

Bigger Episcopal church to rise on Aptos meadow

Fast-growing Church of St. John the Baptist to move from Depot Hill at cost of \$7 million

Churches 2000

By TOM RAGAN
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APTOS — It's just an open field right now with scattered patches of dirt and tall grass.

But within a year, the 2.5 acres just west of State Park Drive and Highway 1 will house a new Episcopal church — the result of dedication, determination, an immeasur-

able amount of faith and a bit of money.

On Sunday, dozens of members of the fast-growing Church of St. John the Baptist held a groundbreaking where their \$7 million, 5,000-square-foot church will be built on Canterbury Road — not too far from the Snow White Drive Inn.

The Right Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves, bishop of the Diocese of



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St. John's parishioners gather at the future site of their church Sunday in Seacliff.

El Camino Real, made a special appearance from San Jose to bless the parcel, where a construction crew is set to start digging the church's foundation this week.

"O God of all creation, you make all things new," Gray-Reeves told the small congregation, some

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of whom wore symbolic yellow construction hats. "The heavens cannot contain you, yet you are pleased to dwell in the midst of your people, and have moved us to set apart a place on which to build a house of prayer."

The present church, built in the late 1800s, isn't too far away. It's on Oakland Avenue in Capitola, in a quaint hilltop home where the church was built long before many of the nearby houses appeared on Depot Hill.

In the past two decades, however, worshippers have found themselves increasingly pressed for space as the church's size has grown — from dozens of families to more than 150.

Not only will the new church have 90 parking spots and much more space, but it will eventually have a basketball court, an outdoor stage, a youth center, a clergy office, a main office, several storage rooms and a garden.

"We don't worship like they used to — when they came here in horse and buggy back in the 1800s," said Anne Baker, who's excited about

the new church and chairs up the building committee. "In a lot of ways, it's going to be like we're moving from an apartment to a house. We're going to finally have a yard."

Some members say the departure from the beautiful surroundings of Depot Hill will be bittersweet. But parishioner Karen Greenleaf pointed out that it doesn't really matter where the church is located. At least it shouldn't matter.

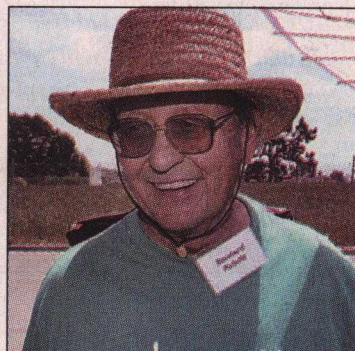
"The church isn't just about a building," she said. "The church is about the congregation and its people. That's what defines a church, in its truest spirit."

The process to build the new church began as far back as 1992, when the church bought the 2.5 acres for \$880,000.

But like anything else, the construction of a church this size takes time and planning, said Rowland Rebele.

He said the church members themselves are footing about \$3 million of the project — Rebele himself is donating \$1 million — thanks to the generosity of more than 100 members who have said they will make five-year pledges.

Wells Fargo Bank is loaning the church \$2.3 million.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Rowland Rebele gave \$1 million toward the building of the new St. John's.

The rest has come from private donations and from the proceeds of the sale of the current church property. The church sold the property, which was actually three parcels, for \$2.8 million a little over a year ago, and walked away with about \$1.9 million.

Steve Ellis, the church's pastor, said it has taken a while to get the new church off the ground, "but by God's grace we've come to the place where yellow machines are going to start moving dirt."

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