



Mitch Mascaro/Herald Journal

Rev. Frank Johnke, an intentional interim pastor, recently took the helm at First Presbyterian.

Icebreaker

First Presbyterian is looking to mend some rifts, and has the man for the job

By Mike Ingraham
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Rev. Frank Johnke, a 57-year old apprentice snowboarder from South Dakota, is a cold weather fellow. Cold weather fiend, even.

"What a beautiful morning!" he said Monday. It was -7 degrees; no wonder he was feeling so fine.

How fortunate, then, that he's in Cache Valley this season. And in one of the chillier spots here as well.

However warm the relations between the First Presbyterian Church in Logan and the community, inside the church the emotional temperature has been brrrrrr.

There was fire between factions before and during the exit of the longtime Reverends John and Bobbie McGarey. Then came ice.

On Oct. 1, 2000 came intention-

al interim pastor Johnke.

Now "the music is better than ever," says Dave Hedgepeth, the church's director of Christian education and master of metaphor. The worship service is "more uplifting." The sermons, others say, are short.

"The perspective of the congregation is much more positive and upbeat," testifies Paul Davis, clerk of session.

"Phenomenal" is a word Johnke uses often and that Hedgepeth uses to describe the pastor. But the turnaround, the "many steps to mend fences," as Johnke says, has been not so much phenomenal as familiar to Presbyterian intentional interim pastors.

These are ministers who ride to the rescue of leaderless congregations in conflict. Like in Logan, most congregations are ready to follow, but are still fuming.

"When a clergyman leaves a congregation there will be some who will be grieving that depar-

ture, and it does take time and internal work for that wound to heal," Johnke says.

"But when there is an expression of animosity or division, time alone will not heal those wounds. People need to explore ways to reconcile, to learn to trust each other again."

It's no time to be without a leader. A church can lose momentum and membership.

Twenty years ago the Presbyterians simply plugged in a minister from another congregation on his way to another pulpit.

But since the mid-1980s trained leadership has been available for these perilous periods. The "in-between times" as Johnke calls them, have become opportunities for renewal, much as Johnke himself has been revived by this specialized calling of interim pastor.

They are in demand. The Korean War years produced a "big

See PASTOR on Page 24