

57 souls, 44 communicants. "Old" Pastor Young, as he was affectionately known by some, stayed with Living Word through the first six months of 1975. In March of 1975, the California Mission Board felt Living Word's size was such that it warranted "mission status," which is the subject of our third and final chapter.

III. FORMAL ORGANIZATION AND SUBSEQUENT HISTORY:

March, 1975 - October, 1981

As was stated, in March of 1975 the California Mission Board granted Living Word "mission status" and with it, the privilege of calling a full time minister of the Gospel. On March 23, Rev. Hochmuth, chairman of the CMB, informed Living Word that they would be receiving as their pastor a graduate of that year's seminary class. The first Sunday of July Rev. Young preached his final sermon for Living Word and the following Sunday, July 13, 1975, seminary graduate Paul E. Huebner was installed and ordained.

The first thing on the agenda for Living Word and her new pastor was the matter of building for themselves a place of worship they could call their own. The Seventh-Day Adventist church was convenient and affordable but it was felt that if Living Word was to have any drawing power at all, it had to have the visibility and permanence that comes with having your own worship facility.

In 1977, Living Word began looking for a site to build her church. After a long search a site on the rural east side of Petaluma was found around which a housing development was being planned.

With help from the CEF, Living Word bought the property and the buildings on it (a house and a barn) for \$85,000. The house is still being used as the parsonage and the barn was torn down and recycled by a member.

The next step was to find an architect for the chapel. Living Word first of all took a look at several plans from the synod architects. One or two of them they found desirable, but when persued, it became evident that the city of Petaluma, for one reason or another, would not approve the plans that came from the synod architects. So Living Word began shopping around for an architect in California. In 1979 Living Word selected the architectural firm of Irwin and Associates of Oakland. Immediately the architects went to work on the contract.

In February of 1980, the funds for the structure as well as the plans were approved by the General Board for Home Missions. In fact, the synod architects were so impressed by the plans drawn up by Irwin and Assoc. that they added it to their own repetoire. In May of 1980, the plans were finally approved by the city of Petaluma. On October 7, 1980, the bids for the contruction of church were opened and the lowest bid came to \$212,000. The building permit cost Living Word another \$11,500.

It was agreed with the contractor that the members of the congregation would do some of the work on the church themselves. Members cleared the rocks from the soil so grass could be planted, installed the sprinkler system, did all the painting, and planted all the trees and shrubs. The church structure was finished in early July but the city of Petaluma would not grant a release on the building until all the trees, shrubs and grass were in. Even

though northern California was suffering through a heat wave those first weeks of July, with temperatures anywhere from 95 to 102 degrees, the members went ahead with the planting so the church could be accessible as soon as possible. We were thankful that very few of the trees planted succumbed to the heat.

On July 12, 1981 Living Word held her first service in her new chapel. The formal dedication took place on October 11, 1981, with over 100 in attendance. Thus, six years after being granted "mission status," Living Word was worshipping in her own facility. But as the Rev. James L. Tate once said, "The church is never a place, but always a people; never a fold, but always a flock; never a sacred building, but always a believing assembly." Then what of Living Word's "believing assembly" during those six years? After a membership high of 61 in 1977, the total number of baptized souls leveled off to 55 in 1979. The year 1980 saw Living Word lose one third of her communicant members through military and business transfers. But I imagine that kind of thing is not too unusual for a church in the suburbs. There was one bright spot in 1980--out of 40 communicants, 5 attended Synod worker training schools. The statistical report for 1981 show that Living Word had a total membership of 47, with 40 communicants, and an average per Sunday attendance of 30.

What does the future hold for Living Word Evangelical Lutheran Church? God alone has the answer. But the members of Living Word know one thing for sure. God will be with their church in the future, just as He was with them when their church began and throughout her brief history. For they, and all Christians, have the Lord's promise, "Where two or three are gathered in my name,

there am I in the midst of them." With such a promise, the future of Living Word will never be in doubt.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!