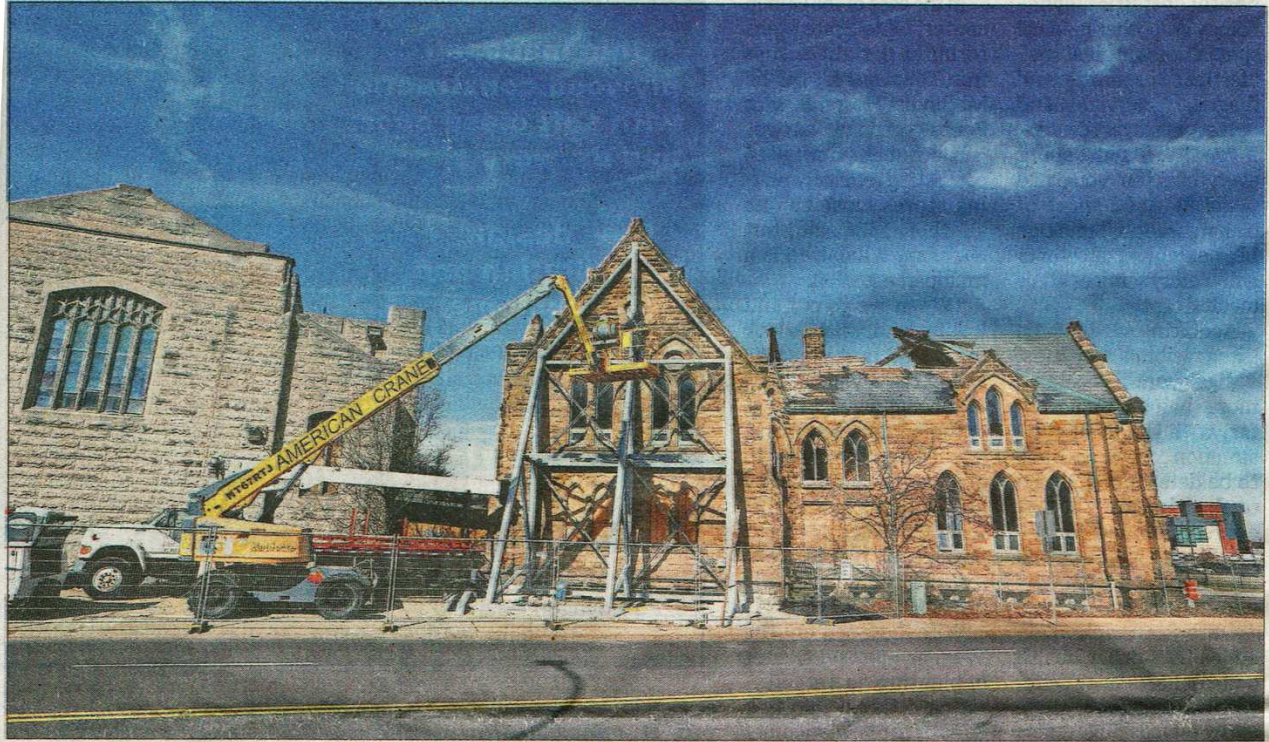
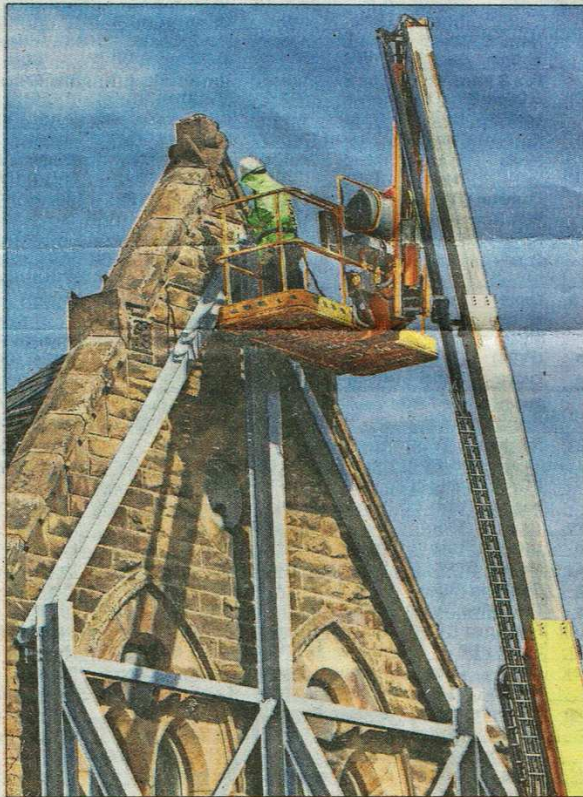


