

Decatur, Illinois, Monday, June 18, 1979

DECATUR HERALD

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Tears, resentment color Trinity CME's goodbye to church

Local

By Linda Hill

As they filed out of the old church building for the last time, members of the Trinity CME Church expressed sadness tinged with resentment.

"We are a small group of poor people, and we don't have money to build. It seems like they just pushed us out," said Chance Ella Read, 950 E. Sangamon St., as she wiped away tears.

The church building, constructed at 343 N. Jackson St. in 1887 and occupied by the CME church since 1920, is to be demolished to provide parking space for the Decatur Civic Center.

The congregation received \$100,000 for the property, but the Rev. C.L. Hawkins, pastor, said that isn't enough to build "a chicken coop."

Specifically, \$48,000 already has been spent for a new parsonage and land on which the congregation of about 150 active members hopes to build a new church in the 400 Block of South Webster St., Hawkins said.

And the lowest estimate for building a

The church is scheduled for demolition in July.

At Sunday's final services, the order of worship was the same as usual.

"It's not like we had built a new building and were moving to a new church on our own," Hawkins said.

"I've been here all of my life, ever since I was a baby. This church is all I remember," said Mary Shirley of 533 S. Webster St.

"When I moved to Decatur, I went into that door, at the age of 14 years," said Minnie Grandberry, 969 N. Illinois St., pointing to the side sanctuary door. Mrs. Grandberry has been a member of Trinity CME since 1922.

As the members stood chatting in front of the church — construction booms already looming near — Mrs. Grandberry comforted a friend, saying, "Honey, everybody's crying today."

Joe Shatto, 722 W. King St., said he doesn't like the way the building was taken.

"We weren't asking to move. I asked

church, but I never did get an answer from them," he said.

Another, Larry Taylor of 921 Lynview St., said he thinks moving the congregation is "wrong."

"How come they wanted to go this way?" he asked. "They didn't go that way," he said, pointing across William Street.

Hawkins said the congregation must await approval from the church bishop in St. Louis before proceeding with a new building.

The church also hopes to get financial help from its conference, he said.

"We're supposed to, but we haven't received it," he said. "We're not the only church that needs financial help."

So beginning next Sunday, the church moves to the YWCA. "The YWCA is not like worshipping in a church," Hawkins said.

"We hope that we can carry on like we were here, but that's not a church building," said his wife, who said she will miss the church atmosphere.

The possibility the church might be moved instead of demolished was raised again this month, with Lucien Kapp, a member of the Decatur Historical and Architectural Sites Commission, underwriting a study by a Chicago architect on the cost of moving the building.

Kapp could not be reached for comment Sunday on the status of the study,

and he reportedly will be out of the city through July.

Richard Westbrook, Historical and Architectural Sites Commission chairman, said Kapp is acting as an individual, and he does not know what arrangements Kapp made about the report.

Bids for demolition are to be opened by the Civic Center Board at 4 p.m. Thursday.

Richard Lutovsky, board secretary, said Sunday Kapp has not approached the board formally or informally to request a delay in demolition so the possibilities of moving the church can be explored.

The board is scheduled to meet Wednesday morning. Lutovsky said the item is not on the agenda, but there is open time for visitors' comments at the end of each meeting.

However, Lutovsky said he believes the demolition schedule must be maintained if the civic center is to be opened on schedule in August or September of 1980.

The subject of moving the church was discussed 1½ or two years ago, he said.

"The information received at that time was that the cost would be in the \$300,000 range, and I might add the figure \$300,000 was in 1968 dollars," he said. That estimate was based on the cost of moving a similar-sized structure in Detroit seven blocks, he added.

Hawkins said he likes the idea of moving the building, but, "I don't want to get up in the air about it."

Westbrook said the Historical and Architectural Sites Commission is on record with the City Council opposing destruction of the church.

"With a little imagination, that could be part of the civic center complex, even if we move the congregation out," he said, adding that he has seen two churches in other cities successfully converted into restaurants.

"From the word go, there was nothing the Historic and Architectural Sites Commission could do to save that structure," he said, because of the Civic Center Board's "glass and steel philosophy."