

Church has new home

BY DIANE HANSON
STAFF WRITER

Nestled far from the beaten path, steeply pointing heavenward, white trim and red brick crisp in the setting sun, the new North Congregational Church on 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills is the perfect Christmas-card picture of a New England church.

"They say architecture is not going to be that which gets people to church, but I believe architecture is going to open the door," admitted the Reverend Dr. Mark Jensen, pastor of North Congregational Church.

"Once people are in the door, we have to make them feel welcome. We have to make them feel that worship is meaningful, that they can grow spiritually and that there is a community for them."

That's just what Jensen has been doing for his congregations for more than 20 years. He served as a pastor in Boston for seven years before coming to North Congregational 16 years ago when the church was located at Lehigh and Northwestern Highway in Southfield.

"I was going to stay 10 (years)," Jensen said. But dedication to his flock and community involvement in the Detroit area have added to time.

Jensen's wife of 25 years, Liane, is a chemical additions registered nurse and works part-time for Eastwood at Botsford as well as serving as a health nurse in family planning.

The couple has two children. Son, Matt, 21, attends Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo and daughter, Rachel, 18, is a student at the University of Michigan.

With roots in the Detroit area since 1866, North Congregational constructed its first building around 1910 on Woodward Avenue. The Southfield church broke ground on the first Sunday in October 1954 and held their first service on the first Sunday in December 1955.

Ironically, ground was broken exactly 40 years later, on the first Sunday in October 1994, for the new Farmington Hills church while the first service at the new church was held one week earlier, the last Sunday in November, 1995.

In deciding to build in Farmington Hills, Jensen pointed out, "We looked at the churches that were already here because we simply didn't want to just duplicate. We looked at the community and make-up and it would seem that the people in the Farmington Hills - West Bloomfield area would be people who would likely be potential members of our church."

The quaint new church building was designed by the architectural firm of Merritt, McCallum and Cieslak. The Federal design is reminiscent of New England churches, complete with two stories of shuttered windows, closed porch and pilasters in the front instead of colonial-type columns. Inside, gleaming white rails grace the stairways to the surrounding balcony as well as the short stairway leading to the pulpit.

While the design and decor bode well of colonial times, the efficient catering kitchen, sliding room walls and state-of-the-art 800-pipe organ with digital capabilities are certainly indicative of the approaching twenty-first century.

Speaking of the organ from the R.A. Colby company in Tennessee, Jensen said, "It has the capability of practically playing itself."

Jensen has been attending meetings of the Farmington Ministerial Association for over a year now since his congregation was temporarily housed at the Mercy Center on Middlebelt for 14 months during the church's construction.

"The sisters of Mercy were good to us," he said.

And good things are being said about Jensen and his congregation for their community involvement. The first Sunday the congregation occupied the new church, Liane Jensen accompanied the youth group to the COTTIS center to serve a meal.

The church founded the Christian Communications Council, now The Metropolitan Council of Churches, and has long been involved in the Crop Walk and The Martin Luther King Holiday Peace Walk. Just this year, Jensen was named the recipient of the 1995 Martin Luther King Community Service Award.

"It's an honor because it says something, not just about me, but it says something about the congregation," said Jensen. "The congregation supported it. You don't do what the congregation doesn't want you to do in a Congregational church. I'm not the boss. The

congregation is the boss."

"I would like to see it filled with people who are growing spiritually and in relationship to one another and to the community," he said, "people who see that if we are going to survive on this planet, we have to be supportive of one another."

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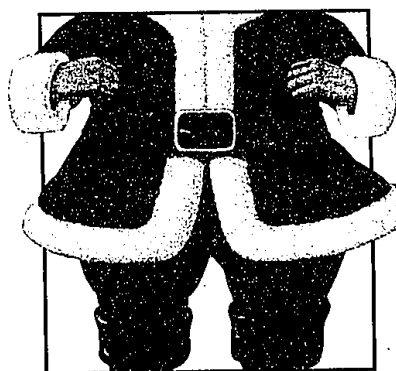
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