



Present and past: The Rev. Philip Trzynka (left) is the current pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, and the Rev. Carl Mehl was the founding pastor.



Special day: The groundbreaking for the Prince of Peace Lutheran Church on New Market, off 12 Mile, in the late 1950s was a special day, especially for founding members.

40th anniversary

Prince of Peace Lutheran celebrates its history and its future

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

When Ginny and John Webber helped found Prince of Peace Lutheran Church 40 years ago, Farmington Road was gravel and Kendallwood I subdivision was just under construction.

"It's a totally changed community," said Ginny, who sat behind a stack of notes about the history of the church on New Market, off 12 Mile.

Like Farmington Hills, the church had humble beginnings and has changed and grown along with the times.

The congregation's first service was in Wooddale Elementary School on Palm Sunday in 1959 and was attended by little more than 90 people. Today, the congregation totals some 400 members.

"I think that was an exciting time with the first service at Wooddale. It was better than a baptism," John Webber recalled. "We met to plan a church."

That was 40 years ago. To celebrate the church's anniversary, a choral concert will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2, at the church. The celebration will feature the Prince of Peace Lutheran

Choir and the American Choral of Sacred Music.

The celebration will continue with an anniversary worship service Sunday, Oct. 4. The service will feature the church's founding pastor, the Revs. Carl Mehl and Rupert St. Pierre, who served as pastor beginning in 1977 until 1981. A banquet will follow services in the church's fellowship hall.

During the banquet, Mehl will provide a glimpse of the church's early history, while John Webber will recount the intermediate history, and member Jack Schwartz will present the current and future view.

To further celebrate the church's anniversary, and as a way of continuing the congregation's mission work, members have agreed to let the Lutheran Church of the Deaf to use the facilities beginning Oct. 11.

"It's an additional way to thank the Lord for his blessings of the past," said the Rev. Philip Trzynka, who joined the church in April, 1994.

In 1958, Mehl was asked by a circuit counselor with the Faith Lutheran Church in Livonia to contact other Lutheran congregations in the area to determine

how many families in the Farmington Hills area were attending. "When we heard a church was going to be formed here, we were just starting a family. It was more convenient to come here," Ginny Webber said.

The small congregation and its charter members, such as the Webbers, met in Wooddale until a church was built on New Market.

The new church borrowed money from the Michigan District Church Extension Fund to build the church, which today is the fellowship hall.

"I didn't want to name the church. I wanted members to," Mehl said.

St. Paul was a name members didn't want because many Lutheran churches are so named. Member Jane Boltz suggested Prince of Peace.

"If I'm not mistaken, it's the first Prince of Peace in the Missouri Synod," said Mehl, who served until the spring of 1968 when he was asked to serve as executive director of the greater Detroit council of Lutheran churches.

The Rev. Victor H. Mosenbrink took Mehl's place, during which time another building program was initiated.

To increase the congregation, "we did a lot of evangelism in the community," Ginny Webber recalled.

By 1971, the second phase of the church building was dedicated, and the congregation had grown to 693 baptized members.

In 1976, Barbara and Glenn Pattison joined the church. "Our backyard neighbors were one of the founding families. They asked us if we were Lutheran and if we had a church," Barbara Pattison said. "We said, 'we're Lutheran and we're looking.'"

One theme — friendliness — rings throughout the discussion of the church's history. "We had so many friends here we couldn't ever transfer," Barbara Pattison said. "It's like home."

Mehl echoed her sentiments. "It's always been a friendly congregation. I've been the founding pastor for a number of congregations. This turned out to be friendliest one. There's just a great bunch of people here."

And they are a bunch of people who are proud of their history in Farmington Hills.

Members have photos documenting the first service 40 years ago, as well as activities since. They also have a guest book which members signed during the church's first service. One of the members also compiled all the history — at least through 1971.

In the late 1970s, religious differences split the burgeoning congregation. Other members left and created Hope Lutheran.

"We still recognize the membership at Hope Lutheran as our brothers and sisters in Christ," said Trzynka.

The church is also known for extending its hand. It has provided sanctuary to the Latvian Lutheran Church and the Greek



Members: Glenn and Barbara Pattison (from left) joined in 1976, while Ginny and John Webber were founding church members.

Orthodox Church. And the Farmington Kiwanis called the church home for more than 30 years. "The women of the congregation fed them every Tuesday," John Webber said.

In the 150-year history of the national Lutheran church body, the Prince of Peace history is short, Trzynka said.

"But we look forward to a long service to the Farmington area community," he added.

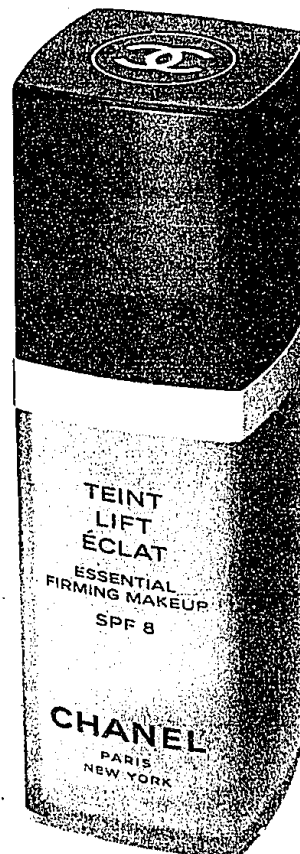
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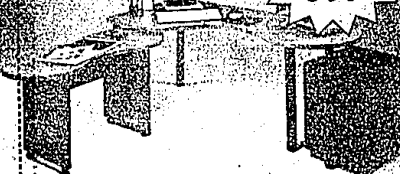
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