

## 'Too many walls' Zumbro Church plans \$4.4 million renovation

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An artist's rendering shows the sanctuary of the Zumbro Lutheran Church after a planned renovation. The Church on Third Avenue Southwest will be undertaking a \$4.4M building project.

The writing is on the wall — or maybe the door — the Zumbro Lutheran Church needs an update after 50 years.

The church kicked off a \$3 million capital campaign during services Sunday. Few major updates have been done at the church since it was built in 1969. The church is old enough that its late mid-century modern design has returned to vogue.

"We're going to let some of that go by the wayside," said the Rev. Vern Christopherson, directing pastor of Zumbro Lutheran Church.

While the main impetus for the campaign starts with needed repairs and updates, church leaders said it was time to rejuvenate the space.

Three years ago, contractors estimated the church roof had about two years of service life left. The church also needs to update the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system.

In addition to that work, improvements will include a new elevator at the north entrance for better accessibility. The sanctuary will be redesigned for better accessibility and visibility, and the church organ will be refurbished. The church library will be moved and two main interior walls will be removed.

The walls have created a literal barrier for people from outside the church attending public events or considering becoming new members.



Artists rendering of the interior of the Zumbro Lutheran Church. The Church on Third Avenue Southwest will be undertaking a \$4.4M building renovation.

"Right now, we're too much a niche church with too many walls," Christopherson said.

The church will also convert some of the lower level space to a youth drop-in center.

When Zumbro Lutheran moved to its current location 50 years ago, the congregation had about 800 Sunday school attendees. That has fallen off to less than a quarter of that in recent years, Christopherson said.

"So now it's a question of how do we repurpose those spaces for missional needs," he said.

The church would partner with Lutheran Social Services to run the drop-in space.

Through the month, church leaders are asking parishioners and the public for about \$3 million toward the estimated \$4.4 million project. During Sunday's kickoff, church officials unveiled project renderings and announced that 58 lead gifts have already contributed nearly \$1.4 million to the campaign.

"We primed the pump," Christopherson said. "We're letting people be led into this and be inspired by it."

Some of the project funding will come from debt sources, including a mortgage on the church property.

"The goal is to not go too deeply in debt," Christopherson said.



Artists rendering of the exterior of the Zumbro Lutheran Church. The Church on Third Avenue Southwest will be undertaking a \$4.4M building renovation.

The first work will be to renovate the existing church elevator and install a new north entrance elevator, which will then give parishioners — and contractors — better access to the building and let workers remove the exterior access ramp. All parishioners will be able to use the same door by the end of the year, plans show.

The rest of the work would likely begin in April, Christopherson added. Services will be held in the lower level gym while the sanctuary is being renovated.

The remodeling isn't the only project the church hopes to tackle. Church leaders are looking for partners to develop the church-owned surface parking lot north of the church. Nothing specific is planned, but that project would likely be a partnership that lets the church keep parking access for services and events while also serving another community need, such as affordable housing.

However, church leaders aren't in a hurry to jump on that next project unless the fit is right.

"We want to do something that feels missional and not just jump at the highest bid," Christopherson said. "I think it will take a step of faith."



Artists rendering of the interior of the Zumbro Lutheran Church. The Church on Third Avenue Southwest will be undertaking a \$4.4M building renovation.