# Hopes high for church damaged in fire



Workers from Quality Masonry Co. of Marion stabilize the fire-damaged structure of the former St. Paul's Episcopal Church and former University of Akron ballet center on Thursday. [KAREN SCHIELY/BEACON JOURNAL/OHIO.COM]



Workers from Quality Masonry Co. of Marion stabilize the walls of the former church owned by the University of Akron on Thursday. The building was damaged by fire in April. [KAREN SCHIELY/BEACON JOURNAL/OHIO.COM]

## UA aims to transfer ownership of former St. Paul's; preservation group notes local interest

By Katie Byard  
Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

The walls of the old St. Paul's Episcopal Church on the University of Akron campus are being stabilized after they were severely damaged last spring in a fire.

Meanwhile, UA continues to work to get state approval to transfer ownership of the historic structure, with the goal of preserving it.

The university is erecting steel scaffold-like supports adjacent to the building's exterior to keep the walls from falling outward.

"This is purely precautionary," said Nathan Mortimer, UA's vice president for finance and administration. "There's no indication those walls are in any jeopardy of moving" and hurting somebody.

Dana Noel, president of nonprofit Progress Through

Preservation, which has long been concerned about preserving the former church, said last week he knows of another area group interested in possibly restoring and moving into the old church.

"There's some very strong interest," he said.

Local preservationists consider the stone-and-wood structure at 354 E. Market St. to be one of the most significant old structures remaining in the city. The oldest portion of the building dates to 1885. A stained-glass window that was designed by Tiffany Studios and is in the newer section (built in 1909) was spared in the April 18 fire. The cause of the fire is unknown, according to an Akron Fire Department spokeswoman.

Mortimer echoed last week what he's told Progress Through Preservation: He

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# CHURCH

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is working with the state's Department of Administrative Services to have legislation drafted that would allow the property to be transferred through a bid process.

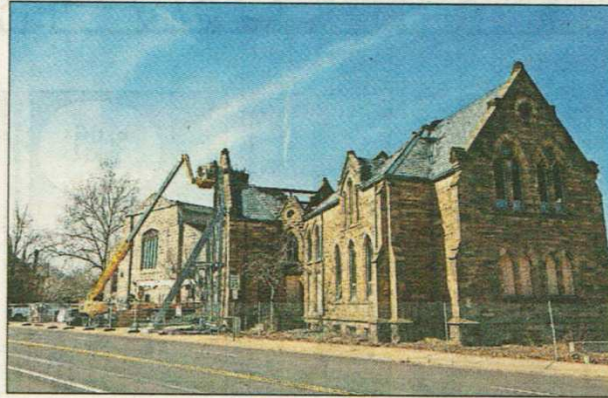
"It's very clear that Progress Through Preservation — Dana and his colleagues — really desire for this building to have some future use," Mortimer said. "I think we all understand that."

But, he said, he can't guarantee that any specific group will end up with the building.

Because it is a state-owned property, he said, "I've got a procurement process that I've got to follow."

Progress Through Preservation "wants to pursue any collaborative option that would preserve the building, and we're ready to share our expertise," Noel said.

He said the group is



**Supports are being added to a building on East Market Street that was heavily damaged by fire in April. The University of Akron says the work by Quality Masonry Co. is a precaution.** [KAREN SCHIELY/BEACON JOURNAL/OHIO.COM]

willing to pay for a feasibility study to explore costs of restoration and potential uses of the building. The group has expertise in obtaining tax credits, used to help fund the improvement of historic properties.

Noel said Progress Through Preservation is grateful for Mortimer's efforts.

"He's taken the time to listen and be engaged with us," Noel said. "It would have been very easy to tear the building down after the fire.

He [Mortimer] managed to take on a more complicated process that will hopefully save the building."

Noel has said it is unlikely the structure would be returned to religious uses. Many congregations are contracting and consolidating, he noted, and it would be a hefty investment to restore and maintain the property.

The oldest portion of the church opened in 1885 as a parish hall and Sunday school. The new

portion opened in 1909. The two buildings are connected by a wood-frame walkway.

In 1947, the Beacon Journal called a wedding there "the biggest society wedding in Akron history."

Martha Firestone, granddaughter of Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. founder Harvey S. Firestone, married William Clay Ford, the grandson of the late Henry Ford, at the church on June 21, 1947.

The university acquired the property in 1952 and moved its music school there in the 1950s after the new St. Paul's at 1361 W. Market St. in West Akron was consecrated.

UA mothballed the property in 2006. It had most recently housed the university's Ballet Center, and in 2006 the ballet program was moved to a new addition at Guzzetta Hall on the UA campus.

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