

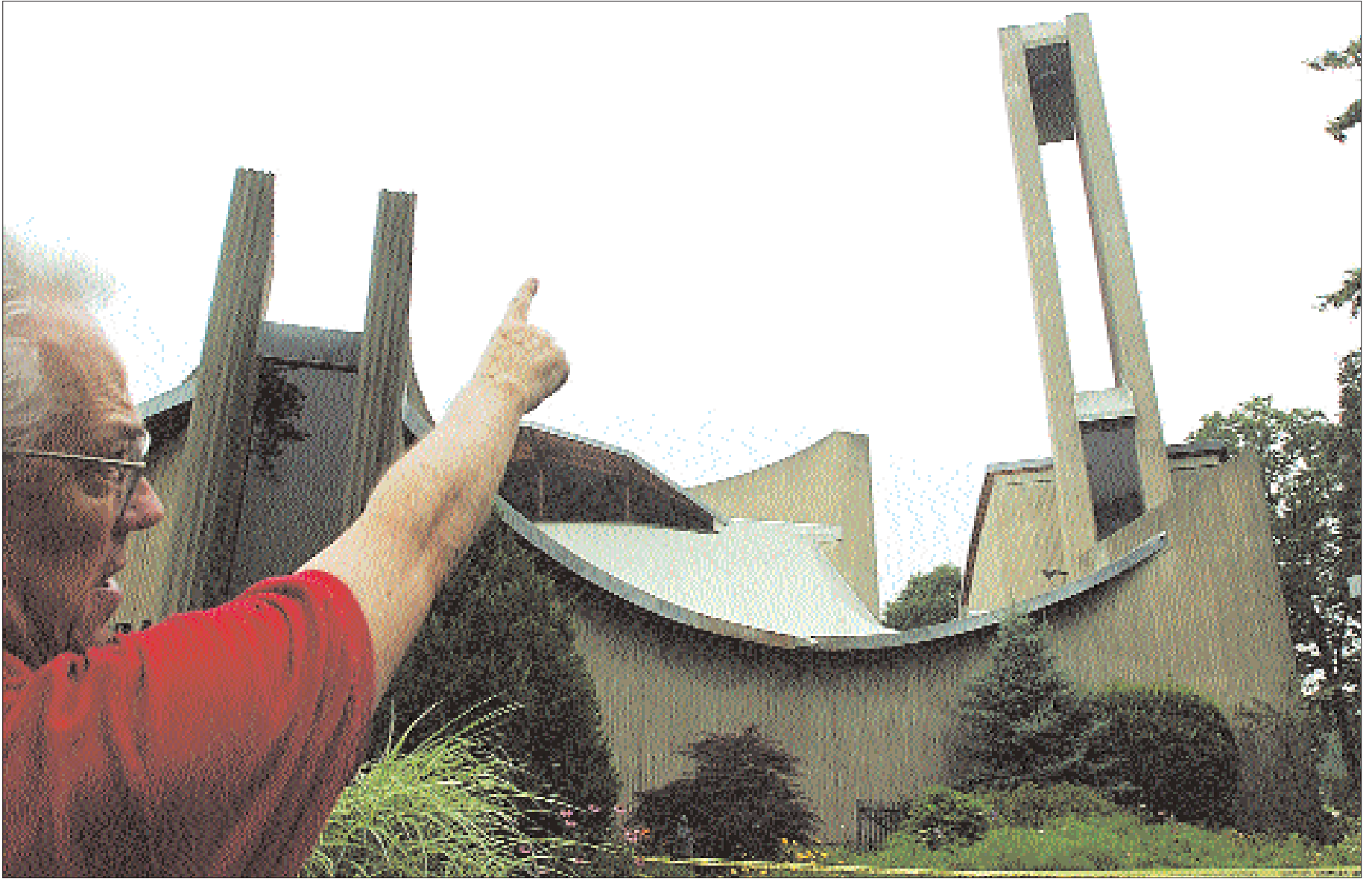
The Hour

Saturday, July 15, 2006 Vol. 135 No. 196

The Independent Voice of Our Community for 135 years

www.thehour.com

50¢



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

Steve Bagnell, administrative director for St. Philip Church, points out the damaged bell tower at the church, which was built in 1968. The tower will have to be removed from the architecturally modern church after water, seeping into fissures in the concrete, weakened the structure.

Church to lose bell tower

St. Philip's tower, structure threatened by water damage

By JILL BODACH
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A beacon for the faithful of St. Philip Parish will no longer be part of the weekly church-going experience for parishioners by the end of summer, when the bell tower will be removed.

Historically, the bells in bell towers were rung to recognize certain church services during the day, call magistrates to meetings or signify capital executions. But soon the church's bell will be silent.

