

*Darienite*

*News for Darien*

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## United Church of Christ Roof 'Unsound' — Services Moved to Parish Hall for Now

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The Meeting Hall of the First Congregational Church at the corner of Brookside Road and the Post Road is closed after an engineer inspected roof beams and found them to be unsound, Senior Minister Dale Rosenberger has announced.

In a message dated Thursday, May 19 [on the website](#) of the oldest congregation in Darien, Rosenberger wrote:

[W]e've learned the timbers in our historic Meetinghouse roof and ceiling are structurally unsound and need rebuilding. Before I detail that, the upshot of this sudden news is that *we are unable to occupy the Meetinghouse at all, until after reconstruction*. Right now, we are still assessing the instability looming overhead in our sanctuary. So for the months ahead *we plan to worship Sunday mornings in our Parish Hall*.

I take a deep breath to say all of that to you. And if you are like me, no little shock must register within you to realize that we are temporarily turned out of the space that is our spiritual home.

Rosenberger said an engineer looked at four crossbeams between the ceiling and roof of the church and found more than one "compromised, with dramatic fissures visible to the eye."

Also, the pins holding the 1950s plaster ceiling to the beams are weakening. The building engineer who examined the beams called the structural problems "major failings."

The building is still being examined to determine the full extent of the problem, but Rosenberger said it's already clear that "Much remediation is required. We don't know how long this will take or how much it will cost."

*Here's Rosenberger's [full statement](#) on the website of the First Congregational Church of Darien:*

Does anyone remember this ditty of a hymn back from the '70s, complete with hand motions?

"The church is not a building;  
the church is not a steeple;  
the church is not a resting place;  
the church is a people."

It uproariously concludes, "I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!"

All of this will be tested mightily in months ahead. For we've learned the timbers in our historic Meetinghouse roof and ceiling are structurally unsound and need rebuilding. Before I detail that, the upshot of this sudden news is that *we are unable to occupy the Meetinghouse at all, until after reconstruction*. Right now, we are still assessing the instability looming overhead in our sanctuary. So for the months ahead *we plan to worship Sunday mornings in our Parish Hall*.

I take a deep breath to say all of that to you. And if you are like me, no little shock must register within you to realize that we are temporarily turned out of the space that is our spiritual home.

A few details might help. Four crossbeams invisibly connect the 39 foot wide expanse overhead in our Meetinghouse. More than one is compromised, with dramatic fissures visible to the eye. We see, for example, displacement in one beam with an offset of four inches. As though that is not bad enough, the pins holding our 1950's plaster ceiling to these joists are losing their hold. We remain in the diagnostic phase, removing blown-in insulation, finishing our assessment. Much remediation is required. We don't know how long this will take or how much it will cost.

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Our building engineer, not someone prone to drama, calls these structural deficits “major failures.” Obviously, the integrity of these beams and joints supporting our roof and ceiling are key to our well-being below. And, of course, that is something we will never risk and trifle with.

That is probably enough technical information for now. This is hard news to take as FCC, Darien has lately been on a nice roll. But pause with me to be grateful in different directions before we cave into discouragement. We owe thanks to our Nursery School and Board of Stewards whose collaboration initiated the hiring of the building engineer firm, GNCB, whose reputation and expertise is being demonstrated to us these days with clear information and recommendations.

Also, please note that we approach a slower season in the church calendar and a prime time of year to schedule construction. If a capital campaign is necessary to defray these expenses, we avoided such a campaign as we rebuilt the Evans Center and can approach the challenge afresh.

Most importantly, these serious problems were detected before any unwitting collapse of our sub-roof structures that could have potentially led to the harm of our members and visitors. For all of these reasons, we give God thanks and praise. Remember, in our 272 history, our beloved FCC, Darien has endured a Revolutionary War, a Civil War, and two World Wars. We are made of sturdy stuff to meet this challenge head on, make the necessary corrections, and to carry on for all of the reasons the Lord placed us here: to praise God and serve our neighbor.

As for now, all of our scheduled weddings planned are offsite, thanks be to God. I am notifying our families with baptisms pending of our new realities as I also invite their unity and resilience with us. If you need a memorial service, other churches in town have already promised us use of their worship spaces—with open and eager arms extended to us—should the occasion arise.

A local pastor wrote, “these issues have the power to galvanize a congregation and lead people deeper into mission.” That was precisely how Council reacted last night upon hearing the news. Yes, they were as stunned with me. Yes, they hurt with me as our mother church hurts. But we shed a tear or two, cleared our eyes, and resolved to find the path to put us right back on track. Our leadership’s energy is poised, pointing toward the light, rather than indulging in dejection.

Let’s keep squarely before us the installation of our Associate Pastor, Gary Morello, this Sunday, May 22, **one service at 10 a.m.**, welcoming a guest preacher, Gary’s friends and family. May our joy go undimmed! If you wish to discuss any of this, we invite you to an information session at 9 am in the Morehouse Room where the Moderator, Chair of Stewards, and I eagerly await you.

Resolving to keep you informed, we ask your prayers and seek your support as it matters most.

Faithfully yours,

Dale Rosenberger, Senior Minister

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*Editor's note: The time stamp on this article, originally 11:30 a.m., Saturday, was changed to 8:30 p.m. to move the link higher on the Home page.*