

St. Patrick's repair plans taking shape

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

Officials at the earthquake-damaged St. Patrick's Church in Watsonville have announced plans for a major renovation of the 87-year-old church.

Construction is expected to start in about three months.

The plan calls for extending the transepts, the crosswise section of the church's floor plan, by 9½ feet, moving the wall behind the altar back about 15 feet and building a plaza in front of the church that would extend to the front of the rectory, which is right next to the church.

The Rev. Michael Miller, pastor of the church, said the church exterior would remain essentially the same, but the interior would look different.

The new altar will be closer to the parishioners and confessionals will be larger, well-lit rooms, instead of the traditional small, dark stalls, Miller said.

The floor plan will also increase the church's maximum occupancy of 540 to 700. Miller said the spire will be repaired and put back in its place.

It is estimate the construction will cost between \$2 million and \$2.5 million. Although the church only has \$331,000 so far, which was raised through a letter-writing campaign, Miller said he was confident the rest of the money will be raised.

Plans have been submitted to city and county officials, Miller said.

In March, parishioners

See CHURCH page 2 ►

CHURCH

► From page 1

started to send out nearly 19,000 letters to Catholic parishes around the country asking for money. Two groups were organized to head the fund-raising efforts. One group was involved in gathering money locally, and the other hunted for funds around the country.

Miller said the latter group will now be approaching private foundations for donations.

The church suffered major damage in the Oct. 17 earthquake, which buckled the side walls, cracked the 132-foot tower, and left the altar in pieces. St. Patrick's Church, which was designed by William Weeks, has been a Watsonville landmark and a place where many have sought comfort, Miller said.

"To some, the church is a symbol of life," he said.

Since the earthquake, parishioners have continued to come to the church, but some have expressed anger and anxiety

that renovations on the church had not been started, Miller said.

Plans for repairing the church have been in the works for several months, Miller said. A committee was formed to make recommendations on repairs and renovations and several public meetings were held at the church.

The renovation and repair plan is the first phase of a master plan put together by the committee. Phase two, which may be implemented in a year or two, calls for remodeling the rectory and enlarging the church's food distribution center, Loaves and Fishes, at the rear of the church.

Since the earthquake, masses have been held at the gymnasium of Moreland Notre Dame School across the street. The church conducts two masses on Saturday and eight on Sunday, Miller said.

At mass will be held in the church's parking lot Sept. 8. After the mass, Miller said church officials would discuss renovation plans in detail with parishioners.