



Robot enters house of God

Charlie Gates
 charlie.gates@press.co.nz

An army robot sent into the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch has filmed new earthquake damage.

The remote-controlled robot ventured into the badly damaged building yesterday, equipped with a video camera that beamed footage back to a laptop computer.

Opus engineers and Kieran Coulton, a sapper from the Royal New Zealand Engineers, gathered in a reinforced-steel container next to the cathedral to direct the robot and monitor the footage.

Opus structural engineer Jamie Lester said the footage revealed that many of the stone columns in the nave were badly cracked.

“We can only see so much

from the outside, so we are trying to find the level of damage to the internal structure so we can make a decision on deconstruction and what are viable strengthening or rebuilding options,” he said. “We have seen a lot of new damage – a little bit more than what we already knew.

“There is damage to the columns and the nave structure which we were not aware of before. There is more damage to the main columns under the dome.”

Coulton controlled the robot using two small rubber joysticks. A cord unspooled into the cathedral as the robot moved further in.

Coulton could move the camera and zoom in on parts of the building to assess cracks. One crack was so wide

daylight could be seen pouring into the building.

The robot supplied the first clear images of the inside of the cathedral since the February 22 quake.

Lester said the cathedral was too unsafe for people to enter. “We haven’t been in since February, so it is pretty cool to be able to get a glimpse of what is happening in there,” he said.

A small remote-controlled helicopter equipped with a camera had been flown into the building twice, but was lost inside on the second mission.

Opus structural engineer Andrew Brown spotted one detail in the cathedral. “The bishop’s seat looks like it has got a rock sitting on it.”



Filming the devastation: The robot supplied the first clear pictures of the inside of the cathedral since the February 22 quake.



Clear images: Sapper Kieran Coulton, from the Royal NZ Engineers, directs the robot and monitors the footage on screen.



The Press
Thursday 14/7/2011
Page: 3
Section: General News
Region: Christchurch Circulation: 83,024
Type: Metro
Size: 490.31 sq.cms.
Frequency: MTWTF--

Brief: OPUS_MENT
Page 2 of 2



DAMAGED CATHEDRAL



Assessing the damage: An army robot makes its way into the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

Photos: STACEY SQUIRES