

# Saint Matthias now offers weekly Sunday services

By **Annette McGee Rasch**  
*IVN Senior Contributing Writer*

Cave Junction's Saint Matthias Episcopal Church has a new spiritual leader in Father Bryant Bechtold, a longtime Episcopalian priest.

Bechtold and his wife Susan were looking for a new place to live. Seeking a location with proximity to the coast, they found a home they liked in Cave Junction's Cedarbrook gated community.

"We really have a preference for smaller rural towns," Bechtold said. "After we moved in, we learned that Saint Matthias didn't have a fulltime resident priest. So I notified the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon, Michael Hanley, to let him know I had retired in Cave Junction and asked if I could be of some service at Saint Matthias."

Hanley responded by licensing Bechtold as "priest in charge." Before Bechtold arrived, the Valley's Episcopal church had gone a longtime without a resident priest. Retired priest Jim Boston drove to the Valley from Grants Pass once a month to hold services.

"Father Boston said I was an answer to his prayers," Bechtold said. "We have a very small congregation, and part of that may be due to having gone so long without a residence priest. When there is only one service a month there isn't much continuity or opportunity for church growth."

Now Bechtold has instituted regular weekly Sunday services, held at 10:30 a.m. There is a little sign just outside the small wooden church located on land that dips down into a hollow, just north of True Value Hardware on Redwood Highway.

"We certainly welcome anyone who is not already affiliated with another church to come and join us," Bechtold said.

Episcopalian faith, in many respects, resembles the Roman Catholic church, but also bears some similarity to the Protestant Church, Bechtold said.

"I like to say that the Episcopalian Church makes a good bridge between the two," Bechtold said. "Our church is part of the Anglican Communion, and our mother church is the Church of England."

"All churches have their own way of living out their faith," Bechtold explained. "For Episcopalians, we try very hard to live in what we call the 'baptismal covenant' which we enter into when

we're baptized. Living the covenant means regular attendance at worship, studying the scriptures and serving the Lord anyway we can. We try to respect the dignity and worth of every human being no matter who they are or what their circumstances are."

"I think as Episcopalians, we're very incarnational in our thinking," Bechtold said. "In other words, when people look at us we want them to be able to see the face of Christ in us."

Bechtold added how this is one key reason why Saint Matthias, for many years, has offered a "harvest kitchen" that offers meals to homeless or disadvantaged people.

"I know some don't always approve of helping some of these disadvantaged people, perhaps believing they got into their circumstances due to poor choices and should not be enabled, but we help many people who have lost their jobs or homes at no fault of their own, and also, low income people who can barely afford to buy food, and others who are dealing with serious physical handicaps. We don't judge anyone; but we do like to give them a hand."

The Harvest Kitchen is open from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and serves hearty nutritious meals.

One goal Bechtold plans to pursue is the possibility of networking with the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Bechtold explained how the Episcopalian and Lutheran churches entered into a "concordant of agreement" which allows the two denominations to exchange pastors and priests.

"Essentially what the agreement has done is to bring the two churches closer together," Bechtold said. "And I would like to explore doing some mutual ministry's with the local Lutheran church. I intend to make contact soon."

Bechtold, originally from Florida, spent many years serving in churches all over the Southeast-

ern United States. He met Susan, originally from England, in Utah, 27 years ago. They have three adult children living in Fort Worth, Texas, one in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and another in Alachua, Florida. They also have 15 grandchildren.

