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A Barn of a Church

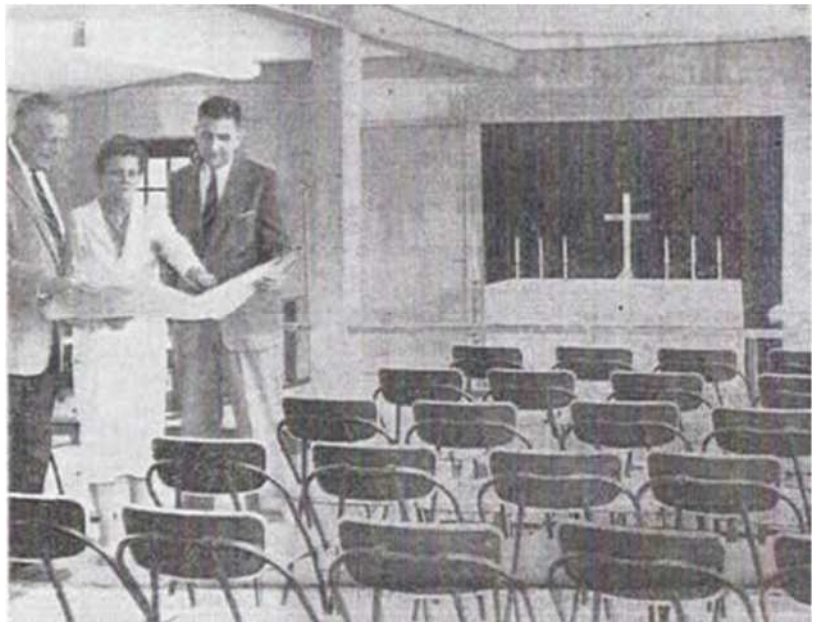
Once a home for horses, the Caldwell barn on Lantern Road is taking on the look of its new use – a church. The Episcopal mission in Mud Creek Valley is called Church of the Nativity. – Times photos by Ben Lawrence.

Episcopalians Convert Barn

By Connie Lien

Ghosts of yapping through-bred dogs and fancy, high strung show horses haunt the sanctuary of the Mud Creek Valley Church of the Nativity.

West of Fall Creek Parkway on Lantern Road, the picturesque church, a one-time plush barn for animals, celebrates its first anniversary this month



WHEN a handful of couples from St. Paul's Episcopal Church were approached about starting a mission in the fast growing Mud Creek Valley last year, little did anyone realize that would happen.

William Zaiser, one of the charter group, heard Miss Margaret Caldwell was putting up her family's barn and grounds for sale. The Rev. Fr. John H. Bruwink, vicar of St. Paul's was skeptical when Mr. Zaiser phoned excitedly to say he had the perfect place for the new church – a barn.

But one look at the copper-guttered building of Indiana limestone and cypress wood and the vicar was convinced.

"Christ was born in a manger," he said, "let's call it the Church of the Nativity."

That was the beginning of a "do-it-yourself" project which has caught the enthusiasm of Mud Creekers and run wild.

Now a simple, solid-brass cross reigns in the weather-vane spot on top of the barn. Nestled in 60 acres of property landscaped with fruit orchards and 8000 pine trees, the barn looks more like a church every week.

"WE'RE REALLY doing ourselves," said Mr. Zaiser, chairman of the building committee. "All of the work is our own"

Last April, the congregation, liking its barn choice, met at first in another barn on Sundays. For music they hauled a cobweb ridden organ, play prop, out of a stall in the Mud Creek Valley Players' barn, owned by the Karl Condit's On 86th.

In October they were ready to move into their Church of the Nativity. Their play-prop organ, minus cobwebs, went with them.

"The first service was in the dog kennels," said Mr. Zaiser. "We took the dog pens out, of course, and in two weeks, with all hands to, tiled the floor, put in a new ceiling and painted the place."

Three weeks before Easter this year, the congregation, needing more room, relegated the kennels to a kindergarten room and attacked the implement shed adjoining.

Frantically hammering, sawing, painting and washing the wall of windows they'd installed, the Episcopalians worked until the witching hour the night before Easter. But everything was finished in time.

THIS MACHINERY-SHED sanctuary will become classrooms when the congregation attacks the adjoining main stable to create its permanent home. Hay lofts will topple as soon as the plans get underway.

Just off the barn, the tack room, once hung with saddles, bridles and curry combs, serves as a nursery for pre-schoolers on Sunday mornings.

Another connected implement shed stored sailboats all winter, a money-raising scheme devised by the building committee.

The final connect building, a pretty guest house replete with fireplace, makes a prefect coffee, meeting and recreation area for the members. Cutout horseshoes on the shutters serve as reminders that the talk used to be of blue ribbons, trophies and horse-show honors here.

Directing the do-it-yourself endeavor is the Bishop's Committee with John Webb as vice chairman. Under him are Edward H. Stephenson, Mr. Zaiser, Mrs. Storey M. Larkin, Mabe Landgraf, Earl Teckemeyer and Charles Graves.

Comes sailing weather, many of the churchgoers will show up at "sailors' service" (early morning), with Bermuda shorts and sports clothes under their Sunday best.

Five minutes after the last handshake, the nautical-minded members will be shoving their sailboats into the harbor of the Indianapolis Sailing Club on Geist Reservoir, a short distance away, as they did last summer.

EVEN THE minister who'll serve the unique congregation is a bit different.

Robert McGill, former advertising executive here, left the world of hard sell to study for the ministry. He'll be ordained from Kenyon College Seminary in June and take his first pastorate – The Church of the Nativity.