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Church needs help to pay for rebuilt steeple



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY JONI AVERILL

The steeple at Holden Congregational Church is a work in progress as of Friday. [Buy Photo](#)

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[By Joni Averill](#)
BDN Staff

When I left my meeting this week with the Rev. Dana Douglass of Deer Isle and Holden Congregational Church trustees Gary Jarvis of Hermon and Carolyn Costain of Brewer, I was filled with wonder.

I marveled at the simple, elegant beauty of this lovingly cared for 1828 church, and at the commitment of church members who continue the tradition of rural worship established by those who preceded them.

I could not stop my mind from drifting back to the childhood finger rhyme, "Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people."

Then my head filled with lines from a favorite, old children's book, "The Little Engine that Could."

Because, you see, here is this beautiful little church with a worn-out steeple, and when you open the doors, you see only 71 people.

Just like that little engine, who said "I think I can, I think I can, I know I can," the truly committed membership of Holden Congregational Church not only thinks it can, but knows it can finish paying for the rebuilding of that steeple.

Local contractors Nickerson & O'Day of Brewer were just about finished with the reconstruction the day I was there, and it was expected the staging would be gone in time for Christmas services.

The reconstruction cost is \$36,000 and through every fundraising effort imaginable the members had raised, as of last week, a remarkable \$24,150 of that amount, Gary proudly told me.

"That steeple has been leaking for 20 years," he said, despite the fact that back in 1987 Gary crawled out the back window of the steeple and proceeded to install a lead-coated copper covering.

Dana and Carolyn agreed that Gary is the driving force behind the effort to "Save our Steeple" and while we talked, he let us in on a little secret: There is motive in his effort.

"I'm from Danforth," Gary told us.

He left town when he went into the military, he said, and when he returned home, he discovered the steeple had been taken off his church.

"I had real trouble with that," he said.

The steeple removal bothered him so much that he never forgot the feeling.

So when the domed steeple on his present church really needed to be attended to, Gary had a little talk with the Lord, he said.

Gary promised that would not happen to this church. With the Lord's help, Gary would see to it that this steeple was saved.

He talked with Clayton Holmes of Bangor, "who was a big help to me in getting this going," and the trustees worked on applying for grants to save their steeple and its 8-foot weathervane.

But, because they have been working so hard over the years to maintain the integrity of the building and paid for improvements such as siding and handicapped accessibility, historic grants were not available.

Undeterred, in 2008 "with bats in the belfry and the steeple swaying in the wind," they said, the membership, led by the trustees who include Peter Burke of Dedham, Greg Caron of Holden and Jo Wood of Lamoine, forged ahead.

Letters were mailed to the members asking for pledges; an auction and yard sale were held, the church cookbook was revised for resale, younger members conducted a penny drive, the church held a gospel concert and a blueberry festival. Money trickled in, but more is needed.

And saving the steeple isn't just for members of HCC, it's for the community, too.

The church, according to its published history, was built by members of the East Brewer Meeting House Corp. and included family names that even today are an integral part of Holden: Farrington, Fisher, Man, Blake, Copeland, Hart, Field, Rogers, Torrance, Blake, Holbrook, Winchester, Hodges, Wiswell, Jones, Bates, Shedd, Shepard, Rider, Tozier, Jones, Clark and Brastow.

Today, the HCC houses the Holden Food Pantry that serves not only church members but also other needy community members. The Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts meet there, as does the Holden Historical Society.

So this little church with the newly rebuilt steeple and 71 people worshipping inside need a minor miracle this holiday season.

Perhaps you can grant their Christmas wish and help them save the steeple by sending a donation to Holden Congregational Church Steeple Fund, P.O. Box 309, Holden 04429.

Merry Christmas, everyone!

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