



## First Parish Congregational Church United Church of Christ

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**NEWS**  
For Immediate Release

### **Steeple Coming Down at First Parish Church in East Derry, New Hampshire**

*EAST DERRY, NH – August 13, 2015* – A very visible step in the effort to preserve a significant New Hampshire landmark will soon take place with the lowering of the steeple at First Parish Church (FPC) in East Derry.

On or about Wednesday, August 26, timber frame experts will make the final detachments and a large crane will lower to the ground the top two sections of the tower on the historic FPC Meetinghouse. The belfry and lantern will be placed in secured staging on the lawn, and a temporary roof will be lifted up and installed above the clock, which will remain in place.

It will take two years to complete the restoration work and reunite the top sections with the rest of the tower.

#### **Rehabilitating an Historic Landmark**

Built in 1769, with the current tower added in 1824, the timber frame Meetinghouse appears to be in remarkably good condition but actually needs an estimated \$1.5–\$2M in repairs. The tower structure is especially deteriorated, and the top sections must come down now before the weather potentially takes them down this winter.

This work on the tower is part of a multi-year effort to rehabilitate the historic Meetinghouse, ideally in time for the 300th anniversary of the church and Derry's founding in 2019. Plans call for:

- Lifting the building to rebuild its foundation and adding an adjacent elevator for full accessibility throughout the facility in 2016,
- Repairing the timber frame and slate roof in 2017, and
- Restoring and rehabilitating the interior finishes in 2018.

The tower top itself will be repaired and restored while on the ground, and be reunited with the rehabilitated tower base after the Meetinghouse foundation work is completed in the fall of 2017.

Initial funding for the Tower Takedown and early rehab projects comes from years of preservation donations and a recent \$800,000 capital campaign drive within the church. A community-oriented fundraising effort launching soon and various grants will hopefully contribute towards the remaining costs; FPC has submitted a 2015 NH state LCHIP application to cover part of the \$300,000 estimated cost of rehabilitating the tower alone.

“Our church has been a trustworthy steward of “The Old Meetinghouse on the Hill” for two and a half centuries,” said the Rev. Dr. Deborah Roof, pastor of First Parish Church. “We look forward to sharing this rewarding challenge with the community through several dramatic rehabilitation projects that all begin now with taking down the damaged parts of the steeple.”

## **About the FPC Meetinghouse**

The current FPC Meetinghouse was constructed in 1769 to replace an earlier structure built by the area’s first settlers. It has served as a civic, community, and religious center for almost 250 years, and today is home to the vibrant First Parish Congregational Church UCC (United Church of Christ). Along with two modern FPC buildings, the Meetinghouse is host to concerts, social gatherings, history events, a preschool, and the regular meetings of dozens of community groups.

With its hilltop location along a heavily traveled road, the Meetinghouse epitomizes the classic New England village church and is a well-known and much-appreciated regional landmark. It anchors the East Derry Historical District—placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982—and is thought to be the oldest structure in town and one of the oldest New England meetinghouses still operating.

Learn more about First Parish Church, the Meetinghouse’s history, the multi-year rehabilitation project, and how to contribute by visiting [www.fpc-ucc.org](http://www.fpc-ucc.org).

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“The meetinghouse at First Parish is one of the most beautiful and significant 18<sup>th</sup> century New Hampshire buildings still in active use,” said Maggie Stier, shared field service representative for the NH Preservation Alliance. “We applaud and support the church’s dedication and perseverance in beginning this rehab effort, and look forward to seeing their great results over the next three years.”



The First Parish Church Meetinghouse in historic East Derry, New Hampshire (Photo courtesy of First Parish Church) High-res file: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/yxpilylfcgdpfzh/fpc-meetinghouse-e-derry-nh.jpg?dl=0>

“The First Parish Church Meetinghouse is one of the most significant and inspiring timber framed structures in New England,” said Arron Sturgis, president of Preservation Timber Framing, Inc., lead contractor for the rehabilitation effort. “The peaceful removal of the damaged belfry and lantern frames from the tower begins a comprehensive and thoughtful preservation of the entire historic structure. We look forward to working closely with FPC as they ready the building for their 300<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2019.”