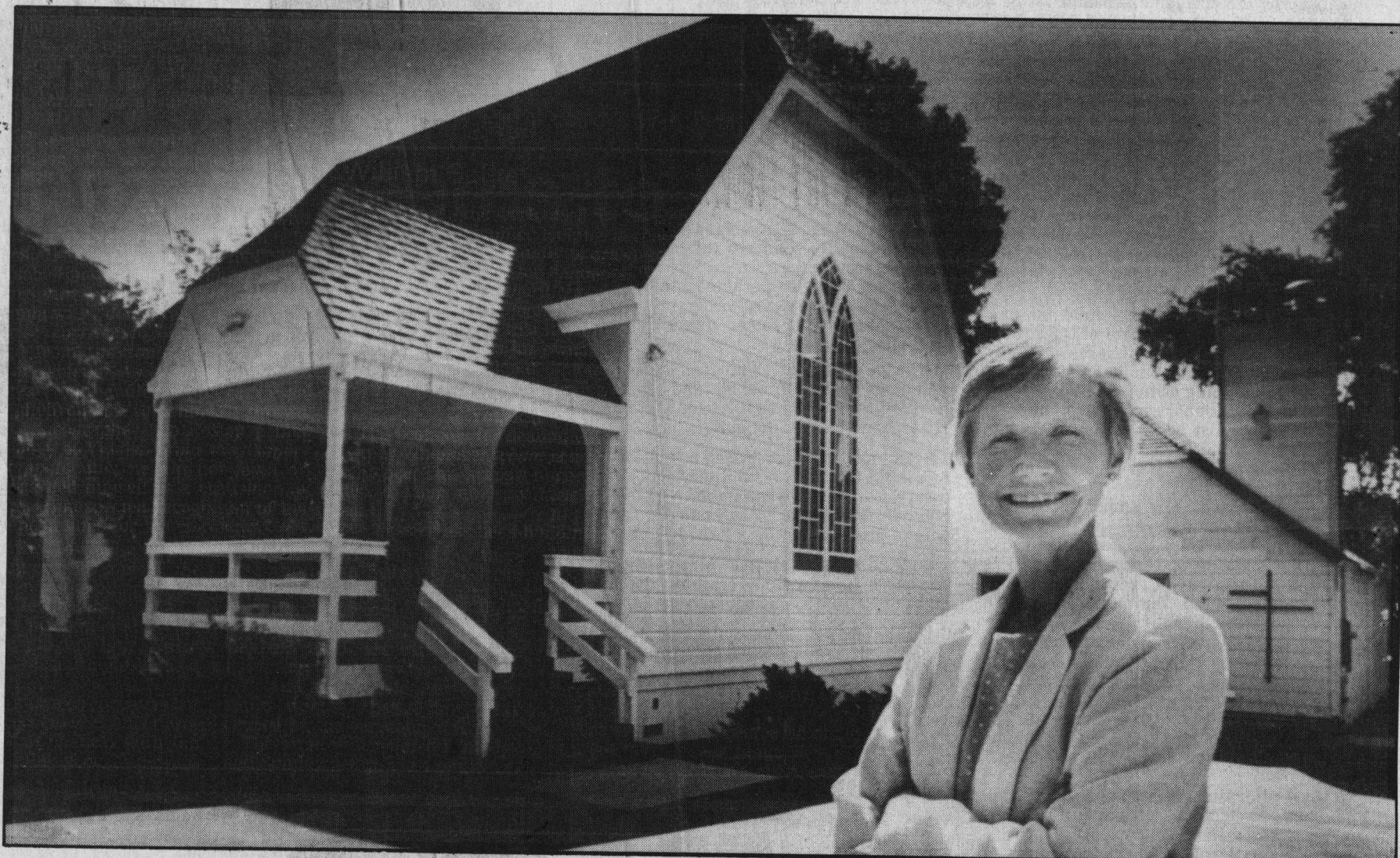


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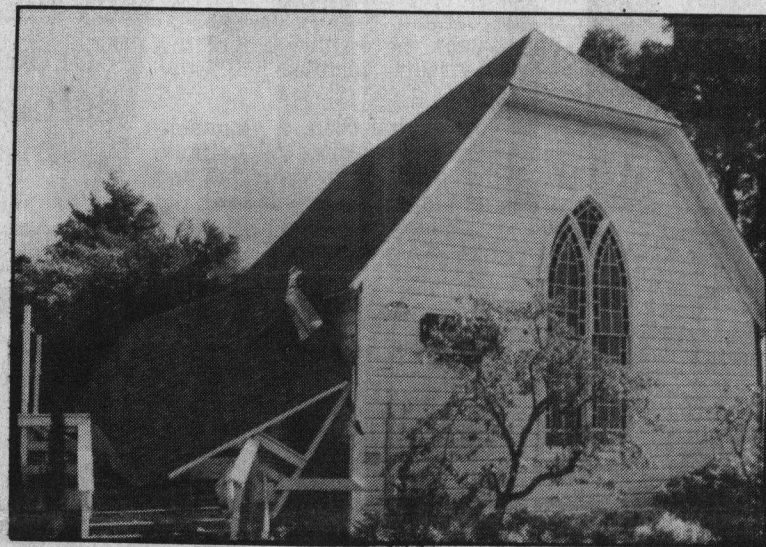


