J. 2/25/72

City Overrides Protest On Care Center's Site

Upholding the Portland Planning Commission, the City Council has overridden substantial neighborhood protest to permit a care center for young boys in the Model City area.

The vote was 3-1, with City Commissioner Francis J. Ivancie casting the negative vote, and Commissioner Connie McCready absent with flu.

The one-year conditional use permit was granted last month by the Planning Commission to Centenary-Wilbur Child Care Center, Inc., which will operate the Mary Acheson Center in a home at 3018 NE 15th Ave. It will be for care of 10 boys, 12-15 years old, who have been removed from their own homes because of delinquency or family problems.

THE MATTER was appealed to the City Council by a neighbor, Jack J. Quinlin, 3039 NE 15th Ave. The City Council also received 57 written remonstrances from within the 400-foot notification area surrounding the care center, and 115 remonstrances from outside the immediate area. Many of the neighborhood residents appeared at Wednesday's three-hour hearing to protest in person.

The Multnomah County Juvenile Court, the Model City Citizens' Planning Board and the Irvington Community Association board all favored the center, but only on condition that a majority of the neighborhood residents approved it.

THE PROPOSAL for the center went first to the City Zoning Committee, where a split vote last Dec. 28 sent it on to the full planning commission. On Jan. 4, the planning body granted a year's permit, with renewal to depend upon favorable review after the initial year of operation.

The neighborhood is zoned for single family residences, and the care center will be in a large home. In opposing the permit, Commissioner Ivancie said he "can't see why, whenever some institution is considered undesirable in a neighborhood, it gets dumped out in the Model City area."

O. 7/80

Distorts struggle

To the Editor: Georgie Ann Geyer's article on El Salvador (June 20) gives a particularly distorted account of events in that country. While she claims that the "reformist" junta has accomplished "quite a bit," the late Archbishop Romero declared that the reforms were a cover for widespread repression.

Prominent members of the Christian Democratic Party have resigned from the government, corroborating former junta member Hector Dada, who stated, "We have been unable to stop the repression, and those who commit these repressive acts with the authorization of the junta go unpunished."

Geyer claims that so-called Pol Pot leftists massacred dozens of innocents at Archbishop Romero's funeral. But 24 church leaders present at the funeral have testified that the violence at the funeral was not the responsibility of the popular organizations. No U.S. Embassy delegate was visibly present at the Romero funeral. Geyer's account of the funeral is based on what the State Department learned from the Salvadoran National Guard and the chief of police.

Archbishop Romero called the mass organizations of El Salvador, "a social force for the good of the people." To dub them part of the Pol Pot left is part of a ploy to justify escalating U.S. military and economic aid to a tottering and unpopular regime.

While Geyer claims that El Salvador represents the new "pathological" war, I would argue that what is truly pathological is the propensity of the State Department and the U.S. press to distort the struggle taking place in that tormented country.

THE REV. DONALD BARNHART,
Centenary Wilbur Church,
215 S.E. Ninth Ave.

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CWMC

P.S.U. Vanguard

April 18, 1969

Centenary utilizes up-to-date services

By GREG MYERS
Vanguard Staff

Mounting the pulpit, the preacher proclaims, "I feel like an old splintered drumstick." The congregation responds in unison, "It looks so ugly somebody push a button."

A conventional opening for a Protestant service? Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church, 215 SE 9th Ave., doesn't pretend to be like most churches. Austin Harper Richardson, the 40-year-old minister, is the reason it isn't.

Ordained in 1955 at Garrett Seminary, a part of Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., Rev. Richardson is a leader in the community as well as his church. He believes the work of the church is in the world and sets an example by working with many committees and organizations throughout the city.

As a member of the Ad-Hoc Police-Community Relations Committee, the minister seeks to prevent alienation between the community and the police. He is also president of the East Central Church Non-Profit Organization which is a group seeking low-rent housing for low income families.

Rev. Richardson brings in up-to-date and relevant material in his services. The opening of his service is taken from the Beatles "Yellow Submarine." His message last Sunday was "unbury yourself," also taken from the movie. It concerned the generation gap, and he called for an end to finger pointing on the part of people, which tends to separate and divide instead of unify the gap in understanding each other. His message relates and doesn't admonish.

The greater part of the congregation is made up of the younger set, but middle-aged and elderly individuals are a part of the flock. The pastor attempted to move beyond age differences and called for an end to the warfare between generations.

Many members and non-members of the congregation are active in projects they deem worthwhile. "The Ninth Street Exit" is the name of the coffee house run in the basement of the church building. It's open 8 p.m. to 12 midnight. Sunday and Tuesday through Thursday and between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. on the weekends. Another project undertaken by a church member is to raise money to pay for Pvt. Robert Hinckle's lawyer. Hinkle lost his latest appeal for release from the US Army and is now in New Jersey.

Involvement seems to be the key undertaking of the church and the relevance of the message to the current scene makes the service a now experience. Blue noses, sometimes found in congregations, are played down, for piousness doesn't stand a chance at Centenary-Wilbur.

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60 s radicals now

Politics of faith

By Donna Warren

Austin Harper Richardson is the minister of Centenary Wilbur Church, located two blocks off Burnside on SE 9th. Ministers wear robes of many colors; Harper's are stained with sweat, dirt and determination. Centenary Wilbur physically looks more like a warehouse than a church. This image is reinforced by numerous warehouses in the neighborhood. It wasn't always so. In 1954, it was a wealthy congregation with 1500 members. When Sandy Boulevard was put through, it became a busy intersection with industry springing up all around. Harper was greeted by a congregation of 121, mostly senior citizens, when he arrived. The people were very conservative, retired regular church-goers. Over time, things evolved and he now heads a " "bobtail" group of 45-50 people. Financially, Harper could have coined the term "shoestring budget." There was a time when he couldn't see operating past December. But this year the holidays brought in $690 in gifts and he now projects its existence through June (the interview was conducted last December).

Harper's political history goes way back. He has always been socially active. In 1959, while heading a church in Yakima, he became concerned about the 'military security seminars' being given by Reserve officers to local housewives. A public relations campaign with a "garrison mentality," they suggested that the answer to the spread of communism was to give the Pentagon ten percent of one's income, build fallout shelters, and so on. The seminars met six hours a day for two weeks, fostering a climate of fear. Harper attended the meetings, asking pointed questions. He felt at the time that he was being watched by detectives who would have liked to jail him. The atmosphere of the times was that knocking the military was knocking the economy. He knew of three country churches in Wisconsin, where the ministers were victims of such a climate. They lost their ability to finance their churches or gain new member. "It took finesse to be critical and still stay alive in the ministry, or to apply the gospel to a social problem."

His beliefs were tested again in Coos Bay. He worked within a Methodist church from 1962-65 where there were strong John Birch Society influences. A prominent member of his congregation was the son of the John Birch coordinator on the coast. Harper supported the United Nations and their peace-keeping effort. The Birchers saw this as selling out, and made an unsuccessful attempt to get rid of him.

