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Mary Belser, who is helping lead the restoration of Trinity Episcopal Church, shows some of the problem areas of the church.

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Church receiving \$5 million 'face-lift'

Work on downtown Trinity Episcopal should be finished by its bicentennial

By CAROLYN CLICK
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Trinity Episcopal Church, an enduring, historic presence in downtown Columbia, is undergoing a more than \$5 million renovation and restoration in time to celebrate its 2012 bicentennial.

"We're old, and like a lot of old elegant ladies we need a face-lift," Mary Belser, president of the Trinity Foundation, the church's fundraising arm, said Friday.

After a brief history lesson on the cathedral's founding by Harry Bull, chairman of the cathedral's docents, Belser led a small tour through the soaring structure Thursday, pointing out the extensive repairs that will be carried out over the next three years.

"We knew we had some major leaks, we knew we had to address electrical issues and accessibility issues," Belser said.

The distinctive salmon-colored Gothic structure that fronts Sumter Street next door to the State Capitol was built in 1846, but the church dates its founding to 1812.

Most repairs can be completed as the cathedral carries out its daily business, leaders said.

But Belser said the sanctuary will be closed for about three months for interior painting.

No date has been set for the closure, but when the sanctuary is tem-



Water damage from a deteriorating roof is a large problem in the sanctuary.

porarily shuttered the congregation will worship next door, at the Trinity Center for Mission and Ministry, which opened last year.

During the renovation, Belser said the heating and air-conditioning system, patched and repaired throughout the years, will be completely replaced.

On the roof, the spire caps and wooden louvers that have deteriorated over the years, allowing the occasional bat to disrupt services, will be repaired and replaced.

The broken spire caps, made out of sheet metal, were responsible for leaks that have stained interior walls, and, in some cases, destroyed plaster.

TRINITY FACTS

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 1100 Sumter St., is one of Columbia's most recognizable historic buildings.

FOUNDED: 1812

CURRENT CATHEDRAL: Built in 1842

LOCATION: Sumter Street, across from the capitol

RENOVATION COST: Between \$5 million and \$6 million

Inside, the beautiful, stained-glass windows will be cleaned and repaired.

Wilson Farrell, the project coordinator, said he is trying to figure out a way to repair the exterior stucco using the same method used in the 1846 construction.

The front steps and handicapped ramp will be replaced to conform with modern standards, providing greater accessibility.

New flooring will be laid in the Parish Hall, and it, too, will undergo a serious face-lift.

Trinity Foundation members are leading a "quiet" capital campaign to raise the money for the renovation.

Belser tells those she visits it is time the historic structure undergoes that gracious face-lift. Although she noted, "It's nice to have a church that is a little bit beat up, because it shows it's being used."

In 2006, the congregation dedicated the \$6.2 million Trinity Center, which houses a gym, fitness center, conference and Sunday school rooms and a youth cafe.

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