

Bay Ridge Church Gets Special X-mas Gift — A Lady Reverend

By Craig McGuire

Parishoners at the Bethany Lutheran Church received a bit more than the usual Christmas presents and yuletide cheer this holiday season.

In late December, the congregation at Bethany, 1037 72nd Street, announced the arrival of its new pastor, the Reverend Jeanne R. Warfield.

Warfield, who comes to Brooklyn after serving as an associate pastor in Baltimore, Maryland, replaces Reverend James Hazelwood, who left to accept a pastorate in Rhode Island.

While Warfield admits to only have visited Brooklyn once, she says she is already impressed with the borough and is eager to experience it.

"It's not what everybody is so afraid of it being," remarked Warfield.

She said members of her Baltimore congregation had apprehensions about her "going to the city and not having enough trees [there]."

Warfield has since contacted them, reporting, "There's more than one tree that grows in Brooklyn."

The pastor moved here with husband Sheldon, who is training as a church musician while being the house care provider for both his wife and their

five-year-old daughter, Robyn.

Diverse Community Found In Brooklyn

"One of the things that attracted us to Brooklyn was we were looking for a place that had a multiplicity of people, cultures, and religious faiths," explained Warfield, "as a place where our daughter could grow up and learn about all people."

"I'm amazed at both at how large and how small Brooklyn is," commented Warfield. "It's a big city, but it's also a small neighborhood and that's really nice."

Warfield said her difficult move was made easier by a congregation that welcomed her with open arms.

"The folks here have been fantastic," related the appreciative pastor. "They almost turned themselves inside out to make my start-up a smooth transition."

To further ease the relocation, "My husband and I decided to give ourselves a Christmas present early so we took some time on the front end to move in," she said.

While the Reverend Warfield remarked that her relocation was difficult, she noted that she is no stranger to moving.

"I was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania with a

knapsack on my back," said Warfield, explaining that as a child, she and her family moved around a lot. Among other places, they lived in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Maryland, and even the Netherlands. "I leaned a lot on my parents and two younger brothers, and that strengthened our family unit," she recalled.

Warfield completed her undergraduate work in St. Louis, Missouri at Washington University and performed her seminary training at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

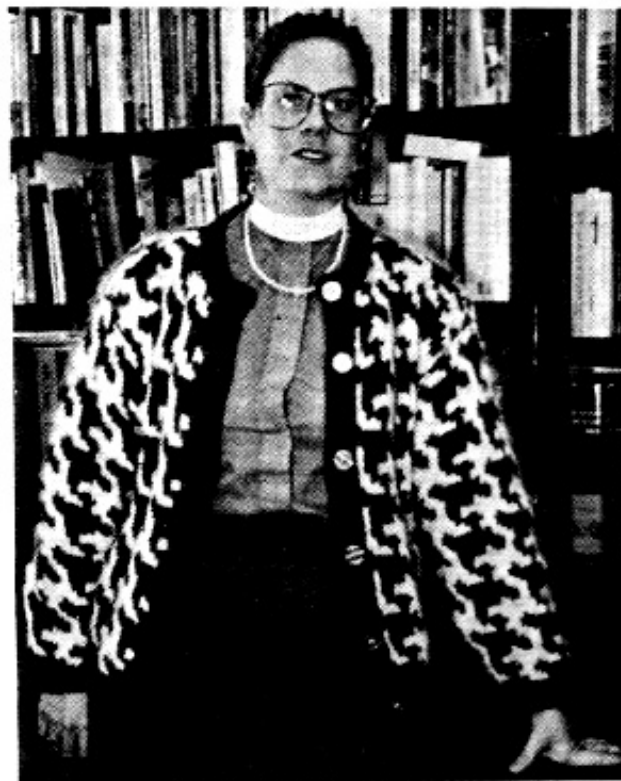
According to Warfield, the first order of business is to settle in and find out "the wonders and delights of Brooklyn."

Warfield said she also intends to get to know members of the congregation, the school and the community.

According to Warfield, the children at the Leif Ericson Day School, which is operated by the church, have been accepting.

However, she did say, "They're still getting used to me and every now and then I catch a glance my way like they're trying to figure out what to do with me."

Warfield said that she hesitates to form an agenda



The Bethany Lutheran Church and Leif Ericson Day School welcomed the Reverend Jeanne R. Warfield, who assumed the role of pastor on December 19, 1993.

Photo by Craig McGuire

until she is more familiar with her congregation, which consists of between 300 and 500 members.

She did say any direction taken will reflect Bishop James Sudbrook's goal to continue to grow healthy congregations for healthy communities.

Warfield said, "That is one of the things that drew

me to this area. I think one of the ways we can use our human gifts the best is by encouraging one another to be healthy in mind, body and spirit."

Originally, she was contacted by the bishop's office which offered the position that required someone interested in creative worship experiences.

"You can worship using the standard apostles creed and the liturgical formats that we've known through centuries," said Warfield, "and there are also the newer, contemporary worshiping tools, using everything from Bach to Amy Grant."

Warfield said the time of year for the move was "a definite plus because the season of Advent is a season about waiting for Jesus to arrive and bring us this news of hope and promise." In the Christian religion, Advent, celebrated the four Sundays prior to Christmas, heralds the coming of Jesus Christ.

Warfield said, "As we were waiting to come together it lent a whole new dimension to this time."

So far, so good for the new pastor, but she admits nothing is ever perfect.

"I think one of the problems may be the folks getting used to a pastor who is not six-foot-five," said Warfield, referring to her rather tall predecessor.

Warfield says she's here for the duration. "Besides, my husband says this is it, he refuses to box up anything again."

Warfield says she is "looking forward to many years of ministry with the congregation here."