

Point Roberts' Trinity Church in danger of collapse

BY PAT GRUBB

Trinity Community Lutheran Church, a fixture of Point Roberts since 1913, is in danger of collapsing and requires \$200,000 in repairs, according to Andy Mar who is heading the fundraising drive.

"We're in pretty desperate straits," Mar said in an interview with Point Roberts Press, parent company of *The Northern Light*. The sanctuary has been condemned and no one is allowed to enter it following examination by a building engineer and a contractor.

Last winter, Louise Cassidy noticed that the west wall of the sanctuary was bowing outwards and asked Tom Sheridan of Sheridan Construction to assess the condition of the building. Subsequently, the church's insurance company, Brotherhood Mutual, hired John MacLeod, PE, to inspect the building.

MacLeod reported that "the lateral movement of the side walls resulted from an outward thrust imposed on the walls due to the gravity loading of the roof above. This is an original construction issue." At the time, the wall was bulging about six inches from vertical plane; it has since grown further.

The report noted that two ten-



▲ Trinity Community Lutheran Church, one of Point Roberts' oldest buildings, is in danger of collapsing and needs \$200,000 in repairs.

Courtesy photo

sion wires had been installed in the 1990s to shore up the walls and had "resolved the issue to some extent."

Further complicating the issue, MacLeod found that uneven settling had resulted in the southwest corner of the floor being four-and-a-half inches lower than the opposite corner.

As well, he found that the wooden piers supporting the floor were not mechanically at-

tached either to the floor joists or the concrete footings below. Many of the piers appeared to be off-center of the footings. In the event of an earthquake, there would be nothing to prevent the building from sliding off the concrete footings and most likely collapsing.

To rectify the situation, Mar said the church needed \$100,000 to immediately shore up the western wall. This would be ac-

complished by installing steel plates on opposite sides of the building and connecting them by seven steel cables.

The work would proceed in two phases, said Mar. Following the initial work to save the building, the next phase would involve constructing a real foundation and new entry for the building.

Each phase would require \$100,000, or \$200,000 in total. Work on the first phase has al-

ready begun.

In a letter detailing construction costs, Tom Sheridan wrote, "After thinking about all the different ways to approach this, David Bradley and I think this is the best way to proceed ... as it gets the church fully functional to full capacity and, with maintenance, ensures the church's use for the next 100 years and beyond. This will protect the church from any further settling, spreading of walls and roof and seismic events. Basically, this saves the church structure."

The church has already begun its fundraising campaign and is seeking the community's help to save the historic building. To date, it has raised \$50,000 but it obviously needs much more and soon.

Mar says while the church has a GoFundMe link on its web page, it would prefer checks and can accept U.S. and Canadian currency. Donors will receive either a U.S. or Canadian tax receipt.

Donations can also be made at the Umpqua Bank branch in Point Roberts. Checks can be mailed to Trinity Community Lutheran Church, PO Box 437, Point Roberts, WA 98281.

For more information, go to pointrobertschurch.com.

Op-Ed: Help save our historic Icelandic landmark

BY MARGOT GRIFFITHS

In the early 1890s the first Icelandic settlers arrived in Point Roberts. Though few in number, their resilient spirits fuelled a steadily growing population and founded a lasting heritage in this tiny exclave of the U.S.

Separated from mainland U.S. by Canada, Point Roberts presents numerous challenges for its residents today. How much more so when those resourceful Icelandic settlers arrived here nearly 130 years ago? But moving between countries, across borders and frontiers, was nothing new to the intrepid few who left Iceland with the dream of a new life in their hearts. Their journey from Iceland to Canada was marked by long days at sea, long nights on trains, seasickness, exhaustion and hunger.

Once at their destination in Victoria, B.C., unemployment and uncertainty marred their lives. Canada was enduring a depression, and so it was that Kristian Benson moved his family from Victoria to Point Roberts, where he heard a new Alaska Packers Association cannery was being built and the company was hiring. More Icelandic settlers – Helgi and Dagbjort Thorsteinson, Arni Mrydal, Paul Thorsteinson – left Victoria, and thus began the history of the Icelandic people in Point Roberts.

They worked hard and worked together, building homes and barns, buying fishing nets, tilling the land and harvesting the seas that surrounded them. And they

loved the land.

The forests rose at their backs and the rocky beach before them reminded them of their home in Vík í Mýrdal, Iceland. They loved the quiet after the noise of Victoria, and on summer evenings, families gathered to enjoy Point Roberts' first beach parties. They formed a literary society, "Hafstjarnan," which means "ocean star." Soon they had a library and their numbers grew.

In 1913, over 35 adults and their children formed that first mission congregation when the Icelandic Synod in Winnipeg sent the Reverend H. Leo to Point Roberts. Services, held in the school house, were conducted in Icelandic for several years before English was adopted.

The same energy, strength and faithfulness they brought to homesteading, farming and fishing, the Icelanders brought to building their new church. In 1920, a group of volunteers completed the sanctuary that has stood 100 years, a symbol of Icelandic love of church and community. Trinity Community Lutheran Church stands on land donated by the Soloman family. Rough lumber from forests in Point Roberts was cut and donated by the Largaud family at their mill.

And now that iconic church, the sole church in Point Roberts, is in danger of collapsing. The situation is dire and the sanctuary has been condemned. Without a firm foundation, the west wall is bowing outward, the result of the gravity load of the roof above.

The restoration to stabilize the church and retrofit a foundation is underway and money is urgently needed to meet the costs. With our borders closed due to Covid-19, the many Canadians who once regularly visited Point Roberts are not here to sustain the economy. Businesses are shuttered and fundraising in our diminished local community is very difficult.

This historic building is more than a church. It is the oldest landmark in Point Roberts and has developed an ecumenical membership that has flourished for over 100 years. It is the only concert hall, an emergency shelter for the Red Cross, a partner with both the Point Roberts food

bank and Point Roberts Emergency Preparedness.

A testament to Icelandic faith and tenacity, Trinity Community Lutheran Church is loved, indeed cherished, by the community of Point Roberts. And in spite of isolation due to the pandemic, a group of volunteers has raised over \$50,000 toward its restoration. However, with an ultimate need of \$200,000, we are very much hoping that Icelandic communities of today will join us in honoring and preserving the legacy of the past. Please help us save this historic Icelandic landmark.

For more information on the church, visit its website at pointrobertschurch.com.

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