

Growing Faith



Above, Jack Steenbergh, senior pastor of Traverse City's Bayview Wesleyan Church. Left, Bayview Wesleyan is adding an 18,000 square-foot expansion to its building. Below, an exterior view of their construction site.

On the cover: Interior of construction work at Traverse City's Grace Episcopal Church. Photo by Lara Neel.

Photos by Lara Neel

Traverse area churches expand, merge for the future

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Special to the Record-Eagle

While some recent statistics have suggested that numbers for traditional denominational churches across America are shrinking, the opposite seem to be true in the Grand Traverse region. The evidence comes in the form of expansion, mergers, construction projects and goals identified for the future, all done for the purpose of accommodating growth.

In Traverse City, Bayview Wesleyan Church, Grace Episcopal Church and Traverse Bay United Methodist Church have all been in the process of completing major building or reorganization projects in order to more effectively serve their members, and even the community at large. In all three cases, the external changes have been visible to the public, and the internal ones are being achieved thanks to the planning, labor and financial support of

parishioners.

Jack Steenbergh, senior pastor of Bayview Wesleyan Church (located near the intersection of Division Street and Grandview Parkway), says that planning for their reconstruction project began in 1998 and will culminate with a July 10 dedication of the new facilities.

"We are anticipating a growth in membership and in the strength of our congregation to reach out with the message of faith in Jesus Christ," said Steenbergh, who has been at Bayview for the past seven years. "Our goals also include providing a place to strengthen families through our new Bayview Family Life Center, and to reach out to the community to meet their needs. We're located on the bay, so we see ourselves as a light to reach across it."

Bayview's original sanctuary, built in 1950, was torn down last August, with groundbreaking in October, and construction beginning in January. The new structure will have room for a two-level Sunday School class, an educational wing, 14 classrooms, two large nurseries, a kitchen and a combination fellowship hall and gym that will be the Family life Center. All facili-

ties will now provide barrier-free accessibility, and new heating and electrical systems. The entire project will cost approximately \$1.5 million.

"We looked into the options for expanding or relocating, and a survey of the congregation said that they absolutely supported staying where we were and growing to meet future needs," Steenbergh

said. "There have been a lot of management issues to deal with as we've torn down the spaces we were in and still kept going, but the congregation has been very excited about how God has led us in this process and raised our vision. It's been a real demonstration of faith in action, time and resources."

Because of its close-to-town location at Boardman

and Washington, the construction and changes taking place at Grace Episcopal Church has been quite visible. Led by Rev. D. Edward Emenheiser, Grace was founded in 1867, and one of the first four congregations in Traverse City. In 1947, the entire church was redesigned and renovated, though the original chapel existed until last year. Today, the church includes well over

