

Frederick church closes temporarily after falling plaster causes damage

Weekend Masses at St. John the Evangelist in Frederick will be offered Sept. 21-22 in the school hall while the church remains closed during clean-up and inspections following incidents of falling plaster.

As reported on the parish website and Facebook page, two chunks of plaster crown molding crashed into the sanctuary over the presider and cantor chairs.

“We’re being very cautious to make sure everything is OK,” said Bob Fitzsimmons, executive director of operations for the parish, Sept. 20.

The first chunk of plaster’s fall was caught on security cameras Sept. 16 at 2:11:47 p.m. A second chunk fell later that evening.

No one was in the building at the time, according to Fitzsimmons.

“We’ve got angels protecting us,” he said.

Structural engineers were surveying the remaining ceiling to determine if there are structural concerns or if the damage was merely cosmetic, he said.

It appears water got behind the old laths and plaster, causing it to weaken and fall, according to Fitzsimmons.

Though he didn’t have a final report, he was hoping for the best.

“It appears structurally we’re fine,” he said.

Fitzsimmons said he suspects the molding is original to the church building, dating to 1837. When the plaster molding fell, it exposed the old wood laths. Old hand cut nails led him to think the molding is as old as the church.

All activities scheduled for the church this week, including a Spanish Mass and eucharistic adoration, were canceled. The Ministry Fair will also be rescheduled,

according to the parish website. The building has been locked for safety considerations.

In addition to moving all weekend Masses for Sept. 21-22 to the school hall, parish leaders encouraged parishioners to consider attending weekend Masses at St. Joseph-on-Carrollton Manor in Buckeystown.

“We hope to be back in business next weekend,” Fitzsimmons said. He noted that the building will reopen when it is safe to do so, even though restoration and continued monitoring will be ongoing in the weeks to come.

Repair costs and insurance were still being determined, Fitzsimmons said.

No weddings were scheduled for the church for Sept. 21. Fitzsimmons said he expects a wedding scheduled for next Saturday will go on as scheduled.