

Woodside Church get a new home

Woodside Church in Flint, Mich., an Alliance of Baptists congregational partner, has a new home.

Barely five months since leaving its mid-century building in the College Cultural Neighborhood, and nearly 150 years after building its first permanent home two blocks away at West First Avenue and Lyon Street, Woodside leaders announce the church's return to Carriage Town and a new era of life for the congregation.

"We are on our way to who we are," said Linda Angus, moderator of Woodside. The congregation purchased the home of Carriage Town Antique Center and Hoffman's Deco Deli.

"This is a great space for us," said Deborah D. Conrad, Woodside's pastor. "Groovy, functional, well-located and very inviting. Plus that fabulous patio/courtyard in the center."

The Art Deco facility at 503 Garland, built in 1930, has been mostly about cars: it first housed the Goodrich Silvertown Store, and later Goodrich Tire, then Sears Tire and Auto, and other auto care-related businesses. After several years of vacancy, Nick Hoffman acquired it from the Land Bank in 2007. The congregation will tend to some renovations, but expects to begin using the building for some purposes right away.

Woodside, legally the First Baptist Church of Flint, which began in the 1830s and formally organized in 1853, has had several homes, including the small white clapboard church building at First and Lyon in Carriage Town, and a grand, brick "big steeple" church at Second and Beach in downtown, neither of which is still standing.

A historical marker at First and Lyon commemorates Flint's founder, Jacob Smith, and indicates that the land that was Smith's trading post from the early 1800s was deeded by his daughter to the First Baptist Church in the 1870s. In earlier years, the emerging Baptist group had met in a room upstairs over the Cumings & Curren 'Scotch store' on North Saginaw Street, one of the first commercial brick buildings in Flint. The congregation's most recent building, on East Court, an Eero Saarinen design, was built in 1949 and housed the congregation for nearly 70 years. It was sold in 2017 to Mott College.

Now a member of the United Church of Christ, the Alliance of Baptists, and the American Baptist Churches, and known as Woodside Church since it became interdenominational in the 1960s, the congregation has a long history of community involvement and social justice, dating to the days of the Underground Railroad.

Long an interracial congregation, Woodside/First Baptist was also the first in the city to embrace the LGBTQ community publicly and enthusiastically (for which it was dis-fellowshipped from the Michigan region of the American Baptist Churches). Its Flag of Humanity has been a fixture at rallies and marches for justice since the 1960s, including the original march at Selma, Ala., the early Flint marches for fair housing, Obama's first inauguration, and marches for water, wages, immigration, racial and economic justice, as well as incarceration reform, from Flint and Lansing to Washington, D.C.

"So-called permanent homes come and go," said Conrad, who came to Woodside in 2014. "This congregation is what I imagine the reign of God to look like. We are all kinds of people paying attention to how to make this world reflect God's vision, and always willing to adapt to changing times."

Is it a little quirky for a church to live in a tire store? Yeah, but why not? Quirky is also a bit of who we are. What congregation wouldn't be more interesting with a little bit of neon?"

For now, the congregation will continue to worship at 727 East Street in Central Park, sharing space with Court Street Village Non Profit. You can learn more about the congregation's work and worship at www.woodsidechurch.net.