An important influence upon Harper's attitudes about the current role of Centenary Wilbur came from his first visit to Glide Memorial Methodist Church in San Francisco, in 1966. He saw homosexuals, ex-convicts and "hippies" coming together in an open accepting church. "Let form follow function".

The first incident which he said "yes" to at Centenary was when ADC mothers (Aid to Dependant Children, Welfare) who met there wanted to smoke. A seemingly small issue, but at the time smoking was generally unacceptable in churches. He said "yes." A beginning... a breakthrough.

Harper feels that the Methodist conference placed him at Centenary as an invitation to leave the ministry. Consequently he went for broke. "Out of fury I took my freedom." He realized that this church could do more than others and took risks. During the Pentagon demonstration in Washington in 1967, Harper and seven people from his congregation flew back... a very unusual event for him.

He provided space in the church for draft counseling. The Resistance, a pacifist anti-draft organization, had an office there. When the American Legion convention came to Portland, the People's Jamboree protest cooked their food in the church's kitchen, People for Portland had an office there, planning to quell explosive situations, while the Vortex people were planning upstairs. Centenary was a place for 'the street' and 'the Establishment' to meet.

Many activities found a home at this church over the years, including a "Poverty lunch" which met on Friday afternoons. People from the helping professions were gathered together (Roman Catholic Sisters, social caseworkers, legal aid). Harper met Neil Goldschmidt, then a legal aid attorney, attending these lunches. On Wednesday nights there was a potluck dinner for kids on the road. This reduced the defensiveness of the street people. The coffee house was a favorite place to crash. Harper said there was a fine balance between taking care of and being taken advantage of. They tried to create an emergency shelter on North Williams. It lasted two months. The sheriff would bring people there. But, with little work being done and much stealing, the violence crescendoed, and it closed.

Harper feels that he pioneered gay activities with the coffee house, A.A. groups, theater, and a Sunday night church service. He continued to practice openness and acceptance, giving people a start. He allowed the Public Interest Law Collective (a young female attorney and four colleagues) to use the office space for six months until they moved to Belmont St. Of course, the Scribe is

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currently housed in Centenary along with the Willamette Learning Center. For six months the church housed the Oregon Rural Opportunities which helped Chicanos with housing, employment and education until they lost their funding. At one time, the Non-Profit Housing Corporation working out of Centenary, sold 52 houses to poor people at reasonable prices. When Nixon was elected the project was terminated.

For three years the church sponsored a youth care center for boys from 12-15 years old. The Mary Acheson House started from a $1000 memorial fund left by the widow. It housed five boys but needed a population of 12 to be economically sound. Maintenance money from CSD, and a lot of volunteer time were mainstays. Lack of supervision of the boys due to an inexperienced director led to the demise of this project. Harper said he put his head on the line, using the church facilities in many of the aforesaid ways.

During Resurrection City in Washington DC, Harper was the treasurer/fundraiser for the Portland delegation. They accumulated $1700 in the treasury which had to be scrupulously guarded from sticky fingers. There was a struggle as to who was going to go back to the City. It was the Blacks vs. the communists. There was a democratic vote... Harper appealed to the church and everyone came out and voted. He won. Ten people traveled on a bus to DC, nine Blacks and one white. It was a learning experience for Harper as near violence was the tempo of the fundraising.

Since 1968, an ad hoc police relations committee has met at Centenary every Wednesday morning. It conducts a continuing seminar on our criminal justice system. The members work for an understanding of the police as peacekeepers. One of the major things they have accomplished is getting a bill passed that limits the time one can be kept in jail in Oregon... 60 days without being brought to trial. "By pumping ideas into the system, the committee hopes it can facilitate changes." In 1976, the chief of police boycotted the group. The reason being, that they had created a Peacekeeping Award to be given to an officer who handled a violent situation in a peaceful manner. $100 was given to a fund. The Police Department gave the award to a man who was closely related to a shotgun incident (he had shot a suspect and crippled him). Angry letters flew. Harper asked the police chief to resign... For six months contact with the police department was broken. Relations have since resumed.

Richardson, paid for the printing of the Policewatch, which had two issues, one on the Slow Pitcher Tavern riot and the other on the CRISS file. An Ad Hoc person was on the jury of the tavern trial and saw alot of police testimony discredited. The committee now acts as a police review board, measuring accountability, and giving "hurt" people a place to air their problems.

Other innovations of this energetic man include a ride-along program where civilians can see the policeman's job through his eyes. When Harper first requested it here, the Dept. said that insurance and safety were insurmountable problems. Harper went to Washington DC and was allowed to ride-along without being a resident of the area. He came back and organized twelve people who were then allowed the privilege. People like Harper make the bureau nervous. (The committee also encouraged the Crime Prevention Bureau and it is now a reality.

Harper speaks to police academy classes as well as police-community relation classes at PSU. He finds the city police more resistant to change and more authoritarian than the sheriff.s department. "Using people's help threatens their macho image." He gets satisfaction out of his police work.

Another great accomplishment, is staying alive in an inner city neighborhood. He has been trying hard for 12 years to look like a legitimate Methodist minister. Employing open decision-making, he tries to stay close to his congregation so that they trust him. He believes in a teaching/preaching ministry and dealing with issues before they reach a flash point. Harper feels that he has gained his freedom by exercizing it." The Bishop should have done something a long time ago...now it is too late." As long as he pays his bills, he feels he is alright. He currently uses his pulpit in such diverse ways as inviting someone to discuss tax resistance or giving a deserter of the Vietnam war a place to speak for amnesty.

When the My Lai atrocities occurred Harper had a special service. He further believes that the theology of South America leaves a place for rage... "Christians need to be angry." Unhappy with capitalism (the distribution of wealth), Harper has some sympathies for socialism. However, he fears the bureaucracy of it. Ideally, he would like to see a plural society with private enterprise, citing as an example, the Tenessee Valley Authority (TVA) which has socialist inclinations (especially economic). "What we have now is military socialism... we need to preserve room for innovation... free enterprise... so that you can run risks."

Harper sees capitalism turning people such as Rockefeller into pirates. The poverty situation which has always existed during his ministry at Centenary Wilbur has done things to him...depressing things. The constant tensions have taken away some of his ability to smile. In the last six months he has made time for classes at PSU for a bit of a break.

