New C-U pastor gave up politics for preaching

1980's

By The News-Gazette

The Rev. Steven Jackson once looked to politics to change the world.

Then he found something better.

"I used to think I could save the world," recalls the new pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Champaign.

"I realized politically that it was virtually impossible, simply because you could legislate laws, but you couldn't change attitudes or people's morals," Jackson said.

"It had to come from some place else. In the midst of that political frustration, I just received a call to preach."

Jackson, 39, was appointed to the Bethel AME Church at 401 E. Park Ave., C, this past March. He arrived here with his family in May.

JACKSON

Jackson and his wife, Donna, have three children: Tasha, 17, Patrick, 9, and JoAnna, 6.

Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Jackson attended Wright State University there and received a bachelor's degree in political science.

He was working politically there when he received his call to the ministry, he said.

From there, Jackson studied pastoral ministry and theology for two years at the former Marion College in Marion, Ind., a Wesleyan Bible college now called Indiana Wesleyan.

He first started pastoring at the Bethel Church in Long, Ohio, where he stayed for about a year.

From there, Jackson was appointed to the Wayman Church in Peru, Ind., and stayed about 3½ years.

He then took over as pastor at two churches in southern Illinois: Model Chapel in Alton and New Bethel AME Church in Godfrey.

The small church in Godfrey was burned down by arsonists twice, but Jackson and his congregation of about 25 rebuilt it both times.

Jackson said he was then appointed to the Bethel AME church in Champaign, after the death of a presiding elder in Indianapolis prompted a reshuffling of pastorates.

Jackson said he hopes to work with the local congregation of about 300 to make the church more visible in the community.

"We're in the midst of changing and doing some things now," he added. "We're going to be more active in the community, in campus ministry. We're just going to be highly visible — the church as a whole. We're going to identify the aches and pains of the city."