In her first week as interim pastor at a new church, the Rev. Jo Siders learned the meaning of charity.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A church is shaken to its foundation

16-13-90



Patricia Burrow

The force of the earthquake tore the quaint clapboard church off its foundation.

By ROBERT MITTENDORF
Sentinel staff writer

WHEN THE MEMBERS of Skyland Community United Church of Christ meet for worship Sunday, they will hear a sermon titled "How Firm a Foundation."

Sermons such as these address the core of a congregation's faith; they're a minister's stock-in-trade. But for Skyland, a 150-member congregation near the summit of the Santa Cruz Mountains, that message has special significance.

Last October's 7.1-magnitude temblor jerked the quaint one-story clapboard building off its foundation, causing \$200,000 damage. Repairs were finished in September, thanks to loans, grants and an outpouring of donations from people around the nation. The quake's anniversary will be observed with a rededication ceremony Sunday and a visit from a regional United Church of Christ official.

Even though the quake wreaked havoc on its members' personal lives, and rendered their sanctuary unusable, it also drew them closer together.

"We're a church with a solid face, but when you have an earthquake, you look at yourself in a different way," said the Rev. Jo Siders, interim pastor.

"It seems to me that our religious foundation has been extremely important. My faith is what supports me all the time,"

OCT 17
One year later
OCT. 17

EARTHQUAKE

said Siders, who moved to the Santa Cruz area shortly before the quake from Murphys in the northern Sierra foothills.

She'd given one sermon at her new church, and was just getting accustomed to her new home.

Then the quake hit. At 5:04 p.m. on Oct. 17, 1989, Siders was running errands and had stopped at the Felton farmers market.

"I just continued on down to Santa Cruz like nothing had happened," she said.

It was only after she found the Murray Street bridge impassable that she realized the gravity of the situation, "which finally made me think, 'What in the world am I doing here?'"

Because she was unfamiliar with the local roads, Siders knew how to find her new church only by traveling Highway 17, which also was closed. It took her a day — and some helpful Felton firefighters — to make her way back to the tiny church, which was built 1891. What she found made her heart sink.

"It was like moved over and tipped kind

of sideways," Siders said. The front and rear porches had shattered as the building was ripped four feet off its foundation.

Remarkably, however, the structure proved salvageable. Architect Dennis Burrow, the husband of church member Patricia Burrow, evaluated the building and made that determination.

"The county wanted to red-tag (condemn) it right there," Siders said. "If I hadn't had that piece of information, we'd have been in big trouble."

That seems like an understatement. The church was uninhabitable. The nearby social hall had lost its chimney and was without power, water, or gas. Several church members were homeless.

"So I'd had one service in the church and down it went," Siders said. "Our next service was in the parking lot beside the social hall. I didn't even know who these people were ... So we sang songs and people told their earthquake stories."

What happened next was a lesson in human kindness and generosity.

"The calls just started coming in from all over the country," Siders said. "I remember it was the Friday after the earthquake and for the next few weeks my phone began to ring off the hook. People wanted to know what we needed."

"I left the house one day for two hours and there were 30 calls on my machine."

A Roman Catholic parish on Long Island sent \$1,600; others sent smaller

amounts. All told, the contributions made up about half of the rebuilding cost. A \$15,000 grant came from the United Churches of Christ, and another \$15,000 from the world church's Insurance Advisory Board. Loans from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration covered the balance.

Contributions came in all forms.

A nearby Mormon congregation allowed Sider congregation to use its church for services for several weeks, until the damaged social hall could be readied as a sanctuary. People helped each other clean up or find places to live.

But one of the more heartwarming gestures came from the children of a small Church of Christ in Primghar, Iowa.

"Their kids sent a packet of letters to our kids," Siders said. "We shared the letters at our Thanksgiving service."

Now, the church has been lifted into place. A new, stronger, foundation has been built and its walls and roof were reinforced. The plaster walls — which had cracked in the quake — were removed to expose the sanctuary's original redwood paneling. All the stained glass survived.

On Sept. 16, after the church's annual Harvest Festival, the first worship service was held in the restored building.

"That day ... we really thanked God for the harvest of grace from this year," Siders said. "It's been an amazing year."