A fitting quote he mentioned seems to sum up his definition of the purpose of his ministry, "The language of faith in our day isn't metaphysical, it's political." (Harvey Cox). I felt that I had interviewed a remarkable man who has consistently manipulated his profession to mirror his beliefs. And when you are a minister that task is doubly difficult. □

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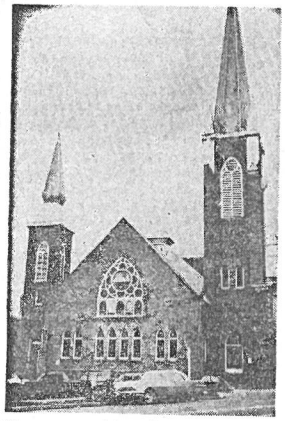
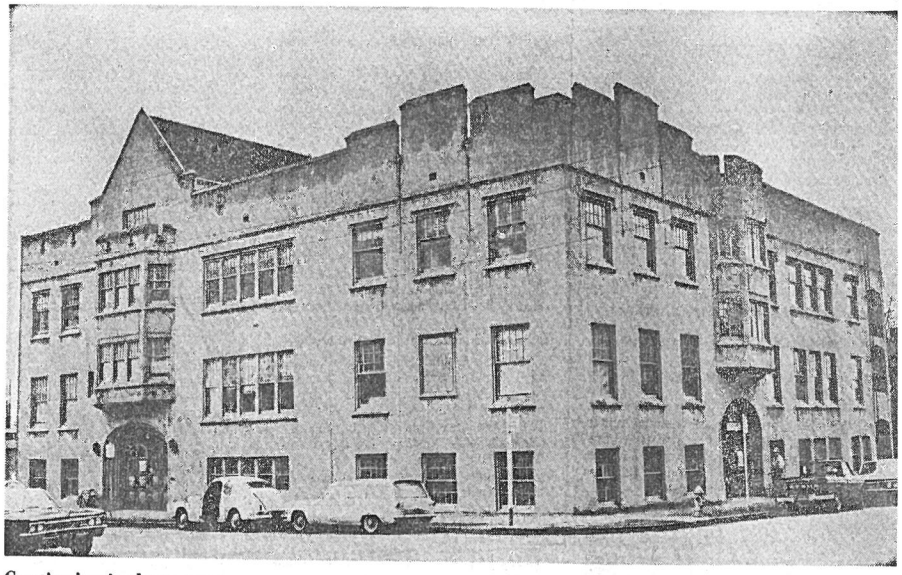
Just as the catacombs were a refuge for persons at odds with the popular culture of first-century Rome . . . so Centenary-Wilbur Church has become a haven for the alienated, dropped-out and disenchanted . . .

A Church Filled With Living

By Charles McBride



Now a parking lot



Continuing in the rectory

LIKE the catacombs which harbored Christians in an earlier era, Centenary-Wilbur United Methodist Church at SE 9th Ave. and Ash St. in Portland is a rather dark, dank and decrepit place, full of corridors leading back to little rooms where unlikely enterprises are headquartered.

Pursuing the analogy, just as the catacombs were a refuge for persons at odds with the popular culture — and even government — of first-century Rome, so Centenary-Wilbur Church has become a haven for the alienated, dropped-out and disenchanted in this place and time.

A few may have revolutionary notions; certainly there are some radicals among them.

An Episcopal priest, whose own more affluent parish adjoins the turf for which Centenary-Wilbur accepts responsibility, characterizes his neighbor as "the only real apostolic church in Portland."

And like the early Christians, the members of Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church — the few who are left — are continually subject to the pullings and pushings, stresses and strains, of their consciences versus the influences urging them to conform more nearly to the popular and accepted model of what a church should be.

After all, Centenary-Wilbur is not a "successful church." Its congregation voted three years ago to place a $50,000 mortgage on its building to secure five-sixths of the Oregon Methodist Conference's share of the construction cost of Koinonia House, the inter-church center on the Portland State College campus.

Its roof leaks copiously, the plumbing operates noisily and spottily, and the congregation worships in the former gymnasium.

The large sanctuary which served the church in better days was torn down and the space now is a parking lot. The Columbus Day storm of 1962 struck Centenary-Wilbur, as much else in Portland, with a vengeance. The landmark steeple was twisted, almost torn away, stained-glass windows were broken and other damage was so extensive the decision finally was made not to attempt repairs.

That decision was another turn in the twisted course which has taken Centenary-Wilbur a long way from its former status as one of the grand old churches of Portland to its present search for a new style of ministry appropriate to its neighborhood.

For the neighborhood around Centenary-Wilbur has changed. It is near Buckman School and Buckman is one of Portland's southeast "poverty pockets."

In fact, it may almost be said that Centenary-Wilbur is in a non-neighborhood. Buckman School has a 100 per cent turnover in its enrollment each year, indicating the area is typical of "The Secular City" Harvard Theologian Harvey Cox describes in his book of that title.

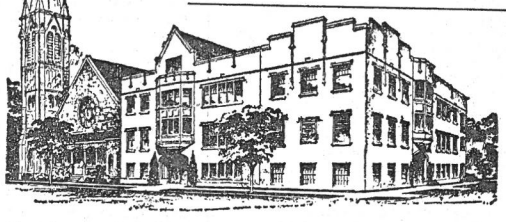
The characteristics of the secular city, Cox says, are mobility and anonymity. Its people are on wheels, moving, barely touching, seldom attempting or wanting to know one another deeply.

The secular city is a far cry from the farm towns of a generation or two ago or a century or two ago — the rural culture which shaped America's churches, made them extensions of the friendly, supportive (and controlled) atmosphere of the small towns in which they were located.

When Centenary-Wilbur's congregation voted in late 1962 to tear down the damaged steeple and sanctuary, patch up the south wall and make a new entrance to the remodeled gymnasium, most members saw it as another giant step towards oblivion.

Back in 1935, the church had a membership of 1,500, but immediately after World War II the exodus of Portland to the suburbs began. For awhile, membership of Centenary-Wilbur remained fairly stable, but in the early 1950's the decline began. By 1960 there were only 544 on th church rolls and the question of th church's future loomed large amon those who were left. Many who kept thei membership at Centenary-Wilbur wer already residents of the suburbs or mor attractive sections of the city, who eac Sunday morning made the sentimenta journey back to SE 9th Avenue.

Many who have stayed were nominal Christians before



In better days—since 1890

Temporary use of the gym for worshi was seen as a sort of holding action unt members were able to bridge the gap t reality and accept the inevitable demis of their beloved church.

What happened next may not hav been a resurrection, because the patien was not quite dead — but it perhaps wi turn out to be a miraculous cure, al though that is by no means certain. Th congregation now numbers about 160 – not much more than 10 per cent of th membership in its heyday.

In June, 1965, a new minister, the Rev A. Harper Richardson, was assigned t Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church. H was educated at Carleton College i Minnesota, the University of Minnesot and Garret Theological Seminary i Evanston, Ill.

Richardson is one of the "new breed" of ministers who, if they stay in the insti tutional church at all, are dedicated t some radical changes.

Yet Harper Richardson belies an stereotype of a radical. He does have a mustache, but that might be more a mo tion of conformity than any evidence he i kicking over the traces.

For the Centenary-Wilbur minister's environment puts him among varied an marvelous hirsute adornments — beards, whiskers, long hair and side burns. Richardson's mustache is really pretty conservative.

