



The congregation at the Pendleton United Methodist Church circles up to sing "Bind Us Together" at the end of a Sunday service. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Beautiful albatross

Congregation opts to sell crumbling Pendleton church

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

For sale: beautiful 111-year-old church with stained glass windows, quarried stone and pipe organ: \$410,000.

The Pendleton First United Methodist Church, despite its elegant grandeur, has become a money pit for its small, close-knit congregation. Church members recently voted to sell their house of worship, but not without plenty of reflection and agonizing.

"This building is old and we have tried to keep it up, but it's consuming our resources," said Wanda Remington, president of the church's administrative council. "We think our resources could be used better in other places than trying to rehab a 100-year-old building."

She paused.

"It was an extremely difficult decision to make," Remington said. "But we

realized this church is an albatross. It's a beautiful albatross, don't get me wrong, but it's still an albatross."

The church, located at 352 S.E. Second St., shows evidence of water damage, black mold, asbestos, cracking and peeling, crumbling mortar and deferred maintenance.

Jim Pierce, the veterinarian-turned-preacher who leads this tiny band of believers, arrived

from Tennessee in July 2014. He leads about 35 people in worship each Sunday in a space that could hold 300.

Last Sunday, about 20 people stood in the glow of two huge stained glass windows and sang as Judy Jenner played the church's floor-to-ceiling pipe organ with gusto. The organ wrapped the worshippers in rich reverberations.

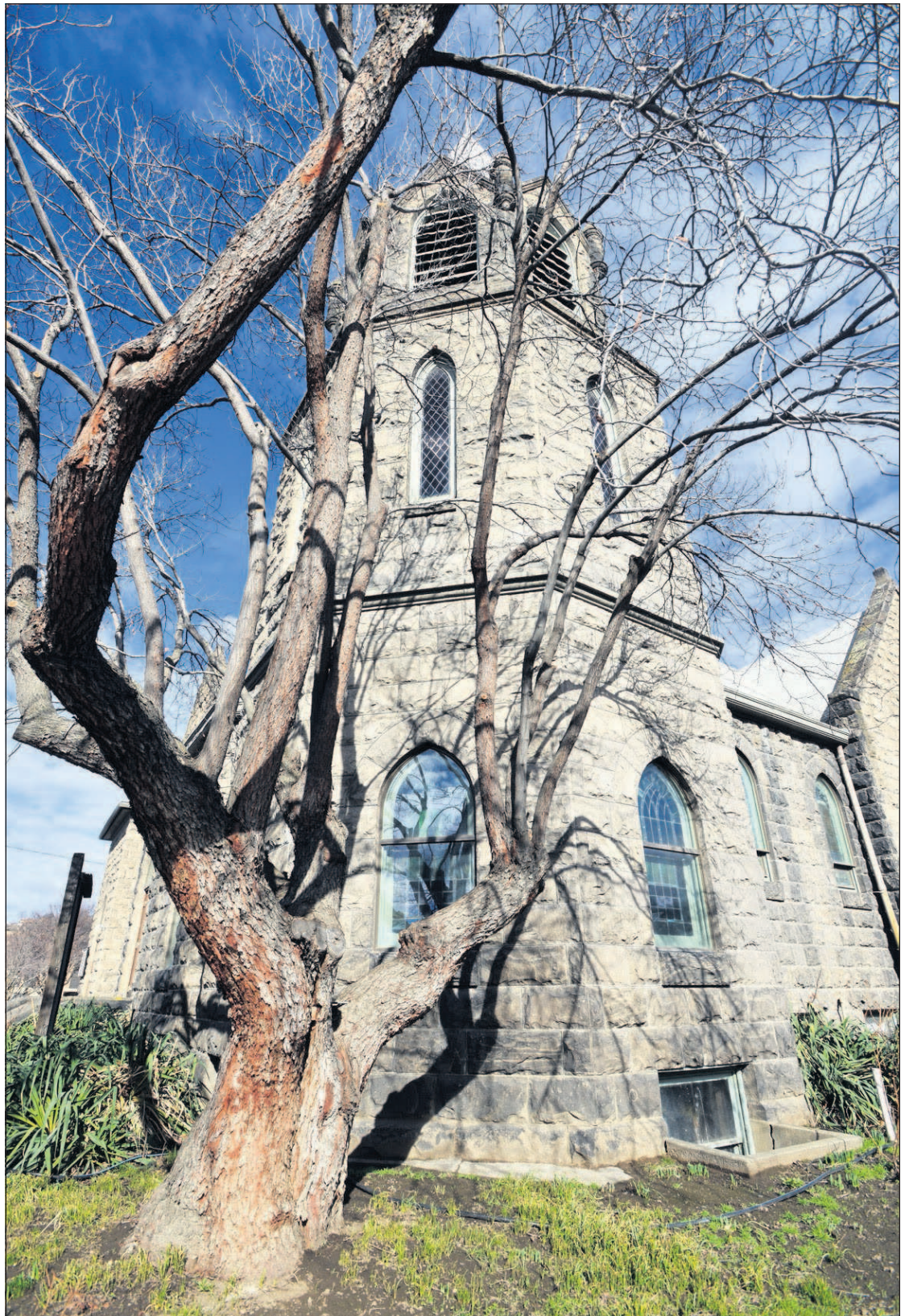
Pierce took the microphone and addressed his flock about the joys and difficulties of going home for the holidays. He ended with a statement that had double meaning, considering the impending move from the stone church that has sheltered them for decades.

"Home is anywhere we meet God face to face," he said. "You are God's people. We are all God's people. We're getting ready to come home."

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"We do a lot of laughing, but behind the laughing is a lot of emotion."

— Virginia Conrad, member of the Pendleton United Methodist Church



Members of the Pendleton United Methodist Church recently voted to sell the 111-year-old building located at 352 S.E. Second Street. EO file photo