

New Lutheran church meets in Inverness

By Nancy Kennedy

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On any given Sunday, 40 to 50 people gather together for worship amid the pine trees at Whispering Pines Park in Inverness.

The Rev. Paul Sutterer, a retired Lutheran pastor, conducts Sunday services for Tree of Life Lutheran Church, a new church that meets at 10 a.m. Sundays at Whispering Pines Park in the recreation building.

Talented church organist Keith Schenck makes a small keyboard sound like a grand pipe organ as he plays the opening hymn, accompanied by Jonathan Manchester on the trumpet, as the congregation finds a seat in the recreation building at the park.

It's simple and casual and also lovely as the sun shines through the trees and into the building's high windows and skylights.

The Tree of Life Lutheran Church began meeting as a church in October 2014. However, until January, they were without a pastor. Now, the Rev. Paul Sutterer, a retired Lutheran pastor, travels from Summerfield each week to lead this new church in the study of the scriptures and the celebration of the sacraments.

"I have 49 years in the ministry, and this church turned out to be a blessing for me," Sutterer said. "I had some serious heart conditions, and if I were a cat with nine lives I'd be on my third or fourth, but this has been a great joy for me."

Sutterer, who is an avid historian, is currently taking the church through a study of the Old Testament book of Habakkuk.

On a recent Sunday morning Sutterer told the congregation, "Habakkuk is angry with God because he is silent, but God's silence doesn't mean he's absent or uncaring."

It can be daunting to start a new church, and it's unusual to begin a new Lutheran church in a community, but as Sue Fullerton, one of Tree of Life's organizers, said, they feel strongly that God is leading them to do this.

As their vision statement says: "We are a family on a journey. Living grace, living truth and reflecting Jesus. We are an unfinished collection of travelers. Single and married, young and old, bound together and captured by a glimpse of Jesus big enough to convince us that life is not about us, but all about Him.

"We pursue transforming truth rather than stagnant knowledge. We desire to constantly move toward one another in unconditional love and forgiveness. Worshiping together, playing together, living together. We are wounded healers embracing the stranger, strengthening the weak, empowering the poor and seeking the lost. We are seed throwers, fire stalkers, hope peddlers and grace givers. We want our world to be different because God has sent us."

The church hopes to eventually be a part of the English Missouri Synod.

Tree of Life Lutheran Church invites the public to visit them any Sunday at 10 a.m. On Sunday, March 22, join them for a renewal service of dedication at the Whispering Pines recreation building. Enter the park and follow the signs to the right.

"I've started three other churches, and it's been a pleasure being able to help another one get started," Sutterer said. "The nucleus of this church is made up of wonderful, talented people, and they have a real warm heart for the scriptures. I hope to be with them for as long as I can."

For more information about the church, visit online at treeoflifelc.org.

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