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St. Stephen Church, Oil City, Undergoes Necessary Safety Measures

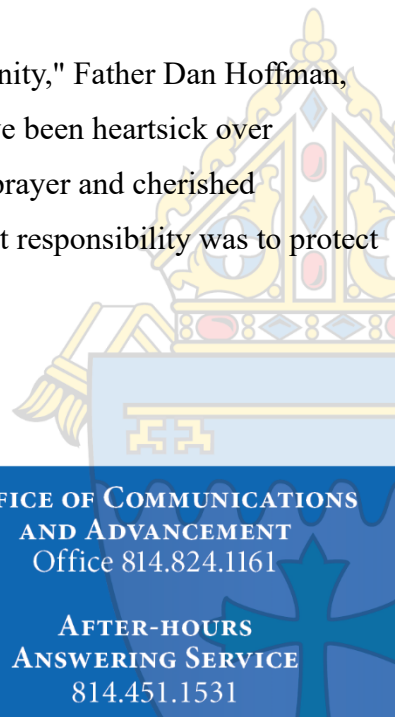
The Diocese of Erie is providing an update following the emergency demolition of the St. Stephen Church tower after city officials determined it posed an immediate public safety risk.

On Sunday, Aug. 2, the City of Oil City closed the area surrounding the church after identifying concerns with the stability of the tower. To protect pedestrians, motorists and emergency personnel, the parish responsible for the building made the difficult decision to authorize the removal of the unstable tower.

During the demolition, the tower's deteriorated condition caused additional damage to portions of the church building, including the roof and front entrance. Over the past several months, the parish has safely removed and preserved the church's sacred vessels, liturgical furnishings and other historic items. The parish is now working with contractors to safely remove the stained-glass windows and the few remaining sacred items that could not be removed previously.

"This has been an incredibly heartbreaking week for our parish and our community," Father Dan Hoffman, pastor of St. Titus Parish, Titusville, and St. Joseph Parish, Oil City, said. "I have been heartsick over everything that has unfolded. St. Stephen Church has been a place of worship, prayer and cherished memories for generations. While the loss of the tower is deeply painful, our first responsibility was to protect the safety of everyone in our community."

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No final decisions have been made regarding the future of the church building or property. The parish's Pastoral and Finance Councils will continue to meet to discuss the path forward, and Father Hoffman remains in regular communication with Bishop Lawrence Persico of the Diocese of Erie.

"As we move forward, we ask for patience, prayers and charity," Father Hoffman said. "When the time comes to make decisions about the future, they will be made thoughtfully, prayerfully and in consultation with parish leadership and the Diocese of Erie. We are grateful for the prayers, encouragement and support that have been offered, and we ask everyone to continue praying for our parish family during this difficult time."

The Diocese of Erie will continue to provide updates as additional information becomes available.

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