

Building faith: Local churches adding on

BY WILL BUSS - News-Democrat
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FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS -- In 1953, Christ United Methodist Church was a modest building with a couple hundred members.

Two years ago, a massive and towering 31,000-square-foot church and steeple was built to accommodate the congregation that had grown to 1,200.

Now, there is even more construction. Work on a \$1.1 million, 8,000-square-foot addition at the church at 339 Frank Scott Parkway will include a new nursery.

Church business administrator Alan Prass said this was part of the original \$3 million expansion project but there was not enough money to complete it at that time. Prass said initial plans actually called for a three-story education building.

"This is the first floor of the education building," Prass said. "Basically, when we built the sanctuary, we hoped to build it at once, but we couldn't get the money to build it at once. We broke it down into a few phases."

Completion of the current building project is expected by March. Plans for additional floors will still be carried out one phase at a time.

"That is our plan," Prass said. "When, we do not know."

Impact Strategies in Fairview Heights is building the new addition. But this is not its first.

President Mark Hinrichs said his company is currently working with First United Methodist Church in Trenton about constructing a new building for the church, and is consulting with First United Presbyterian Church in a planned expansion that is expected to start next spring.

"Certainly, a number of churches around here continue to expand facilities throughout the metro-east area," Hinrichs said.

Fellow Fairview Heights builder Holland Construction also has built its share of churches and religious buildings in the region. One of its more noteworthy was the \$19 million Holy Trinity Church and School built in Fairview Heights in 2007.

Holland Construction Executive Vice President Dave Birk said the company was hired for this and other projects like it from existing relationships. The company also has a contract with St. Nicholas Catholic Church in O'Fallon. Holland Construction built the sanctuary and added office and gather space 15 years ago.

Birk said the church has a building addition program and is currently focusing on fundraising. He said construction is not just limited to sanctuaries and chapels. He said contemporary church communities are providing more insular services, such as religious education and counseling, and churches are needing more space to accommodate these spiritual needs.

"To get people and retain congregations, people are looking for more," he said.

"A lot of these churches have different approaches. What they're seeing is that more successful churches have a component over and above that one-hour Mass or service. I think churches now have a very successful dynamic where a pastor provides more than the one-hour ritual on Sunday. They are providing a learning environment, more of a family environment, interaction and more activities," Birk said.

The congregation at Faith Family Church in Shiloh moved into a new church in January to accommodate the 1,300 people who attend services each Sunday. Executive Pastor John Temple said the non-denominational church was also looking to address education, so 38,000 square feet of space was included for youth ministry, young adult and adult ministry needs.

"It really all came together and expanded those ministries hugely," Temple said. "It give us room to really do what we feel we needed to do."

Hufton Construction in Chesterfield, Mo. built the new church after having built the first church there years before. The company also built a building for the church five years ago. Project manager Jason Provinse said the company has been building churches since 1980. Church construction has always been a part of his company's clientele.

"It's a niche we have," Provinse said. "Definitely, we're still seeing growth. I would say anywhere from 30 to 60 percent at one time. It's quite a bit. I bet right now it's a significant amount of our work."

"We're all in this together," Temple said. "To me, that's extremely exciting to see. What you're seeing, even in this economy, there's good things happening there with expansion. Things are growing and so are we, and we're excited along with them."

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