



Sentinel photo by R. C. Gregory

The Rev. Roy Pitts and his wife Jean will retire this month after serving Ionia's First Baptist Church since 1973.

Rev. Pitts retires Jan. 24⁸²

IONIA — The time has come, The Rev. Roy and Jean Pitts say, to retire.

After more than seven years as pastor of Ionia First Baptist Church, he will preach his farewell sermon to his congregation Sunday, Jan. 24, and she will play the church organ for her last regular service.

That week they will complete their packing and begin the move to a new house in Manistique, Mich. While others who retire may think of sand, the Roy and Jean Pitts think of snow.

WE'VE BUILT a small house, with a beamed ceiling and a stone fireplace," he says. "We spoke with the builder this week — and he seems pleased with how the house looks. We haven't seen it since October."

"We're looking forward to it. I think there comes a time to retire. It's possible to stay too long — when you can no longer do your work as it should be done. And we won't be idle. We have lots of projects in mind," he says.

THEY WILL return April 25 for the dedication of the new Christian Education Wing now nearing completion at the back of the church. The wing, Rev. Pitts says, is a highlight of his ministry:

"The new wing makes me so proud of this congregation. It's the fulfillment of a dream. We wouldn't miss coming for the dedication."

Looking back over more than 40 years of marriage, both agree they can't imagine any other vocations. He says, "Working with my wife has been great. You know, in more than 40 years of marriage I don't think anyone in the churches we've served has said one angry word to my wife.

THAT'S SOMETHING else of which I'm proud."

Mrs. Pitts says, "It's been an exciting life. Of course there are frustrations at times — but there have been so many satisfactions." He adds, "Working with people as we have, as intimately as we have, we've become close to them. Our congregations have become our families."

They also both agree that among the six churches they've served, First Baptist of Ionia holds a special place. Rev. Pitts says, "This church has a tremendous future. The boards and committees are simply tops in their fields, in every way.

IT TAKES about 80 people working together, on boards and committees, each doing a part, and I can't imagine more willingness than we've found here. I can't speak highly enough of all our friends in this church.

"Our congregation is a sharing congregation. The

ability it has to relate to each other and to the community is outstanding. In a world in which there is so much strife and injustice, this is a haven of kindness and love."

"Our church's outreach into our community has also been outstanding. When I asked if I might serve as chaplain at Riverside Correctional Facility, there was no dissent. My board said to me, 'It's about time our church was involved.'"

MRS. PITTS commented, "Well, I was a little concerned because I didn't want him (Rev. Pitts) working so hard. But being chaplain has had its rewards, too. He says, "Well, in some ways it was the best college education I could have had in recent years.

"Some of the men I knew there have stayed in touch. One calls me from Maryland occasionally."

Mrs. Pitts, who has served as church organist and choir director, says, "I've been involved in music all my life, from a little girl on. I was educated at the Royal

Conservatory of Music in Toronto — and have taught piano and organ since I was in my teens.

THAT'S HOW THEY met, in a sense. Rev. Pitts says, "My first introduction to (Jean) was over the radio. I was listening to this 19-year-old girl play the piano. There wasn't television then..." "Well, it was quite a long time ago," she comments.

"We'll miss Ionia," she says, and he agrees. "In the almost eight years we've been here," he comments, "I've noticed a growth in the pride we take in the community, a recognition of what we have here. My hope for the community is to see that pride grow, until it permeates deep and wide."

"This is a nice place to live. Ionia's a beautiful town."

During his pastorate in Ionia, Rev. Pitts has served a variety of community activities, in addition to Riverside Correctional Facility.

HE'S BEEN active in the Ionia Ministerial Association and served as its president

for two years. He served as chairman of public relations for the Ionia County Chapter of the American Cancer Society, and also as a volunteer counselor for the Spouse Abuse Center of Ionia.

He was also a member of the Post Resource Committee, sponsored by the Ionia Post of Michigan State Police.

In addition to serving as church organist and director of the Judson and Chancel Choirs, Mrs. Pitts served as secretary to the board of managers of the Ionia Council of Church Women United for seven years.

REV. PITTS says that the national organization of American Baptists may call on him. "We have a program called Minister-at-Large (MAL). Through arrangements made by the national organization, retired ministers are called upon to serve as interim pastors, while a congregation is selecting a new pastor, for example, or waiting for a new pastor to arrive."

"I EXPECT to serve some as MAL."

"It isn't that we'll be all that far away," Mrs. Pitts says. "We'll keep in touch."

"We might have retired sooner," Rev. Pitts says, "but when the Christian Education wing became a possibility, I agreed to stay until the building is up. Well, the building is now up and nearing completion. The time has come for us to retire."

THE CHURCH will host a farewell reception for Rev. and Mrs. Pitts Sunday, Jan. 24, from 3 to 5 p.m. in the church's fellowship hall.

"The reception will be open to the public," according to Rodney Zeagler, active in church affairs, who has served as chairman of the building committee for the addition.

"We're sorry to see Rev. and Mrs. Pitts go, but we're happy for them too. I think I speak for the church when I say we think Rev. Pitts has been an outstanding representative of our church to the community.

"**AND HE'S A** number one as a spiritual leader. He's really been the driving force behind our new wing. He never gave up. The church had talked about it for years. He got it started.

He's simply been so good for our church. And so has Mrs. Pitts. We're going to miss them. But we honor their wishes and wish them all the best."