



Dr. Robin Meyers, new senior minister of Bushnell Congregational Church, is making his new home in Novi with his wife, Shawn, and the couple's two children, 4-year-old Blue, and 1-year-old Chelsea.

Bushnell Congregational Church

Old congregation calls one of new generation when choosing minister

By Loraine McClish
Staff writer

Bushnell Congregational Church of Detroit was once the largest church of its denomination in Michigan and once housed the second-largest Sunday school in the country. Now the church is in the process of moving west, following its congregation to the suburbs.

The move is under the auspices of the church's pastor, Dr. Robin Meyers, who realized his goal of attaining his doctorate before the age of 30, is the youngest senior minister ever called to pastor the old and established congregation.

He calls himself "one of a new generation of ministers," and declines his official title of The Rev. Dr. Meyers as "just a little too much."

He describes himself as "A free man called to a free pulpit for free people." That's a description that is steeped in the tradition of Congregationalists, the oldest Protestant denomination in America.

His call here brought him to a split congregation that, for the time being, keeps him juggling his time between the tall steepled church that towers above the Grand River and Southfield Freeway intersection, and the interim quarters in Northville.

WITH HIS MOVE here the native of Wichita, Kan., inherited the overseeing of 14 acres of land on Meadowbrook Road, north of Eight Mile Road, where the congregation has plans to build a \$1-million church building.

He has been charged with building up the congregation in what he now calls "Bushnell West" in Northville while the church property in Detroit is up for sale. When the sale is made, building will begin in Novi.

When he arrived, the church was leasing space in a Novi school building for Sunday-morning services.

But, after negotiating with the

Northville Historical Society, he has since moved the Sunday services from the school facilities to the historic Mill Race Village.

The Mill Race church bears the date of 1832, but hadn't been used as church for about 100 years, Meyers said.

Of the restored building, he said, "It sure beats giving services in a school gym."

Meyers officiates at 9 a.m. services Sunday in Mill Race Village and holds 11 a.m. duplicate services in Detroit.

"I wanted it so I went after it," Meyers said of the church building in Mill Race.

"Anything you want badly enough you can get."

The statement is part of his combination religious-philosophical outlook that made him one of the youngest senior ministers with a doctorate in the country.

BECOMING A minister was not his lifetime dream, however.

He attained a teaching certificate for English and grammar along the way to his doctorate.

And for the two years it took him to get that degree he turned house-husband. He baby sat for his son Blue while his wife, Shawn, was pursuing her bachelor's degree in art history.

The couple shared a double graduation and now have a daughter Chelsea.

As one of the new generation of ministers Meyers does not hold to the "old tradition of the minister's wife who is

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— Dr. Robin Meyers

expected to be the perfect role model, teach Sunday school and play the organ," he said.

She's happy being home as a full-time mother for now, but she's also talking about getting her master's," he said of his wife.

Meyers said he thinks of building a \$1-million church in these economic times as a challenge, but added he thrives on such challenges and the dreams of what Bushnell West will one day be.

His visions for the 14 acres of vacant land include a church building constructed along the architectural Georgian colonial lines of the original church, with eventually a nursing home, private school and day-care center.

"The church should not be a Sunday-only place. It should serve the entire community," he said.

HE CALLS his denomination "Liberal Protestant; anti-moral majority; anti-New Right thrust."

He continues, "We stand for an alternative to fundamentalism. We stress freedom of thought. We have a non-dogmatic religious approach. I am not pastor to a bunch of blind sheep."

The Congregational Church is completely autonomous.

"There is no conscription of funds," Meyers said. "We decide how to spend our own money. We are masters of our own fate. We run our own show. We are the original Libertarians."

Holistic approach

'New' medicine is old method of prevention

By Doug Mills
Special writer

By 1975, six years after establishing his practice, Dr. Leonard J. Portner had one of the largest medical practices in Oakland County. He also had high blood pressure at age 33.

"Yes, the work load contributed to my high blood pressure," said the Bloomfield Hills resident, who is founder and director of the Holistic Medical Center in Farmington Hills.

"I went to the Ann Arbor Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic during a year off with total disability. But nothing seemed to work."

