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Orthodox church breaks ground on a new parish

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CHEYENNE -- One of Christianity's oldest branches is preparing to open a new parish here, its first in 80 years.

The Orthodox Christian Church of Cheyenne has set a groundbreaking for a new church at 11 a.m. today. It will be located at the corner of Hynds Boulevard and Riding Club Road, north of the city limits.

"There was a decision from some of our members that we needed to grow our faith, and that's basically what we're doing," said Tim Joannides, the church board's vice president. "With the size of Cheyenne, we decided we needed a second church to help us accomplish our goals."

Members come mainly from Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Christian Church, the only other Orthodox Church in town.

But Joannides said members of the new church aren't abandoning or splitting from the old church. Rather, they are creating a new place for the faith to continue attracting new adherents, he added.

"There's one God, we have one Orthodox faith in Cheyenne," he said. "But now we'll have two parishes to worship in. The other church is going to benefit by this as well. It's going to be a positive thing for the whole community."

Dating back to the earliest days of the Christian faith, Orthodox churches profess an unbroken connection to the doctrines of the ancient church.

The name comes from the "orthodoxy" of members' beliefs and practices, which they believe are closest to what original Christians practiced before the establishment of the other churches to come.

The church is most dominant in Russia, Greece, Serbia and other Eastern European nations, though it claims more than 5 million adherents in the U.S.

While the church is commonly known as the Greek Orthodox Church, parish President Sam Galeotos said one reason his congregation decided to found a new church was to attract more members. And no, being Greek is not a requirement.

"Historically, the Orthodox faith has come to America and been in America more from an ethnic background," Galeotos said. "Now we're trying to get more people aware of it and get more people

engaged.”

The congregation, which numbers about 40 families, have been working since late 2011 to raise the roughly \$1.5 million it will take to build the first phase of the church.

According to church secretary Stephan Pappas, the church is expected to be made up of three buildings: an administrative and educational facility, the church itself and a community center.

“The first one will be the administrative and educational building, and we’re going to use some of (it) as a temporary chapel,” Pappas said.

They hope to have the first phase done by January 2014.

The congregation has bought 50 acres of land in the immediate area, 13 of which will be used for the church and its facilities.

The rest of it has been rezoned, and the church hopes to sell it off for residential development to raise funds.

In the meantime, the church is fund-raising through Halladay Motors, which is raffling off a \$50,000 Cadillac XTS luxury sedan. Halladay’s is selling 750 tickets at \$100 apiece, with the drawing set for June 29.

The church also is selling tickets to a dinner event, Western Boots and Ancient Roots, also set for June 29 at Shell Back Ranch west of town. Tickets are also \$100.

The Reverend Hieromonk Ambrose Omayas, who has served as the interim priest since June of 2012, said he is impressed with the speed with which his congregants have gotten the project started.

“Most new parishes that start, it takes years for them to really get off the ground,” he said. “Here, we have great support, great stewards, and my people are full of blessings because they’re supporting both my parish and the old parish.

“There’s so much excitement, and I’m just as excited as they are. It’s joy being with them to see them grow and expand. I’m looking forward to the new church that will eventually be built.”