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Changes Upcoming For 'Village Church'

By FRANK D. STARR

SLAVIA, FLA. — The church building seems transplanted. The red brick structure, with its square tower in front, was built in the European village manner, but it stands in a semitropical setting.

The village church in its languorous surroundings is emblematic of the kind of people who came nearly 60 years ago to this flat land, decked with orange groves and groves of lake trees. The soil is mostly spare but sometimes, lovingly tilled, lush and fat with vegetables.

They were Slovak migrants who had come from Cleveland to "take our children on the farms where there will be better opportunity for the world of the wilderness of a large city," said Steve Sidlik, a teacher at St. Luke's. "But we were frightened rabbits." 

"It is the job of the farsighted missionary to anticipate a new emphasis among religious leaders that local congregations will be given the responsibility of the work of God, to listen to people, and let others develop the program," said Mrs. Alfred Kaiser, a delegate to the 14th biennial International Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) convention.

"We are "here to live lives inherited and to join in setting our course forward," he stated. "We are here to live lives inherited and to join in setting our course forward." 

"God will not be defeated by the lack of work that I recognized this, but that they should be ready to do it," Dr. Raedeke said. "We are "here to live lives inherited and to join in setting our course forward." 

"I accepted the appointment because I felt led of the Spirit to do it," he said.

"It is an opportunity to do better for the non-Christian church and other denominations." 

"I believe there is a uniqueness about Lutheranism — which streams both the Gospel and sacraments, and for this reason we have something very special to offer Key 73." 

"We do not minimize or ignore doctrinal differences among denominations. In the organizational structure of Key 73 we explicitly state that doctrinal differences not only exist, but that they should be respected, and never should a doctrinal difference prevent or frustrate us in our efforts to live lives inherited and to join in setting our course forward."
saying, "Well, when it comes, we will do something about it, This is the one fear I have," he confessed, "maybe we are going to take things too lightly, and then it is going to happen on us." Stidham’s expectations are echoed by another teacher at the school, Joe Battle, who was born and raised at Divido, a few miles away, and who joined the congregation as a young adult.

"When I was in senior high school," he remembers, "the whole school, grades one through senior high, may have had three or four hundred students. Now the school, through senior high alone has more than 1,400 students.

"South Seminole over here was just like this area — lots of woods, houses here and there. But the growth of South Seminole has been such that the political power has shifted from the north end of the county to the south."

He feels that the people of Slavia are aware of just how great a change in their community will be in the next few years.

Mixed Emotions

"I have mixed emotions about it myself," he says. "I think the growth is going to be good, but it will be a very trying time for the congregation."

"We've been a small congregation, with a small church, and still have several acres of land where we could have had a kind of life not to see the change, and yet if you are going to do something, you're going to have to accept the change."

On the whole, he says confidently, "the congregation will respond very well to these changes."

"A year or two ago, everyone in the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, which includes the congregation, said that we may not be so close to the Lord."

"The last thing we want to do is get into personal mission work by neglecting the church, by neglecting the word of God to people."

"Now the junior through senior high school, grades one through twelve, may have had 13 years ago as a teacher and later married into a Slavia family, says she has always been impressed with the campus. (See VILLAGE CHURCH, P.5)

ON SCHOOL GROUNDS teachers Joe Battle, left, and Kenneth Markert, right, talk with Parent-Teacher League president Mrs. Walter Duda, center, and several students.

LUTHERAN HAVEN RESIDENTS John and Helen Provon met and married after both had retired to the SELC's home for the aged, Mr. Provon, whose hobby is raising flowers, hands his wife one of his roses.

AT CHAPEL SERVICES for children of St. Luke's school Pastor Kucharik makes a point about prayer by using an object. Fewer than half of the students at the school are members of St. Luke's congregation.

whose family has farmed the Florida flatland for generations, observes: "Our church has branched out. Not everyone comes from here anymore."

"It was strictly a church of farming people as it started, and it remained that way for a number of years." Ferdinand Duda says. "But now it is composed of different segments of people."

"That the congregation has been active in reaching out to the community "can be seen and felt by the growth," he maintains. A former teacher at St. Luke's, and currently president of the SELC's LWML, Mary Ann Weitenbarger, remarks that "It wouldn't be a growing church, would it?" for the congregation to have remained in such a small community.

Although the congregation already has a strong sense of mission which causes them to reach out into the community, some members of the congregation want to see this aspect of congregational life developed more.

Rev. George Mareck, retired SELC pastor and a resident of Lutheran Haven retirement village, says that "a great challenge" facing the congregation is the need to "be more active in personal mission work by witnessing to Jesus and His kingdom."

"Our people are starting to wake up to their challenge, and they are starting to make a little progress."

Mrs. Walter (Judy) Duda, who comes to the congregation about 13 years ago as a teacher and later married into a Slavia family, says she has always been impressed with the campus.

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VILLAGE CHURCH

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ed of the words of God to Adam after the Fall: 'In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread till thou return to the ground."

The easy life the settlers first expected unfolded instead in years of poverty and hardship which disciplined and molded them into seasoned farmers and strengthened their faith and reliance in God.

