



Contact:

Dan Herbert. Email: dph Herbert@csuchico.edu. Phone: 530-898-6238.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 20, 2020

Work is progressing rapidly on a community effort to restore Chico's oldest church, but more money needs to be raised to finish the project.

Bolstered by donations large and small, the Bethel AME Church Restoration Project Fund at North Valley Community Foundation has raised nearly \$100,000. Organizers originally estimated \$100,000 would be enough for materials to complete the restoration, but there was more damage than anticipated to the old building from termites and dry rot. They hope to raise an additional \$30,000 to complete the work.

There has been significant progress in four months. Work crews, consisting of professional builders donating their time and volunteers from community organizations, have been working on the exterior of the building, including replacing the siding.

A local painting contractor has offered to paint the exterior and a roofing company has stepped up to put a new roof on the church and steeple.

The steeple has been built and will be hoisted into place later this week. It is a replica of the original steeple that graced the church, which dates to 1863. The bell in the tower is a gift from Trinity United Methodist Church. Trinity Methodist will host a service at 10 a.m. Wednesday at the church, 285 E. Fifth St. in Chico, to commemorate the gift.

The bell will be moved from Trinity, where it has sat for decades, to a shop for repairs before Bethel AME places it in the bell tower.

"This has been a true community-wide effort via monetary donations, community workdays, gifts of labor and materials, and joint gatherings for prayer," said Dan Herbert, one of the organizers of the restoration effort. "Spearheaded by many of the local churches, this project is intended to provide a tangible expression of the love and commitment this community makes toward our African American brothers and sisters."

The church was built in 1863 and in 1907 was donated to the African Methodist Episcopal Church community. The church has moved three times and lost the bell tower and steeple. The leadership at Bethel AME Church has had a dream to one day restore their building's steeple and bell tower to its original 1863 condition at the current site, 821 Linden Street.

To learn more about the fund or to donate, go to: <https://www.nvcf.org/funds/Bethel-AME-Church-Restoration-Project-Fund>