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NOVEMBER 2006



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Smoke Church Celebrates 250 Years

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Smoke Church Celebrates 250 Years

BEFORE 1917



By the Rev. Elna Stratton, pastor, St. Paul Lutheran and New Jerusalem Zion United Church of Christ Shared Ministry, Hamburg

(Ed. Note: Pastor Elna Stratton was raised in Connecticut but began her ministry in the Dallas, Texas, area, where she spent 22 years. Before coming to New Jerusalem Zion and St. Paul's, she served an ELCA congregation in Schuylkill County. In November 2004, she was called to work with the congregations of St. Paul Lutheran and New Jerusalem Zion United Church of Christ to formalize the shared ministry agreement.)

Throughout 2006, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran ("Smoke") Church of Hamburg has been celebrating 250 years of ministry at the church's location in Windsor Township, northern Berks County.

Many events have been held during this 250th year to celebrate the occasion. Former pastors have returned to preach and reminisce; members in period costumes marched in the Oct. 28 King Frost Parade in Hamburg; and Pastor Guy Grube led a Pennsylvania German service on Oct. 29. A banquet will be held on Nov. 11.

The culmination of the year's activities will be the special anniversary service on Sunday, November 5, 2006, at 2:30 p.m. The guest preacher that afternoon will be **Jon Pahl**, Professor of the History of Christianity in North America at the **Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia** and currently a Fellow in the **Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University**.



It all began on November 6, 1756, when the Rev. Daniel Shumacker dedicated the log church built on land granted by William Penn's son, John. Originally known as Lebanon Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Lutherans were joined by a Reformed congregation in 1826 and plans were made to erect the stone church which is still in use today. The Union church was renamed St. Paul's when the new edifice was dedicated in 1832.

In 1930, the Lutheran congregation became part of a three-point Lutheran parish. In 1964, St. Paul's Reformed (now UCC) congregation dissolved, and St. Paul's again became a Lutheran church.

A Shared Ministry

In 2005, St. Paul's Lutheran Church entered into a shared ministry arrangement with New Jerusalem Zion UCC of Greenwich Township, about nine miles away. Both of these congregations were experiencing financial stress and considered shared ministry as an alternative to lessen the financial burden on the two smaller congregations. The joint study committee also considered that shared ministry could bring new life to special services, youth ministry, and fellowship activities.

Because of the physical separation of the two facilities and the fact that they serve somewhat different communities (New Jerusalem Zion serves the greater Kutztown area and St. Paul's the Hamburg area), each maintains its own governing and committee structure. However, they have established a Shared Ministry Board with members from both congregations. In most recent times, they have begun to share in special services, including Lenten services, Thanksgiving and an early Christmas Eve service structured for families with younger children.

Why "Smoke" Church?

A curious thing about St. Paul's is that it has been known for centuries now as "Smoke Church." Numerous legends are claimed as the reason, but no one seems able to prove one theory as most accurate. Did smoke from the fireplace chimney escape through the chinks between the logs? Did the men keep their pipes lit while waiting for the circuit preacher? Was there a smokehouse out back? Was it the

wraith-like fog that can arise from the valleys in the area?
Was it even because the first structure was burned down in
1763 by the Lenape Indians?

If anyone knows, please share your information with the
congregation!

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