

Aurora United Church warns of fundraising fraudsters as demolition work continues



By Brock Weir

Aurora United Church is cautioning residents to be wary of fraudsters going door to door claiming to be raising money for the congregation.

Alarm bells were raised by the congregation last weekend after a member living in Newmarket's Stonehaven neighbourhood received a knock on their front door from an individual claiming to be collecting money to benefit the church's rebuilding fund.

‘They were asking for money on behalf of the Aurora United Church (AUC) and we are not door knocking or asking for any funds door knocking,’ says Rod Johnson, chair of the AUC congregational council, who reported the incident to York Regional Police. ‘We are not reaching out for funds other than at a couple of events.’

Last weekend was an emotional one for members of the AUC congregation, who continue their regular services at 11 a.m. each Sunday at Trinity Anglican Church, just a stone's throw from where their church used to be at the foot of Yonge and Mosley.

Demolition crews reduced the building's two landmark towers, along with the Yonge Street-facing narthex to rubble last week, and continue efforts to raze the rest of the site down to sidewalk level.

Crawford Heritage, Chair of the AUC's Property Committee, was one of the few people able to climb the towers to survey the damage for himself prior to the rest of the demolition commencing last Monday.

Mr. Heritage has helped oversee the salvage of many items from the site, including the stained glass windows from the narthex, filing cabinets full of choir music and sermons written by Reverends Andy Comar and Lorraine Newton Comar, and other items which are currently being restored at a facility in Hamilton.

He estimates up to \$75,000 has been spent so far on restoring paper material and other archival documents, as well as all the other items that were salvaged from the wreckage. Although they were hopeful the Yonge Street façade could be preserved for use in a future building, Mr. Crawford said it was clear after going up there that they had to go.

‘The north tower had an entrance to the attic whereas the south tower did not. When the fire came along through the attic, it came through the north tower and it was just blackened from the inside,’ he said, with his voice breaking. ‘We went up the stairs to the balcony and looked up to the sanctuary and it was just nothing.’

‘On the south tower, there were major cracks that just went straight up and down. As the structural engineer said, if these cracks had been jagged or going around the bricks rather than through the bricks, it wouldn't have been as bad, but they went right through and just weakened the foundation. When the demolition crew approached the site with their machines, the tower just shook. You could

see it move back and forth. The mortar was just cooked. It was the only decision to make for those two towers.?

As the congregation settles into new life at Trinity, money continues to trickle in through legitimate means to help towards the future.

On Sunday, Richmond Hill United Church's regularly scheduled concert was turned into a benefit concert for their brothers and sisters north of the Oak Ridges divide.

Next month, on Saturday, June 7, the AUC will also present Opera Nella Chiesa, which will benefit the AUC's Rebuilding Fund. Money is also flowing into the church coffers through old fashioned bank donations and online donations through their website at www.auroraunitedchurch.com.