

Maranatha: Just say they're new in the neighborhood

By Ann Portal

This article is the first of two parts on Maranatha, a national religious group that has started a University ministry this year.

In the dining room, the metal baptismal tub with carpeted steps underscores the fact that the house no longer belongs to a fraternity.

The beer-stained shag carpet that was in the main meeting room has been removed. Sunlight shines on the house's original wood floor, on the recently installed chandeliers, on the pristine white walls. Outside the french doors, an icy pool waits for house residents — who are waiting for a \$100 swimming pool permit.

Maranatha, a nondenominational campus ministry, has been in its new home on the corner of 15th and Alder only since December, although the group has been on campus since last May.

Slowly, carefully, members of the evangelical ministry are remodeling the abused frat house, which has seen at least two fraternities come and go in the past two years because of problems that members had paying the rent.

On the other side of campus, University Dean of Students Bob Bowlin is relatively unconcerned about what the group is doing to the house. He's more interested in what Maranatha may be doing to University

students.

"I'm concerned about some things that seem to be so demanding and putting so much pressure on students that they are hurting academic performance," Bowlin says. He says he knows of at least two students affiliated with Maranatha who have had "serious academic difficulties" this year.

going to run their life. I expect them to be at everything that they can possibly be a part of, but I could get tremendously frustrated trying to chase them down and make them do what I want them to do.

"You can talk to anybody here and they'll all tell you I don't rule over them with an iron fist. If they've really had a born-again experience, they're going

The local ministry is directly connected to a nationwide Maranatha organization, which locates only on college campuses. In the last 9 years, the ministry has moved onto more than 60 campuses in the United States and abroad.

"There is some demand for your time," says Tom Visoky, a Maranatha member who graduated from the University winter term. "We have meetings three nights a week."

Some of the students involved in Maranatha are doing better at their school work than others, says pastor Buster Landwehr, who moved to Eugene with his wife Pat in September. But he says he doesn't encourage anyone to participate in the religious meetings at the expense of their studies.

"The Bible talks about submission to authority," Landwehr says. "I'm not

to want to be committed." He says he cautions students against becoming "so spiritually minded that they're no earthly good."

A former fraternity member himself, Landwehr's low-key approach and earnest commitment is attracting students to the large white house. About 16 men and women now live there and four more say they will move in next month, Landwehr says.

"I just don't let anybody move in. One guy wanted to just live here for no apparent reason," he says.

Part of the attraction may have been cheap living expenses. Each month,

house residents contribute \$150 toward the \$3,000 rent and about \$80 for food expenses. A part-time cook lives in the house; the rest of the chores are shared on a rotating basis.

The local ministry is directly connected to a nationwide Maranatha organization, which locates only on college campuses. In the last nine years, the ministry has moved onto more than 60 campuses in the United States and abroad, including Oregon State University, where a ministry began last school year. The ultimate goal, Landwehr says, is a ministry on every campus in the world.

"That's really the burden that God has placed in our heart," he says, adding that "God's definitely speeded up the work" in the past several years.

Landwehr downplays the influence of the national organization, which he says has only provided emergency funds for starting up the University ministry. However, about \$5,000 already has been spent remodeling the local Maranatha house.

"We have a lot of different ways of covering our bills," Visoky says. "We get money from the outside all the time."

The University ministry also received about half of a \$3,000 collection at a Seattle Maranatha convention, Visoky says. "The one in Seattle is really flowing in bucks — they've got two houses. People have been giving them paint, furniture, a stove. We've been living out of crock pots — we've got about six of them right now."

Actually, the crock pots were recently put away when an ancient stove was located for the house. The Landwehrs also have added refrigerators and a freezer, plastered torn-up walls and repaired cracked ceilings. "Nobody would have wanted to live here. I didn't want to live here," says Pat Landwehr.

Buster Landwehr talks optimistically about getting curtains and a big blue rug for the meeting room. "I'd like this house to be as beautiful as any house on this block," he says.

Maranatha has time to accomplish that goal. The group has signed a five-year lease with the house's owner, who would like to sell the house to Maranatha for \$500,000 at that time, Landwehr says.

The only way out of the lease is if the landlord doesn't fireproof the basement as promised, Landwehr says.

The lease is probably at least one reason why Maranatha members would like the campus to like them — and what they're doing. Landwehr and Visoky both say they have "heard the rumors" on campus that Maranatha is a "cult," and they say they want to dispel those rumors.

"Naturally when there's something new on campus and it really starts doing something they say 'hey — what's going on,'" Landwehr says.

Tomorrow: Is Maranatha a cult?



Maranatha, a nondenominational religious organization is the latest occupant of this former frat house at the corner of 15th and Alder. Its more interesting features include an indoor baptismal tub and an outdoor swimming pool.

Photo by Bob Baker

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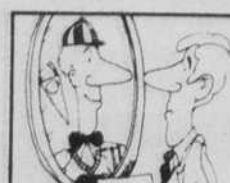
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