

## Couple fights town, church, music

Continued from 11A

began playing the music again an hour a day beginning Dec. 15. "We thought it was settled. Twice, now. I think it's become a personal vendetta with them now."

"If it were a group of people, it would be different," Leamon said. "But it's just them. It doesn't bother the people who live on either side of them. Or behind them. They want us to believe the music just drops down on their house."

The church's 400 or so parishioners and other supporters said they can't understand why anyone would sue a church that is simply celebrating Christmas.

"I think it's absolutely ridiculous what they're doing," said Mary Ellen Crabbe, who lives on the same block as the Diehls. "It's an enjoyment to our little village to have the music playing."

Raechel Eggleston is the deputy village clerk. Her office is right across the street from the church. The music has never bothered her, she said.

"They're being unreasonable. The village bought new Christmas lights this year. Everybody's trying to get into the spirit. People are sick of them," Eggleston said.

Plus, the Diehls' stubbornness has cost the village money in legal defense fees, she said. One of their lawsuits named the village, and accused it of not enforcing its noise ordinance.

The Diehls have lived on their 1 1/2-acre parcel in Antwerp for 18 years. Mary Diehl was once on the village's board of trustees and both she and Stephen have long years of community involvement, including working with the church's youth group even though they weren't members.

Diehl said the couple have supporters in the community, but they don't want to voice their feelings publicly for fear of making themselves targets of harassment.

"They want to make it look like the whole village is against us," he said. "I don't want outsiders to think this is a bad village. It's just a hard-core group of misguided church members."

Diehl said he doesn't see an end in sight to the yuletide row. He knows he's not giving up.

"This is my home. I like Christmas music but I shouldn't have to put up with it blasted into my livingroom," Diehl said. "You can go into a mall and they've got Christmas music cranking along, but you always have the option of leaving. We don't have anyplace else to go."

## Small group services grow

By Brian Sharp

THE IOWA CITY PRESS CITIZEN

IOWA CITY, Iowa — This Christmas season, Jeff Landes once again will stand in church with his family, singing praise and listening to his pastor preach the gospel. There will be no pews, no pipe organ echoing off the stained-glass windows and into the rafters.

But again this season, Landes has comfort in knowing the one thing he could never find in his youth.

"I was always searching for God," he said.

That search has caused him and many other Americans to turn away from mainline religion. Landes and 125 other local residents worship every week at Grace Fellowship, a charismatic church rising on 18 acres in south Iowa City.

Mainline churches continue the struggle to hold onto their congregations in this changing, tumultuous society whose youth grow up quickly with a different, harsher reality than existed 10-20 years ago, said Diana Cates, associate professor of religion at the University of Iowa.

Technology and communications pull the far-reaches of the world into every living room, making it more and more difficult to accept that there can be one world view. People are asking the tough questions and rejecting the answers that don't fit their lives, Cates said.

"A lot of the churches have not done a good job adjusting," she said. "People don't have the patience to deal with all the complexities of religion. They want to get to the core of it and deal with the issue that is most pressing to them."

In Iowa City's Catholic community, there is some concern. But the Rev. Ed Fitzpatrick emphasizes it's important, especially in this transient community where the

Catholic community has held steady, not to overreact" he said. "We want to resource the moment ... and not cut and slash. We don't want to address something too soon if it is not going to be necessary."

It's called "prayerful discernment" in the religious community, viewed as planning for the future in the same cautions and faithful way asked of parishioners.

Parishes have begun to network instead of going it alone, he said. That means greater resources and — for smaller communities where church survival has been well documented locally — loss of the church doesn't have to mean the loss of the congregation.

Where once the people would find a new church and join individually, now they are encouraged to join in groups and maintain community gatherings, as well.

Ministering isn't just for the ordained, anymore.

While leading the youth group this week, Grace Pastor Gary Miller talked about divorce, relationships, drug overdoses ... even whether cats go to heaven. Grace Fellowship grew out of a Bible-study group and organized in 1978. Miller admits that 20 years ago, there wouldn't have been a place for — much less acceptance of — his church.

"I don't think the church should just stick its head in the sand and not deal with the life that we are living," Miller said.

He describes the church as preaching a spirit-filled message, seeking deeper relationships with God and focusing on the family in all its varying forms and issues.

"The role of the church is not changing," Miller said. "It is continuing to develop to meet the needs of its congregation."

And then there are the tough issues: abortion is one. But even more so is homosex-

uality, Cates said. It heavily divides society and thus congregations along generational lines. Some churches have found the only way to deal with the issue is to not deal with it at all, she said.

Cates said almost every church today is busied with surveys about how people can best use the church in their lives. Small groups — from parents' groups to grieving groups — have become common. Monday night at Grace is "healing school."

Mega-churches have entered the scene recently, bringing technology and sometimes full bands to the Sunday service. It's the personalization of God, Cates said.

"That concerns churches a lot," she said. "They really see themselves as trying to speak the truth, which really is a painful choice ... when they see the people really wanting to be entertained."

The Rev. James Vrba has led mass at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in the near southside since July. The newcomer has a fresh perspective on Iowa City, and transfers the mega-church idea into every denomination.

"How big is too big?" he asks. "Is there a point that the local parish can have too many members? That people can't get to know each other?"

"Churches can become too huge. It becomes like filling stations instead of helping to build community and teach people to love one another."

