The Eagle has landed . . . at Mission San Antonio de Padua
Phase 1 of a Five-Phase Seismic Retrofit/Restoration Has Begun

By Joan Steele, Mission Administrator
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Excitement is in the air – as is a great volume of dust – as Phase I of our Five-Phase, multi-year seismic retrofit/restoration project of Mission San Antonio begins.

The buzz of the saws and the persistent knocking of many hammers broke the stillness of a cool summer morning on Monday, August 4th, 2014. By mid-afternoon the construction crew had erected a series of wooden supports designed to shore up the lower roofs, enabling them to withstand the additional weight of the incoming scaffolding required to get the crew to the site of their work space.

The California redwood tree located on the northeastern side of the church had to come down. The tree, displaying a decidedly stressed disposition, was growing too close to the church walls and was negatively influencing the stability of its foundation. Don’t despair, though, as the redwood was cut into 16-foot sections and prepped appropriately to ensure it dries properly for later use. It is the intention of the Project Team to mill the wood when dry (estimated to take about one year) and to deliver it to Rancho Cielo Youth Academy. In the year, 2000, the Rancho Cielo Board was established as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization for the purpose of developing a comprehensive center of learning and social services for underserved youth in Monterey County.

Founder, former Superior Court Judge John M. Phillips witnessed the tragic cycle of offending and incarceration that many young people found themselves in. He wanted to create an effective alternative that would help keep first offenders from becoming repeat offenders. This school’s staff has agreed to work with the Mission in repurposing the redwood into benches that will be returned to the Mission to their new home in the Padre’s Garden.

Within the first few hours of the first day, the Spanish clay tiles began to be removed by the Salinas Valley Roofing crew. After three long work days, the work week ended. After a few days of quiet, the dust settled and work resumed on Monday, August 11th. The remainder of roofing tiles on the lower roofs were removed, stacked and stored. As the next few days sped by, the scaffolding quickly climbed the outside walls forming a wooden exoskeleton.

Even though we’ve been involved in the discovery, preparatory and planning stages of this project for years, now that it’s begun, it all seems to be moving sooooo fast! By the second week’s end, the scaffolding is almost complete.

Monday, August 18th the roofers begin removing the roofing tiles from the upper roof of the church. Construction workers begin the labor intensive process of dismantling the now outdated chimney on the north side of the church building. Since we previously completed the restoration/remodel of the church’s radiant floor heating system in 2012-13 which included the removal of the old boiler and installation of new highly efficient propane boiler system, the chimney is now no longer needed. To address the potential hazard it could pose during inclement weather conditions (remember those?) we are removing it down to roof level, where it will eventually be capped.

While all this is going on outside, the inside of the church is undergoing its own transformation as the majority of the artwork has been removed from the walls and stored elsewhere. For now, the statues remain in place, although most are covered by plastic to protect them from the dust.
During the next thirteen months as we work our way through Phase 1, we will remain open to the public. Depending on the work being done on a particular day, portions of the Mission may be closed off temporarily. If you are traveling a distance for a visit, please call ahead to make sure all the areas you want to see are open. If you live more locally, please feel welcome to come watch our progress. Since the work creates a fair amount of dust, the church will require dusting EVERY week – on Friday or Saturday – so it can be ready for the 9am Mass celebration on Sunday mornings. Many hands make for light work so if your schedule allows for it, we’d love to have you lend a hand (or two).

It is exciting! We must remember, though, that there are still four more Phases to go. At least an additional $10 to $12 million will be needed to complete the entire project. It is both our honor and our responsibility to care for this historic treasure. Please continue to spread the word . . . far and wide…