

Congregation to build new sanctuary

By Jay Tokasz
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Fix the old church building, purchase a former Catholic church about four miles away, or knock down the old church and build anew.

Those were the options facing St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in West Seneca after structural engineers determined that the congregation's longtime worship space posed a safety hazard because its truss system was faulty.

The congregation has decided to stay at 3512 Clinton St., where its been located since 1870, but church members plan to tear down the current church and build a new sanctuary.

Parishioners learned they had to leave their longtime worship space in January after structural engineers determined the 1911 red-brick structure did not have sufficient support for its roof.

They've been worshipping in the parish hall since then, while exploring their future options.

"We had to face up to this and make some sort of decision," said the Rev. John R. Klatt, pastor.

The congregation of more than 250 members voted in May by a two-thirds majority in favor of building a new church on the current site.

The project is estimated to cost about \$1.5 million, which would include demolition of the old church.

The congregation has yet to start raising money for construction.

Church members considered stabilizing the old church, but those costs were estimated at between \$1.6 million and \$2.1 million, without any other renovations.

They also examined the possibility of purchasing the former St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church at 4928 Seneca St., which closed in 2008 when the parish merged with nearby Queen of Heaven parish.

The purchase likely would have been the least costly option, but many church members wanted to stay at the historical site of St. John's.

The congregation will form a building committee and work with a building consultant from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the national denomination, which also will provide an architect to help with preliminary plans for a new building, said Klatt.