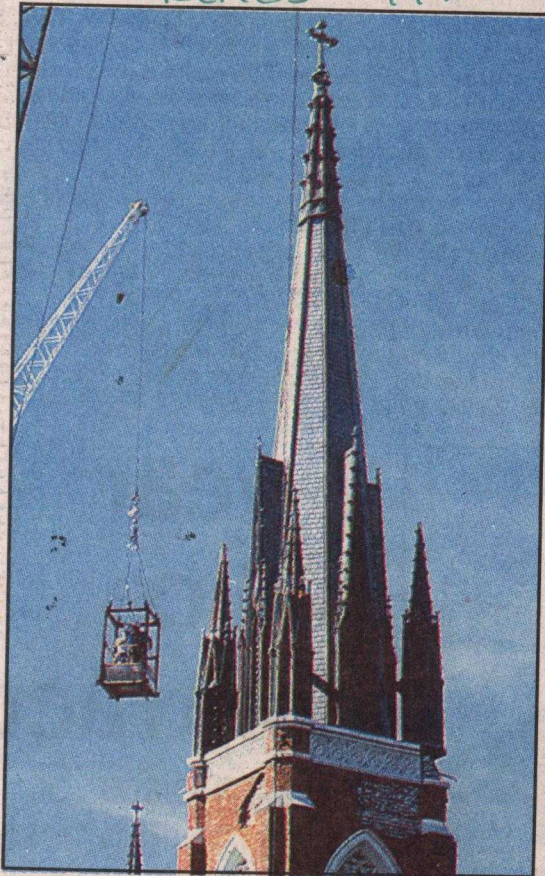


Churches - 1990



Sentinel file

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church steeple after the 1989 earthquake.

Watsonville steeple will rise again

By GREG BEEBE
Sentinel staff writer

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WATSONVILLE — The landmark steeple at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, a symbol of efforts to rebuild the city after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, will return to its post atop the church tower Thursday morning.

The 70-foot, eight-ton steeple will be lowered into place at 7 a.m. Thursday, church officials said Friday.

Once the steeple is secure, Bishop Sylvester Ryan of the Monterey Diocese, along with church clergy and parish members, will bless the cross atop the steeple.

Community anticipation over the return of the steeple has been growing as the rebuilding progresses, said the church's Rev. Michael Miller.

"It's exhilarating to see after some darkness that we've stood up and shaken the dust off ourselves and we're just moving forward. ...

"People just brighten up as they talk about it," Miller said.

"The tower and steeple will be like an enormous arm, the arm of the community, raised up in blessing over Watsonville, showing it the love of Christ.

"I hope that's the kind of parish we'll be, and that no one will ever accuse us of false advertising," said Miller.

The return of the steeple, said Jerry Hernan-

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St. Patrick's steeple

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dez, director of the Main Street downtown revitalization program, "gives people a sense that things are coming back" in the city.

"It's our entrance to Watsonville," said downtown merchant and St. Patrick's member Esther Herrera.

The church suffered heavy damage in the earthquake and was torn down. Rebuilding efforts began in March. Church leaders hope to hold the first Mass in the rebuilt church on March 17, 1994.

Meanwhile, interim services are being held in the Notre Dame School gymnasium, "but it's just not the same," said Herrera.

"Everybody's just kind of scattered about without the church being there. We're looking forward to attending church once again at St. Patrick's."

G.W. Davis, a Watsonville construction company, is rebuilding the 90-year-old church from scratch. The new St. Patrick's, designed by Monterey architect Russ Haisley, is essentially a replica of the old

parish.

Its interior will mirror major elements of the old structure with some revised seating arrangements and new sound and lighting. Ornate stained glass windows saved from the original church will return.

The 4,000-member St. Patrick's is still \$1.2 million short of the \$3.8 million it needs to pay for the rebuilding, said Miller. Money has come from community donations, private businesses, the National Catholic Relief Fund and hundreds of small Roman Catholic parishes across the country.

"We haven't turned down any contributions," said Miller. "I hope it's not an exercise of foolishness. I hope it's an exercise of faith."

A large crowd is expected to watch the return of the steeple from across the street at Notre Dame Sisters Convent, where coffee and doughnuts will be served.