

The Rev. Marsha Dempsey, former director of congregational life at the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, is returning to Oregon to re-establish an MCC congregation in Eugene. She was on staff at the Portland church from 1998 to 2000, leaving to pastor the MCC in Windsor, Ontario.

Dempsey hopes to hold her first Eugene service Sept. 7. Before that happens, she acknowledges a lot of hard work will need to be done.

Eugene was the site of the first MCC in Oregon, Bread of Life. Though never large, it seemed to flourish at first, later going through several incarnations and population decreases. It closed last year.

Dempsey sees the challenge of rebuilding but thinks she is up to it. "In one sense," she says, "I don't feel it will be any more of a challenge than it is to build a church from square one." She will look for "a committed core group of 10 people, then we can do almost anything."

She anticipates MCC Portland's support of the Eugene outreach. "I feel very blessed to have a good working relationship with Rev. Glenna Shepherd and the [Portland] church at large," she says.

In addition to University of Oregon and a significant queer population, Eugene is also home to the center of Oregon's timber industry. Dempsey plans to welcome participants from all segments of the population.

"I would love to have members of both communities in the church. It should open up an incredible dialogue," she says. "How much that will really happen is anyone's guess. But whether it does or doesn't, my basic approach would be the same: listen to both groups and help them to understand that they have more in common than they might think."

BORN AGAIN

Pastor returns to Oregon to revive Eugene MCC

by Patricia L. MacAodha

Dempsey's determination helped her through educational experiences in Sherman, Texas, where she received a bachelor's degree from Austin College, and a master's of divinity from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kentucky. After her 1974 ordination she pastored in seven Presbyterian churches, having to be closeted during that time.

She eventually left the denomination, affiliating with MCC in 1992. In 1997 she was credentialed as MCC clergy. "Portland," she says, "was my first opportunity to pastor within MCC."

She found it a challenge. Her work included team ministries, welcoming newcomers and building a working relationship with the senior pastor. "I had the opportunity to teach," she says, "which I found very rewarding."

Windsor, just across the border from Detroit, Mich., was a different challenge. The city "has a real love-hate thing with Detroit. It wants American money but doesn't want Americans and the problems they sometimes bring...kids coming over for underage drinking, drugs and violence. It is an old city and one with tremendous diversity."

Both Windsor and Detroit have large Mideast, Jewish and Catholic populations. "The gay community in Windsor is much larger than you would first think," she says, "but it doesn't embrace religion or spirituality."

The MCC was small, "with all the chal-

lenges most small churches have," and "seemed to fight an image problem all the time." She feels the Windsor church has not yet found its voice or where it belongs in the community.

She and her partner, Amy, are excited to be back in Oregon. Dempsey sees herself as starting out with two major tasks in Eugene: "to build a brand new organization and to convince people to leave the past in the past."

"We have to take our responsibility for what happened," she stresses. "It may not be easy and it may not be pleasant, but we have to do that or we...won't get beyond where we are."

She sees herself as having "a strong sense of pastoral identity and a very good listening ear" and credits a two-year training in hospital chaplaincy with giving her "a sense of what Christian compassion is all about." She enjoys counseling and preaching and plans to use her



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—The Rev. Marsha Dempsey

gifts in consensus building to help in the reconstruction of the Eugene church.

"I hope that in Eugene, bringing people together and helping them grow in their faith will help us to build a strong, healthy church," she says. In the new church, which will be known as MCC of the Two Rivers, "I foresee a church with different outreach ministries and opportunities for getting involved in many areas—a gathering place for people involved in professional ministry who want to learn more about what it means to minister to the gay and lesbian community."

She looks forward to being a bridge builder in Eugene, creating connections that will "bring people together and help them work toward a common goal." □

For more information about METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE TWO RIVERS visit www.mcc2rivers.com.

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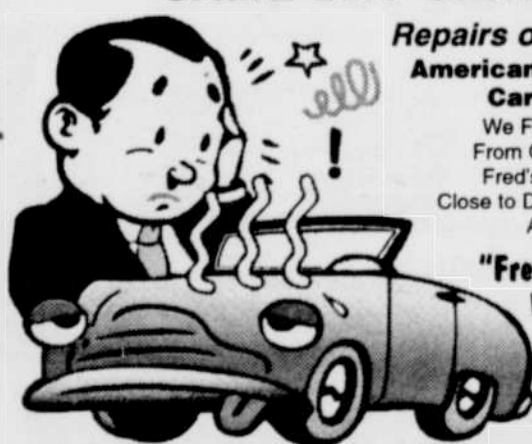
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