Portner, who hosts "Ask The Doctor" on WXYZ radio each Saturday morning, then traveled to Israel and lived on

a kibbutz where he did the laundry of a communal village. He said he learned Arabic by talking with Bedouins. He also noticed similarities between Bedouin herbal remedies and remedies used by American Indian tribes he had studied.

"The Bedouins have a remedy for headaches called salsin, which is taken from the inner bark of a tree," he said. "Salsin is a chemical called salicylic acid, which is the basic ingredient in aspirin. In the southeast, Indians found the same chemicals in willow trees."

AFTER TRAVELING to Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, Portner, now 39, found other similarities in medical habits. Diet, exercise and relaxation seemed to be part of a common denom-



inator between many peoples, he said. Through these techniques he tried to control his blood pressure. It worked, he said.

"I thought if this works for me, then it will work with patients, but it didn't. The (office) atmosphere was not conducive to this type of practice. I had four or five nurses and a waiting room for 39 people. It was a lot like my regular practice. I asked myself — the patient's time is as valuable as mine, why herd them in a waiting room?"

By March 1979, Portner had sold his practice, but he didn't make the break as completely as he would have liked. Patients from his old practice continued to come to his new office for familiar formulas.

At his new building, Portner said his "new" preventive medicine using old cures has worked.

With an assistant, Cherry Carr-Gizzi, who holds a graduate counseling degree, Portner interviews each patient up to two hours to determine the various factors influencing his health or lack of it.

His approach, he said, is called holistic medicine and it takes into account psychological and emotional stresses as well as physical symptoms.

"Now I work longer hours, but I don't

get tired because I relax at any time," he said. "I see about eight patients a day."

WORD OF Portner's practice finally reached a member of a local radio station, and through him Portner was scheduled to appear on a scheduled show. An executive at WXYZ heard the program and booked him on the Sonya Friedman show, he said.

"During a commercial break she told me she had back problems and I applied acupuncture (applying pressure to acupuncture points). Her pain went away and we did another segment which led to another hour," he said.

Later, Portner substituted for Friedman after Michael Parker, the operations manager for WXYZ, heard the program. His own program, "Ask The Doctor," debuted in December 1980, and has since become the top-rated radio show among local listeners 35 and older.

"The body can't tell good stress from bad stress," he explained. "Being fired or being promoted are both stressful situations. I still suggest drugs and X-rays when the patient requires them. But holistic medicine is preventative medicine. It was the only medicine around until the 1880s when medicine became more institutionalized."

Portner contends that a patient should be responsible for his own health. He added that a doctor should be a teacher, guide or pathfinder, and should not take the role of a dictating parent.

"IT'S FASTER and more lucrative for me to practice medicine as I used to," he said. "I earn a sixth of what I did in conventional medicine."

His style of treatment also costs the patient less, Portner said. Courses in stress reduction were once available to anyone who had \$5,000 to \$10,000 to spend on a spa, he said. With increased popularity more methods and techniques for stress reduction were developed, and they became available through courses that cost \$300 to \$700.

In 1980, Portner launched his own course for groups of 12 people at a charge of \$100 each. He said this modified course proved so successful he began to offer it to larger groups at \$20 per person.

Portner said that holistic medicine is not a religious belief but a belief in nature and energy. It is based on the belief that the mind and body can't be treated separately, he added.

"Six out of 10 diabetics can be taken off their medicine with the proper exercise and nutritional approach," he

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— Leonard J. Portner,

M.D.

DICK KELLEY
Staff photographer

said while sipping decaffeinated herbal tea.

Portner said that most of the adult prison population in the U.S. were hyperkinetic as children and he has seen the holistic approach work well with such children.

"I took one 14-year-old off the drug Ritalin, changed his diet, and spent some time talking with him. His teachers wanted him in an institution but now he's in half special education, half regular school. Bright boy, even designed his own telescope."

ONLY ABOUT 240 physicians belong to the American Holistic Medical Association, he said. Also a member of the American Academy of Physicians, he said, "The mind and body approach is reaching more people."

To contribute to their education, he said he has developed a set of three cassette tapes with which more people can follow holistic methods.

Titled "Basic Visualization and Relaxation," "Tunnel Relaxation," and "Quick Techniques of Relaxation," the tapes are priced \$25 per tape and last 25 minutes.

Dr. Portner said he will be scheduling a stress reduction class in February. For information contact him at 31500 Northwestern Highway, or call 855-2814.

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