"I feel those people who are close to the earth are closer to their Lord and love to hear His Word and study it," affirms Rev. John Kucharik, present pastor at Slavia.

"A son of one of Slavia's founders remarks: "You can see the hand of God much more clearly on the farm than you can in an office or factory job."

Although the colony was without a pastor for its first 22 years, worship services were held faithfully "every Sunday and holy day," and declares Ferdinand Duda, president of the congregation (and Sunday school teacher of a class of pre-schoolers), "if a person didn't attend church in the old times, he was sick."

A resident pastor arrived in 1934. He was Rev. Stephen M. Tudy, who remained as shepherd of the colony for 33 years.

"Under Pastor Tudy's leadership the congregation matured. Not only did the congregation build a new church — an architectural gem which reflects Pastor Tudy's interest in history and worship — but St. Luke's founded a school which has flourished in confidence and respect of the entire area and serves a great many children beyond the congregation."

Synod Leader

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(See VILLAGE CHURCH, P.5)

CONGREGATION'S PRESIDENT, Ferdinand Duda Sr., right, confers with St. Luke's pastor, Rev. John Kucharik. Mr. Duda has also taught a class of preschool-age children for more than 35 years.

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ON SCHOOL GROUNDS teachers Joe Battle, left, and Kenneth Markert, right, talk with Parent-Teacher League president Mrs. Walter Duda, center, and several students.
VILLAGE CHURCH

(Continued from Page 4)

gregation but that "if I would make any criticism of the people of St. Luke's - and I would include myself in that - it would be that we are a little shy. The people are basically humble and quiet people. They hesitate to go out and knock on doors and push themselves."

A strong evidence of the congregation's openness to outsiders in the parish school. Some 60 per cent of the 263 students are from families who are not members of the congregation, the school's principal, E. L. Bellhorn, points out.

Many of these, of course, are members of the congregation, but some have no church background.

Of these last Pastor Kucharkin says, "You can become acquainted and acquaint them with the Gospel of Christ as taught by the Lutheran Church. St. Luke's school is a mission arm of the congregation."

Until about 10 years ago the parish school included mostly children from the congregation. At that time the congregation decided to open the school to more outside children. Since then the school has grown rapidly. Now 10 teachers lead classes from kindergarten through junior high.

Recent Growth

School leaders say the greatest growth in recent years has been in the junior high department. Last year the school had to turn down 52 applicants, many of them for the upper grades. Principal Bellhorn says, "We will have to have a good number of applications for the seventh grade - some for the sixth." The figures for the growing popularity of the school in the community are impressive. "In the past school has earned the reputation of being the best in the community, crowded public schools, and the dissatisfaction of parents with what they see as relaxed standards and lack of control in public school classrooms."

"Parents are concerned about the growing sophistication of the world and feeling ready to go out and face it. Anyone, millions of parents are really concerned with the youth — not just in our congregation but with the youth all the others, too."

The only anxieties that people have are really concerned with the youth — not just in our congregation but with youth at large, because, after all, our kids go out and meet all the others, too."

Some of the young people themselves are concerned also. They hesitate to go out and knock on doors and push themselves."

A high school sophomore told of worrying about being able to maintain her standards as a Christian and about wondering what is missing in the lives of classmate's who had turned to abuse of drugs and to other antisocial behavior.

A seventh-grade student at St. Luke's own school was of the opinion that "the school is starting to get problems like many public schools have."

The community whose forefathers decided to "take our children on the farms where there will be less temptations of the world and of the wickedness of a large city" has found that the world's temptations and wickedness have moved in next door and threaten to move in altogether.

Still, though some take occasional sidelong glances at the past, few in the congregation seem resentful or repentant of past decisions.

WOULDN'T Go Back

Steve Sidlik, remarks, "In a little community, you have your advantages, and then as you grow larger, well, there are some things you wish you could have back again, but you didn't want to go back, he says.

Judy Duda, remembering her impressions when she first came from Chicago, says: "There's a community spirit which I have to admit, changing a little bit. Our school is growing so that a smaller percentage every year are actual members of St. Luke's. And that has changed things a bit. You know, its beautiful, but I don't like the price you pay for expansion and success."

Anyway, members say, it wouldn't make sense. "You can't have faith in the Christian faith and not want to share it, even if there are risks that must be taken."

Congregation president Fer­dinand Dude declares emphatically: "You can't have faith and not try to practice it."

ONLY FOUNDER of St. Luke's Lutheran Church and of the Slavic community who is still living is George Jacobcin Sr., right, telling Pastor Kucharkin about the congregation's original church building (background), now used for storage.

Wider Variety

The growth of St. Luke's school has not been an unmixed blessing. With more kids come more problems. The staff and space to accommodate the growth of the school has not been an unmixed blessing. With more kids come more problems. The staff and space to accommodate the problem of overcrowding in the classrooms. The school leaders say the growing possibility of a senior high school would not make sense to have a large city" has found that the world's temptations and wickedness have moved in next door and threaten to move in altogether.

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FAMILY DEVOTIONS bring together residents of one of the children's cottages at Luther Haven, maintained by the SELC District on grounds next to St. Luke's school. In this cottage Mr. and Mrs. John Kern serve as parents for nine teens as well as for their own two smaller children.