

# Scarborough Leader






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## Former resident returns to start church

### Nondenominational Cross Church begins holding services

By Michael Kelley Staff Writer



**Scarborough resident Aaron Werner preaches at the University of Southern Maine Sunday, Jan. 12. Werner and his wife, Kathy, moved to Scarborough earlier this year to start Cross Church, a nondenominational church. For more photos, visit the Leader Facebook page. (Michael Kelley photo)**

Bowling Center for years.

This time last year, Scarborough native Aaron Werner was Dean of the Chapel and a philosophy and religion professor at Shorter University, a 3,000-student Christian university in Rome, Ga. He gave all that up last spring to start Cross Church, a new nondenominational church in the greater Portland area. Werner said he was called by God to relocate to Maine and start a church.

In June, Werner moved with his wife, Kathy, and their four daughters to Scarborough, where they are renting a home near Flaherty's Farm on Payne Road.

Aaron Werner said he is happy to be back in the area, where he still has many ties. He has several relatives, including his brother and father, who lobster fulltime. Aaron Werner, who lobstered before moving away in 1996, is looking to get back into the industry, at least part-time. His uncle was a fire chief in Scarborough and his mother and stepfather owned the Big 20

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He was drawn to the area, not just because of those connections, but also because of its large population of nonchurchgoers.

Portland, Kathy Werner said, has more atheists per capita than anywhere else in this country.

“Portland is one of the most unchurched cities in America,” said Aaron Werner, a 1989 graduate of Scarborough High School, where he excelled at track. “I think it is number three behind Providence, R.I., and Albany, N.Y.”

This is not the case in south where the Werners had been living.

“In the south, there are great churches everywhere,” Kathy Werner said. “We wanted to make a difference someplace.”

The first service at Cross Church was held Sunday, Jan. 12 at 10 a.m. in Hannaford Hall on the Portland campus of the University of Southern Maine, which Kathy Werner called “a beautiful facility” that works well for the church.

Aaron Werner, the church’s pastor, said the mission of the church is simple: Love God, Love People.

Werner said the hope is to attract people of all Christian denominations.

“I envision a church that gets back to Jesus, away from specific religion and back to Jesus,” he said at the beginning of his sermon Sunday, Jan. 12.

Services, which will last about an hour, begin at 10 a.m. and include a 25-minute sermon, as well as contemporary Christian music, PowerPoint and even video segments.

The music portion of the service will be lead by Ricki George, the church’s worship leader, who the Werners met last year.

“The Lord brought us to him. He is a musician and wanted to be part of a church band,” Kathy Werner said.

Music, Aaron Werner said, is “a powerful, powerful tool for reaching people.”

Kathy Werner said more than 200 people showed up for the first service. Earlier this month, the Werners sent a flier to 25,000 homes in Cape Elizabeth, Portland, Scarborough and South Portland, as well as running ads on Christian radio stations and the *Leader* to spread the word.

The service, Aaron Werner said, was well received.

“I don’t think we got any negative comments. They loved it. They said they hadn’t seen anything like it and were going to come back and tell their friends,” he said.

Aaron Werner said he wants to create a church that creates a lasting connection between people.

“Most of the churches have failed and closed down because they failed to adapt and failed to be relevant. We want to stay relevant,” Aaron Werner said.

The long-term plan, Kathy Werner said, is to create similar churches in other parts of the state.

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