

Police mediate church feud caused by 'internal strife'

■ **High tempers:**
Officers are called to West Side Church of Christ when members argue about who should lead the congregation.

By SCOTT WILLIAMS

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ROCKFORD — A struggle for control of a west-side church nearly turned ugly Wednesday,

prompting police to order parishioners off the property.

About two dozen members of West Side Church of Christ, 1523 Morgan St., clashed after minister Jeff Caruthers and his supporters resisted a move to oust him as congregation leader.

Rockford police arrived about 10:30 a.m. and spent nearly two hours trying to mediate between the church's feuding factions.

"Some tempers were getting a little bit high," said Sgt. Joe

Westmoreland.

Even after police arrived, the confrontation continued.

Onlookers shouted, traded insults and periodically restrained one another physically.

Some waved Bibles with one hand and pointed fingers with the other.

One congregation member theorized that the feud is about church finances.

Four uniformed police officers stood in the aisle of the church

auditorium negotiating with Caruthers and his critics.

In the end, both sides agreed to let the congregation's estimated 300 members decide Sunday whether to retain the pastor.

Police then cleared the premises, forcing cancellation of church activities until Sunday.

"This was simply a gentleman's agreement," Westmoreland said.

Caruthers, minister for five years at the nondenominational

church, later expressed uncertainty about whether the congregation will support him.

He said some families unhappy with his performance have tried to organize opposition against him: "We are having internal strife."

Please see Police, 4A ▷

■ **What's next**

■ **About the church**

Both on 4A