

CASE STUDY

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A Plumbing Miracle: Grinder Pump Saves Church \$30K in Installation Costs over Conventional Drainage

Oneonta Assembly of God Church was facing the specter of an expensive plumbing installation for its new building expansion. Fortunately, a good Samaritan plumber proposed and installed a duplex grinding solution from Saniflo that saved the house of worship nearly \$30,000.

BY TONY BARA

ONEONTA, NY — Serving a congregation of 150 faithful, Oneonta Assembly of God Church has increased its flock significantly since its founding in 1939. In the past 20 years alone, the number of churchgoers has more than tripled.

Congregation growth has necessitated corresponding facility growth throughout the years. The current sanctuary was built in 1995, replacing an older chapel that had been converted from a three-car garage. Even this larger building, however, could not keep up with the rise in attendees and demand for community programs.

“By 2012, with 150 people and a growing children’s program, the church needed to expand,” says the Reverend John Grenier, Pastor of Oneonta Church.

The decision was made to undertake a two-story, 50- by 100-foot expansion that would contain three classrooms, boys’ and girls’ restrooms and a gymnasium. Chief among the challenges was figuring out how to run plumbing from the new facility all the way to the septic system on the other side of the original building.



Installing contractor and Oneonta Church parishioner John Stewart with the installed Sanicubic 2 grinding system from Saniflo, which will handle all of the church expansion’s plumbing needs.

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An initial solution, proposed by the project's original general contractor and architect, called for running a sewer line from the building expansion to the septic tank near the original structure—a distance of roughly 150 feet. “We would have had to run pipe in the ground the full length of the old church (100 feet) and across the side of the expansion (50 feet),” explains the Rev. Grenier.

Concerned with the significant time and material costs involved with such an undertaking, the Rev. Grenier was hoping for a more cost-effective and less-laborious solution. “Not only would we have had to dig up the ground, including sidewalks and driveways, by running all that pipe, but we would also have to worry about freezing pipes during the winter, not to mention replanting grass and other greenery.”

A Simpler Approach

When churchgoer and licensed plumber John Stewart heard the proposed solution, he immediately suggested a different approach. “I thought it made absolutely no sense to endure all the labor and cost of installing that much pipe when you could just use a macerating system,” he recalls.

Stewart instead recommended installing a grinding system from Saniflo. Designed for both commercial and residential applications, these systems macerate (or grind) waste into a slurry before pumping it horizontally or vertically to a building's drain line. “I've been using this technology for 10 years, and it hasn't disappointed me yet,” affirms Stewart. “It's well-built and designed to handle more than you would think possible.”

In the case of Oneonta Church, a pump would be connected to all the plumbing fixtures in the building expansion and housed in a pit. Effluent would be pumped up 13 feet and across the ceiling and link up with a stink pipe in the old building before eventually working its way to the septic tank on the other side of the property. The proposal promised to save a significant amount of time, labor and money on the project overall.

Despite the promise of savings, the architect on the project had some initial concerns. “He wasn't used to the technology and was worried about leaks and bursts,” recalls the Rev. Grenier. Stewart's confidence in the grinding system was so strong, however, that he managed to eventually sway the architect to support the idea. “As I kept emphasizing how much less labor and cost the grinding system would require, the first option of digging up the ground became virtually indefensible,” insists Stewart.

All that remained was to choose the pump that would best accommodate the church expansion's plumbing needs—which were many. Discharge from six toilets, seven sinks, two floor drains and two urinals needed to be pumped up and out. "With the potential for a high volume of effluent in a short amount of time, I wanted a pump with built-in redundancy that could handle anything flushed its way," explains Stewart.



The Rev. John Grenier, Pastor of Oneonta Assembly of God Church, stands in front of his place of worship.

He discovered just the product during a conversation with Bill Norris, a Saniflo sales representative working for Empire State Associates in Rochester. Norris recommended the Sanicubic 2 because it comes equipped with two grinder pumps. Both are engineered to operate alternately. They each take turns handling the wastewater so that neither is more heavily used over time than the other. A single pump is able to handle up to 50 gpm. If the incoming rate is higher than the discharge rate, the pump automatically signals the "overload" stage. This will activate the second pump and both will operate simultaneously until the condition is alleviated. When both pumps are in operation, the discharge rate increases to roughly 90 gpm.

"The last thing I want is to be pulled from my church pew because we have a plumbing problem in the middle of service," laughs Stewart. "This unit's built-in redundancy reassures me that demand will be met."

Stewart was further impressed by the unit's heavy-duty grinding power. "I watched Bill flush a packaged tampon down a toilet connected to the system and... poof... it was ground to bits," recalls Stewart. The unit also comes with an external alarm box that gives the owner status alerts.

Miraculous Savings

Under Stewart's direction, church volunteers installed the plumbing system over the course of three weeks. "If we had installed the plumbing uninterrupted, it would have taken roughly six hours," explains the Rev. Grenier. "Our volunteers have busy lives, so they had to break up the work." The pump was installed inside a five- by-five foot pit, with all plumbing and venting running up and through the ceiling.

Reported complications were minimal and mostly involved running the pipe. “Since we had a team of volunteers doing the pipe runs, I often stepped in, as the certified plumber, to reassure them that they were doing it properly,” says Stewart. “We also had a few hiccups in determining which pipe angles to use coming out of the pit and into the ceiling, but we resolved those fairly quickly, and it was an easy installation overall.”

Even better for Oneonta, by opting for the grinding system installation, the church garnered substantial savings. Choosing the first option of running a sewer line through the ground would have involved expensive digging and material costs totaling nearly \$40,000. “Thanks to the great cost-effectiveness of the grinding system plumbing solution and our wonderful parish volunteers who donated their time and effort, we saved roughly \$30,000 on the project,” reports the Rev. Grenier.

After the installation, Stewart tested the pump with all the fixtures. “Even with everything running at full speed, only one of the two grinder pumps needed to come on, meaning the unit can handle even more in the future,” says Stewart. “The high level of engineering and ingenuity put into this technology is astounding,” he continues. “All the money it saved Oneonta Church can now be used to foster our faith community and improve our children’s programs—that is, ultimately, the real victory for us.”

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- **For more information**, contact Saniflo at 1-800-571-8191. Or visit the Saniflo website at www.saniflo.com.
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