

## **St. James Lutheran Church launches expansion project in its 130<sup>th</sup> year**

Members of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church in Verona plan a major renovation and expansion of their church, and are planning to break ground in spring 2017. The project will cost \$3.5 million and construction is expected to take about twelve months. St. James was founded in 1886 and is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Members approved the project because Christians and society have changed. “There was a time when weddings, funerals and Sunday worship provided the main reasons for gathering,” says Pastor Kurt Billings, “but now, ministry happens Monday through Sunday in a variety of settings for a variety of reasons.” He says St. James must upgrade facilities to remain relevant in this new environment.

The project will integrate the St. James Pre-school into the church building, adding more space for additional enrollment. The school, currently housed in the former church parsonage, will continue service without disruption until its new space is available in the main building. The new pre-school will create a bright and modern environment, with a separate entrance for parents and children.

The renovation features a spacious, accessible fellowship hall on the main floor for congregation and community meals, gatherings and events. Its design is open and inviting for conversation and welcoming members and visitors. A new commercial kitchen will be located on the main floor near the fellowship hall.

Expanded space for youth and adult programs and Sunday morning education is part of the plan, as well as additional space for middle and high school student activities and education. Sunday School rooms will be upgraded. Rehearsal and storage space for vocal and bell choirs and expanded office/clerical space are included as well.

The beautiful sanctuary in St. James with century-old stained glass windows will not be changed as part of the renovation.

Pastor Peter Narum says the new space will provide more opportunities for members and others in the community to gather and develop meaningful relationships. “We’ll have some soft spaces where people can sit and have conversations and build relationships with others,” he says.

J.H. Findorff & Son Inc. will be the general contractor on the project.

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