

CITY/ FAITH & REASON

Blended family finds new life

Anglican parishes
celebrate first
Christmas as one

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CALGARY HERALD

Blended families — when both partners in a marriage bring children into the union — are an increasingly common fixture in Canadian society.

A blended faith family, the result of a merger between two Calgary Anglican parishes earlier this year, will share traditional candlelight Christmas Eve services as one community Sunday night.

"We've found some new life," says Rick Merryfield, a member of the congregation of St. Mark's and St. Philip's Anglican Church in southwest Calgary.

"I think the Lord is going to use all our traditions in a very powerful way."

The two priests and lay leaders from both sides of the merger say their combined parish remains a spiritual and logistical work in progress, but the first seven months together have seen positive signs of growth and collaboration.

There has been a St. Mark's Anglican parish on 33rd Avenue S.W. since 1912. St. Philip's was built in the mid-1950s in Elboya as Calgary's post-war population and attendance at mainline Christian denominations mushroomed.

Recent years at both parishes have not been as kind.

"We had a meeting in the fall of 2002 and decided that if we were to continue down our present path, the future didn't look very bright," said Rev. Graham Goode of St. Philip's dilemma.

For Rick and Deirdre Merryfield and other longtime St. Philip parishioners, it was time for an emotional decision.

"The financial situation was just untenable — there were five or six families that were carrying 30 to 40 per cent of the church budget," Rick Merryfield recalls.

"And there had been a decline in Sunday school attendance until there were



Rev. Bob Bettson, left, warden Olive Hillman, Deirdre Merryfield, Rick Merryfield and Rev. Graham Goode. This will be the first Christmas the combined Anglican parishes of St. Mark's and St. Philip's have celebrated as one after they decided to merge last summer.

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