

# As one church ends, one nears beginning

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

Earlier this week, even as one church in Orange was preparing to close its doors, the seeds were being planted for another religious institution to open and begin ministering to the community.

Daniel Sargant was among the small group of people who came out Sunday to witness the final service at the First Presbyterian Church of Orange. But he said he was also there as a sign of good will and solidarity with the city's religious community since he plans to open his own church soon.

"I reside in Montclair and attend Christ Church there. However I've come to Orange to start a ministry," said Sargant. "The Lord has directed me to this location to start a life-giving ministry. I think I've found another location on Cleveland Street and we're probably looking to open our doors sometime in October."

Sargant said his new church will be known as Life Giving Church. He said he hails from New York City, where he has been at the Bible Institute in Manhattan for the last 18 years, but now he is "launching out" to start a church in Orange.

"I had a vision and He showed me this location," said Sargant. "If it had been left up to me, I would not have come to Orange, but the Lord directed me here and that's why I've come."

In fact, Sargant said he had briefly considered taking over First Presbyterian Church's buildings and grounds as the new headquarters for his ministry. The reality of the high financial costs of maintaining the facilities, he said, was just too much. Instead of moving there, Sargant said he looked around the city for other locations that would be amenable to his needs and those of a burgeoning congregation. He decided on a building that is not too far from First Presbyterian.

"I came here about a month ago to inquire as to the use of their space for launching this ministry. At that time, I was informed that the church was about to close," said Sargant. "The

reason why I couldn't rent the church building is that it costs so much to maintain. There's no way that I could pay that kind of money. It's about \$50,000 just for utilities here, so that is one of the reasons they are closing the building because the congregation is so small. Even though other churches have tried to pitch in and help, there's not much that you can do with a dwindling membership and rising costs and expenses."

During that first visit, Sargant said that he met a man by the name of "Christianson" that day who preached a sermon about the demise of the church. He said he talked with him after the sermon and "formed a bond with him." Because of that connection, said Sargant, he returned Sunday to reflect upon the next step for his ministry.

"It is sad for me to see a church that is dying, and I ask myself, 'Why did this happen? Is it that the church did not change with the community; what went on that caused this?'" said Sargant. "Historically speaking, churches die because they have not integrated the new members in the community; they have not gone out and reached out to them. I don't know if that's what happened here or not, but it's sad to see the church, and more importantly what used to take place here, die."

Sargant said he is looking at the end of First Presbyterian as a cautionary tale. He said he hopes he can learn some things from its demise that he can apply to his own ministry to make sure it always stays vibrant and active within Orange.

"I think the problem in general is that historically churches have waited for people to come to the church. That was not the teaching of Christ, who always taught that you need to go out and go to where people were and minister to them and bring them in," said Sargant. "Many churches don't do that, and I'm not sure if that was the problem here with First Presbyterian. But I do know that I heard that there was a pastor here about 18 years ago who actually went out into the community. Because of that, the church started to grow."