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THE CHURCH DOME RESTORATION PROJECT 23 YEARS LATER Boy Scouts Eagle Scout Project at Saints Peter and Paul Church, Bethlehem, PA

Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Bethlehem, PA, began its existence on Edward Street, on the south side of Bethlehem, in 1917. After seventy-four years, overlooking Bethlehem Steel, the population of the parish began to migrate toward the north of Bethlehem and its adjacent townships.



In May of 1988, Monsignor Paul Firczak, pastor, recognized the changing demographics of the parish. Msgr. Firczak purchased thirteen plus acres of prime land located between Macada Road and Johnston Drive, on the north side of Bethlehem with the intent of eventually relocating the parish. Unfortunately, Monsignor Firczak would never realize his dream. He was called to the Lord in September, 1988.

Throughout the following years, Saints Peter and Paul Church was served by a series of interim pastors until Reverend Robert Slesinski was appointed pastor in November,

1990. Upon carefully studying the demographics of the parish, it was determined that the time was opportune to relocate and build a new parish plant which would consist of a church, parish center, rectory, and a pavilion.

The design of the new church would incorporate many of the existing church features. The original stained glass windows, chandelier, and church bells would become fixtures within the new church. Construction began with the ground breaking ceremony on October 1, 1991. Six months later, on April 16, 1992, the old main dome, which sat faithfully atop the bell tower, since 1942, was removed in order to provide access to the church bells. Since, the large dome was found to be in stable condition, it was thereafter relocated to the site where the new church would eventually be built. It was hoped that this original dome would someday become the centerpiece of a shrine at the new church.



In 2014, altar server Nicholas Chismar, of Boy Scout Troop 362



Bethlehem, PA, noticed the old dome sitting on the ground in the field behind the new church. He decided, as part of his Eagle Scout Project, to restore, relocate, and create a shrine that would blend the history of the old church with the new church. Approaching current pastor, Father Peter Hosak, with his idea, the planning process began. On October 9, 2014, the Eagle Scout Project received approval — work would begin in the Spring of 2015.

The scope of the entire project included numerous facets: power-washing the brick walls surrounding the church, landscaping, beautifying and mulching all areas surrounding the church and rectory, and of course providing a new home for the old dome. Moving the dome was formidable since the weight of the dome was estimated to be between six hundred and seven hundred pounds. The location chosen for the new shrine would be approximately one hundred and fifty feet closer to the church. By relocating the dome

closer to the church, it would enable all worshippers to clearly see and admire the newly-constructed shrine of which the dome was the centerpiece.

On April 25, 2015, seventeen volunteers, including scouts and scout leaders, gathered at Saints Peter and Paul Church. The project was underway as the photo indicates. The multi-stage project required several days to complete and its scope required the use of a crane to place the dome atop the newly-created pedestal. In total, over 220 service hours went into this project.

The rank of Eagle Scout was earned by Nicholas on August 13, 2015. Altar Server and Eagle Scout, Nicholas Chismar, photographed with the completed and restored old church dome, admires his accomplishment in the photo below. A contrasting, recently gold-leaved church dome can be seen on the new church in the background. After sitting in the field behind the new church for 23 years, the old dome finally has a new home. We are very proud of Nicholas!

