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FEATURED

Vista Lutheran Church views the future in St. Louis Park

Seth Rowe 2 hrs ago

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A temporary sign announces the location of the newly named Vista Lutheran Church in St. Louis Park. (Submitted photo)

Vista Lutheran Church represents two former churches with decades of history in St. Louis Park, but the new name of the combined congregations seeks to indicate its members' focus on the future.

Earlier this year, Wooddale Lutheran Church and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church combined, conducting services with the temporary name of New Church of St. Louis Park. After giving a permanent name more thought, the church announced publicly in August that it would become Vista Lutheran Church.

A temporary sign has been placed over the former name of Wooddale Lutheran Church, at 4003 Wooddale Ave. S. in St. Louis Park – the site of the newly formed church.

“We wanted a name that could represent our new vision of partnership in St. Louis Park,” said Amy Johnson, council president of the church, in the church’s announcement. “A vista gives us an opportunity to look out into the distance, with a wide view to the future. We are excited about where we are going. Vista Lutheran also celebrates the community we reside in, the Minikahda Vista neighborhood within St. Louis Park.”

The move comes in the year that Wooddale Lutheran celebrated its 90th anniversary and Prince of Peace Lutheran marked its 70th year.

With Vista Lutheran Church taking over the former Wooddale Lutheran Church at 4003 Wooddale Ave. S. in St. Louis Park, the new congregation is seeking to sell the former Prince of Peace Lutheran Church at 8115 Highway 7 in St. Louis Park. The building is currently serving as the site of services for the Maranatha SDA Church, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation. Vista Lutheran is using a request for proposal process to sell the building.

“In the sale of the building, the legacy was very important, so it would either continue as a congregation or meet the needs of St. Louis Park in its future,” said the Rev. Heidi Zimdars, pastor of Vista Lutheran Church, in an interview. “We’re not selling to the highest bidder.”

All the groups that have met at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church have been invited to move to Vista Lutheran Church, Zimdars said. Such groups include Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Al-Anon, Fare for All and Dinner at Your Door, although Zimdars said she did not know how many of the organizations would make the move.

Prince of Peace Lutheran and Wooddale Lutheran began considering the consolidation last year. They voted to join last May. Each of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations had been involved in Grace in the Park, which included combined midweek Lenten worship services and summer outdoor worship. The group included Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church, which will continue to meet at its location at 5801 Minnetonka Blvd. in St. Louis Park.

Of the decision of Prince of Peace Lutheran and Wooddale Lutheran to join, Zimdars said, “In our study, we found out that we had the same values and were a good match for consolidation. Both churches wanted to figure out how to show up differently in the community and revitalize worship

and be more involved in the community of St. Louis Park, and we thought we could do that better together. It gave us an impetus for change.”

In the church’s statement announcing the new name, Zimdars said, “Vista Lutheran is following the Spirit into something exciting and new. We are poised for change and this is the beginning of an amazing journey, which will continue to unfold through the dreams of those already involved and new voices to come. This is just the first step.”

Vista Lutheran treasurer John Carlotto added in the statement, “This was a consolidation, not an acquisition, so a new name was a crucial signal that this was a new beginning, not just one church absorbing another.”

The statement continues, “Vista Lutheran will focus as a bigger presence in the community as it serves and reaches out.”

Zimdars elaborated in the interview on the idea behind the consolidation.

“We wanted, before we went into decline, to re-energize and to show up differently in the community,” she said. “God is leading us in a new way. The old ways, they don’t seem quite as relevant, and so we want to be relevant and active in the community in a new way. It’s exploring everything from worship to service to community outreach to working with busy families.”

She pointed to the church’s Vacation Bible School program Aug. 26-29 as an example of its community involvement. Last year, about 20 students participated at Wooddale Lutheran Church. This year, the enthusiastic sounds of nearly 70 students could be heard reverberating in the building as they engaged in this year’s theme of “Mission Possible.” The kids collected food for the St. Louis Park Emergency Program and collected books for Guatemala and other Latin American missions programs. Zimdars called the participants “secret agents for God.”

She noted that the church chose a week when the St. Louis Park School District child care program, Kids Place, was not operating.

“Everybody’s on break this week before school, so we decided to change our format and make it this week when parents need a safe and energized place for their kids to go,” said Zimdars, who noted that many children in the neighborhood participated.

The kids shot off water bottle rockets during a water-themed day.

“I’m watching them get totally doused,” Zimdars noted with amusement.

No major plans are in the works for Vista Lutheran’s building aside from “the normal things” like a sound system and security systems and the recent creation of a conference room available for community purposes, the pastor said.

“We’re trying not to put all of our finances into the building,” she said. “We want to put it into the community more, into worship more than the building.”

As to how the transition has been going, Zimdars said, “Within weeks some of the senior members were saying they were at home.”

With a laugh, she added, “It’s blending two families, and so it has all of the complexities of that. It’s nothing that we didn’t expect, and people are slowly getting to know each other even more and volunteering together. Change is hard and good, so we’re willing to do it. Mainly people are just glad to be in an energized worship and to have the opportunity to have a new beginning.”

For more information, contact Zimdars at 952-926-7603 or pastorvistalutheran@gmail.com.

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Seth Rowe