He is quiet, self-effacing to a fault, a scholar, a thinker, not particularly

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The poor, the disinherited, the rejected persons in that little world of Centenary-Wilbur know God loves them because they see evidence of that love, expressed in the lives of people in the church.

leader of men, yet beneath his calm exterior, behind his reasonable words, are passion, impatience, an insistence that the Christian imperative is revolution.

One of Richardson's young constituents is Dave Cox, who has office space at Centenary-Wilbur as a draft counselor. Also headquartered there is the Resistance, a group dedicated to non-cooperation with the Selective Service System and willing to accept the consequences of its non-violent protest.

Cox expresses his feelings about the connection between Centenary-Wilbur and the Resistance this way:

"It is logical for the Resistance to be in a church, because Christ was and is the greatest revolutionary of all time. We believe it is doubtful that Christ would have carried a draft card.

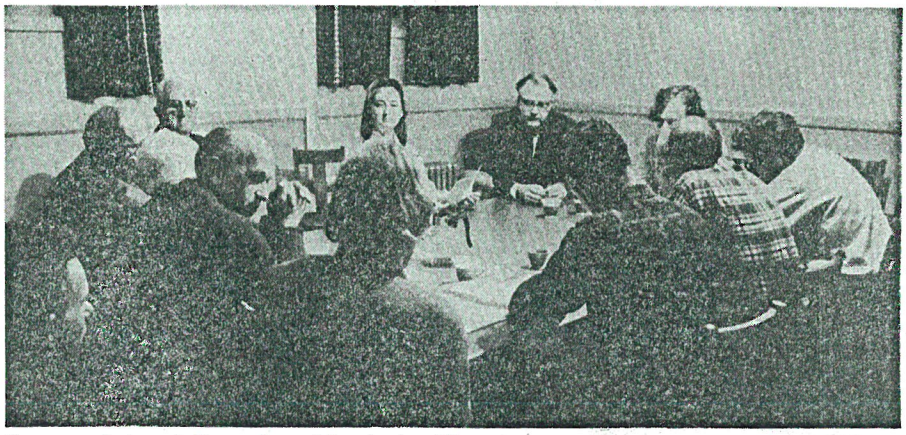
"And the Resistance is talking about a revolution — a revolution for all men through brotherhood."

He explains that although not all the church's members support or even sympathize with the objectives of the Resistance, they nevertheless accept the official position of the Methodist Church as expressed in its discipline. In part, it states: "We recognize the right of the individual to answer the call of his government according to the dictates of his Christian conscience. We also recognize that non-violent resistance can be a valid form of Christian witness."

The Board of Trustees of Centenary-Wilbur voted unanimously last November 19, to permit the Resistance to use a room on the fourth floor of the church building for its office. The privilege was also extended to another group affiliated with the American Friends Service Committee which offers draft counseling.

It was a natural development which brought the Resistance and other groups concerned with the draft and the Vietnam War to Centenary-Wilbur Church. They came because young people were finding this church accepted them. A year ago plans were made to cope with an expected influx of "alienated youth" to Portland—runaways, kids hung up on drugs or just turned off from "straight society."

Portland did not become the mecca for the drop-out crowd last summer, although hundreds of youngsters came here, stayed awhile and then left. While they were here some stayed at Together House, near Centenary-Wilbur, a cooperative "crash pad" which welcomed youngsters who came into the strange



"... a revolution of all men through brotherhood."

city and by word of mouth learned about it.

Soon a regular Wednesday night potluck supper at Centenary-Wilbur drew kids from Together House and the wider youth community. There were times when there just was no more room at Together House, and the overflow overnighters stayed at the church, sleeping on the floor or in the pews.

The "floating youth community" of the summer vacation period is no longer the problem, but the Wednesday night potluck supper continues to thrive. There is no program and no consistent turnout of the same people, but each Wednesday evening there are about 30 high school and college age young people present, joined by a few middle-age couples or individuals who bring a hot dish from their "straight society" kitchens.

"It is a warm, open, informal time," Richardson says. Adults in the congregation, including Mrs. Thomas Acheson, widow of a former minister of Centenary-Wilbur now in her 70s, say it is the time they learn it is possible for young people to know and trust those who are over 30. Mrs. Acheson thinks this is possible "because we talk about real problems—like whether the Ladies Aid or the Resistance will get first choice over use of the assembly hall."

Dave Hopper is a member of Together House's "corporate community." He also is a member of Centenary-Wilbur, and administrator of the "runaway program" which is part of the youth ministry of the Greater Portland Council of Churches. He sees his job first as expressing the "caring" of the church and is frank to say he is an evangelist.

"Evangelism"—although the word really means "telling the good news"—turns off most young people. "But when we get the word across which means that we care, then lines of communication begin to open which enable us to say to a kid that drugs are a cop-out and involvement with people has more meaning," Hopper says.

From the planning for the summer program came the opening of a coffee house, the "Ninth Street Exit," at Centenary-Wilbur. It's open every night from 8:30 to midnight and usually has live music ranging from folk singing to hard rock.

The Poor People's Alliance is a grassroots organization of folks . . .

It's a mystery why people want to belong to Centenary-Wilbur—until one thinks about it. Well, it has thoughtful members; perhaps that has something to do with it.

Don't begin by assessing Centenary-Wilbur according to the usual scale of values of churches. You'll go mad. Not only are there money problems, but members constantly are called upon to defend the kooky things that are going on there.

James Ylvisaker, chairman of the church's official board, is one who has given a lot of thought to it. A teacher, he is chairman of the department of social studies at Gresham High School.

Ylvisaker believes that it has taken courage to stay with Centenar-Wilbur. "During the last few years, church members have either adjusted to what is happening, or they have left the church," he says, and adds, "Many who have stayed with it were nominal Christians before, and now have "turned on' and are practicing a living, viable faith."

The board chairman and others in the church see their minister as a symbol of the new meaning that has enlivened their faith. Harper Richardson is unwilling to give in to authority, either ecclesiastical or civil, if he believes its wrong. He currently is a quiet but persistent voice of protest against what he terms a "gimmick" recently proposed by the Methodist hierarchy to raise funds by publishing commitments of the ministers and their congregations. "I want no such gratuitous notoriety," he told his people. He really meant he wouldn't cooperate with the system.

His are the sane and searching questions raised in an ad hoc committee which is attempting to establish a Police-Community Relations program in the Portland Police Bureau. He is called on to speak before groups of clergymen, nuns, social workers and even service clubs about the feelings, the gut experiences, of the unemployed, the persons on welfare in his neighborhood.

Then, on Sundays, he reports to his congregation on the progress — or lack of it — in the world around Centenary-Wilbur. He reminds them that this is the world God "so loved that he gave his only Son . . ."

The poor, the disinherited, the rejected persons in that little world of Centenary-Wilbur know God loves them because they see evidence of that love, expressed in the lives of people in the church.

The Poor People's Alliance is a grassroots organization of folks from Portland's poverty pockets, both black and white, interested in political action which may lead to relief of the predicament of those caught by deprivation. The Alliance recently began to circulate petitions calling for lower bus fares. These people know, from their own experience, that it is the low income, elderly and retired persons who do not have automobiles who most need dependable, cheap public transportation.