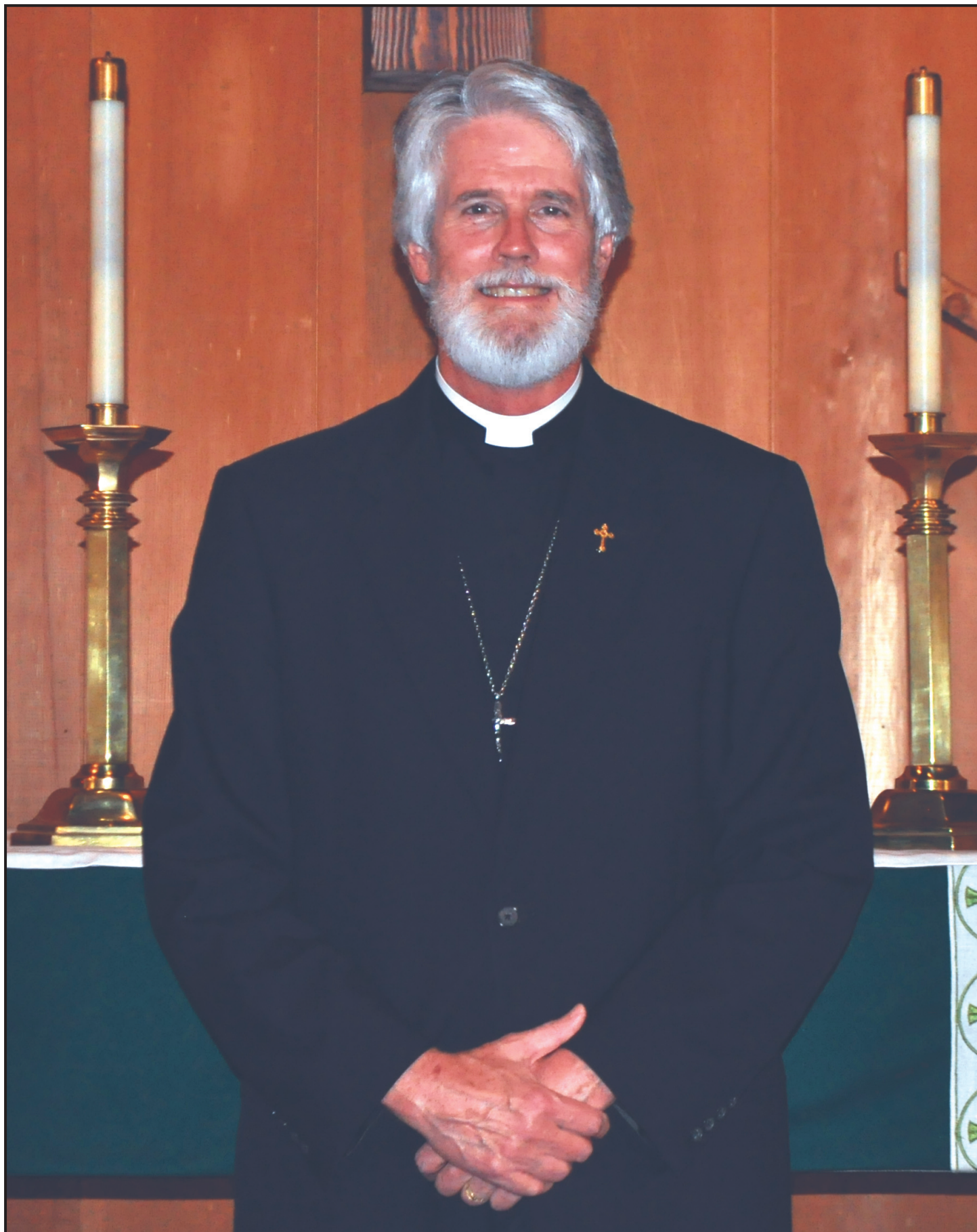
Most recently the Bechtolds spent seven years in England, serving the Wainfleet group of parishes, which consists of four churches. Bechtold had "pastor oversight" at these churches located in England's central midlands, just a few miles

from the coast on the North Sea, in the county of Lincolnshire.

"Now, we're so delighted to be part of this community," Bechtold said. "One thing we have really noticed about Cave Junction is that everyone seems to be very friendly. Another reason we moved here is because my wife and I love to hike and there are so many opportunities on the area. But mostly, we're looking forward to being able to serve the community any way we can."

"It is important that we live in

accordance to our faith and that we practice what we preach the other six days of the week," Bechtold said. "Because if we have no authenticity then people are not going to listen to us or believe what we say. We have to let people know that Christ has changed our lives - that he does make a difference in our lives. People have to be able to see concrete examples of that."



Father Bryant Bechtold at the altar of St. Matthais in Cave Junction.

(Photo by Annette McGee Rasch, Illinois Valley News)

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