

Hartman pleased with area achievements (4.29.06)

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Pastor heads to N.Y. after 17 years in Green Bay

By Jean Peerenboom, Green Bay Press-Gazette

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It is with mixed feelings that the Rev. Steve Hartman and his wife, Betty, head to New York after 17 years with the First Baptist Church in Green Bay. His congregation and the community will say goodbye at a luncheon after his last service Sunday.

Hartman will head to the First Baptist Church of Penfield, N.Y., a suburb of Rochester.

"We've enjoyed it here," said the soft-spoken pastor. "One of the important things is this is where our children grew up. It's a good place to grow up, and it's a really important part of our family."

The Hartmans have three children. Katie is a graduate of the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities and now works for Young & Rubicon in San Francisco. Rebecca, who wrote for the Green Bay Press-Gazette's teen pages, is a junior at Northwestern University in Chicago. She is studying in London this year. She is majoring in philosophy and religious studies. Jon is a first-year student at the University of Minnesota after graduating from Green Bay Southwest High School last year.

Betty Hartman is a middle school counselor in De Pere.

Steve Hartman said Green Bay has become home. "We've been well-received by our community. It's been fun to know the Packers. I came from Nebraska where there's no pro team. I've learned about the paper industry, too," he said.

He became involved in several community groups while in Green Bay. He served as vice president of the interfaith social justice group JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope United for Action). It's a tangible way for religious communities to come together, he said.

In addition, "I had opportunities to do things ecumenically with the Brown County Clergy group. I was able to contribute to the strategic planning process for the Green Bay schools and that was a wonderful opportunity. I've worked with the pastoral care department at St. Mary's Hospital," he said. He also served on the Press-Gazette's Faith and Culture panel. "It was fun to try something new."

In church work, Hartman worked in Wisconsin on the General Board of Church USA and took on responsibilities with the national church.

"Two years ago, I served as president of the Wisconsin Baptist Churches of Wisconsin and was active in the summer camping program of Wisconsin," Hartman said.

He considers his work with JOSHUA one of his biggest accomplishments here, but he's also proud of the growth and work done by his congregation. The church has been renovated to be handicap-accessible and the church has gone to two styles of worship services--traditional and contemporary. The latter "is geared around music, but it aims to be user-friendly for the unchurched."

He will go to a church of similar size in New York, though it is in a village rather than city setting. It is part of a citywide association of churches, whereas the Green Bay church is in a statewide association.

In a way, it's like going home for Hartman, who attended Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in the Rochester area. "It's about a 15-minute drive from where I studied as a seminarian," he said.

A search committee will study the needs of First Baptist Church prior to seeking a replacement. In the meantime, an interim pastor will be hired, Hartman said.