

# Pastor leads 'Christ-centered' church



PEACE —Jake Parsons, Director of Family Ministry; the Rev. Rob Rebensal, Pastor; and Deacon Mike Schultze, serve Peace Lutheran Church in Camarillo.

RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

In 1962, Faith Lutheran Church in Camarillo was just a fledgling congregation.

Founded three years earlier in the living room of George and Bee Muenich, the church—now known as Peace Lutheran—had grown slightly and moved to a small home on Mission Drive. A chicken coop in the backyard had been converted into a classroom for Sunday school.

It was modest beginnings for the small church.

Yet it would only be another year before its membership would jump unexpectedly with the arrival of a new company in town, and the little church would quickly flourish.

The company was 3M, the Minnesota-based technology giant that opened its Camarillo manufacturing facility in 1963. The company brought new jobs and an influx of 3M employees from St. Paul, a city with German and Scandinavian ties and deep roots to the Lutheran church.

“Our church started to grow,” said Bee Muenich, 94, who still attends services at Peace Lutheran. “It was really a godsend.”

The church eventually purchased a 5-acre avocado orchard on Loma Drive, just off of Las Posas Road, and was officially dedicated on Easter Sunday in 1967.

Led since 2001 by the Rev. Rob Rebensal, Peace Lutheran has about 375 members and is part of the St. Louis-based Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the second largest Lutheran body in the U.S. with 2.4 million members.

“Our branch of Lutheranism is conservative,” Rebensal said. “We’re Christocentric in our theology—Christ-centered,” the pastor said. “You’ll never come to church without hearing that Christ died for your sins.”

The church grew out of the reformation of the Christian church in 16th century Europe, and its basic tenets are summarized in the creed “Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone.”

“We teach and believe that people are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone,” Rebensal said. “The sole authority for our beliefs rests on Scripture alone.”

The 59-year-old pastor came to Camarillo after serving a church in Riverside County, where he began his ministry work after graduating from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind.

It was a second career for the Ohio native, who was living in Sonoma, Calif., with his wife, Anda, and daughter, Aija, when he decided to become a pastor. At the time he was the manager of an auto body shop. The decision to switch careers was a long time in the making, he said.

“The call to being a pastor is kind of a funny thing,” said Rebensal. “It comes back to haunt you over and over again until you give in.”

Rebensal said he would often sit and talk with customers in the waiting room of his auto body repair shop; it was during one of these chats that he met a man also in his mid-40s who was attending seminary.

Rebensal said that although the mind can often think of all the possible obstacles associated with a big life change, the man persuaded him that “if it was really what God wanted for me, all those doors would just open.”

The decision to become a pastor and his previous life experience have shaped the

way Rebensal approaches his ministry work and how he helps church members.

“(Life is) about finding your spot,” he said. “If you’re not happy with what you’re doing in life, it’s rarely too late to change.”

Rebensal works alongside Jake Parson, director of family ministry, and Mike Schultze, deacon.

What does Rebensal enjoy most about his work as a pastor?

“To direct people back to Christ, to help them with their problems, to help them with their needs—it’s all exciting to me,” he said.

In addition to its church, Peace Lutheran is home to Peace Preschool and Proverbs CoffeeHouse, a small home on the church’s property that has been turned into a coffee shop and art gallery. A showing by the Pastel Society opened yesterday and will be on exhibit through Sun., Dec. 5.

Rebensal also said the church has an active youth ministry and a weekly reading mentoring program for children.

As part of its local ministry work, Peace Lutheran participates in Many Meals of Camarillo and partners with two other Lutheran churches to operate a thrift store in Moorpark.

Peace Lutheran, 71 Loma Drive, hosts three Sunday services at 8, 9:45 and 11 a.m.

For more details about the church, call (805) 482-3313 or visit [www.peacecamarillo.com](http://www.peacecamarillo.com).