



A *Sanctuary* in the city

by Timothy Verity

Immanuel, Grand Rapids is committed to stay right where it is! The members of Immanuel consider it a privilege to coexist with the developing Michigan Avenue *Medical Mile* in downtown Grand Rapids.

Members come from all around the greater Grand Rapids area and love worshiping at Immanuel. It is a beautiful, historic structure. The ornate interior of the church and its lofting pipe organ connect people with the past and gloriously directs us to Christ - the hope of the future!

Members and friends weave their way on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings through the detours and obstacles with a sense of purpose and anticipation as we come to church. We come to worship, to renew acquaintances, to make new friends. Immanuel's storied past provides a solid foundation for its members as we look forward to serve neighbors, visitors, patients, and medical workers.

A question that is posed by many is, "Why do the members of Immanuel continue to come to church in this urban setting, surrounded, as it is, by large, gleaming new buildings?" The answer is simple - Immanuel cares.

The congregation has long described itself as a sanctuary for the city. Neighbors are becoming more and more concentrated in the medical industry. Immanuel hopes to show its historic hospitality and care for them and the many patients who use their services. We hope to become their sanctuary, not for gain, but for love.

Obviously, we do not provide medical care, but we surely can offer solace and peace in the Gospel of our Lord to medical workers and to those who use those services. The medical industry offers the

certainty of science. We offer the certainty of the promise and love of God.

Immanuel's church building is historic, beautiful, and irreplaceable. It will not change. The school will be taken down and a new ministry center will be erected. Christian education is a part of what we do and of what we are about. Beginning this fall we will be operating our school in the north end of town.

The congregation will soon come to agreement on the shape of a new, bright and accessible ministry center. When our new ministry center and all the other projects are finished in a couple of years there will be more parking available to us than ever before!

With the advent of a new ministry center, we hope to make space available to our neighbors, both patients and providers, for spiritual respite. We contemplate spiritual seminars and becoming a center for illness support groups. We hope to explore subjects of common interest with our neighbors in a friendly environment.

We will continue to offer our monthly community breakfast, participate in the area food pantry, celebrate Easter with our neighbors in the Bellknapp neighborhood, and offer English Second Language Classes.

The members of Immanuel want to do these many things not for the sake of praise, nor gain, but, because of the compelling love of God in Christ! And that's why we're staying!

Rev. Timothy Verity served congregations in Kansas before coming to Michigan in 1995. He served Our Savior, Gladwin until accepting the call to Immanuel in 2005. He and his wife, Janet, have three "mostly grown up" children.