

# Church's 'vision' now a reality

Churches

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In the six years that Inner Light Ministries leaders have been looking for a home, they've always envisioned having space for children's ministries, a large church, offices and places to hold workshops.

"We do this process called visioning where we do visualizations and we draw pictures of what we see," said the Rev. Deborah L. Johnson. "This (standing outside the former Church of Grace on Soquel Drive) is what we have been drawing."

"This" is 3.3-acres on Soquel Drive, which Inner Light Ministries bought at the beginning of the month. It's the first permanent home for the congregation, which has held services at the Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial

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INNER LIGHT MINISTRIES

Building for six years.

At a time when many congregations are consolidating and some churches are closing, the ministry's purchase of the building is a victory. Three churches have sold in the last year, one for financial reasons and two others to consolidate into one location. Only about 10 percent of county residents attend church on any given Sunday, according to one study.

Meanwhile, at Inner Light Ministries, 15 new people show up every week, said church

board member Dave Izett.

"The fact we're inclusive really matters," said Valerie Hayes. "The fact that Rev. Deborah is an out lesbian and in a relationship matters. The fact that she's a black woman matters. The community began to see how this is not a typical ministry approach."

Other churches taking alternative approaches also are growing. Vintage Faith Church, an evolution of Graceland Ministries, which meets Sunday nights at Santa Cruz Bible Church, is designed to reach out to young people. The pastor of that church, Dan Kimball, is looking for a downtown location for the church's offices, so the church can be where young people are, and offer a cafe, art space and other things that appeal to them.

Inner Light Ministries' appeal lies in its abil-

See **CHURCH** on **PAGE A17**



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The Rev. Deborah Johnson takes a break from work Wednesday in the sanctuary of the Inner Light Ministries' new home on Soquel Drive.

## Church

Continued from Page A13

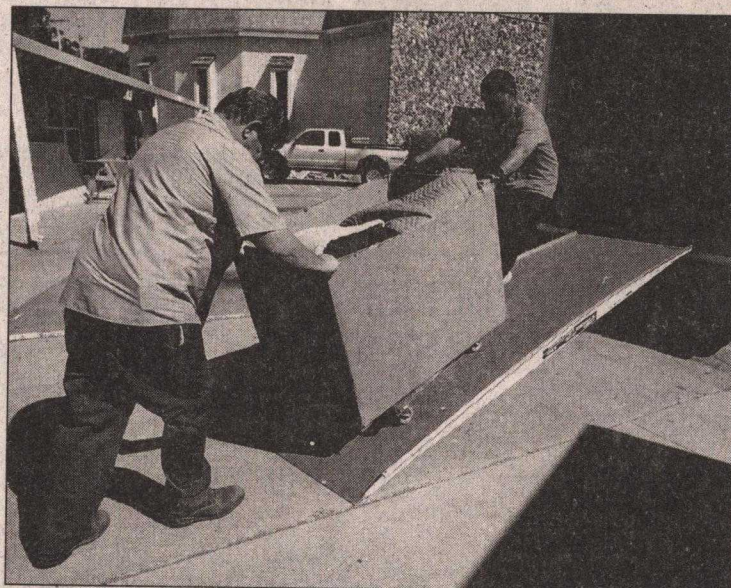
ity to reach out to people who have been wounded by previous church experiences, organizers say. Both Izett and board chairman Jim Felich call themselves "recovering Catholics." Another board member is Jewish. Since the church does not preach any dogma, all of them say they feel welcome.

Now they have a new place to celebrate their rediscovered faith. The 3.3-acre property includes a sanctuary and administrative building of about 9,000 square feet each, two playgrounds, a fire pit and an outdoor seating area.

The first service at the church will be Oct. 5.

Before then, a lot of work is being done. Johnson calls the purchase of the church, as well as the repairs being done on it now, a case of "divine circulation" — in other words, the good deeds the church does by donating a 10th of its tithe to charities is coming back in donations of furniture, space and repair work.

Johnson estimates the donations



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Movers unload a box of new computers at the new home of Inner Light Ministries last week in Soquel.

total about \$330,000.

Clearwater Construction owner Jim Thomas is a member of the congregation and is donating all the time, labor and supplies to replace the sanctuary roof, install new car-

peting and repaint the inside of the sanctuary and the offices. Others are donating office supplies.

Other congregants made the down payment and helped with the financing, Johnson said.

Johnson has other plans for the property. A new prayer room is already under construction in the offices. The small rooms off the main social hall all have tags on them noting that they will become rooms for toddler care, youth ministries, teen ministries, multimedia and operations centers, among other things. A community garden and labyrinth are planned at the back of the property. Johnson envisions it as a fully-functioning community.

Felich said, while none of this good fortune is owed to the church, it feels as though it's an affirmation of spiritual will.

"We feel like we've come home," said Felich, who has been with the ministry since it began in 1997. "For so many years when we were looking, we'd get close and it would fall through. We kept saying, 'It's OK, something better will come along.' Then we'd get our hopes up again, and it would fall through, and we'd say, 'It's OK, something even better will come along.' And then we got this place and it was like, 'It couldn't get any better than this.'"

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