

# The Little Church that wasn't supposed to be!

by Carmen Pauls  
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It's the little church that wasn't supposed to happen.

Bev Kenny was busy doing a praise-and-worship TV show, running the Ochapowace Light House church and driving a school bus five days a week.

But then a visiting minister prophesied that Kenny and her husband Louis would receive a big building to start a church.

And when the folks from Carmichael United Church called a few months later and asked if they wanted the big, empty, 75-year-old stone church across from the General Hospital, what could they say but "yes"?

They call it the Songs of Living Water Revival Centre. An average of 20-30 people - mostly Native - show up for a Thursday or Sunday night camp meeting.

Church elder Doreen Creeley isn't worried by the small size of the congregation. Glancing at the rows of empty white lawn chairs that serve as pews, Creeley matter-of-factly states, "There's angels in those seats." Other feel a greater sense of urgency.

"The Second Coming is coming soon," says Ralph Wasacase, who attends the services regularly. So they want to get people back who are on the streets."

Kenny agrees: "What we must do for the Lord, we must do it quickly."

Ten months after the revival centre opened, people are indeed coming in off the streets. Sometimes they have a strong earthly motivation: food and a little tender-loving care.

On Sundays, Creeley starts cooking soup at noon, and by 5 o'clock 100-150

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people have gathered to eat and hear praise music performed by church members.

As Louise Wasacase puts it, "It gives them (street people) hope."

Bev Kenny, or "Sister Bev" as she is called, sees herself less as a pastor than as a facilitator for what the church members want to do.

It may be handing out tracts or preaching in downtown Regina's shopping malls. It may be orga-

nizing a group of "prayer warriors" on Tuesday nights, or having neighborhood kids play volleyball in the gym.

Or it may be telling stories. Kenny randomly calls people to come forward and give a testimony, and perhaps sing a song.

In response, a woman tells of being alone and considering suicide, and then looking up to see Jesus like "a bright whiteness" above her.

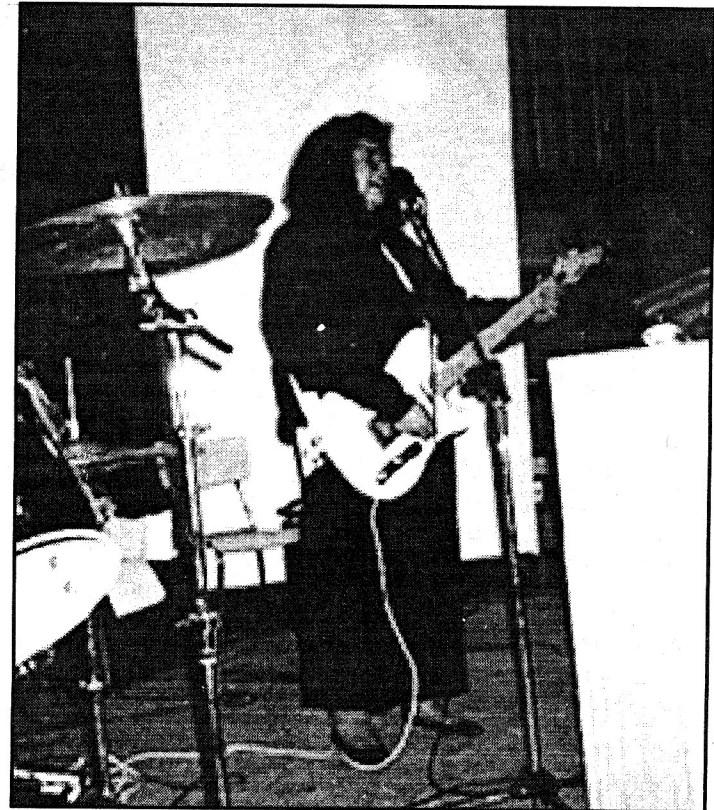
A man announces: "I don't serve no dead God. I serve a true God."

Such conviction radiates through the scattered congregation. Around them, there are still relics of Carmichael United Church, like a faded spot the size and shape of a hymn board.

Behind the plastic lawn are two old United Church wooden pews. Blue carpeting runs up the aisle to the simple stage, where the drums are steadily beating.

As Bev Kenny's rhythmic voice rises and dips, mantra-like murmurs - "Thank you, Jesus. Praise you Jesus" - increase to an ecstatic dull roar.

Eyes are clenched tight, almost as though the people are in physical pain, and hands are rising in the air.



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Bev Kenny leads worship at Songs of Living Water Revival Centre located in Regina, Saskatchewan on 1431-Fifteenth Avenue.

"Hallelujah, Jesus," says Kenny. "God is in the saving business tonight."

Bible texts trip easily off Kenny's tongue, but she is certain of her words.

"In the last days, God will pour out His Spirit on all the nations." The world will end soon, she says, and the message is for everyone.

This is not just a church for Natives. Non-natives are welcome to attend, and

some do, but the idea that Christianity is a "white man's religion" doesn't interest Kenny.

"It's really not a religion," she maintains. "It's a personal relationship with the Lord."

And so the little church that wasn't supposed to happen prepares to take on this world, while getting people ready for the next.