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Dear parishioners,

While we await the results of the Existing Conditions Survey of our Grace Church campus, it may seem like we've been on a pause with regards to property upgrades at Grace. Au contraire, my friends!

We have spent the better part of the first half of the year concentrating instead on our rental properties on First Avenue.

In case you weren't aware that we own rental properties — or it's been a while since you thought about them — here's a little rundown.

We own 145, 141 and 137 First Avenue. These are the second, third and fourth homes going east from Franklin Street (we do not own the house on the corner of Franklin and First).

145 First Avenue has two apartments. The second floor had for many years been rented by Julia Colt, whom some parishioners may remember at one time helped out with our coffee hour. That apartment had been funded partly by Section 8. The first floor had been rented by a tenant who left in March.

141 First Avenue is a two-story home. Verne Becker — our security assistant, livestream technician and longtime parishioner — lives there with his wife, Nancy.

137 First Avenue has two apartments. The top floor was renovated in 2023. Our tenant lives there with her daughter. It is partly funded by Section 8. The first floor is rented by a longtime tenant.

Church property reports go back years — to the 90s, and probably even before that — lamenting the fact that we do not keep up with maintenance and repairs to these homes.

When the vestry passed the 2025 budget in December, we decided to do our best to rectify that. We zeroed out the revenue from our rental properties, deciding instead to invest the money into their repair.

When the 145 first floor tenant left in March, we offered our long-term tenant Julia the opportunity to move downstairs. She was thrilled, especially because it meant she no longer had to climb the stairs to the upper floor. This was a win-win for both of us: She would get to move into a newly renovated apartment, and we would have the opportunity to renovate the one she had been living in upstairs.

It has been a big job.

Here is the rundown on what we accomplished for the 145 building overall:

- Collapsed brickwork in foundation under the porch was repaired by stone mason James Walsh of Rock Solid Contracting
- Doors and rotted windows along basement perimeter repaired and made safe from rodents (DeMarco Contracting)
- Entire back yard and basement cleaned out, two dumpsters worth, thanks to our sexton, Jim Sevier, and Raymond Bergen-Fulmor
- Stairs to second floor painted (Vince Urrutia)
- Foyer floor replaced (Bernardo and Jim)
- Second floor landing floor replaced (Bernardo Guarascia)

Here's what we accomplished for the first floor renovation:

- Electric was fixed (some outlets were not working) (Jim)
- Roof on the back porch was replaced (Jim)
- New back porch light (Jim)
- New storm door on back porch (Jim)
- Storm door on front repaired (Jim)
- Paint stripped from heat registers (MGM painting)
- Sticker on stained glass window removed, sill cleaned and screen replaced (Jim)
- New bathroom sink and medicine chest (Jim)
- Bathtub reglazed (Mixing Reglazing Co from Pennsylvania)
- New kitchen faucet (Jim)
- New oven hood (Jim)
- New blinds throughout (Jim)
- New smoke and carbon monoxide detectors (Jim)
- Plumbing snaked out (American Minutemen)
- Deep clean (IMS Cleaners, our cleaning company at the church)
- All rooms painted (MGM Painting)

Here's what we accomplished for the second floor renovation:

- Kitchen cabinets were sanded and stained by Gerry Maye
- Electric was fixed by Jim and Bernardo Guarascia (One outlet was badly frayed.)
- Recessed lighting in kitchen was repaired and a fixture replaced (Jim)
- Windows that were sealed shut were opened and the sash cords repaired (Maye)
- Four windows that were beyond repair were replaced by John Henegan

- Hundreds of staples that were fastening plastic over the windows were removed from the frames by Jim
- Faux brick fireplace panels were removed from the wall by Jim
- New medicine chest (Jim)
- New blinds throughout (Jim)
- All rooms painted (Vince Urrutia)
- Floors refinished (Toms Floors)
- The entry door was scraping the floor; sanded down and rehung by Jim
- Installed safety bars in the bathroom (Jim)
- Installed backsplash over sink and stove (Bernardo)
- Door stops installed (Jim)
- New knobs on cabinets (Jim)
- Safety treads installed on the stairs (Jim)
- New refrigerator (Jim)
- Deep clean (IMS Cleaners, our church cleaning company)

During this renovation, we were finally able to access the attic, which had been blocked by bins in the entryway. The plaster is falling off the lath, which is exposed. There are disintegrating floor tiles from the 1950s or 60s. There was lots of junk up there. Julia, with the help of Jim and Raymond Bergen, cleaned out the junk. We had a couple of people look to see whether we could renovate the attic, but it would prove to be too expensive. That, and the outside paint job, is the only part of the house we are choosing not to repair.

At 141, we replaced two storm doors, purchased a new dryer and glazed the bathtub. Unfortunately, the glazing caused a leak to pool water over foyer ceiling, ceiling had to be taken down and leaky pipe repaired. The ceiling then had to be rebuilt. We also installed a new fence, after a tree fell on it last fall. All the stumps were ground.

t 137, we replaced the roof. We reglazed the bathtub in the second floor apartment. The vibration from the glazing caused tiles to fall off the wall. We realized that the studs behind were rotted. When we opened the wall, we found that the hot water was attached to the cold pipes, and vice versa. We redid the plumbing to code. Replaced studs, installed new tile and painted. We also redid the backsplash with new subway tile.

Painting

We have three bids for painting the exterior of the First Ave properties. We do not see how this will be possible with our budget.

Other property updates

We have also been keeping up with the church and the rectory.

So far this year we've:

- Replaced rotting basement windows along the path to the Shakespeare door, and replaced rotting windows in the robing room along Franklin Street.
- Replaced the controls for the bells with one that can be managed with a remote and over a VPN.
- Removed a tree whose roots were cracking the foundation of the rectory garage. Soon we will install a new fence there.
- Installed handrails going up to the choir loft
- Repaired chapel ceiling in Bradley after a leak
- We're going to replace the lighting in the music room

Soon we will get the results of the existing conditions survey we commissioned from Marilyn Kaplan of Preservation Architecture.

After we know more about what she's uncovered, we'll start to make a plan to take care of this beautiful church that God has entrusted to us, so it can remain a sanctuary for us and for future generations.

Stay tuned!

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