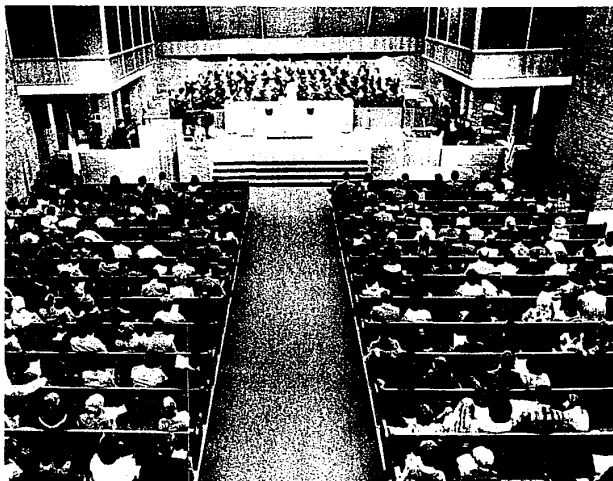


We gather together, following tradition



Livonia police officer Douglas Smith is busy at the noon hour Sundays directing traffic along Farmington Road as worshippers pour out of several large churches in that area. (Staff photo)



Sanctuaries large and small are filled with worshippers each week as organized religion continues as a major force in suburban living. At latest count, the area had 208 places of worship. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)

Organized religion advances despite roadblock

By MARGARET MILLER

At last count, there were 207 places of worship holding regular services in the area comprising Livonia, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Redford, Garden City, Westland, Plymouth and Canton.

Make that 208—the Redford Church of God began worship services on Easter Sunday under the leadership of the Rev. William Clendenen to take its place as the newest congregation in these parts.

The list names more than 30 different denominations, with Baptist churches the most numerous at 38. Lutherans with 33 churches and Roman Catholics with 29 parishes are right behind.

Church members are harder to count than church buildings, but an informal survey of about a tenth of the flocks gives a picture of increasing attendance on public worship in this area.

Every one of the churches checked report increasing membership as of right now. Some have had earlier experiences of falling away, but said things were now looking up. Many had increased 20-fold or more.

These 200-plus churches have become a part of the fabric of life in the western suburbs through a variety of routes.

Some, like First Baptist, First United Methodist and the Baptist of Plymouth and Newburg United Methodist of Livonia, date back to the days of the earliest pioneers who arrived to farm the land in the first half of the 19th century.

Others were established first as missions by specific congregations or by denominations. Ward United Presbyterian of Livonia is the giant example in this category.

Catholic parishes formed as populations increase and parishes divide.

A Detroit turned suburbanite can look down the list of churches in this area and see a lot of familiar names.

Grand River Baptist, for instance, had two homes on that Detroit thoroughfare before its members literally paraded out to Livonia in 1968 to take abode in a new building on Six Mile Road.

Nardin Park United Methodist of Farmington was located, of course on Nardin Park, a city recreation spot in west side Detroit, from 1927 until it followed its migrating members in 1965.

Bethlehem Lutheran also went the northwest Detroit-to-Farmington route.

Mt. Hope Congregational Church (Livonia) once was located at Livermore and Davison in Detroit, and Adat Shalom, a conservative Jewish congregation, packed up and moved from Curtis Street in Detroit to a spacious location in Farmington Hills.

MIGRATED CHURCHES and one-time mission churches, taken together, indeed make the northwest territory look like a promised land for those who sought to worship in fine new chapels close by their new suburban homes.

But recently organized religion has had to pull up short in its advance on the suburbs. Just as immigration quotas closed to a large extent another promised land, there is now local government action pulling back the welcome mat when new churches come knocking.

The leaders of Brightmoor Tabernacle decided like many churches before it that quarters in northwest Detroit were too cramped. They found the members lived to the west of it, building, and made plans to build anew in Livonia.

They picked a Six Mile site, on a stretch already home to enough parishes to have acquired the nickname Six Mile Row.

But many residents of the Burton Hollow subdivision near that site objected, listing traffic congestion, the large number of churches already located nearby and the fact that the land would become tax-exempt instead of being filled with families and prospective students for emptying schools.

And early in April, in a move with few precedents, the Livonia City Council rejected by a 4-3 vote the petition by Brightmoor for permission to build a new sanctuary on the land it had chosen (and gained option to purchase).

As a result of that vote, another large Detroit congregation, First Church of the Nazarene, is shying away from plans to move to Livonia.

Set to build west of 1475 and north of Seven Mile, the church has announced it will make other plans.

BUT LEST THESE recent developments lead to a surmise that there's a paucity of church-going in the area, a Sunday morning drive and the sheer number of congregations would indicate otherwise.

On Farmington Road, another avenue of churches, police direct traffic when late morning services send hundreds to their cars.

Ward United Presbyterian, the biggest congregation, numbers more than 2,900 and has an annual budget of \$1 million.

In Canton, Calvary Baptist has a membership of 596 and an annual budget of half a million dollars. A number of other congregations range between 1,000 and 2,000 members.

The programs offered by the churches are widely varied, as lectures, classes, seminars and sporting events abound.

The building are used every day of the week, sharing space with day care centers and hosting programs like cooperative nurseries, Lamaze training classes, scouting functions and senior citizen activities.

The leading denominations, after the Baptists, Lutherans and Roman Catholics, are United Methodists, eleven; United Presbyterians, eight; Church of Christ, seven; Episcopal, six; and Reformed Church in America and Orthodox Catholic, four each.

There are three of each of the following: Jewish synagogues, Assembly of God churches, Missionary churches, Free Methodist congregations, United Church of Christ groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Nazarene and non-denominational churches.

Other denominations represented by one or two congregations in this area are Pilgrim Mission, Apostolic, Church of Christ in Union, Universalist-Unitarian, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Latter-Day Saints, Maravian, Unity, Pentecostal and Wesleyan.

LIVONIA HAS THE greatest number of churches, 64. Farmington has 33, Westland 32, Redford 28, Plymouth 24, Garden City 15 and Canton seven.

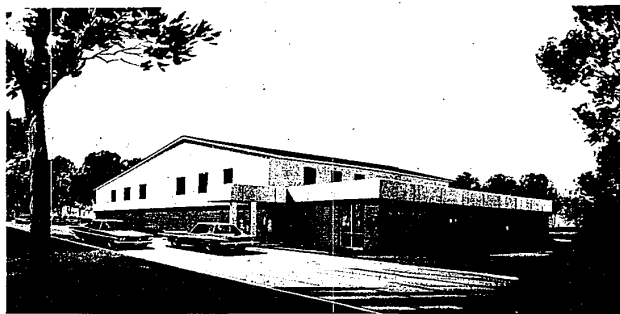
It is in Canton that organized religion, like many other things, that growing fastest.

The last few years in Canton have seen the establishment of Geneva Presbyterian Church, St. Michael Lutheran and St. John Neumann Catholic parish.

Marantha Baptist and Faith Community Church, a Moravian congregation, have been added to the ranks within the last year, and on April 16 services began in the Plymouth-Canton High School cafeteria for yet another congregation. This one, to be known as People's Church, is affiliated with the Reformed Church in America.

The suburbs, you might say, are keeping the faith.

Two years ago, the First Baptist Church of Farmington celebrated its 150th anniversary. Ten people were covenanted at the formation of the church in 1826. After fire destroyed the original structure, the church pictured was built in 1861. There have been several additions through the years, but the bell tower still stands as a unit of the present structure.



Newest church structure built in the area is this house of worship of the Marantha Baptist congregation in Canton Township. It is a branch ministry of the West Chicago Baptist Church of Detroit.

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