

Historic St. Philip Chapel gets restoration, preservation award

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Last October, St. Philip Catholic Church undertook a major renovation of its original chapel, built in 1871. On May 20, those efforts were recognized when the parish received a historic preservation award from the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County.

"It's such an ancient building, which has been such an important part of St. Philip's campus from the start," said Lewis Guthrie, St. Philip parishioner since 1983, and chair of its Building and Grounds Ministry. "That's really where St. Philip started, with the chapel. Portions of it are 140 years old. Nothing had been done to it in a significant manner for at least 50 years."

The restoration was intended to bring the chapel up to codes, in terms of heating, air conditioning, electrical and fire-proofing. Although the 1871 wood floor was preserved, refinished and reinstalled, underneath is a new concrete and brick foundation, new heating and air systems, and new electrical wiring, paint and finishes throughout.

Because it is one of Franklin's historic preservation sites, the goal was to make these needed changes while maintaining the integrity of the original structure. "The building looks very historic still inside and out," said Guthrie. "But now it has 21st century technology, basically. When you go into the place, it still feels 140 years old."

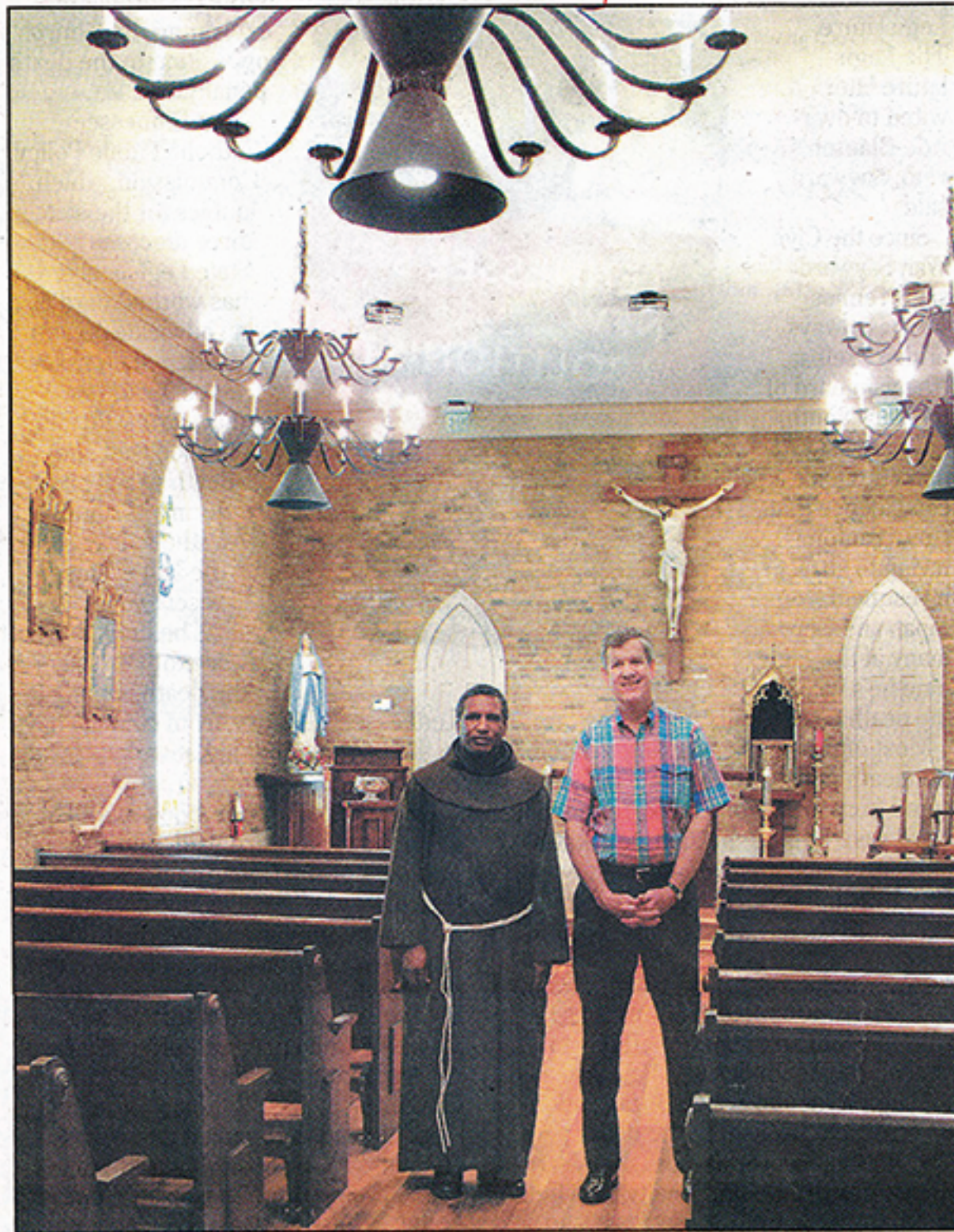
Besides the old flooring, the project preserved and restored the original pews and kneelers, altar and tabernacle, Stations of the Cross, church doors and stained glass windows.

