

Church - 1990

THE CHURCH OF SPIRITUAL THERAPY

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From its beginnings nine years ago, Coastlands church has grown to a congregation of more than 900

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THEIR PASTOR is a poet. Their first church service was a New Year's Eve party.

But what seems at first hearing to be some weird, New Age, yuppie religious movement, is actually one of the fastest growing mainstream churches in the county.

Over the past nine years, it has expanded from a congregation of 12 to a parish of more than 900.

It trains missionaries and ministers and has spirited programs for children.

Its congregation is mostly young

people in their mid-20s to mid-40s, and rock music sets the tone for services.

The church's message is that there is healing for all of those who have been crippled by life's travails; that the world is full of wounded people.

"Jesus has nothing to say to you if you're fine," said the church's pastor, Daniel Brown.

THE COASTLANDS sits on 14 acres of woods and rolling ground right next to Highway 1 in Seacliff.

It is a beautiful spot with tall trees lining a black asphalt road and an amphitheater that looks out

over the ocean.

Its buildings were once home to an order of cloistered nuns who walked its halls in silence and prayer.

Now, the nuns' bedrooms are filled with office equipment and workers laboring to get out the message of God.

"We came here two years ago Palm Sunday," said Brown, whose office looks out over the bay.

Before that, the congregation had led a nomadic existence, holding services in gyms and classrooms, and hauling church equipment around in a trailer.

But quickly it outgrew each venue and eventually, the church was able to get a seven-year lease on the old Poor Clares convent.

Weeks of work by hundreds of volunteers turned the convent from a warren of tiny rooms and green hallways into bright offices and classrooms for children.

The church's stiff wooden pews were replaced by purple chairs and



'We're not afraid to give you a bad diagnosis, but the prognosis is always good,' says Pastor Daniel Brown of Coastlands church in Seacliff.



Dan Covro/Sentinel photos

The congregation at Coastlands is mostly young, and it's not unusual to hear rock music at the Sunday service.

volunteers turned the convent from a warren of tiny rooms and green hallways into bright offices and classrooms for children.

The church's stiff wooden pews were replaced by purple chairs and its green walls painted white.

Brown said getting a rundown church was a dream of his.

"It makes a statement for what God loves to do in people's lives," said Brown. "He says I can beautify you and remake you in my image."

BBROWN is a charismatic man with a quick smile and a penchant for using metaphors about football and car repair shops when he talks.

His voice is warm, and he wears a casual khaki shirt and wire rimmed glasses that make him look more like a college professor than a pastor.

Which is not strange, since that is what he did before he started his church.

With a doctorate in education and a master's degree in literature, he taught literature courses in college for years. He still likes to write poetry.

"But ultimately I decided I loved the Bible more than novels and one thing led to another," said Brown.

Soon, he was preaching with the Rev. Jack Hayford at the Church on the Way in Los Angeles.

But, said Brown, he believed there was a niche to fill in Santa Cruz and he moved up here with a dozen believers.

Their first service, he likes to say, was a New Year's Eve party at his house.

The Coastlands is part of the Foursquare Gospel Church and its

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name, said Brown, comes from a Hebrew word that means a desirable spot.

Its message is a simple one: that all of us were wounded or crippled, but God offers healing.

Its philosophy is centered in repentance and forgiveness.

"Most people have hidden lives behind that Ozzie and Harriet mask, and we'd better address that stuff," said Brown.

"We're like a car repair place and if you're fine, you'd better back out as fast as you can, 'cause we are going to get you scratched or greasy."

He believes that in a world of abuse, abandonment and neglect, "we have become a nation of victims."

But most therapy, he said, leaves off there.

His church offers healing in acknowledgement of sin, repentance and prayer.

"We're not afraid to give you a bad diagnosis," said Brown with a smile, "but the prognosis is always good."

If it sounds a bit like the recovery movement, that's because there is a seed of it in the church.

Brown says that for a church to ignore cultural and social needs of its members is dangerous.

Under the church structure, the congregation is divided into Inter-

congregation Units, or ICUs, of six to a dozen people.

Each group is like a small family, which helps members with everything from babysitting to prayer.

Basing their beliefs on a biblical order to confess your sins to one another, members of the ICUs also bare their souls to each other, then get prayer and support in return.

"We have three or four men who meet for breakfast, and we put it all out on the table," said Dave Mann, a local Realtor and early member of the church.

"It makes you accountable and relieves all this stress. It lifts the weight from your shoulders."

Other church members agree.

Acknowledging their sin brought healing.

Even Brown talks about his shortcomings.

"We question each other not out of judgment, but out of compassion," said Brown.

"Jesus is the great physicians"

This kind of approach is "is not in contrast to the entire Christian motif," said Professor Gary Lease, of UC Santa Cruz's History of Consciousness program.

"The whole goal of Christianity is to heal a very sick being."

Public confessions also are not new. In Catholic seminaries, acolytes make public confessions. In a faction that has split off from the Church of Christ, public confession

is a major part of church philosophy. The Mormon church does it.

This more modern, recovery-oriented approach is becoming popular. Several similar churches in San Jose have rapidly growing congregations, said Brent Walters, a Biblical historian.

The Coastlands' appeal shows in the rapid growth of the congregation and the enthusiasm of its members.

"I think a lot of people today are really looking for answers; answers about how they can be fulfilled in this life," said John Childs, a church member. "They want to find out how to deal with questions they don't have answers for."