

Unique path leads local pastor to Casco

Gadd's style has helped church's attendance grow

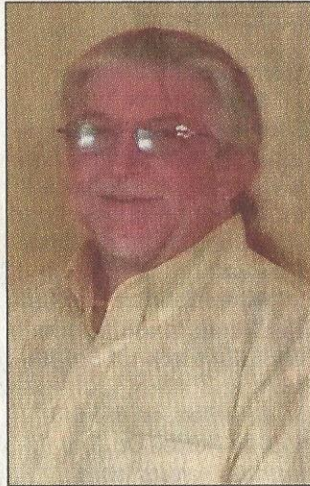
**BY BARB PERT
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VOICE REPORTER

Kenneth Gadd stands at 6 feet, 3 inches tall with a long gray ponytail, earrings, a couple of colorful tattoos and a personal history that includes a rough dozen years on the streets of Detroit.

Seeing him leading the Sunday morning worship services at St. James United Church of Christ in Casco Township would certainly appear to be a lesson in contradictions and redemption.

"I'm not typical, I'm pretty earthy," laughed Gadd. "I was called (to the ministry) since I was a very young person but for me it used to be when God calls run like hell the other way and so I did that for many years."

Growing up in Detroit, Gadd, now 58, describes a



Kenneth Gadd

"double life" spent attending church every Sunday with his parents and two brothers, but being part of the city's street life from a very early age.

"I spent a lot of years on the street being a thug; I got caught up in drugs and alcohol very early on," he said.

Although he was never convicted of a crime, that "street" behavior went on until he was in his late 20s

and then he got clean and sober in 1982.

Working in the religious community in Detroit and St. Clair County for many years now, Gadd moved to Port Huron more than 15 years ago. He didn't actually attend the seminary until he was in his late 40s.

Assigned to St. James United Church of Christ in Casco in October of 2004, Gadd said the church represents a second calling for him as he owns a business consulting firm and serves the parish on a part-time basis.

Culture shock all around

When he first pulled up to the small church in the woods that dates to the 1800s Gadd recalls having a good laugh at the city boy ending up out in the country.

"What a funny sense of humor God has," Gadd smiled. "I think it was culture shock for both myself and the congregation, but

it seems to work. We love each other and we understand that we're different."

Teri Wagner, of China Township, joined St. James five years ago and today is a member of the church council. She recalls being incredibly impressed upon meeting Gadd who, despite his size and hair length, was "very unimposing."

"He's the type of person that because of the life he's lived he can relate to everyone," Gadd said. "And you can let your guard down and be yourself around him too."

The church's location that's off the beaten path means many who attend or drop in are there due to word of mouth. Wagner refers to the church as the little "jewel" of Casco Township and, perhaps, Gadd is the crown that holds things in place.

"He is very open with his life which makes us feel like we need to share him with others," she said. "Ken has led a very interesting life but he is a perfect fit for our church."

Amid all his flair and uniqueness, you won't find any dramatically scripted skits or pop music tunes being presented during Gadd's services.

"I grew up in a very high level Episcopalian Church so I only do a traditional church service," he said.

All about the journey

In addition to his business and ministry at St. James, Gadd also provides pastoral care at area prisons including speaking with maximum security inmates on a regular basis.

"I believe in the power of forgiveness and that people should be treated with kindness," Gadd said. "But just because I forgive you it doesn't mean giving you the keys to my house. We are all doing the best that we can with what we have to work with."

He's always looking to expand his reach at St.

James. Sunday services typically have 50 to 75 people in attendance. There were only 25 members when he arrived at the church nine years ago so things are going in the right direction.

"I'm not looking to steal anyone away from the church they go to," Gadd said. "It's more about the people that have gotten away from the church because the church has damaged a lot of people, they are afraid, feeling guilty and the church hasn't done what they were supposed to do."

"This is a place for maybe those who don't feel they fit in and I want to make a safe welcoming place for people," he added. "For me it's always been about the journey."

St. James United Church of Christ is located at 9008 Meisner Road in Casco.

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