The restoration was done by American Constructors, under the direction of Project Manager Joe Braden. American Constructors is not new to Catholic church building and renovation work, having completed a new worship space, fellowship hall and chapel at St. Henry, a sanctuary, narthex chapel and parking lot at St. Stephen, and major additions to the Holy Family Church campus in 2006, among other projects.

The money for the chapel renovation – approximately \$150,000 – came from St. Philip itself, with no other diocesan funds or bank loans involved. "We had the luxury of having enough in the kitty to fund it ourselves," said Guthrie. "We're in good shape financially, and we're not taking that for granted."

Guthrie has served on the Parish Council for three years as chair of the Building and Grounds Ministry, and during that time the renovation has been a high priority. Guthrie's area of expertise makes him perfectly suited to head up the Building and Grounds Ministry – he owns Tennessee Architectural Products, a commercial construction business, sub-contractor and materials

Father Tien Tran, left, associate pastor of St. Philip Church, is pictured with pastor Father Showraiah outside the historic St. Philip Chapel, which recently underwent its first major renovation in 50 years. At right is a detail of a stained glass window in the original chapel of St. Philip Church. The parish received a historic preservation award from the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County for the work done to restore the 140-year-old chapel.



Photos by Theresa Laurence

St. Philip pastor Father Marneni Bala Showraiah, O.F.M., and Lewis Guthrie, chair of the parish's building and grounds committee, are pictured in the newly restored chapel, which was built in 1871. Bishop David Choby will celebrate a rededication Mass for the chapel at 9 a.m. Friday, July 9.

supplier. "But it's a big team," said Guthrie. "I'm just one of many, many people that have been involved in this project."

The chapel was closed in October, and

will reopen this month. Fortunately, the work did not interfere with most of the normal running of the parish. The St. Philip campus has a much more modern

sanctuary that accommodates 1,000 parishioners, as opposed to the 115-seat historic chapel. "So this is just a small chapel that's used for special Masses, morning Masses, weddings and baptisms – almost like a sacramental chapel," explained Guthrie. "We outgrew this chapel a long time ago."

Outgrowing by size does not mean the chapel has outgrown its usefulness or worth. The Heritage Foundation Award is testament to the intrinsic value of the property. The chapel restoration project was nominated for a Preservation Award along with 22 other properties around Williamson County – churches, farms, homes and a courthouse. Independent judges visited all the properties, and at St. Philip in mid-May they took photographs and interviewed St. Philip's pastor Father Marneni Bala Showraiah, O.F.M., and members of the church.

Guthrie attended the Heritage Foundation award ceremony at Jamison Hall at The Factory in Franklin, along with Father Bala and 12 other parishioners. "We were the first award of the night," said Guthrie. "They put on a little slide show with the history of the church and the history of the chapel. It's an honor, and I'm proud for the parish, and for the team that's been involved in working on this and putting it together. I think that our parish has something to be very proud of."

The timing of the restoration and the award couldn't be better, as St. Philip gets ready to embark on its 140th year celebration, which begins in November and continues through November 2011. "We were the original Catholic church in Williamson County," Guthrie said. "So this is where it all began for the Catholic faith in our community. And so to preserve that, and keep that history vital is very important."

"I appreciate the fact that Heritage Foundation recognized that, and I think the people of our parish recognize that this is something not to be taken for granted," Guthrie continued. "We're very fortunate to still be here 140 years later." ✠

