

400 members with an average Sunday attendance of nearly 200.

“Grace has always seen itself as an outreach -oriented church,” said Steve Wade, Grace’s lay ministry coordinator. “Throughout our history, the people of Grace have sought ways to respond to the needs of the community and continue to look for and respond to what is unmet. As part of our construction, we are working with several community agencies to establish a the Jubilee Center, a drop-in-center for the homeless.”

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**Pastor Jeremy Williams,
Traverse Bay United
Methodist Church**

ning and construction.”

The challenges for Pastor Jeremy Williams have been a bit different. Williams helped oversee the Jan. 1, 2005 merger of two area churches, Asbury United Methodist and Emmanuel United Methodist, into one, the new Traverse Bay United Methodist. The congregation of more than 400 meets for worship at the former Asbury site at the corner of Bay and Ramsdell in Traverse City, with the former Emmanuel building used now for youth ministry and rentals for other churches and events.

“Most big changes are worth doing,” said Williams, who has been with the church for the past three years, succeeding retiring Pastor Doug Pedersen. “We had to think long-term and make sure that over the next five years, we had real answers to our real building and ministry needs. To increase our worship level to over 300 on Sundays, we had to break through our own glass ceiling and make our leadership work as effectively as possible so we could strengthen our organization.”

Williams says that the merger process grew out of evolving talks with both congre-



The Traverse City Grace Episcopal Church expansion will offer seating for over 300 people and includes wheelchair accessibility. Below right, Pete Whyte saws a bead board.

When completed, Grace’s nearly \$2 million reconstruction project will have much to show for the effort. The new sanctuary will seat 301 people; a house adjacent to the church will serve as an outreach and youth ministry center; the Jubilee Center will provide significant meeting and ministry space; and barrier free and hearing impaired needs have been addressed.

“It is our hope that the church will look different but will feel the same,” Wade said. “As a people of God, the single greatest challenge has been trying to discern God’s will for Grace Church. It is not a simple matter of ‘to build or not’ but what is God calling us to do, how can we do this and how to be good stewards of the gifts He has given us. We have taken the question of God’s will seriously therefore, we’ve moved carefully, but deliberately through each phase of plan-



gations that led to a task force committee made up of leaders from the two groups. “We started with some open-ended people willing to see the vision and keep a focus, and dealt with the issues of change and possible identity loss by giving people an opportunity to speak and be heard,” he said. “By the time it came to a vote, there had been so many conversations, that there was no crisis, just an

overwhelming positive response to growth. It’s been a good learning experience for me. There were a lot of issues going on, and in the end, we went about it in the least disruptive way by keeping both buildings and never losing sight of our first mission, which is to do more ministry for Christ.”

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

