

Community joins together to rebuild Thayer church

Some refer to it as their "Miracle on Main Street."

An unexpected outpouring of support from the entire community of Thayer re-invigorated its only church and allowed it to not only survive, but thrive.

It was a bleak period in June 2001 when heavy rains exposed major structural problems with the Thayer United Methodist Church,

a facility that had been standing at Main Street and VanBuren since 1904.

Church members contacted Norman K. Brown of Brown Engineers in Springfield who inspected the building June 28, 2001. He found that the roof rafters were too light to hold much of a load and the main beam had fractured. His report concludes, "In my judgment,

the cost of investigating and evaluating the building and providing the necessary structural strengthening would most likely be prohibitive. The expenditure of considerable money on such an old building doesn't seem feasible or advisable. I do not believe that the building can be considered structurally sound or safe at the present time . . . High winds or failure due to age or other structural problems yet unseen could occur at any time."

The congregation, stunned with the news, had no choice but authorize its demolition.

Bobbie Trojack, chairwoman of the Church's Board, says it was during that darkest hour, when many were questioning the church's future, that a few key members stepped forward, confident a new church should and would be built.

Asked where the money was going to come from, they said, "Faith." One even offered to mortgage his own home to ensure that a church remained in the village.

And these testimonies of faith were answered many times over.

On Nov. 17 this year, Thayer

United Methodist Church will dedicate its new 4360 sq. ft. facility valued at over \$400,000.

Parishioners as well as community residents contributed \$120,000 in cash, the church borrowed \$100,000, and the remainder came from donated materials and labor.

Trojack noted that this was not just an undertaking from the local parishioners. "The community has built this church. People of all faiths have stepped forward — and not just with money."

In the old church, Trojack says they had about 25 people attending each week. Today, that number has more than doubled.

Headlining the dedication ceremony at 10 a.m. Nov. 17 will be Glen W. Bocox of Springfield, Superintendent of the Sangamon River District. Special music is planned and the facility will officially be named, Thayer United Methodist Church "Church of the Resurrection." The congregation unanimously voted to change the name "because the new church came up from the ashes." Immediately following the dedication, a cor-

nerstone will be laid which will include a time capsule.

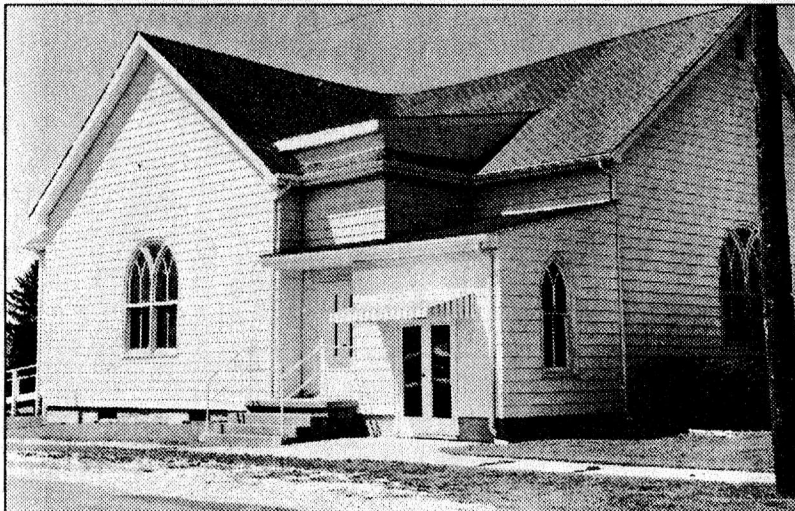
Bocox wrote an article in the church's district publication, "The Current," a year ago August, talking about the Thayer church. He started the article, "I witnessed a resurrection the other day, and I am still filled with amazement at the awesome power of God!"

He noted the Thayer congregation, served by retired pastor Robert Sabo Sr., had 65 members, with an average attendance of 25. "But since the news spread through the community, attendance has been 50 to 60 per Sunday, and people are coming out of the woodwork offering their help."

He quoted Sabo as saying, "This is the only church in this town of 800, and they are beginning to see just how much this church means to them, even the ones who go to churches in other towns."

Bocox continued, "Many members who haven't darkened the doors in years have returned to worship in their temporary quarters, the Community Center, even

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Old Thayer United Methodist Church was demolished in 2001.

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though it is not air conditioned and inadequate for their needs. The Village Board has said to use it as long as they need to, without charge. And many young families have started attending too. Why? Because this congregation has decided to build a new church on the same spot and because they now see God's vision for them; to reach out to the town's children and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

"Permission has been given for the Virden Fire Protection District to burn the structure, saving between \$10-\$15,000 in demolition costs. A local masonry contractor has volunteered to supply all the brick and labor for the new church. Dozens of people have asked when construction will start, they want to help!

"As Superintendent, I want to tell you how my heart is filled with joy at the resurrection of this congregation. As I shared with them in worship on August 5, 2001, they were a 'dying' church, a church with no future, but now, thanks to the death of their facility, they are now a 'living' church, a church with a bright future."

Thayer Methodist Sunday School began on Jan. 22, 1902, led by Mrs. Mary Gillespie. The first services were held upstairs at the Company Store until May, 1902. For a short

period, services were then held in the park, later moving to the church's present site. Logs were used for seats and a giant oak tree provided shade.

When Thayer's first school was completed in 1902, services were held there on Sunday by the Rev. M.M. Want, pastor of the Virden Methodist Church, or Mark Turner, ordained as a local preacher, until the school was destroyed by fire in 1903. No services were held while the new school was being erected.

After lengthy deliberations, the old Walnut Grove Church, located one mile east of Thayer, was moved in sections to the present site.

A new church was built, using the old church as wings and completed in late 1904. That structure stood until October, 2001, when it had to be burned down due to its structural problems.

Pews and the altar furniture are all that's left from the old church. Architect for the project is Wesley Corgan of Virden. Overseer is Tim Evans.

The one-story structure includes a 44'x40' foot sanctuary, a 32'x38' fellowship hall, kitchen, two restrooms, and a foyer.

The facility is available for community meetings, dinners, receptions, showers, and weddings.

All are invited to attend the dedication ceremony Nov. 17.