



RICHARD TSONG-TAATARI • rtsong-taatarii@startribune.com

Churchgoers at Singaas have ancestors — many who came from Norway — buried in the churchyard cemetery. The Christmas singing program has been held every year for more than 80 years.

closeness. Ushers intercept visitors headed for the spacious outer pews and guide them to the massed center.

“I’d like to see my church full again, like it was,” Lovro said.

So would Jay Nelson, 36, still a member of the congregation though he moved to Atlanta eight years ago.

“I like to sit in a pew and look over my shoulder and see that I’m surrounded by friends and family,” he said. “There is a wonderful continuity here, and bedrock values.”

It is a conservative Lutheran church, a place where preachers have been known to thump the pulpit, warn and scold; and that could be its salvation, said Dan Lawburgh, 55, a sign maker who moved his family here from Colorado six years ago.

“I sat in that church, and I could feel something,” he said. “There was passion, integrity, and I wanted to be part of that. I think there are other people who will want the same thing. There are people who say, ‘My life is not working — I need a place like this.’”

Juanita Nolz, 63, the church organist for 45 years, nodded. “It’s the old-time religion,” she said.

Singing in a packed church

Nelson said it was members’ fond memories of singing in a packed church at Christmas that inspired the CD.

It was recorded last June, “on the hottest day of the year,” he said. “No air conditioning, and we had the win-

HEAR THE CD

- To hear selections from

“Christmas in the Old Country Church,” go to www.startribune.com/audio.

- For more information on Singaas Church and the recording, including ordering information, go to www.startribune.com/a2100.

- The Christmas program at Singaas Lutheran Church, 3 miles northwest of Hendricks, Minn., has been held the day after Christmas for more than 80 years. Tuesday’s program begins at 7 p.m. and features local musicians Rollie and Marie Trooien. The church is about 170 miles west of the Twin Cities along the South Dakota border.

dows closed to simulate an evening service.”

The church has sold more than 2,100 copies so far. Profits will go to mission work and to help sustain the church. Church members and others from the area also will gather Tuesday night for Singaas’ annual Christmas concert, which has been held the day after Christmas for more than 80 years.

“Christmas is the last service we hold upstairs,” Nelson said. “After that, we’ll hunker down in the basement to save on heating costs. We’ll come back up at Easter.”

Chuck Haga • 612-673-4514