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## [St. Peter's Seeks Support for Historic Building](#)

By GARLAND KENNEDY  
Sentinel Staff Writer

It's been over a year since a rotted section of floor fell into the dirt under St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal church, adding urgency to the parishioners' never-ending task of maintaining a 125-year-old historic building in a rain forest.

Support beams beneath the floor of the sacristy, one of the back rooms of the main church building, gave way, causing the floor to fall about 4 inches, St. Peter's junior warden Loyd Platson told the Sentinel. Platson and co-junior warden Linda Trierschild are in charge of maintenance of the picturesque stone church and two other buildings on the site, the Victorian-era See House and a modern support structure housing the church archives. Julie Platson, Loyd's wife, is the priest.



Loyd Platson, St. Peter's junior warden, recently points to stones in the church buttresses that are in need of re-pointing. (Sentinel Photo)

The floor joists themselves just rotted off... One of the things that we discovered was that when we pulled this floor up the dirt was right onto the floor joists,” Loyd Platson said.

In the long run, the goal is to stabilize the old building, but a tremendous amount of work remains to be done despite the recent repairs.

“What happens with congregations is they put off maintenance and they put off maintenance and all of a sudden it catches up with us,” Platson said. “And so that’s really where we’re at right now, is that we want to keep the building maintained now, and there’s just so much work to do. A few years ago, they redid the See House, they put like a million or two million into the See house to restore that and stabilize it. What we’re trying to do now is really stabilize this building, and restore it.”

He first noticed the flooring issue in the sacristy when he stepped into the room and felt an unusual draft in the fall of 2022. The original floor joists had been laid on bare dirt, allowing water damage to continue unseen for over a century. Repair work on the floor and some outdoor wooden beams was completed in November 2023, he said, but the church’s to-do list is still lengthy.

Platson said the church needs a new roof, which will cost between \$350,000 to \$400,000, vastly more than the floor, which ran about \$30,000. Half of the floor work was covered by a statewide historic preservation grant. Upcoming stonework this spring will cost between \$33,000 and \$35,000.

“What we actually got was the Office of History and Archaeology National Historic Preservation grant that came from the state and went to the city. So the city is involved in that. We got \$15,000 from them, and then we had to match it with our own \$15,000,” he said. As part of the work done this fall, some of the rotting corner posts were sealed to prevent further degradation.

St. Peter’s is the oldest original church building still standing in Sitka, though some congregations predate the structure. Both the original Russian Orthodox and Lutheran churches – each one older than St. Peter’s – burned in 1966. The stone and red-shingled structure now standing beside Crescent Harbor was built in 1899 with the assistance of the town’s first Episcopal priest, Peter Trimble Rowe.

The construction process required some creative fundraising and a fair bit of dynamite, Sitka historian Nancy Ricketts writes in her book, “A Brief History of St. Peter’s by-the-Sea Episcopal Church to the Year 2000.” The first service there was held on Thanksgiving 1899.

While the current congregation stands at around 40, Platson said the role of St. Peter’s extends much further into the community.

Platson emphasized “the attachments of the church, the association with the community and the use of the facilities by everybody. That means a lot of people use that facility, from 4-H to the LGBTQ community. The decolonization group uses it, Sitka Counseling uses it. It’s open to anyone... We’re one of the few places that really doesn’t charge for the use. If people want to donate, they do. And that’s one thing that we consciously decided on – the vestry of the church decided that we wanted to make the facilities available to our community.”

Along with the aging roof and total lack of insulation in the building, Platson pointed out the crumbling buttresses that line the side walls. When he and Julie arrived in town in 2015, that stonework was in fine condition, but a century and a quarter of freezing and thawing has finally taken a serious toll. The stonework and floor joist problems are linked.

“You can see the condition of the buttresses. So the water’s coming off the roof and dripping on the buttresses, and so then it’s getting in the cracks and breaking those apart. And then it’s coming down to the ground, and then it’s seeping through the rock underneath the church. That’s what rotted,” he said. The issue overall comes down to poor drainage, as the building has no gutter system. As part of the repair of the sacristy floor, Platson said, contractors dug a trench beside the church and installed the beginnings of a gutter pipe. When the roof is redone in 2025, he continued, the plan is to add gutters.

“We’re going to take the roof, we’re actually going to put four inches of solid foam insulation up there. Because that’s where most of the heat is going out — the roof. And that will allow us to have fascia on there so that we can actually put gutters on the church,” Platson said.

But before the roof repairs, which are planned for the first half of 2025, Platson said a stonemason is flying in from Pennsylvania to work on the buttresses, along with some other parts of the building.

“We applied for another grant from the state and they approved it, but we won’t get the monies until May. So (the stonemason is) coming in April. We’re going to have to put up our own money, a lot of congregational money. And we’re hoping to reach out to the community as well,” he said.

When the time comes for work on the roof, Platson said, the church plans to launch a capital campaign.