

# Historic church put on new foundation



Ostermiller Housemoving workers remove a support beam used to move Faith Lutheran Church from Box Elder to the Heights near Skyview High. The church was moved onto its new foundation Monday and will be part of a new St Johns Ministries project.

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Photos by Bob Zellar/Gazette Staff

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Slowly, with painstaking care, building mover Duane Ostermiller maneuvered a historic country church onto its new foundation in Billings Heights.

After a month long journey from Box Elder and another couple of months of preparation, Faith Lutheran Church rested at its new home Monday afternoon as the centerpiece of a senior living complex planned by St. John's Lutheran Ministries west of Wicks Lane.

"I wish the foundation had fit a little better," said Ostermiller, who moved the 89-year-old prairie church 277 miles to Billings and then set it on its foundation.



Workers prepare to move Faith Lutheran Church onto its new foundation.

### **Foundation will work**

The concrete basement is just a little long on both ends, but it will work, he said.

"I'll jiggle it around to get the best fit I can and set it down," he said.

Preparation for mounting the church on its foundation began Dec. 6, said Jack Beals, a St. John's employee in charge of the project.

"I'd like to think we can get it closed in before we get actual snow," he said.

The whole process of preparing the church for restoration to its original 1917 look has taken more time than expected, he said.

"We're getting there, but it's been a slow process," Beals said.

It has also been expensive. Kent Burgess, president and CEO at St. John's, said the move cost about \$88,700.

He's raised just short of \$60,000, which had been his original estimate for the move.

Putting in new front doors will be the next step. Then a landing and stairs will be added. Once a temporary heat source has been installed, work can begin on framing in the basement and ripping apart the inside of the old church.

Before it opens in June, the building will be rewired and plumbed; carpeting will be removed and the original wooden floors sanded and refinished; and new windows, closer in design to the originals, will be installed.

## Replacing the steeple

The steeple, now sitting on the ground nearby, will be reconditioned over the winter. In the spring, Ostermiller will return with a crane and hoist it atop the little white church.

Burgess estimates that the cost of completing the project will be at least an additional \$100,000. He will be asking for donations of materials and labor.

"We're going to be using volunteers wherever we can," Burgess said. "What we really need now is shingles and siding."

He's looking for special shingles that duplicate the look of 1917 and 4-inch siding panels that match the originals.

The church will serve a congregation at a new senior complex that St. John's will start building early next summer on 7.4 acres donated by Atonement Lutheran Church. It was part of a 27-acre Heights tract purchased years ago by Atonement Lutheran. Its congregation plans to build a new church there.

St. John's adopted Faith Lutheran after its Box Elder congregation decided there were no longer enough members to keep it open. The Hi-Line congregation welcomed the opportunity to keep the church alive.

Faith Lutheran began its arduous journey to Billings on Sept. 12 and rolled into The Heights on Oct. 2.