

[News](#)[Sports](#)[Religion](#)[Calendar](#)[Opinion](#)[Contact](#)[SNAP!](#)

news

New Beginnings for Arvon Presbyterian Church



0 Comments

[Email This Article](#)

Published: April 11, 2012 Heather Harris

Spring is a time of new beginnings. Flowers spring forth from the ground, newborn animals make their debut, and the winter blues fade away, proving that the season is a time of rebirth. For members of Arvon Presbyterian Church in Buckingham County, the season also marked the rebirth of their church.

On the morning of January 15, 2009, crews from Dominion Power noticed smoke coming from the building. They rushed to a nearby house and called the fire department, who quickly came to battle the blaze. It was later determined that squirrels had built a nest above one of the light fixtures. Over time, the nest dried out and the heat of the lights caused it to smolder.

Due to the efforts of the firefighters—and a miracle from above, as many believe—only the sanctuary of the church was damaged. A large connecting door kept the flames from spreading to the offices, kitchen, and Sunday School room.

“When the bell fell down, it was like a lump just falling down in my throat,” said Jo Elaine Justis, a member of the church.

Once the fire was under control, Justis’s brother raced into the structure in hopes of saving the Bible and the Austrian pulpit chairs. Justis then took the Bible home with her and stuffed sheets of newspaper between the pages and used a blow dryer to help dry it out.

During the drying process, Justis discovered interesting notes written within the pages of the bible. One message predicted that there would be an earthquake within fifty years, which she found eerie. Despite the roof collapsing, all but two of the pews were able to be salvaged, as well as the pulpit, Communion table, and Christ Candle. Even the large brass Crucifix was able to be restored with the help of local artisans.

“The cross burned and fell. It didn’t look like it was good for anything,” Justis said. “That cross, growing up to me, was just the special thing about our church. For it to come back as beautiful as it has... I think is really special.”

Originally built in 1885, the church served as the place of worship for the many Welsh miners who worked at the nearby slate quarry. The name “Arvon” is a derivative of the word Caernarvon, a town in Wales.

In April 2009, the church members decided that they would rebuild rather than consolidate with the other churches in the parish. They wanted to restore the sanctuary to its original state, but because of modern building codes, some changes had to be made.

“We had to make lots of little adjustments to keep the original flavor of the building, but meet building codes. What worked in 1885 and worked well isn’t necessarily okay to do anymore,” said Pastor Joe Allmond.

Rather than having a foundation of dry stacked slate with just a layer of dirt on top, a layer of concrete was poured behind the slate to lock everything into place. Other minor changes had to be made to meet handicapped accessibility and fire safety standards.

Some of the original window panes and shutters were salvaged and used as models for the replacements. Glass



Altar area inside Arvon Presbyterian Church.

windows were hand-crafted in the 19th century, so historical replicas were imported, allowing the church to retain an authentic appearance.

The rebuilding process brought out the true giving spirit of the local community, as well as people across the country. Nearby craftsmen used their skills to restore the salvageable furniture, businesses donated storage equipment and slate for the front steps, and hymnals were donated by a church in Iowa.

The church members are extremely grateful for all the help and support they received through their difficult time. On April 1, when they opened the doors of their new church, they celebrated not only the greatness of the Easter season, but also the chance to worship once again at the church they cherish so dearly.

“What a wonderful symbol for this season of lent,” said General Presbyter Nancy Dawson. “They’re joy-filled and it’s exciting to see what a congregation can do when they put their minds to it. Pastor Joe has been a wonderful leader for them.”

(0) Comments • [Email This Article](#)

Reader Comments

There are no comments for this entry

Submit Your Comments Below

Name:

Email:

Location:

Remember my personal information

Notify me of follow-up comments?

Submit the word you see below:



By clicking submit, you agree to our [terms and conditions](#).

[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#)

© Copyright 2012 Media General Communications Holdings, LLC.