The modern-looking church, known for its non-traditional shape and looming bell tower, is sustaining water damage severe enough to warrant removing the tower. St. Philip's bell tower, which contains an 800-lb. bell, was built 40 years ago. It will be removed because of structural problems — including leaks and cracks in the foundation of the tower — that are too costly to repair.

"The problem is that when the bell tower and roof were put on the church, the highest points in the roof didn't have the proper weather coating put on them so the concrete was subject to rain, snow and thawing cycle, which caused leaks into our day chapel and the main body of church over a number of years," said Steve Bagnell, administrative director of the church.

As the leaks became worse and more frequent, Bagnell and the Rev. Michael Boccaccio decided to bring in contractors from three different companies to survey the roof.

"One of the contractors said that the concrete was damaged due to the freezing and thawing cycle but that there was a bigger problem, swelling of the concrete around the bell tower because of the water that had accumulated there and that basically we

could try to fix it or remove the tower," Bagnell said.

Boccaccio said that he was disappointed that the tower needed to be taken down.

"When I first learned of this 'catastrophe' I was very upset when I thought about the decision-makers who allowed this to happen," Boccaccio said. "Because of their decisions we are faced with a building that is endangered and a tower that must be demolished."

Despite the attachment that parishioners and staff members have to the tower, it was decided that it was more financially sound to remove the tower, Bagnell said. In addition, trying to repair the tower and get the repairs to match the color of the original roof and tower would have been difficult.

"Basically, in order to fix it you'd have to follow each crack as far as it goes to repair it and then when the concrete dried it wouldn't match the old concrete so you'd have a big tower with all these discolored cracks throughout it and that would look terrible," Bagnell said.

No decision has been made as to which company will take the tower down, only that it will come down and it will not be rebuilt.

Bagnell said he understands that this may upset some longtime parishioners but hopes that they understand the reasons for the tower's removal.

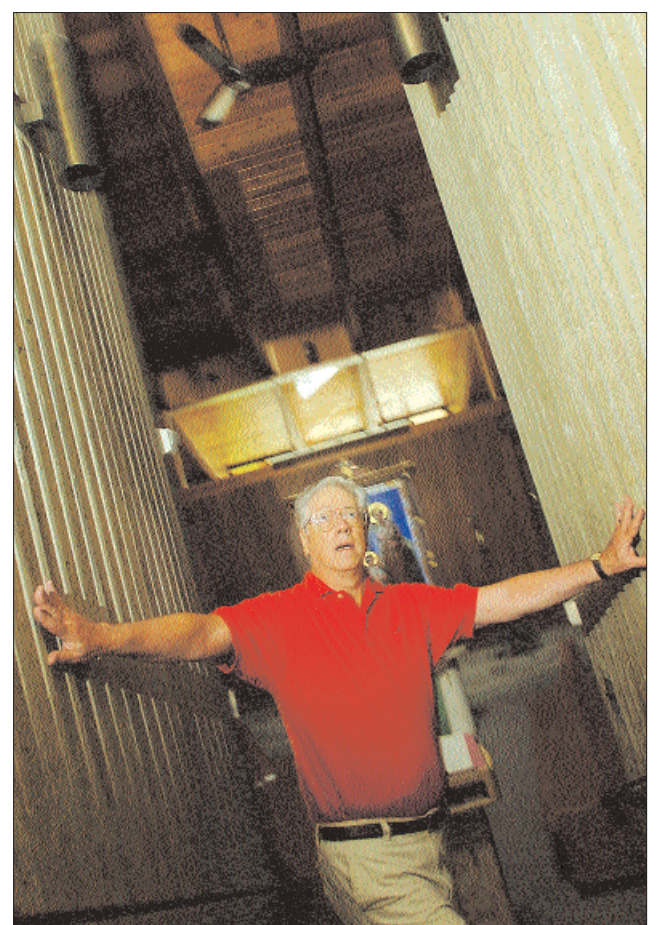
"We've informed parishioners of what the condition is and some are very disappointed because the tower is part of their spiritual home but I think most understand."

The most frequently asked question is what will happen to the 800-lb. bell.

"We aren't sure what is going to happen to the bell, but it's large enough that it can't exactly go anywhere," Bagnell said. "We are asking the architects to come up with some plans for it so that we can still keep it here."

Either way, the sanctity of the parish will not be compromised, Boccaccio said.

"The sacred space that is St. Philip Church will be a haven of safe structure and sensational spiri-



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

St. Philip Church administrative director, Steve Bagnell, points out the legs of bell tower near the church's chapel where water leaks down during rainy weather.

tuality 40 years from now, even 400. That I am sure of," Boccaccio said.

Demolition is supposed to occur sometime during the last two weeks of August.