

Exciting Progress with Chapel Garden Apartments

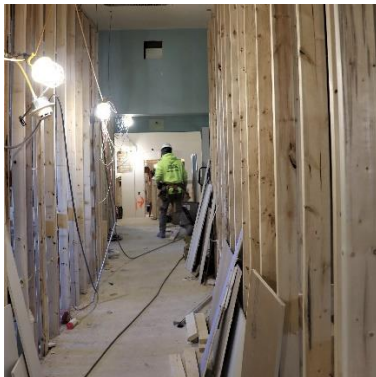
By Abigail Springsteen, Communications Intern

The chill of winter has not slowed down the renovation of St. Joseph Center into Chapel Garden Apartments. Progress continues each day, and currently, the work is getting closer to completion on the fourth floor. (*below*)

“On the fourth floor right now, they’re finishing the electrical and plumbing, and HVAC,” explained Michele Carlson, executive director of St. Joseph Center and Maria Linden. “Once that’s done, the inspector will come and if everything looks good, they can drywall. We’re hoping to get that done next week. Then we’ll move to the third floor, second floor, and finally the first floor. We’re at an exciting step because when you see the units with drywall up, it starts to look like an apartment, a home.”



A new roof has been installed on the former St. Jude building, which will be family townhomes, and drywall will soon be installed in those units as well. The new convent area in the St. Joseph Chapel building is also coming together, according to Sister Joann Riesterer, a member of the renovation planning group.



“The sisters at Maria Linden are imagining how it’s going to look,” Sister Joann said. “As they see the frames of the rooms, they are trying to envision—this has to be a living room, this must be a kitchen.”

Work on the Chapel building also includes new bathrooms on the second floor, next to the Heritage Room. “The bathroom accessibility will be such a great improvement for our sisters and for the guests who will come to join us for Mass and for events in the chapel,” Michele said.

Surprises Along the Way

One of the biggest construction challenges so far was clearing out the many old pipes from throughout the building. “Removing the pipe system that gave us our heating and cooling was a big change,” Michele said. “It took two men just to lift each small section of pipe. Now all of that is gone and the new system is in.”

“This is a historic building, so there are challenges,” Sister Joann said. “When the plumbers are putting in the pipes, the apartments aren’t directly underneath each other, so a pipe might be coming through the floor and running into the middle of a wall, or the middle of a room. That all has to be ironed out. It’s a big challenge that they would not have if the spaces lined up from floor to floor.”

“When you’re dealing with a 100-year-old building, you’re not developing it from a clean slate,” Michele agreed. “When you knock a wall out, you don’t know what you’re going to find. But the building was constructed amazingly well, and that’s very favorable to us, obviously. And the construction team and architects have a great partnership, and they are always working together.”

For someone like Sister Joann, who has been around St. Joseph Center throughout her life, the changes have produced some wonderful surprises.

“On Floor 4-1/2, the windows had always been very high, but who would want to have an apartment where they couldn’t look out the window?” To address this challenge, the construction team raised that entire floor. “When you walk up there now, you can look out the windows! I know that will be an awesome time when the sisters see it. Having lived up there for how many years as a dormitory, or an independent bedroom, they can now look out the windows. When I walked up there—oh my goodness, I’d never seen the city from this view!” (*above*)



Michele said the renovations have revealed glimpses of the past. “There have been a lot of surprises, and not just structurally. There were beautiful mosaics. (*below*) I’ve kept a lot of pieces that we’ve found and we’re going to showcase them: gorgeous crown molding, beautiful cabinetry, bricks, the wood from the gym floor on the second floor of the town homes. These are being saved and will be displayed, and we will still keep the motherhouse in the forefront.”



There have been other surprises, like a Schlitz beer can inside a wall and a newspaper from 1969 that mentions Sister Regina Pacis Meservey, who was then serving as principal at St. Gregory High School in St. Nazianz, Wisconsin. “The papers had fallen behind a built-in cabinet, between the cabinet and the wall,” Sister Joann explained.

Staying on Track

The renovation project is on schedule to be completed in late June, Michele said. “We already have a waiting list, especially for the one-bedroom apartments, and there is a lot of buzz about the townhomes. Those are going to be homes for families and it will be really neat to have multi-generational residents. Banners are ordered and we’re creating a Chapel Garden website and marketing materials which will be out in February. Pre-leasing will start in March.

“The wood floors will be beautiful and the units themselves will be so unique. There are so many different floorplans. The units have character, and the views are amazing. It’s an honor to be able to provide that to seniors who have a limited income.



“it’s going to be a lovely place to call home, just like we provide at Maria Linden,” Michele continued. “It’s good to know that the building that has been of service to our sisters will now be of service to the wider community. It’s coming to life again for a new purpose—a purpose that is greatly needed in this area.”

“It’s a very exciting time,” Sister Joann agreed. “The sisters are excited and supportive of the project. I keep thinking Mother Alexia is with us in this rehab because it’s amazing in this day and age, where supposedly the market is behind in getting supplies to building projects, we have been able to get the supplies we need. Mother Alexia claimed she would be with us, even after her death, and I feel her presence with us in this whole project.”