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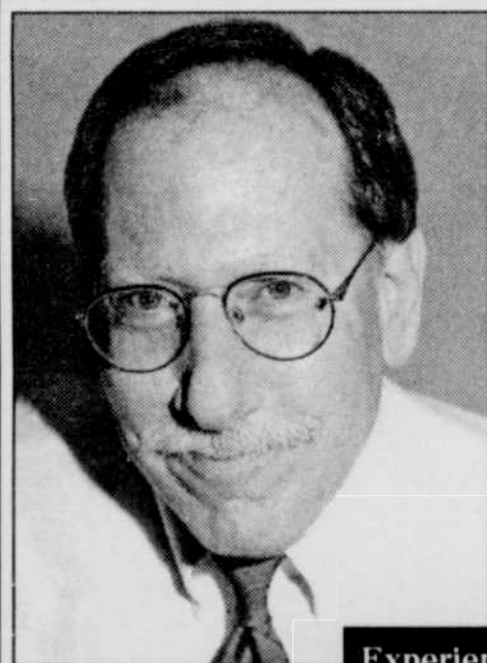
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NORTHWEST news

PAYING FOR PRAYING

MCC Portland seeks donations to retire its mortgage

by Patricia L. MacAodha

In the past several years, Metropolitan Community Church of Portland has made a lot of changes: pastors, a paint job, a new roof and significant remodeling.

What hasn't changed is the commitment of the church on Northeast 24th and Broadway to Portland queers. In any given week, the building plays host to several artistic and creative groups, two trans organizations, 16 12-step programs and the church's two choirs. This doesn't even count the number of community groups that have held meetings and workshops and given performances there.

"We have remodeled the building several times for additional office space," says Dave Dishman, MCC Portland board of directors co-vice moderator. "Several years ago we remodeled the sanctuary and added a ramp up to the altar. This, for the first time, made the altar accessible to all. We also have an...elevator for accessibility to the second floor."

The church, which can comfortably seat about 250 people, has played host to three Northwest District Conferences, one MCC Leadership Conference and, according to Dishman, "numerous community meetings, concerts, talks, etc. The church was the first home of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus," he adds, "and the first concert was held in the sanctuary."

MCC Portland's pastor, the Rev. Glenna Shepherd, puts in at least 12 office hours a week, and the church has an office for the new pastor of Two Rivers MCC in Eugene, an outreach of the Portland congregation. In addition, the church has a part-time parish nurse available to deal with regular health issues.

The building, purchased in 1979, required a large mortgage that was paid off in 1993. A gala celebration accompanied burning that mortgage, but just five years later, a new mortgage had to be taken out for significant repairs, especially the roof and the top of the church.

Shepherd hopes to see the \$40,000 mortgage paid off as soon as possible. If the church garners enough donations to accomplish this, ministry programs could access the \$900 monthly amount now designated for that payment. This has never been done in the congregation's history.

Shepherd has a long list of services that, given adequate funds, she would like to see come out of MCC Portland. The most vital, she feels, are in health and wellness, "working with our parish nurse to offer education, screenings and health-related events to our congregation and larger community." She wants to emphasize spiritual development through "quality educational classes and events" and to restructure the Esther's Pantry program, which provides food and personal care items to low-income people with AIDS, by making it more accessible and user-friendly. Other goals include children's ministries, liturgical arts (music, art and drama for worship and entertainment) and social action.



The building that is home to Metropolitan Community Church of Portland has a rich history, including a cornerstone laid by President Howard Taft in the early 1900s (inset)



An interesting succession of denominations has called this building home, including Unitarians and a spiritualist congregation. It has two cornerstones, both placed on the northwest side of the structure. The first was laid in the early 1900s by President Howard Taft, making MCC Portland, according to Shepherd, the only church in the United States to have its cornerstone laid by a sitting president.

In 1993, MCC added its own cornerstone. "We purchased it and had it inscribed with our name," says Dishman, an active church member for 25 years. "It was a very emotional moment when the cornerstone was brought down the aisle...and presented to the congregation."

The denomination's founder, the Rev. Troy D. Perry, later dedicated it. Shepherd hopes, in time, to have MCC Portland's building added to the rolls of the U.S. Historic Register, but other important fixes must be made first. The most significant of these is to pay off the current mortgage.

Last fall Dishman came up with a fund-raising campaign, "Debt Free in '03 at MCC-P," which the church's board enthusiastically accepted. Through it, he hopes both church and community members will make tax-deductible donations toward the payoff of the mortgage.

The campaign was announced at a congregational meeting Oct. 26 and has been drawing positive attention. Donations amounting to \$8,000 have been made, and the annual Harvest Dinner and Auction brought in \$4,500. Additional donations for the debt retirement will guarantee the availability of this historical structure for many more years as a community resource and center. **J**

Send tax-deductible contributions to METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF PORTLAND, 2400 N.E. Broadway Portland, OR 97232. Donors should designate on the check that it is for the mortgage retirement.

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