

Press Release
(For immediate release)
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Restoring the faith at St John's

St John's Anglican Church in Invercargill will be restored to its former glory in time to celebrate its 150th jubilee in October.

An extensive \$500,000 restoration project spanning the past six years has repaired both the exterior and interior of the category one listed historic building. The Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation have now granted a total of \$150,000 to enable the final phase to be completed.

ILT Foundation and Invercargill Licensing Trust chairman Alan Dennis said St John's Anglican Parish was a significant historical landmark deserving of restoration.

"It's an imposing building in its own right and when you factor in the neighbouring Civic Theatre and nearby First Presbyterian Church, as a trio they form a special architectural feature of our city," he said.

As the internal project nears completion, St John's Vestry chairman Geoff Piercy – a member of the congregation for over 70 years – has an overwhelming sense of pride.

"It's wonderful to see what has been achieved," he said. "St John's is not only an important Anglican church, it's an important heritage building for this community.

"If we don't protect it now, there's going to be nothing for future generations. There is still work to do but it's a gradual process."

There was no doubt the restoration could not have been achieved without the support of community funders.

"We certainly buy all our port wine from the ILT for communion," Mr Piercy quipped.

While Invercargill's heritage was considered young compared to locations around the globe, historic churches often proved popular attractions.

"Some of the cathedrals I visited in the UK are over 1000 years old – you can picture in your mind the knights stepping over the threshold into the church," Mr Piercy said.

"Churches are where people migrate to and hopefully people will do the same here when they visit Invercargill from around the world. They are such a valuable part of our heritage and are there for the community and visitors to admire and for us to worship in."

A collection of magnificent stained glass windows, which were restored following additional funding from the ILT and the Lotteries Commission, includes a memorial to surveyor John Turnbull Thompson valued at \$1.25 million.

The Vestry committed to the refurbishment six years ago when it noted the walls were black with mould and plaster was falling off.

"Water had migrated down inside the walls so the first part of the restoration was to do all the brickwork and make it watertight. Now we are able to safely complete the interior work," Mr Piercy said.

Mr Piercy, 80, has held many roles within the St John's parish – from choirboy to lay minister for over 40 years. He was looking forward to the jubilee celebrations where former parishioners would be invited to attend a dinner and grand church service.

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For further information, contact:

Geoff Piercy
St John's Anglican Parish
03 213 0466

Ann Eustace
ILT Foundation
03 211 3751