So what does the future hold? More splintering, Cates said. New and looser religious communities where everyone doesn't agree on issues, but the core belief is shared.

"People are going to find a way," she said. "Most people want to find connection."

Items for Church News should be submitted to 342-2160 by 5 p.m. on Monday

## Bethlehem's tree stuck in customs

By Gwen Ackerman  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — A 40-foot-high Finnish fir and 100,000 lights should be putting a special glow on Bethlehem's Manger Square by now. Instead, they are stuck in an Israeli customs warehouse and may spend the Christmas holiday there.

The Finnish tree and the lights imported from China were held up because they don't meet Israeli standards, said Idit Lev-Zerahia, spokeswoman for the Customs Authority.

She said she could only release the goods "in the name of the Christmas spirit" if she

got the go-ahead from the Israel Standards Institute or the Industry Ministry.

Two weeks ago, U.S. evangelist Jerry Falwell got involved in trying to help untangle the red tape, said Bobby Brown, who serves as adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Christian affairs. Falwell plans to be in Bethlehem with 300 Christian pilgrims for the annual lighting of the Christmas tree.

Brown said he asked Trade Minister Natan Sharansky to release the lights from Ashdod port in southern Israel for shipping to Bethlehem, a Palestinian-controlled enclave in the West Bank.

Sharansky agreed, said Brown, and all that is necessary is for a Bethlehem official to go to customs, fill out some forms and pick up the lights from Ashdod port.

The Finnish donors, meanwhile, bought a smaller, local tree and donated it to the cash-strapped Bethlehem municipality. The municipality found another tree and decorated it Thursday.

Brown said he only found out about the Christmas tree on Friday and would also try to get it out of customs before Christmas.

"We don't want to be the Grinch that stole Christmas," Brown said.

## Northeast loses prayer rug suit

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — A former security guard who claimed that a fellow worker desecrated his Muslim prayer rug was awarded \$300,000 Monday for religious discrimination.

The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination said that Lule Said will receive the largest emotional distress award in the agency's history.

The award against Northeast Security Co. is for

religious harassment and stress caused when Said was told he would be fired if he didn't stop praying at work.

"This case goes straight to the heart of religious discrimination and discrimination based on national origin," MCAD Commissioner Charles E. Walker Jr. told The Boston Globe. "We want to send the message that it will not be tolerated."

Northeast Security disputed the MCAD's factual and legal findings. It said it would

appeal to the full MCAD board and take the case to court, if necessary.

"We believe the decision is intended to punish Northeast Security without any basis for doing so," the company said in a prepared statement. "The amount of damages awarded are grossly excessive and combined with the mandatory training required, which is unprecedented, are extremely burdensome for a firm of our size."

We want to wish you a Great Holiday Season  
and offer you these Great Holiday Savings

17 Cu. ft. New Magic Chef Refrigerator  
Only \$499.99  
Designed for Energy Efficiency

Rebuilt Washer & Dryer Sets  
w/ 1Yr. Warranty  
\$399.95

Scratch & Dent Magic Chef Washer & Dryer  
22 lb. Super Capacity  
\$699.95

Used Stoves  
\$89.95  
w/30 Day Warranty

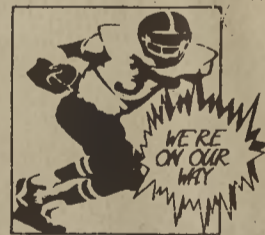
30 in. New Magic Chef Range  
Only \$289.95

Appliance & Furniture World 3815 Wilkinson Blvd. • 394-5115  
Where your patronage is truly appreciated.

## BIG LEAGUE SPORTS ARE HERE



WHICH WILL COME FIRST?  
SUPERBOWL? N.B.A. CHAMPIONSHIP?



CHARLOTTE HASN'T HAD EITHER ONE  
**YET**



BUT WE'VE ALREADY HAD

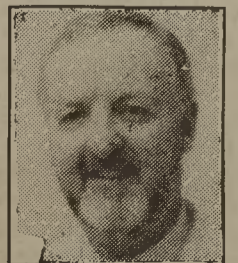


A WORLD CHAMPION BOXER,  
KELVIN SEABROOKS,  
and

HIS CHIROPRACTOR  
**DR. WATTS**

KELVIN SEABROOKS  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR

OF A & W CLINIC, HELPS KEEP KELVIN'S BACK IN SHAPE  
IF YOUR BACK OR NECK IS INJURED  
**CALL 393-3333**



DR. DENNIS WATTS, D.C.

WITH 3 OFFICES ON: BEATTIES FORD, WILKINSON & THE PLAZA  
OUR STAFF WILL TREAT YOU LIKE A WORLD CHAMPION

BEAT THE CLOCK  
**SAVE NOW**

100's to Choose from  
6x9 \$59  
9x12 \$99

Remnants  
Large Selection  
50% off

Hardwood Flooring \$6.49/Sq. Yd. (150 Ft. Min.)

3 ROOMS \$369 Installed  
Carpent/Labor/Pad up to 36 sq. Yds.

Berber \$12.95/Sq. Yd. Installed  
Commercial Carpet \$3.99/Sq. Yd.

Free Financing  
Visa, MC, Dis.

Carpet & Rug Outlet  
522-7787  
4301 South Blvd. Charlotte Mon.-Sat. 10-6