

## **Saving the Memorial Bell Tower and setting the tone for the next century of inquiry, inclusion, and service at Fountain Street Church.**

### **The challenge**

Through wars, recession, political and societal instability, and pandemic, the Fountain Street Church Memorial Bell Tower has stood tall as a testament to resilience, hope, inquiry, justice, inclusion, and service.

But time has taken its toll. Water damage has weakened the Tower's masonry, loosened its brickwork, and silenced its bells.

When the church was completed in 1924, its Memorial Bell Tower was the tallest masonry structure in Grand Rapids. As the city recovered from a brutal war, the congregation wanted their church to serve the community. With remarkable generosity, they built a church much larger than the congregation itself needed, so it could serve the whole community — for lectures, concerts, weddings, and memorials for those with no other church home.

Today, our endangered Bell Tower still serves as a symbol of unwavering inclusion throughout West Michigan.

The historic landmark and beacon in the Grand Rapids skyline welcomes everyone to Fountain Street Church, an independent liberal non-denominational church, striving to be a vibrant community that challenges individuals to craft their own spiritual journeys and to engage in creative and responsive action in the world.

The Memorial Bell Tower:

- Supports eight bronze-cast bells, ranging from 290 pounds to 2,332 pounds. These last were heard playing *We Shall Overcome* at the frightening onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Memorializes Kent County soldiers who “gave their lives for their country,” as the stone inscription above the Tower's doors declares. The names of these soldiers are preserved on the Tower's walls. The ground floor of the Tower also honors deceased members of the church community.
- Invites all people — no matter what they believe, regardless of who they love or who they are loved by — to the 1,600-seat sanctuary and church house that for generations have welcomed and motivated West Michigan. World and national leaders from Winston Churchill to Robert Frost to Gloria Steinem, and distinguished artists from Duke Ellington to B.B. King to U2 have enlightened and entertained thousands in our sanctuary.

The challenge before us is the restoration of the Bell Tower — by honoring its past and by ensuring that it will continue to beckon the wider West Michigan community throughout the century.

### **The solution**

Extensive architectural, engineering, and preservation studies have made our task clear: Action is needed now to preserve the Memorial Bell Tower. Select Michigan contractors — including Quinn Evans Architects, Silman Engineering, Building Restoration, Inc., and Owen-Ames-Kimball — are prepared to begin work in Spring 2024. Restoration will repair water damage, fix drainage problems, address fundamental structural masonry concerns, install a new roofing system, and install new support beams for the bells. Restoration will ensure that the Bell Tower retains its structural and aesthetic integrity, and that the bells will ring again, for generations to come.

### **Why now?**

As we celebrate the 100th year of our neo-Romanesque building and its Memorial Bell Tower, we cannot ignore the Tower's deteriorating condition. Although considered, neither removing nor replacing the Bell Tower are feasible or cost-effective options. Delaying restoration will only endanger the rest of the church structure, create safety issues, and drive up future restoration costs exponentially.

We must act now.

### **What will it cost?**

Thanks to annual distributions to the church from the Foundation Board, generous six-figure gifts from an anonymous donor, and a donation of land from the late Anita Gilleo, \$703,000 has been set aside for restoration of the Memorial Bell Tower.

Our Second Century Capital Campaign will raise an additional \$800,000 from members and friends of Fountain Street Church. This \$800,000 will be matched, dollar-for-dollar, by the Fountain Street Church Foundation.

Together, these actions will result in the \$2.3 million needed to restore the Bell Tower.

## **Why the Memorial Bell Tower matters**

As our greater world and society grapple with immense challenges, Fountain Street Church, as it has from its beginning, must remain inclusive, influential, and inspirational. Through the decades, the church has brought together West Michigan to hear musicians; to witness speeches; to celebrate graduations and weddings; and to worship and mourn. The church and its members have been catalysts for social change — launching chapters of Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union; hosting Alternative Proms; and running support groups for LGBTQ+ teens as early as the 1980s.

Fountain Street Church has always been a beacon, a refuge, and a welcoming community for all who seek to learn, grow, and think freely.

Ensuring the integrity of the Bell Tower is but one important step in ensuring the vitality of Fountain Street Church and its community to meet the needs of the future.

## **How you can help**

Capital campaigns succeed when those who have been well-served by the institution give whatever they are able. After a century, we are optimistic that Fountain Street Church — represented by its historic building and its iconic Memorial Bell Tower — has earned a place among the indispensable institutions of West Michigan. Now, as we launch our public campaign and reach out to Fountain Street Church stakeholders near and far, we accept with sincere gratitude whatever amount you are able and willing to give.