

# New church splitting congregation

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## Parishioners vote to continue maintaining St. Paul's Chapel in Gordon

By Kevin Steigerwalt

The REPUBLICAN

GORDON — A project meant to bring the parishioners of three area chapels together under one roof has, instead, split the congregation of one borough church.

Groundbreaking begins Saturday for the new \$700,000 Christ's United Lutheran Church, which will serve a 400-member congregation made up of parishioners from St. Paul's Chapel in Gordon, St. Peter's Chapel in Lavelle and St. John's Chapel in Ashland.

However, some members of St. Paul's oppose the move. On Sunday,

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**Maurice S. Hubler**  
St. Paul's member

they voted to stay in their church and take over its operation on May 1, said Malcolm E. Boyer, vice president of Christ's United Lutheran Church council.

“I'm sure they are sentimental, and I can understand that,” Boyer said. “What will happen to attendance is anybody's guess ... we're trying to sort that out now.”

Rev. Joseph A. Serafin, who is pastor of all three chapels, will minister at the new church. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Parishioners who want to stay at St. Paul's will concentrate on raising enough money to cover the operating expenses and hire another pastor. In the meantime, an interim pastor will conduct the services, said Donald N. Kimmel, a member who plans to stay.

“We feel rather confident we can keep the church in Gordon,” Kimmel said. “We wish the best to the new church and all its endeavors.”

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Kimmel expects that about one-half of the 150-member congregation will opt to stay. Many of those who want to continue worshipping at St. Paul's are elderly residents who have strong emotional ties to the church and like the convenience of its downtown location, said member Maurice S. Hubler.

“We want to stay in our church. It's convenient to us and we have gone to that church all our lives,” Hubler said. “Whether we can maintain our lovely, big church is the problem.”

Construction of the new church, which will be built on a seven-acre site about two miles west of Gordon, will be completed by late fall, Boyer said.

The single-level church will in-

clude seating for a 250-member congregation, four classrooms, a social room, a nursery and a kitchen, Boyer said.

“Everybody is anxious to see the construction go ahead and see it take shape,” he said.

After the construction, church leaders plan to sell St. Peter's Chapel in Lavelle. The Lutheran congregation at St. John's in Ashland shares that church with a United Church of Christ parish, which has agreed to take over the building, Boyer said.

Parishioners began making plans in 1988 to build the church. Members from the three chapels promised to raise \$180,000 for the project, and, so far, nearly \$77,500 has been collected. The sale of the churches and money from the na-

tional Lutheran synod will fund the remainder of the construction, Boyer said.

Bishop Harold S. Weiss of the Northeast Pennsylvania Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America will attend Saturday's 2 p.m. groundbreaking, said the church's secretary, Judy A. Stepulitis.

Originally, the church included five chapels, St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. John's, Zion's Lutheran Church in Girardville and Good Shepard Church in Ashland, Stepulitis said.

“They were all considered one congregation except they worshipped in five different places,” Stepulitis said. “This has been one congregation for the past 20 years ... now finally they're all going under one roof.”