The Poor People's Alliance got started at Centenary-Wilbur. Now it has moved elsewhere, but will be welcomed back when it needs a place to meet.

Poor people need jobs, and one of the recruiters for the Concentrated Employment Program is headquartered at Centenary-Wilbur. He is the Rev. Fred Braunschweiger, a Luthern minister,

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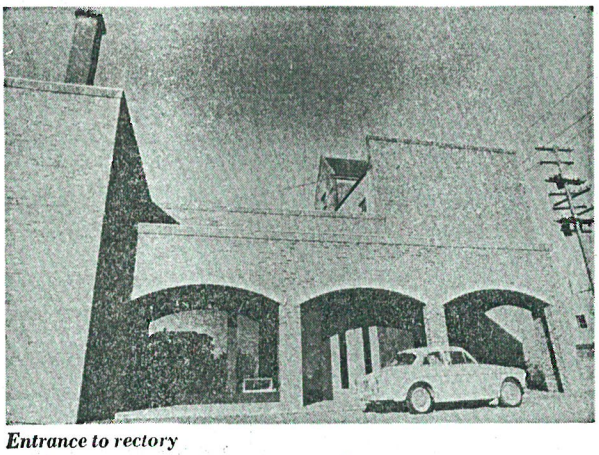

Entrance to rectory

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The visitor to Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church may be unimpressed by the liturgy (or lack of it), the hymns, the meeting place or other churchly elements . . .

liturgy (or lack of it), the hymns, the meeting place or other churchly elements of its life. But time and again, he is told by persons who attend there regularly, and soon he senses it himself. This is a community of persons who care for one another and for the world around them.

All this activity in the world and in the neighborhood of Centenary-Wilbur makes it a tenuous situation, however. The church's small congregation cannot indefinitely maintain its building program and ministry. A modest bequest from one of its members helps, but "If things go well, this would enable the church to continue for perhaps two years longer, no more," Harper Richardson believes.

Yet he believes more than this. In a recent sermon just before the start of the new year, Richardson set before his congregation his articles of faith in Centenary-Wilbur and its peculiar opportunities for ministry in today's kind of world.

"The inner city is the place where all the life of today coalesces," he told his little flock. He acknowledged that the process of a church's movement from a conventional ministry to one which emphasizes a relationship to the world outside its doors is "seductive."

"No longer do I preach a Methodist doctrine of perfection," Richardson said. Rather he sees the necessity for a "faithful realism"—a recognition not only of the human condition in individuals: Man's frailty, his despair, his confrontation with contradiction—but also an assessment of the social, economic and political pressures to which man is subject.

Centenary-Wilbur has a little time. it will use that time, Richardson says, "for a fullfillment . . ."

He sees that Centenary-Wilbur inevitably will be misunderstood, even feared, by individuals and by conventional institutions—both secular and religious—who are threatened by the quality of life and love that is found there.

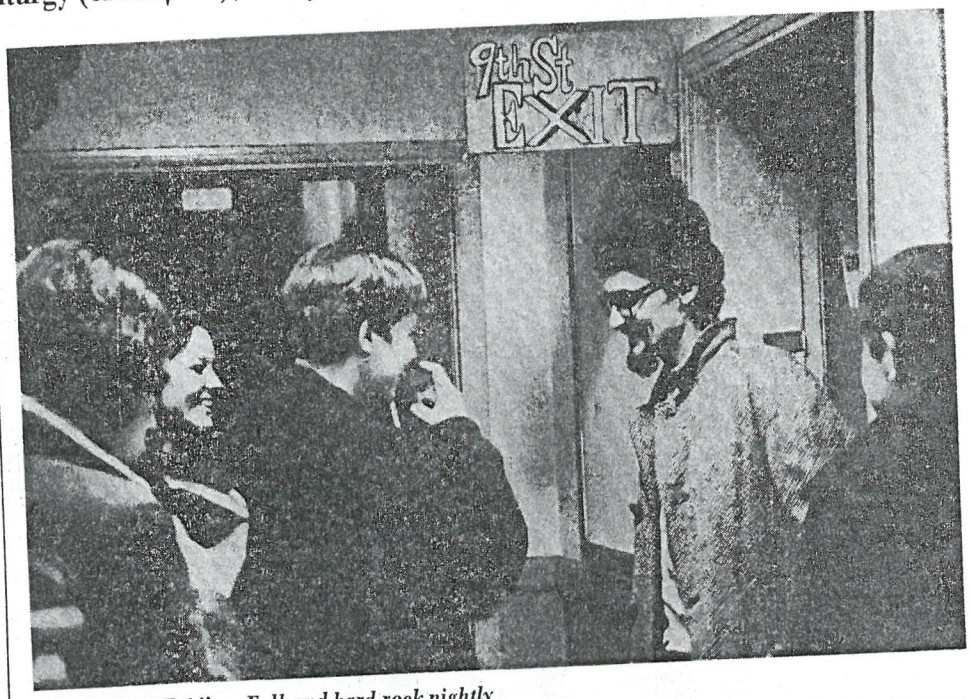
Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church, in one degree or another, soon is noticed. It "makes waves"; it deals with people not seen in other churches—the poor, the uneducated, unskilled, unwashed, society's rejects. Conventional people and conventional churches are embarrassed by such goings-on.

Yet, Richardson told his congregation, it may be that Centenary-Wilbur is right and its critics wrong. He is not arrogant when he suggests this, but he says it with some confidence. "We may be able to reveal to the whole church the real meaning of the church as a body made up of diverse members. We may be able to demonstrate the peace of discipline and order based on caring for one another."

The realization of this vision, however, rests on the church's finding ways to buy time enough to set out on the road to the vision. In concrete terms, it must pay its bills.

Centenary-Wilbur has a little time. It will use that time, Richardson says, "for a fulfillment and continued revealing of the truth we already have."

Charles McBride is a Portland writer. Photos on pages 8 and 9 and 7 (upper) were taken by Allan DeLay, Portland photographer. Photo of rectory on page 6 by Dave Falconer, Staff Photographer, The Oregonian. Photo on page 7 (lower) by Jim Hallas, The Oregonian staff.



"Ninth Street Exit" — Folk and hard-rock nightly

. . . A symbol of new meaning

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(Continued from page 7)

and his concern is the "hard-core unemployed" person, the person who lacks education, job skills and a record of steady employment, but who often has a record of another sort: he or she may be an ex-convict, a prostitute, an alcoholic, a parolee.

During the emergency caused by Portland's snowstorm in January, it was FISH, the county-wide emergency services program of the Council of Churches, which worked with the Buckman Community Action Center to distribute food and fuel to families throughout east Portland. With the Albina Neighborhood Service Center in Northeast Portland, FISH and the Buckman Center provided the volunteer manpower which answered the needs of hundreds of families who had not received their welfare checks or who, because of age, illness or infirmity, were unable to get to a store.

