

✓ ^{Earthquake - Watsonville} Watsonville landmark to fall

Replica to replace quake-damaged St. Patrick's Church

By PAULINE ZENNER
Sentinel staff writer

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WATSONVILLE — The landmark St. Patrick's Catholic Church, which has guarded the gateway to Watsonville for nearly 90 years, is coming down, and a replica of the Gothic-style red brick structure is going up in its place.

The Rev. Michael Miller announced at Sunday Mass that the Monterey Diocese, which rejected a \$3.9 million bid to retrofit the church in December, has decided to rebuild St. Patrick's Church in its entirety, rather than to reinforce and rebuild the existing structure.

"The new church will look as close to the old church as possible. We will save everything we can," said Miller. "The only difference will be if we have another earthquake, our children and grandchildren won't have to go through what we have for the last three years.

"A completely rebuilt structure will be safer, incorporate the best elements of the old and hopefully be within the \$2.5 million budget," he said.

Much of the original church will be saved and reused, including stone doorways, doors, brick, stained glass windows, statues of St. Patrick, Mary and Joseph, the altar stone, pews and kneelers.

The original estimate to repair the earthquake-damaged church was \$2.5 million, a budget agreed on by the diocese.

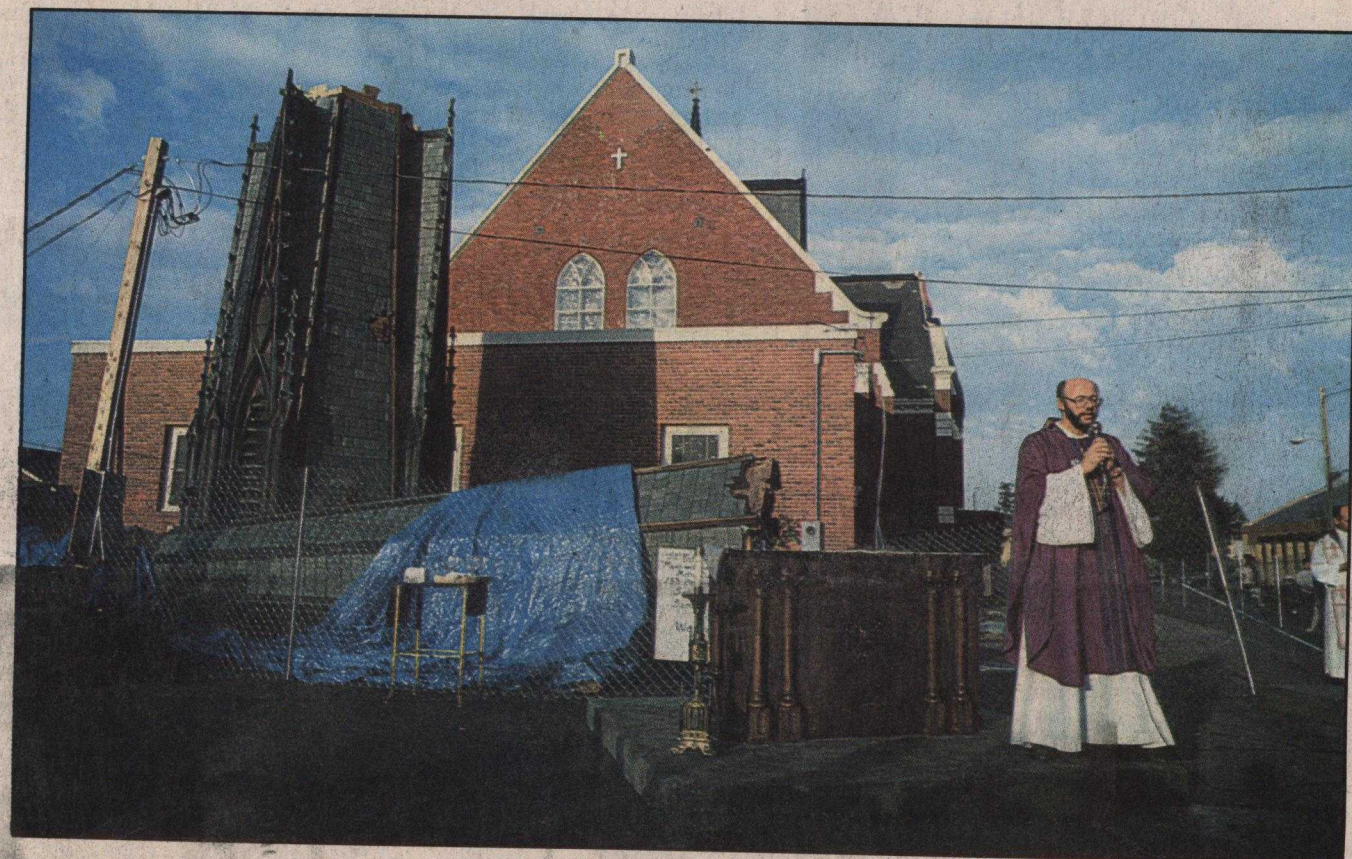
By the time the coordinating committee made all desired changes, including expansion from 550 to 675 seats, the lowest bid came in at \$3.9 million.

"Even after the proposed expansions were deleted, the retrofit proved too expensive and was rejected," Miller said.

"I feel that this is the best decision we could make given the economic situation. As a parish, we can't let ourselves get overburdened by a debt."

Kathleen Eaton, a member of St. Patrick's since 1920, said she didn't expect to hear the church would come down, but realized it was the most sensible decision after hearing the cost of repair.

