

# BELIEFS & Values

## Family center from page B7

before losing his battle with cancer last March.

Light's portrait — unveiled at the June dedication ceremony by his wife, Elizabeth — hangs adjacent to the entrance of the center that bears his name.

"Pastor Gordon Light was a humble, loving, Christian man, just to know him was a gift," recalled Kelsey. "I feel very rewarded in thinking that the Light Center sits there as a beacon in the community."

The new facility and proposed projects have sent a wave of excitement through a congregation intent on increasing its membership through evangelism and community outreach programs. Plans are under way to open a day care center on church premises in September.

"In the advent of the completion of the Family Life Center, everyone is starting to see that it's real, it's happening, and we're moving forward," said Bloomfield Hills resident Donna Ulmer, a commercial real estate developer who chairs the church building committee.

"And they're even more committed to this special phase," Phase II of the project consists

of a 500-seat sanctuary to be built on the corner of Lone Pine and Telegraph at a proposed cost of \$3.2 million.

The new sanctuary will be twice as large as the current one. Groundbreaking is anticipated in spring 1997.

Phase III of the master plan, still years away, was designed to connect the current facility with the new sanctuary. It will house classrooms, offices and a multi-purpose room.

Cross of Christ Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was begun in Bloomfield Hills in 1955 as The Lutheran Church of Bloomfield. Five years later, the mission church was organized as a congregation and renamed.

The current facility at 1100 Lone Pine Road was built in 1963 and has been expanded three times.

The Gordon H. Light Family Life Center is available for use by the greater community. To tour the facility or to join in the activities, contact the church office at (313) 466-5880 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Services are held at 8:30 and 11 a.m. on Sundays, and at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays.

## Public schools an asset to community

### FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

What's the point of "English-only" laws?

Proponents of a federal English-only law argue that it's necessary to help create and sustain a common American culture.

I don't know whether

English requires a law to commend it to immigrants and temporary residents, but I do believe that it's important for us to support the maintenance of a common culture.

The old "melting pot" image has long been in disrepute. We have come to recognize that there need be no threat in various ethnic groups holding on to their traditions or passing them on to new generations. The nation is richer for that.

Still, there is a distinct American identity that grows out of our history on this continent, and there are values rooted in that history.

It is important that Americans of whatever background be able to recognize and work within the value system of this society.

Not necessarily to conform

to it in every respect!

In fact, one of the core values of this society is that it has learned to accommodate and even welcome challenges to those values.

If English is important in holding onto a common culture, I would argue that the public schools are even more important.

The church to which I belong has, from time to time, created what might be called "parochial" schools.

Usually, it created schools in areas where it was not yet possible for public education to get a foothold.

As soon as public education became viable, the existing Presbyterian schools either closed, or redefined their mission.

It has been rare indeed for this church to create parochial schools where it was possible to maintain a system of public education.

Other churches have, for quite good reasons, made other kinds of commitments. My own church's history has been based on a positive affirmation of the value of public schools.

We live in a time when public schools and their personnel are under attack.

Some officeholders or candidates for public office cam-

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paign on a program of offering vouchers to parents who would then be free to use them to tuition costs in private schools.

While parents — and specific religious communities — have always been free to create educational institutions of their own, in this country the costs of separate schools have been borne by those who elect to use them.

The rationale has been that everyone — whether they had children to send to public schools or not — has a stake in public education.

Taxes to support public schools have not been considered as payment for direct services to the taxpayer, but as an obligation to support the common good.

A voucher system defies that consensus, and diverts public funds to institutions,

which are only minimally accountable to elected representatives of the people.

I would argue that a voucher system will inevitably weaken the public systems.

They will not only divert public resources to private and sectarian schools, but will also lead the public to disinvest from these remarkable American institutions.

In a time when society seems more and more fragmented, it would seem wiser to find ways to support these institutions that have contributed so substantially to the formation of a common American culture.

It's good that our children should know as friends people of other religions, races, ethnic backgrounds, social class, and abilities. This exposure happens most consistently in public schools.

Whatever you choose for your own children, public schools are an asset to the whole community — far more of an asset than English-only laws can ever be in the sustaining of a common culture.

Ronald P. Byars, Ph.D., is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham. To leave a voicemail message, dial (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1851 from a Touch-Tone phone.

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