FISH (so called from the symbol of the early Christians) has its office at Centenary-Wilbur. Directed by Jean Higgenbotham, formerly of East-CAP, it regularly supplies food, clothing, transportation, furniture, assistance in finding housing or providing child care, and gives other emergency services.

Evidence that the church isn't a closed corporation, a cut-off-from-the-world esoteric fellowship, is seen in the list of enterprises headquartered at Centenary-Wilbur, many of them focused on problems of the poor who are the church's constituents in the 1960s.

The community action program of the Council of Churches on the near East side is East-CAP. It is an ecumenical endeavor of about a dozen churches, directed by the Rev. Vern Weiss, a bearded Presbyterian minister. It holds a weekly "poverty lunch" at the church, provides Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for the poor, works with people of the neighborhood of all faiths, or who have no religion, to break the cycle of poverty which has trapped so many of them.

Centenary-Wilbur receives $25 a month each for rental of FISH and East-CAP offices, paid by the Council of Churches. Other groups don't pay rent, but the people involved "usually pitch in to help with custodial chores," the minister says. Besides the youth-oriented and poverty related organizations already mentioned, there is a non-profit housing corporation which has completed a $68,000 residential rehabilitation program and has a second $73,000 project approved by FHA; there is a bi-weekly community newspaper, The Southeast Voice; a non-profit "Printing Service" which uses the church's multilith machine; two peace movement organizations which have office space there, the World Without War Office and the United World Federalists.

The most recent addition to the church's varied program was provided by The New Theater, a drama group dedicated to production of serious plays which deal with life's issues, often controversial ones. When it moved to Centenary-Wilbur last fall from Highland United Church of Christ, the New Theater presented William Hanley's "Slow Dance on the Killing Ground" to appreciative audiences and critical acclaim.

Vern Weiss, director of East-CAP, sees Centenary-Wilbur Church as unique. It is unusual, of course, for a church to have around it the variety of human beings which the varied interests of this church gather together — the poor, the transients, the peace groups, the drama people, the youth at the coffee house and in community action programs, and the ordinary church members.

Together they comprise a fellowship which is difficult to define, but it is real. "Centenary-Wilbur is the only church I feel like recommending to people who are too poor to have "Sunday clothes" or who have given up the church," Weiss says.

"I tell them they will be accepted here whatever they are wearing or whatever they think about churches," he adds.

Weiss tells about a Reed College student, a girl who had been reared a Presbyterian but who told him she hadn't been to church since she was 13 "because churches just aren't with it."

She worked for East-CAP as a volunteer community service worker. She found that Centenary-Wilbur Church is different from the comfortable church she left as a child; it is on the scene of the action.

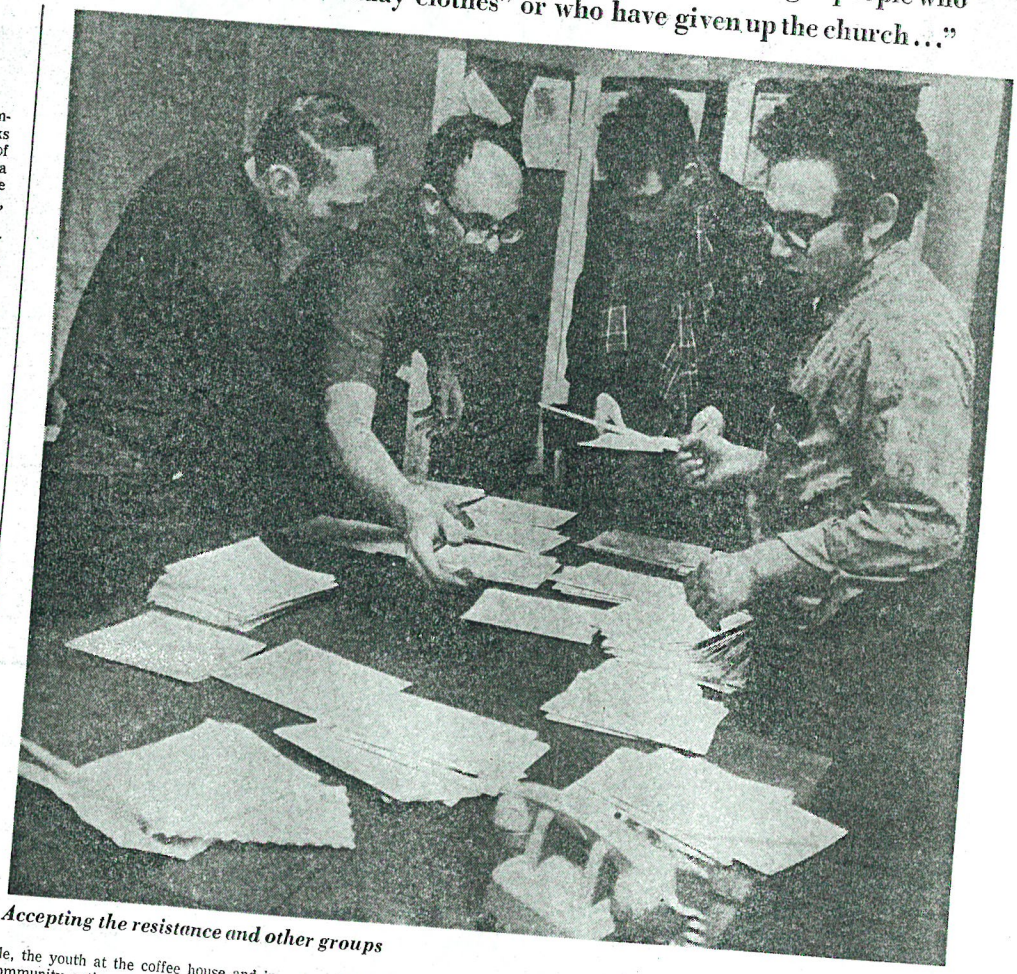
The other day she told Weiss her father has stopped attending church. His reasons? Churches nowadays are too mixed up in politics, social action, he says. "They are full of peacenicks," he complains, and hints darkly that "maybe the Communists are behind it."

The fact is that some Centenary-Wilbur members have felt something like that about their church. Almost all of those members have gone, taken their membership elsewhere or left the church entirely. "Why can't the church stick to religion?" they ask.

What is religion? What does it mean to be religious, Christianly speaking?

To answer these basic questions is really what Centenary-Wilbur is all about. So says its minister. Confirmation comes again and again from conversations with its members and from the spirit one senses in its dark passageways.

"Centenary-Wilbur is the only church I feel like recommending to people who are too poor to have "Sunday clothes" or who have given up the church..."



Accepting the resistance and other groups

> ***... Dietrich Bonhoeffer may have started what now is going on ...***

A German Lutheran pastor and theologian who was martyred by the Nazis during World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, may have started what now is going on at Centenary-Wilbur Church in Portland. Writing from prison, he spoke of "religionless Christianity" and asked, "In what way are we in a religionless and secular sense Christians, in what way are we the 'Ekklesia, those who are called forth', not conceiving of ourselves religiously as specially favored, but as wholly belonging to the world?"