"There was a question as to how successful retrofitting would be and it became too expensive," said Eaton, who was married at St. Patrick's and



The Rev. Michael Miller celebrates Mass in front of damaged church in February, 1990.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

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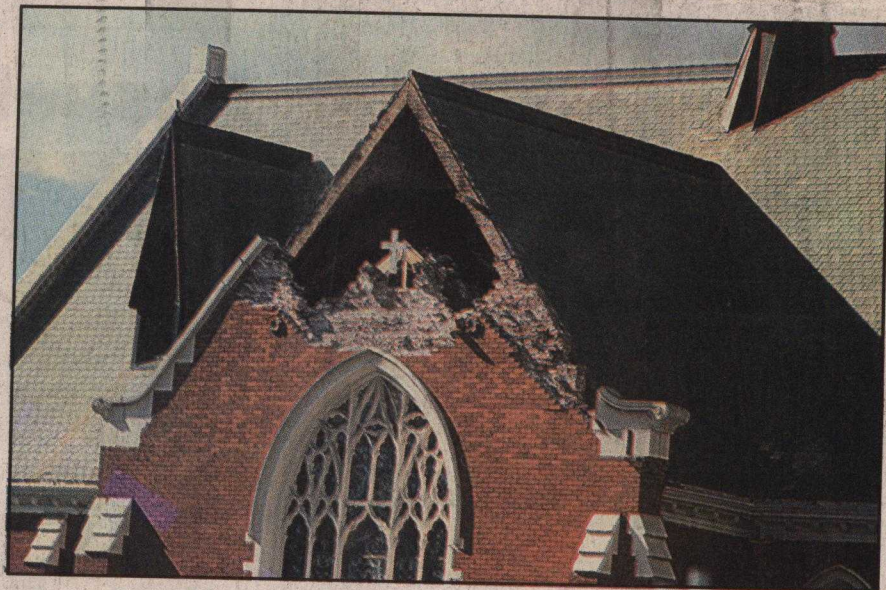
whose children were baptized in the church.

"The church is in our hearts as much as it is in the building. The more I think about it, the more I realize that rebuilding is the best way to go."

Pat Smith, 88, a member of the church for more than 60 years, lives across the street from Notre Dame School gymnasium, where the parish's 4,000 members have been attending services since the quake. Smith wasn't surprised to hear that the church would come down. He said he just wants it back.

"I feel like a lot of other people do; we're just anxious to see something done. I kind of expected they'd have to give some place," said Smith.

"We're getting tired of having Mass in the gym. People miss their church.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel file

St. Patrick's suffered more damage than diocese can afford to repair.

It's a part of our heritage, and we want it back and we're willing to see certain changes made to have it back."

Smith said trying to rebuild it for \$4 million is just too much.

"We don't have near that amount of money," he said. "People are very generous, but there's a limit."

The church was designed by architect William A. Weeks in 1903.

For the rebuilding, the diocese has hired Russ Haisley, an architect from Monterey.

Leo Ruth, ex-chairman of the coordi-

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St. Patrick's

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nating committee and liaison between the architect, the church and city hall, said the architect will meet with the diocese next week to discuss preliminary plans.

"I'm very enthusiastic and satisfied with the decision," Ruth said. "There was a lot of emotion involved in the original plan to retrofit, and it was so expensive, it just wasn't worth it."

"The new church will be much sturdier structure, but it will look the same, which is the the whole intent." The facade of the building will be the same, he said.

So far, \$1.7 million has been raised, approximately \$1 million in cash and \$350,000 more in pledges, said Miller.

"We've already spent \$300,000 on soil tests and fees," he said.

Miller said he knows several people have been waiting to donate until they found out what will happen with the church.

The cost of rebuilding did not include the steeple, according to Mary Pilo, a lifetime member of the church who is co-chairwoman of the fund drive. A series of fund-raising activities has been scheduled to raise funds to save the steeple; an estimated \$150,000 is needed, Pilo said.

"After listening to all sides of the story, I am all for it," Pilo said of the plans. "They are going to save as much as they possibly can."

Betty Lewis, town historian who wrote a book on the architect who built the church, said, "I'm just appalled. It's a real shame they couldn't save it. It's a beautiful building and a wonderful entrance to the city."

"It's sad that it's too costly to repair," Lewis said. "St. Patrick's Church is so special, it will be sad to see it go. But I commend them for saving as much of it as they can and making it look as it did. I think it's a tribute to the people whose time, energy and devotion

'Peoples' Steeple' fund-raisers

"A Steeple for the People" a fund-raising effort spanning the month of April is headed by parishioners and former Watsonville mayors Ann Soldo and Betty Murphy. The 14 events, involving about 100 volunteers, are hoped to raise \$75,000 to help pay for rebuilding the church steeple. The events are:

- Basketball tournament — March 31 to April 4
- Country western dance — April 3
- Fiesta, international food fair and bike-a-thon — April 5
- Gold tournament — April 7
- Yacht races and dart tournament — April 9
- Dinner dance — April 11
- Tennis tournament finals — April 11
- Bocci ball tournament and walk-a-thon — April 12
- Bakalar dinner — April 17

went into trying to save it."

Marilyn McLachlan, president of the Pajaro Valley Historical Society and a 1945 graduate of Notre Dame School, called the decision "pretty emotional. I think everyone dreaded seeing it come down."

"I just hope that they will rebuild it the way William Weeks intended it to be," she said. "I asked someone on the building committee if they had the original plans, and said they didn't think so. I don't want to be negative about this; it's important that we're not ... A lot of people going to be upset."

Former Watsonville mayor Betty Murphy, a member of the Pajaro Valley Historical Society who attends St. Patrick's, said demolishing the building "is a historical loss, as was the Masonic Temple, the Odd Fellows Hall and Ford's. We've lost a lot of buildings, and this was the one besides the Porter Building that we were trying to

save.

"But my feeling is more than historical," Murphy said. "St. Patrick's is right there at the edge of town. It is a landmark, for Catholics and non-Catholics."