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City's oldest doors ready for another 150 years

They couldn't keep out snow, so Holy Family had them rebuilt

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"Our doors are open wide." That's the simple motto stitched into a banner that hangs near the altar at Chicago's second oldest church.

Lately, it's been a little too true for comfort.

After 151 years facing the elements, the 12-foot-high, 600-pound front doors at Holy Family Church were showing their age.

When they couldn't be fully closed during last winter's so-called "Snowmageddon," three feet of snow piled up inside the historic Victorian gothic church at 1080 W. Roosevelt.

And once someone did manage to close them, opening them in a hurry was impossible — thanks to a confusing Rube Goldberg-style latch system that looked like it belonged on a medieval jail.

Now, thanks to a \$150,000 renovation, the doors will keep the snow out and let the faithful in again.

"They're the oldest working doors on a public building in the city," said a proud Rev. Jeremiah Boland, who has overseen work at the recently restored church.

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Germany, Africa and Mexico have passed through the doors of Holy Family, once Chicago's largest congregation and one of a handful of major buildings to have survived the Chicago Fire of 1871.

Six burly carpenters from Paul Borg Construction lugged two of the six doors into place Tuesday morning. They'd been amateurishly repaired and painted a cream color over the years and had to be completely rebuilt,



Holy Family Church's 600-pound, 12-foot-tall doors are rehung Tuesday.

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workers said.

Restained, with gold-painted ornamentation and new brass fittings, they should last another 150 years, Boland said.

"Our doors will always be wide open," he added, "But now we'll also be able to close them."

