

From the Archives

Do We Have a Steeple? A Spire?

As one drives along the streets that frame our church campus, the distinctive Gothic Revival style chosen by the 1928 Building Committee for the new church and parish house is immediately evident. Every hallmark of late Gothic architecture appears in the structure: the soaring sense of height, the massive solidity, the repeated use of arches, the tracereid windows, the cruciform plan, and the extensive use of stone and oak, among others.

Another common feature of this style is the tall, slender spire set at the exact intersection of the nave and the two transepts. The proper technical term for this feature is *flèche*—a French word meaning “arrow.” A quick glance at our *flèche* makes clear why the term was chosen: its slim, upward-reaching form appears ready to fly, though its purpose is ornamental rather than functional. The tip of the cross on the *flèche* rests 140 feet above the floor of the nave.

The drawing below, prepared for a mid-1990s restoration of our *flèche*, highlights the intricacy of the design. The notations on the right outline the structure in full, from the roofline to the cross at its peak, while the notes on the left detail the repairs required after more than sixty years of service atop our church.



SCOPE OF WORK

COMMON TERMS

NEW CROSS REQUIRED
WITH LIGHTNING PROTECTION

CROSS FINIAL

SPIRE

DOMED STANDING
SEAM COPPER ROOF

PINNACLES

DIAMOND HEAD CRESTING

REPLACE HORIZONTAL
STRUCTURAL MEMBERS
(3 PLACES)

3 LEAF CLOVER WINDOW

POINTED FINIAL

REPLACE DIAGONAL
MEMBERS AND SHEAR
PLATE

CURVED ORNATMETAL ROOF

GARGOYLE

4 LEAF CLOVER WINDOW

REINFORCE DIAGONAL
& VERTICAL MEMBERS
AT WOODEN DECK.
REPAIR COPPER COVER.

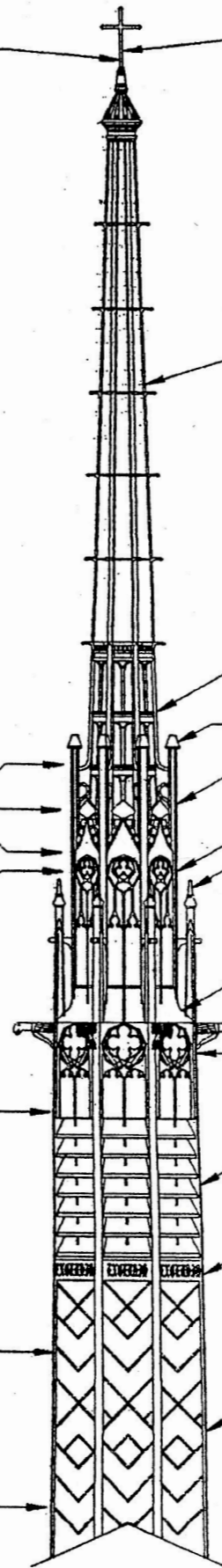
LOUVERS

SCROLL LETTERING

REPLACE BATTEN
CHEVRON PANELS

BATTEN CHEVRON PANELS

REINFORCE DIAGONAL
& VERTICAL MEMBERS
AT WOODEN DECK.
REPAIR COPPER COVER.



Arguably the most recognizable flèche in the world once crowned the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Millions watched in 2019 as fire engulfed the great cathedral and brought down its centuries-old flèche at the crossing. One reason the structure succumbed so quickly was its construction: a wooden framework sheathed in metal, a common practice at the time it was built.



Fortunately, the flèche that sits on the First Church roof benefitted by a more modern construction of metal for the interior superstructure with copper affixed to much of its exterior.

An intriguing detail of the First Church flèche is a Latin inscription located just below the louvers and above the batten chevrons (see detail above). At the time of the church's construction, Dr. McIllyar Lichliter, then Senior Minister, was given the honor of selecting the words for this inscription. Rather than reveal them here, the writer invites readers to guess the **four Latin words** chosen. If you'd like to join the challenge, send your guesses to Greg Duncan at interprep@earthlink.net. The winner—if there is one—will be announced in a future issue of *Connections*.

