

Broadview UCC shares space, LED sign with Ethiopian church

Broadview United Church of Christ in Seattle has been sharing its building with Bethel Ethiopian Church for nearly two years.

With Broadview's installation of a new LED sign in April 2008, the church also shares its message space, so passersby know of Bethel's presence there.

The sharing is a natural expression of Broadview's outreach that has included resettling refugees from Hungary in the 1950s, Vietnam in the 1970s and recently an Afghan mother and son.

While many Bethel members came to the United States as refugees, fleeing political and religious persecution during the communist revolution in Ethiopia, they are now citizens and are at Broadview because they needed a new place to worship in their language.

Many fled to refugee camps in Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya and Somalia before seeking asylum or refugee status in the United States in the late 1990s. There are many first-generation refugees in the 100-member congregation.

Over the past five years, the Ethiopian population in Seattle has grown to about 15,000.

In 1996, 10 people formed the Bethel Ethiopian Church during a meeting at University Plaza Hotel. From April 1996 to 2001, they met at 15th Ave. Bible Church. As the congregation grew, they moved to Green Lake Presbyterian Church, which shared its facilities until September 2006 when they began renovations.

Broadview UCC, which felt that the under-utilization of its building did not mesh with its mission, wanted to share space.

"Bethel now uses our building as much as we do," said Dan Stern, Broadview's pastor.

Both congregations are intergenerational and have about 50 to 60 attend worship each week.

Bethel has prayer and fellowship from 10 to 11:30 a.m., Sundays, while Broadview holds its worship service. Bethel worships from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., so Broadview members hear their music as they gather in the fellowship hall for refreshments and conversation.

Bethel also holds prayer services at 1:30 p.m., Tuesdays and Wednesdays; a young adult fellowship at 4 p.m., Wednesdays; a Bible study at 6 p.m., Thursdays; prayer from 7 to 11 p.m. Fridays, and fasting and prayer from 6 to 8 p.m., second Saturdays.

The churches plan a shared Christmas Eve service. Bethel follows the Coptic calendar and celebrates Christmas on Jan. 6 when Broadview celebrates Epiphany.

Bethel's style reflects its Ethiopian Protestant roots, which incorporate elements of Lutheran, Baptist, Evangelical and Coptic styles.

Teenagers from both congregations also offered their elders a joint forum about each congregation's post-Katrina volunteer relief work in New Orleans by their youth.

The church's secretary, Mary-Mackenzie helped set up Broadview's website and helped Bethel set up its website.

"We are a small, urban congregation with a strong social justice, mission, open-and-affirming identity, coming from an Evangelical and Reformed background," said Stern.

St. Paul's UCC founded the congregation in 1928 as a Sunday school



Dan Stern shows Broadview's new LED sign to attract attention of those passing by to the church, events and thoughts.

mission in an area that was an expanding Seattle suburb.

Broadview is committed to ecumenical relations and community outreach in conjunction with other denominations. Its affiliate members include some Jewish and Buddhist believers, and a good portion of Seattle's cultural and ethnic diversity is represented.

"On a typical Sunday, there may be a few African-American, Spanish-speaking and gay/lesbian members in the pews. Our church includes Japanese members who had been in internment camps in World War II, as well as Korean and Taiwanese college students who live in member homes," said Stern, who is the second openly gay pastor.

Stern has served as Broadview's

second-generation openly gay UCC minister since January 2000. He follows an openly lesbian predecessor who had a long tenure at Broadview.

The LED digital sign outside is another visible way to tell of the building sharing, but it lacks a computer program to produce Ethiopian characters digitally.

"As far as we know, it's the first LED sign for a UCC church in the Northwest," Stern said.

The church had to convince the city to rezone to approve the sign. The PNC Church Development Committee also has provided support to make the sign possible with a no-interest loan to help with the sign's \$15,000 cost. The church will repay the loan over the next seven years.

"This is an evangelistic outreach

to build the church's visibility. We put on sound bites, such as 'God is still speaking and we are still listening.' Different messages flash through and can be seen from the street," Stern said.

The sign includes the sermon title, special events, announcements of Alcoholics Anonymous and other meetings.

It promotes the church's identity as an open and affirming and as a greening congregation. The LED sign is part of the greening commitment, because it is energy efficient. It automatically dims at night.

Broadview will keep track of its experience with the sign and report whether it helps draw new people. For information, call 206-363-8060.