

ALEXANDRIA

Bishop leads dedication of old church's new wing

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Alexandria Township will formally dedicate its new parish hall on Saturday, with a special service of celebration led by the Right Rev. G.P. Mellick Belshaw, Bishop of the Diocese of New Jersey.

After the service, the congregation will hold a procession from the original stone church, built in 1769, to the parish hall for a dedication ceremony. A festive reception will follow the parish hall's common room.

The church, built of stone quarried from an area off Pittstown Road, is a one-room building with dramatically arched clear glass windows. Few changes have been made to alter the original simplicity of the church. Architect Susan Rochelle of Little York, a member of the congregation, designed the new structure to complement, rather than duplicate, the original building. The new parish hall is made of stucco with a stone foundation.

Another church member, Peter Cichonski, served as general contractor for the project, which pro-

vides the 100-member congregation with space for education and social programs, an office, a kitchen area, lavatories and storage space, as well as facilities for use by outside organizations.

Construction is being funded by congregation members and friends, with financing through the Diocese of New Jersey.

The congregation has been in existence since 1723, when 30 Anglican families assembled in a log structure across the road from the present building, led in worship by missionaries supplied by the Bishop of London. The present church building, constructed when membership expanded, was built when Louis Stevens, a member of a prominent colonial family, offered the site on his Cornwall Farm.

The church closed during the Revolutionary War, when the conflict with England also meant a break with the Church of England. It reopened at the beginning of the 1800s as part of the new American Episcopal Church.