Bonhoeffer describes a curious experience which many ministers, pastors and priests of today are discovering is their experience, too. "While I often shrink with religious people from speaking of God by name," Bonhoeffer wrote, "... with people who have no religion I am able on occasion to speak of God quite openly and as it were naturally."

And then comes the stirring challenge from Bonhoeffer, hanged by the Nazis when he was only 39, a challenge which has been taken up here and therein Christendom, in Portland at Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church: "God is the 'beyond' in the midst of our life. The Church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the center of the village."

Harvey Cox, the author of "The Secular City" which he wrote as a discussion guide for young people, made "village" in Bonhoeffer's quotation read "city," for the city is where living goes on in the 1960s.

With the theology that comes from Bonhoeffer and Cox and many others goes a style of life patterned more after that of the first-century Christians—who held their meetings in houses, shops, anywhere they could gather and (when they literally were driven underground) the catacombs of Rome—than after twentieth-century church goers.

That early Christian style of life was characterized by a sort of "incognito"—a hiddenness which made it difficult to single out the Christian from the man on the street—until that primary mark of Christianity came through so plainly that a first-century secular historian was moved to write: "Behold those Christians, how they love one another!"

The visitor to Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church may be unimpressed by the

Centenary Wilbur abandoning building, but not its ministry

By DENISE MEYER
of The Oregonian staff

An end to a unique Portland ministry will come Sunday when the doors of Centenary Wilbur United Methodist Church close for the last time.

The word "ministry" has been used broadly by the financially stressed inner-city congregation that is vacating the building at Southeast Ninth Avenue and Pine Street before another expensive winter heating season begins.

Known as Portland's true funky church, Centenary Wilbur has been been considered more of a political-social-art collective during the last two decades than as a conventional church.

The Sunday service sports a strong, dedicated core congregation of 30 to 40 participants, Pastor Don Barnhart estimated recently. But probably 10 to 20 times that number have walked through the church's doors each week to be entertained by the increasingly fine plays put on by The Production Co., by the work of the Moving Space Dance Collective, or by the music and ambiance of The Ninth St. Exit Coffeehouse.

The three-story building also houses a cluster of social and political nonprofit groups such as the National Organization for Women; Trojan Decommissioning Alliance; Citizen's Party; New American Movement; Northwest Draft Counseling Center, Oregon Coalition Against the Draft; Oregon Solar Institute; Coalition for Safe Power; Committee for Atomic Veterans of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Latin Worker's Association; and, of course, a recycling center.

But to Barnhart and his congregants, social consciousness was and is as much a part of the church's ministry as conventional religious services.

PASTOR DON BARNHART

"Centenary Wilbur is a center in Portland for alternative political and arts activity," Barnhart said. "The people who have remained in the congregation have seen this building act as an extension of the church's ministry — a way to give organizations on a shoestring budget a low rent place so they can strive for social justice, social change. That should be a part of our ministry."

The young pastor, who joined the congregation last summer, said socially conscious ministry is especially crucial in the inner city, where much of a community's poor, elderly and minority members reside.

"We are facing the serious problem of exurbanization — the flow of people, jobs, skills and knowledge to the suburbs," he said.

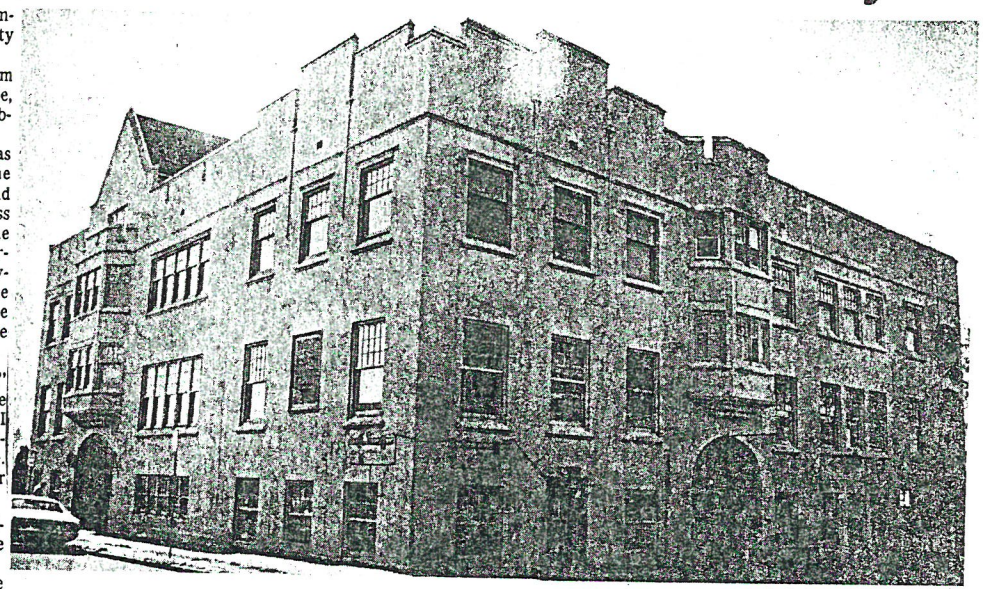
"When the new companies such as Tektronix and Intel move out to the suburbs, and then the restaurants and movie theatres follow, the middle class people no longer have to drive into the city for their culture. In turn, the federal government also will move its services out to the suburbs to be close to the majority of people. But what about the people who can't move: the elderly, the young, the low-income blacks?

"That's why I fear for the cities," Barnhart continued. "It's like the ground is moving from under our feet. I don't think the political parties understand what's happening to these people. I don't think anyone is taking up their cause."

But just because the Centenary Wilbur doors are closing, doesn't mean the congregation is going to quit.

Barnhart said his group will be meeting in members' homes until the group locates an old house or storefront to become the new Centenary Wilbur.

"It was really clear during the whole process when we were talking about moving or selling the church," he said, "that we would stay in this inner city (Southeast) area. It is vital that the minorities, the poor, the Native Americans, gay people — all oppressed people have a liveable place in the city. Making the inner cities liveable is our mission."



Staff photo by DAVE NEWHOUSE

MOVING OUT — Political and artistic groups, as well as the Centenary Wilbur congregation, will be looking for new homes next week when the Centenary Wilbur United Methodist Church in Southeast Portland is closed.

The pastor said he regretted that the congregation has had to end its twice-weekly free lunch program for the poor and transient population from the Burnside, Grand and Union Avenue areas, but hoped such service will be rejuvenated when a new facility is found.

"I feel that we have come full circle from the beginning of the Centenary Wilbur Church in 1864," Barnhart said. The first services were held that year by William Royall, a pioneer Methodist minister who held the services in his own home, according to the pastor.

