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Rev. Frank Gentile says that in high school he wanted to be a minister though he

was sure that he shouldn't be one. (Staff photo)

Minister practices growth

By SHIRLEE IDEN

There's always something to grow about, says Reverend Frank Gentile.

Spiritual leader for 24 years of Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church, the affable clergyman recently undertook a church assistant ostensibly to help a far away Unitarian society, and ended by realizing he had been the one helped.

"For two or three years I've been realizing I was in the doldrums and I was considering moving," he said. "But I had an inkling I was operating on the wrong philosophy."

Then Gentile was asked to become a guest minister for a local society in Plano, Texas.

"The denomination has a program that involves an arrangement with a small society that isn't large enough to have their own minister," he said. "They supply the travel funds and the society supplies housing and other benefits for the visiting minister."

He went to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship North in Plano which is close to Dallas. The church here continued his salary.

Gentile said the denomination's headquarters had been wanting him to do something like this for many years.

"I was reluctant, but I was pleasantly surprised," he said.

"THIS FELLOWSHIP is very well organized and what I was supposed to do was to restore their trust in a minister and in their own judgment to be able to pick a minister."

He explained the society had built a church and called a minister but their choice turned out to be a mistake. The resulting furor split the church.

"They've brought ministers in to visit them since but never made a decision on hiring one. What I did was just to go in a ministerial worked and developed six Sunday services for them," he said.

Gentile said a novel way of nurturing evolved during his stay in the Texas town.

"I got the itch to bake some bread one day and did so," he said. "I was in my bachelor's apartment. I thought about it and decided I would bring a loaf of my own home baked bread to each congregant I visited and I did."

He also held discussion groups and met with the society's board and with several committees.

"I also got a chance to read a lot," he said.

Gentile's wife, a therapist-social worker in pri-

vate practice, visited him at the end of his stay in Texas. He admits she wasn't thrilled about his absence, but was quite understanding.

Gentile said his 24th year at the Southfield church will be marked on Oct. 1.

"I came in 1953 when I was a lot younger," he said wryly.

His first full time Unitarian Universalist pulpit had been at El Dorado, Ohio and before that he had a student pulpit while he was studying in Bates College in Maine.

"IN HIGH SCHOOL, I wanted to be a minister but I was sure that I shouldn't be," he said. "When I left high school I had decided on the law, but sometime in that summer between high school and college I decided to go into the ministry."

Northwest UU Church was a brand new congregation in Detroit which had split from the parent church and did well enough to go on their own.

"We moved into this building in 1961," he said. Gentile is a comfortable, bespectacled, bearded man. His love for the written word is apparent in his book-lined office. He casually apologized for a desk that has "everything from how to screen the windows to a new constitution for the church on it."

"I have very little authority here as a UU minister," he said. "I have no authority to spend money or make decisions for the congregation."

He explained that authority in Unitarian Universalist churches is an individual matter between each church and its minister.

The Southfield church has nearly 250 members.

Gentile thinks his six weeks in a new environment gave him a needed lift.

"My colleagues change pulpits every five to seven years," he said. "And I've been here a long time. I realized I'd been too cautious as a leader."

"In late years, I've moved slower. A minister has got to take a position of leadership, not necessarily control, but leadership."

SINCE his return, Gentile said he and his congregants have "had a lot of fun."

"We're working on a number of new projects," he said.

Gentile said he always worries about "going stale" but since his stint as a guest clergyman.

"I've gotten to accept my own value as a minister."

Area students named by deans

Two Michigan schools recently named 21 Southfield and Farmington residents to their dean's lists.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn School of Engineering named to its dean's list for the winter 1977 semester Kathleen Czajkowski, of Farmington, who achieved a 4.0 GPA; John C. Fennell, of Farmington; and Kenneth J. Wiljanen, of Southfield.

Lawrence Institute of Technology named to its dean's list for the spring day baccalaureate term the following students: Michael A. Sportelli, of Farmington Hills; Vicki A. Cooper, of Farmington; David R. Humphries, of Farmington Hills; Diane E. Young, of Farmington Hills; Craig O. Blumen-

thal, of Southfield; Elie Elhaddad, of Southfield; Kevin P. Malover, of Southfield; David L. Messenger, of Southfield; John F. Galopin, of Southfield; C. F. Reidsma, of Southfield; Amira Skoczylas, of Southfield; Josef Skoczylas, of Southfield; Paula E. Stuter, of Southfield; Amy L. Vanden Berg, of Southfield; Edward A. Hager, of Southfield; Gregory P. Heil, of Lathrup Village; Scott T. Hoelt, of Southfield; Barbara L. Malinowski, of Southfield; Alice Polarek, of Southfield; Paul M. Przygocki, of Southfield; and Lawrence C. Chan, of Southfield.

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