



Fox Point files

by Douglas H. Frazer

Fox Point Houses of Worship

Part II

Last month's article featured the early history of the Village's houses of worship. From their founding to the present, the five, active congregations are a spiritual and social cornerstone of Village life. This month features a more in-depth view of North Shore Congregational and Fox Point Lutheran churches today. Next month the Fox Point Houses of Worship series will conclude with Congregation Sinai, Congregation Shalom and St. Eugene Catholic Church.



Fox Point Lutheran Church

7510 N. Santa Monica Boulevard

After patiently but persistently ringing over 800 doorbells in the fall of 1946, field missionary Dwight Schelhart provided the results of a survey to the Office of the Synod of the Northwest, which determined that Fox Point was ready to have a mission church. Pastor Schelhart gathered together 106 people in the Maple Dale School (Port Washington Road) on the Sunday before Christmas, 1946, for a worship service, and the congregation formally organized a short time later. The chapel dedicated in 1951 was soon inadequate for the growing congregation; membership had grown to 630 by 1954 with almost 400 children enrolled in Sunday school. Subsequently, a larger sanctuary was built and dedicated in 1956.

Fox Point Lutheran was instrumental in establishing Luther Manor in the late 1950s, now a multi-million dollar care and residential facility for the aging. In 1976, they also initiated a program called Kindcare, Inc., for mentally retarded adults in the metropolitan area that today serves many surrounding counties.

In 1947, William Downey was called to lead the congregation. Downey had already participated in a great theological moment requiring both sensitivity and dexterity: he was the 509th Division bomb group's chaplain who prayed with the flight crew that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima before taking off on August 6, 1945. He recalled that he wrote the prayer on the back of an envelope: "We pray thee that the end of the war may come soon, and that once more we may know peace on Earth." Throughout his life, Downey remained steadfast in his position that, although all war is evil, when faced with the choices that were available, the bombing was the appropriate choice.

Fox Point Lutheran is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is led by two pastors, Reverends William Knapp and Bruce Cheever. Knapp came to Fox Point fourteen years ago and has served as senior pastor for the past twelve. The congregation currently has almost 2,000 members many of whom are part of young families drawn to the emphasis on outreach and growing in faith.

Knapp attributes the success largely to his congregation, which he characterizes as "an eclectic group of some very young families, families with teens, empty nesters and some really great seniors. We have a generous, loving group of folks," he said. "It's amazing what can happen when we come together."

Coming up: Fox Point's houses of worship today; Congregation Shalom, Congregation Sinai and St. Eugene Catholic Church.



North Shore Congregational Church

7330 N. Santa Monica Boulevard

The North Shore Congregational Church was founded on April 27, 1949, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Von Grossman "high on the bluff overlooking Lake Michigan." The first service took place on May 15th in the lower school assembly room of the Milwaukee County Day School (now the South Campus of the Jewish Community Center). Their first minister, Reverend Vernon "Pat" Flynn, proved to be an energetic and devoted leader. In fact, a 1950 national Congregational publication described North Shore as the "fastest growing church in all Congregational history."

The church has been led by Minister Karl Schimpf since 1983, assisted by associate minister Sue LeFeber. It has approximately 900 members and draws its membership from throughout the North Shore, priding itself on theological diversity. The church is affiliated with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, headquartered in Oak Creek, and offers confirmation classes and a well-attended Sunday school program.

"To join the Church is to own the covenant," states Schimpf. "It is the content of that covenant and value of that ownership that the North Shore Congregational Church empowers its members to discover ways and means of growing as disciples of our Lord, Jesus Christ in our time."



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Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the village, the village board, other village board members, or Neighborhood Communications, LLC.