

Located in a small office building surrounded by trees and almost unnoticeable to passing cars and pedestrians, Metropolitan Community Church of the Gentle Shepherd seeks to continue its personalized ministry to the Vancouver community.

The congregation began 17 years ago with an evening service at Michael Servetus Universalist Unitarian Fellowship. It later moved to 13th and Jefferson before settling in at 2200 Broadway.

In those 17 years, the church has had only three senior pastors. The first, the Rev. Joyce Baxter, eventually became involved in the domestic violence movement. The second, the Rev. Teresa Nunn, "served for nearly 12 years and was responsible for a great deal of church growth and maturation," long-term member Jerry West says.

The Rev. Harriet Barshofsky, who was installed Sept. 15, previously worked as interim director of congregational life at MCC Portland from April 2000 to January 2001. Before that she was involved with ministry at MCC Long Beach in Southern California.

Barshofsky completed her formal education at University of Portland, where she received a master's degree in theology. Her clergy candidacy, a period of ministerial internship, was supervised by the Rev. Roy A. Cole, who stepped down as MCC Portland pastor in October 2001.

Barshofsky explains the difference between the two churches.

"MCC Portland is a community-based church, and MCC of the Gentle Shepherd is a family-based church. As a family-based church," she stresses, "MCC of the Gentle Shepherd is better able to meet the needs of individuals." She wants that tendency to remain a part of the Van-



PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

The Rev. Harriet Barshofsky will continue working at Oregon Health Sciences University while preaching at Metropolitan Community Church of the Gentle Shepherd

couver church's nature while she and parishioners work to build a bigger congregation.

Barshofsky serves as what is known as a "tentmaker minister." The term refers to a minister whose income is based primarily on secular work.

"Paul was a tentmaker by trade and a preacher/pastor by calling," Barshofsky says. "His subsistence was based on the money he made from tentmaking."

While performing her pastoral duties, Barshofsky will continue her full-time employment as an analyst on Oregon Health Sciences University's Institutional Review Board, the

THE TENTMAKER

Small congregation gets a new senior pastor

by Patricia L. MacAodha

regulatory body overseeing human subject research protection. "I work to promote the science and ethics of human research at OHSU," she says.

What led Barshofsky, born and raised Jewish in Brooklyn, N.Y., into a Christian denomination and, ultimately, into Christian ministry?

"My partner, Andrea, had been a member of an MCC church before we met," she says. "Through her, I learned that [Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches] was a denomination that served the lesbian community. Then, in 1990, I had a religious conversion experience in which I was led to a specific pastor of MCC Long Beach in California."

Barshofsky was drawn to preparation for the clergy by a vision she had 10 years ago. She realized the vision was a call to the professional ministry and began the long and demanding process leading to her ordination, temporary employment at MCC Portland and ultimate election to the position she now holds in Vancouver.

MCC of the Gentle Shepherd meets a need in the community. West describes it as "close-knit" but "never an isolationist church, as some smaller churches are." He says membership varies between eight and 35 people.

In order to reach out to the larger sexual

minorities community, Gentle Shepherd participates in a monthly dinner sponsored by the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Rain-tree Empire and staffs informational booths at Portland Pride and Vancouver's Saturday in the Park. The congregation is probably best known for Martha's Pantry, a food and dry goods bank for families affected by AIDS in Southwest Washington. The church also coordinates an annual Christmas basket program for the same people.

Though low-profile, Gentle Shepherd is an example of how determination and commitment can keep a small congregation active and inspirational to the community around it. Barshofsky is excited about her calling to this church, and the church is enthusiastic about her.

"When I was interviewed by the pastoral search committee, I became very impressed by the love and faith of that congregation," she says. "As the church grows...the needs will increase, and I anticipate becoming a full-time senior pastor." □

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE GENTLE SHEPHERD holds worship services 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Sundays in Suites E and F at 2200 Broadway in Vancouver, Wash. For more information call 360-695-1480, e-mail mccgs@aol.com or visit the Internet site www.mccgs.org.

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