

## Widening cracks found in historic cathedral

By **THERESA TAN**

THE foundations of Singapore's oldest Catholic church are weakening and the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd is finding ways to stop the cracks in the 162-year-old building from going deeper.

Reverend Father Adrian Anthony, its rector, said the church had started noticing "quite a good number of cracks" after the Land Transport Authority (LTA) began construction work on the MRT Circle Line around 2003.

Earlier, the Singapore Management University (SMU) also started building work on its new campus next door.

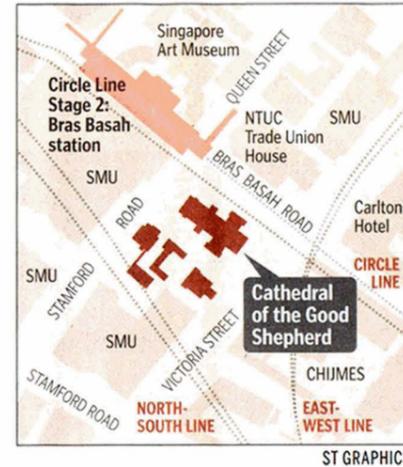
Although not visible to the naked eye the church started to tilt, he said. The cracks also got "bigger and bigger with time".

He told The Straits Times: "It's not like the building is going to collapse tomorrow. It is still stable, but if we don't do anything about it, it will become unstable and dangerous to the public."

The cathedral has hired engineers to study the extent of the damage.

It hopes to get a blueprint of how to restore and repair the building by November.

The Straits Times visited the church yesterday and signs of cracks on the church's walls, columns and floors were obvious. A crack of at least



2m long, for example, ran along the wall where the crucifix was hung.

Father Anthony said the church had had to wait until the LTA and SMU finished their construction before assessing the extent of the structural damage.

He added that the church had informed both parties of the damage, but declined to comment on their response to the church's plight.

The cathedral, located at the junction of Queen Street and Bras Basah Road, is near the new Circle Line's Bras Basah station.

It also stands between the SMU's administrative building and its business school.

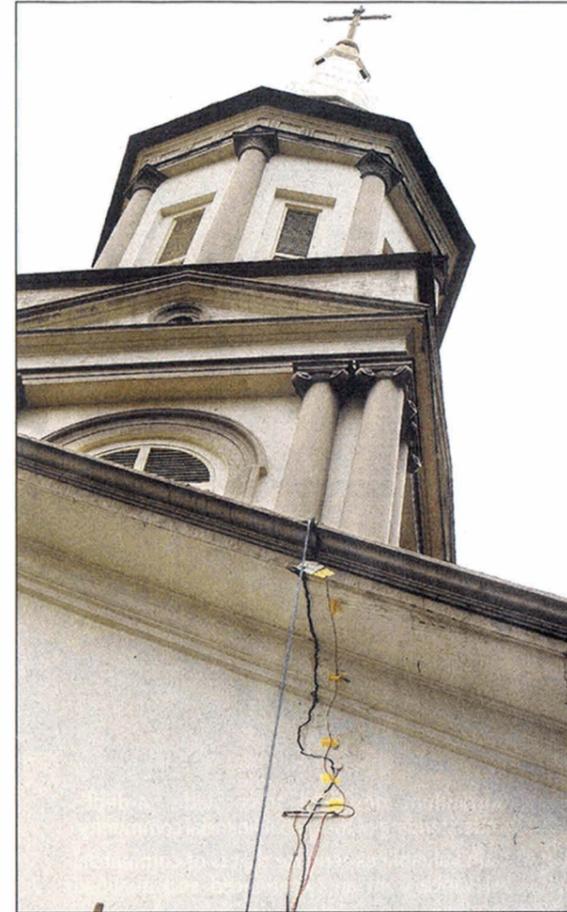
SMU said it had notified its insurers of the cathedral's complaint and that the insurers had appointed lawyers "to look into the matter".

An SMU spokesman added: "We wish to stress our desire to be good neighbours with our fellow residents, and sincerely hope the matter may soon be resolved."

An LTA spokesman said: "Most of the cracks in the cathedral were pre-existing ones which got slightly wider during the course of our construction work and probably the construction of other projects in the vicinity. We have since come to an arrangement with the cathedral that they will repair the cracks as part of their improvement and refurbishment of the church."

When asked if other buildings had been affected by the Circle Line's construction, the LTA said its contractor had completed some repair works for the Singapore Art Museum about three years ago.

But this is not the first time the cathedral has run up against the LTA over the Circle Line construction. In 2002, it had part of its concrete wall - which is topped by an iron fence - removed by the authority.



A crack has appeared beneath the church's bell tower. The church itself is said to be tilting although there is no immediate danger.

The LTA said it needed to remove the fencing temporarily to divert traffic and it did so without first seeking the permission of the Preservation of Monuments Board.

The cathedral is a national monument, which means it has to be conserved.

The LTA apologised to the Board for "overlooking" the need to seek its clearance, citing that it was unaware the cathedral's fence was also considered a monument.

Meanwhile, Father Anthony is faced with another headache - that of raising the millions needed to repair and restore the church.

He says an estimated \$3 million is needed just to put in place a new foundation to support the cathedral.

The Building and Construction Authority said its investigations showed the cracks were old ones that had been reported as far back as 2004.

A spokesman added that the cathedral had earlier been inspected by a professional engineer who had certified that the building was safe.

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## Cracks in walls, floors, columns



Cracks on the tiled floor of the church's sacristy, a room directly behind the altar of the sanctuary. The church, a national monument, has now called in engineers to study the extent of the damage and ways to restore the brick building. The church started noticing "quite a good number of cracks" after work began on the MRT Circle Line in 2003 and after the Singapore Management University had started work on its campus next door. ST PHOTOS: JOYCE FANG