"Royall was also concerned about his mission in the city," he said, "and he built the first church that was only 32-feet-by-50-feet on this property. Now we are back to meeting in homes, and will be in search of another modest space, like he was."

The first structure was built in 1866 — the 100-year anniversary of the Methodist church in America, from which came the "Centenary" name. The Wilbur name originated with the Rev. James H. Wilbur who organized and built the First Methodist Church in Portland.

The congregation enjoyed fruitful years after a large building of rusticated grey stone was built in 1890 that faced on Sandy Boulevard. Barnhart said membership was as high as 1,600 to 2,000 in the 1920s and '30s, but membership started to drop when people started moving out of the inner city neighborhood.

"The changing population patterns in the inner city are what have affected the church the most," Barnhart said. "But the other major disaster came when the Columbus Day Storm (of 1962) tore the massive church steeple down. They also discovered dry rot at that time and decided to level the church. The effect of that was just devastating."

Since that time the Centenary Wilbur Church has been in a building that doesn't resemble a church at all. The present building that the group is trying to sell was built in 1927-28 as the church's educational wing. Weekly services have been held in the former gymnasium, which has also since doubled as a theatre and performance space for a number of groups.

Another major change came in 1965 when Barnhart's predecessor, the Rev. Austin Harper Richardson, took over as pastor, and started the practice of renting space to progressive political and artistic groups who have added their color and flavor to the building ever since.

At times the theatre sets have not formed an entirely appropriate backdrop for Sunday services, Barnhart said, as he chuckled over the set for the raucous play, "In the Boom Boom Room."

"Sometimes it's been a challenge," he admitted.

Ironically enough, Oct. 12 — Columbus Day — was inadvertently selected as the last day of formal service in the church, Barnhart said. The service will be held at 11 a.m. and a pot-luck will follow at 12:30 p.m.

Sleazy Pieces, a lively Portland band which got its start in the Ninth St. Exit, and Ciganski Igraski, a Balkan dancing troupe, will perform along with others at a farewell party beginning at 1:15 p.m.

"I don't want this to be a funeral, you know," Barnhart said. "We're going to have a good time."

BENEFIT SALE for Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church, 9am-4pm in the basement, 215 SE 9th. Help keep red church in the black!

Building to be sold by church

The facilities of Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church, 215 SE 9th Ave., have been put up for sale because of the expense of maintaining the facility.

According to the Rev. Don Barnhart, pastor for the church, the $40,000 basic maintenance budget has been straining the 40 members of the congregation and the community groups which give the church donations when they use space in the 17,000-square-foot building. He said additional needs for the building include work on the oil heating system and the roof. The church was built in 1927.

Centenary Wilbur earned a reputation during the 1960s and early 1970s as a home for counterculture groups, draft counseling groups, programs to feed the poor and a staging center for musical and theater productions.

If the building is sold, Barnhart said, the congregation hopes to relocate in smaller quarters.

8-23 Oregonian

Church fire 3rd arson

Portland fire bureau investigators have determined that a fire at the Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church Sunday night, the third in six months, was started by an arsonist.

Sunday's fire at 215 SE 9th Ave. caused $7,000 damage, officials said. A March 8 blaze, also a case of arson, destroyed $35,000 in property. On May 5, $50 damage was sustained.

The first fire was started in a storage room of FISH headquarters on the second floor of the church. Damage was so great that the organization was forced to move, director Jean Higginbotham said.

Sunday's blaze was contained in an unused portion of the building. Fire investigators do not know if the two incidents are related.

"At first I thought it was a vendetta against FISH" Ms. Higginbotham said. "Now it looks like one against the church."

OLSO 3-12-79

Counterculture loses leader

By ALAN K. OTA
of The Oregonian staff

The preacher rocked back and forth at the pulpit and, for a moment, seemed to search for words to express what he felt. But in the end, there were no more words.

The Rev. Harper Richardson gave his farewell sermon Sunday and officially left the Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church in Southeast Portland that he made famous as a mecca for Portland's counterculture during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

And a tumultuous era in the city's history quietly came to a close.

It was a day to remember the freedom rides, sit-ins, protest marches and all the other ploys and causes that seemed so meaningful a decade ago.

Dressed in a tweed jacket, brown slacks and two-tone cowboy boots, the 50-year-old Richardson delivered a typically low-key sermon. Remember the 1960s, he said.

"What made these youthful 1960s activists remarkable is that, at a time when everything around them was going downhill, they went against the current, they went uphill and prevailed. These young men and women gave a direction to their living, they made their lives mean something."

There should have been music — a ballad by Joan Baez or Bob Dylan. It would have been a fitting end to the 1960s in Portland. But on Sunday, there were only words and memories.

In the short coffee hour after Richardson's final service Sunday, those who have known him over the last 14 years gathered to pay their respects.

There was Ruth Haefner, matriarch of the Gray Panthers; freelance writer Tom Gaddis, a longtime friend; and, in one corner, Ken Swanson.

Swanson was one of the most publicized draft resisters in Portland during the 1960s and served six months in federal prison plus two years' community service as a janitor at Reed College. Swanson remembered Richardson's commitment to help the underground "resistance" counsel draft dodgers at the church.

"He did so much and never wanted any of the credit," recalled M[illegible]aefner.

The draft resisters were among scores of community groups housed at the church under Richardson's program of finding "alternative uses" for church space.

Others included programs for troubled youth, a crisis switchboard, low-income food programs, the Portland Scribe underground newspaper and several arts and political groups.

On Sunday, Richardson recalled numerous highlights. There was the time Joan Baez led a packed house in a draft card burn-in. There were the rallies for the lettuce strike and the trip to Resurrection City in Washington, D.C.

And, of course, there was the visit of President Richard M. Nixon's wife, Pat, to the FISH food-for-the-poor program, with "two busloads of reporters," to show the "Republicans' concern for the poor."

Later this month, Richardson will begin a three-month sabbatical in Latin America to study the new "liberation theology" of Catholic priests in oppressed countries. He will return in June to begin a pastorate at another Methodist church in Oregon, which has not been chosen.

"I'll miss it, but I need a new identity," explained Richardson. "I need a change."

What will become of Centenary Wilbur Church is unclear. Current tenants, including the 60-member congregation, the Trojan Decommissioning Alliance, a theater group and a coffee house, have said they want to continue the church's "counterculture tradition."

But no replacement for Richardson has been chosen.

Built in the 1890s, the church saw great change under Richardson, who arrived in Portland in 1965. Richardson said he came to the city after being booted out of churches in Cleveland, Yakima and Coos Bay because of his strong political beliefs.

"When I got here, this church was silk-stocking establishment," recalled Richardson.

Not any more. "He (Richardson) is a person who feels for the downtrodden," said longtime congregation member Paul Libbey. "We had 850 members before. Now we have 60. But I truly believe Harper changed things for the better. Those who didn't think so left.

"Being a member of this church requires more than going to Sunday service. It demands time, money, energy and deep, creative thought," he said. "And that scares people off."