

MORMON CONGREGATIONS ENJOY NEW HOME IN PINES SHARED FACILITY MEETS NEEDS OF GROWING AREA

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Two Mormon congregations in western Broward County are celebrating and enjoying a new building that houses their worship, youth and fellowship activities and educational classes.

The new facility at 18550 Johnson Street in Pembroke Pines currently houses two wards (congregations), one serving Weston and the other serving Pembroke Pines and Davie. The building was designed to hold three wards. "There will be another ward in this building eventually," said Bishop John Rex of Weston who serves the Pembroke Pines ward. "There is a lot of growth in western Broward County."

"Our members are supposed to attend a ward in their geographical area," explained Bishop Jack Christenson of Weston who pastors the Weston group. Christenson said that it is a common practice for one building to house more than one ward.

"Members are asked to serve in their ward," Rex said. "All of our members are assigned to service in their area, thus it is important that they attend where they abide."

The shared use of a facility seldom creates a conflict and is more cost-efficient according to George Holden of Cooper City who is the Stake President. A Stake is a geographical grouping of wards involving ten units or up to 4,000 members. Each ward has its own staff, including secretarial, and operates independently of the others in the same building. On occasions the wards will worship together.

"I have never had to mediate between the two groups during my tenure at President," said Holden. "The congregations play by the spirit of things."

"None of our Bishops or leaders are paid a salary to work for the church," Rex said. Rex is the Finance Director for a Fortune 500 company, Holden works for an international business and Christenson is a Neonatologist.

The two congregations began meeting at the modern facility on October 27. The Pembroke Pines ward begins a three hour program of worship and study at 9 a.m. and the Weston group starts at 11 a.m. each Sunday.

"The meeting area seats 254 people," said Sister Aubrey Vance, a missionary from Houston, Texas, who is working for 18 months as one of 60 missionaries in the Stake. "We also have an overflow area that can seat 200 more."

One room of the new facility is dedicated to the church's "Relief Society," a women's group that meets regularly for fellowship, education and service projects. "They learn homemaking and cooking skills and parenting methods," Vance said. "Recently they made 200 bibs for Easter Seals."

“We stress food storage in order to prepare for an emergency,” explained Vance. “Every family is supposed to have a 72-hour kit that will help them out in case of a disaster or if some other emergency occurs.”

Members of the two wards said that they are pleased with the new building. “I drive further to attend than I did before the building was opened,” explained Karen Workman of Weston. “By attending our geographical ward, we can send out teams to visit members and the Bishop can help them with home visitation.”

Workman said that all wards follow the same format of worship and teaching which makes the church consistent around the world. “Our young people attend seminary (classes) in the ward and will be able to study the same thing wherever they go,” she explained.

“It is very important that the church is the same in every place,” said Rex who said that he has moved 37 times. “From Rochester, New York, to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to Guadalajara, Mexico to south Florida, I have felt at home in each place. We are all taught the same thing about what we believe.”

Rex said that in each location he has lived, “I have not had to figure out the system. They are all from the same template.” Rex said that each church has “the same feel, the same spirit.”

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ adapts to the culture and the culture adapts to Jesus Christ,” he said.

That similarity extends to the architecture of Mormon buildings, including the new one in Pembroke Pines. “The church provides six standard plans, and the local congregations select the one that fits their needs,” Rex said. “We chose the property ten years ago. We weren’t ready to build then, but we bought it in advance.”

Rex said that the new building took about a year to build and was adapted to fit south Florida’s tropical setting.

Construction was carried out by a team of traveling church members who move around the country building new Mormon churches. By using these teams, a church saves money and because of the similarity of many Mormon buildings, they have experience using the same architectural designs.

For Mormon believers in western Broward County, a new, comfortable building is helping them to worship with the same “feel and spirit” that they have come to know in other locations.

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