

3 Breeds But Same Old Church

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If walls had eyes and ears, the old sanctuary would be mighty confused by now.

For 48 years, it served as a house of worship for Associate Reformed Presbyterians. There was a hassle in it, then it seated the same people but they called themselves (Southern) U.S. Presbyterians.

For about eight years now, it's seen and heard little more than the patter and chatter of young scouts.

But beginning Sunday, the 62-year-old sanctuary will house another breed—United Methodists.

Through a sort of "gentlemen's agreement," St. Stephen United Methodist Church for the next two to three years will worship in the old sanctuary of Sardis Presbyterian Church.

St. Stephen Church, organized last September, had been meeting at Lansdowne Elementary School. But growth has been rapid, and there simply wasn't enough space for the 162-member congregation.

Besides that, it was "too expensive," said the minister, Rev. James M. Armstrong, for a new church that was purchasing property and trying to put something away for future building.

At nearby Sardis Church where a new sanctuary was built in 1960, the old church was standing vacant except for once-a-week meetings there of the Scout troop.

"We decided it would be a good way to make use of a building that still had some use left," said Sardis associate minister, Rev. Frank Mayes.

Through a more-or-less informal agreement, St. Stephen will rent the church building (which has nine classrooms in addition to the sanctuary) from Sardis Church for \$50 a month.

From the rent, Sardis Church will pay the electrical and water bills, but St. Stephen Church will be responsible for the upkeep of the building.

The two sanctuaries are connected by a covered walkway, but there's an education wing on the new Sardis Church which separates them, so the ministers don't

expect Presbyterian hymns to interfere with Methodist hymns on Sunday mornings.

There's plenty of parking space behind the Sardis Church which St. Stephen congregants will use.

Presently, both churches plan to continue holding worship services at the same time—11 a.m. However, they say that if traffic congestion before and after the services becomes a problem, St. Stephen probably will move its morning service up about 30 minutes.

The congregations anticipate no problems living side by side for two or so years.

(St. Stephen is buying 11 acres on Sardis Road but does not expect to have a building there for almost three years.)

"There was a need for another program here," Mayes said. "We'll work side-by-side but not in competition with each other."

Armstrong agreed.

"There's more ecumenism in our working together than if we tried to have one church. Here is a community that needs The Church."

With deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks to Sardis Presbyterian Church for their offer of the old Sardis Presbyterian Church building, St. Stephen United Methodist Church moved in and held their first Church worship on March 2, 1969. Each member of St. Stephen has generously given their time and talents to restoring and repairing the building for use and worship.