



In August 2020, the late Pastor Henry Koepchen; second from right, joined current and former pastors of Messiah Lutheran for the new pastor's ordination and installation. Pictured with Koepchen is Rev. Charles Bell (retired), Rev. Alfred Hofler (retired assistant pastor), Rev. Nils Niemeier (current pastor) and Rev. Stephen Unger (current associate pastor).

Photo from Messiah Lutheran

## Founding pastor of Messiah Lutheran dies at 89

BY RITA J. EGAN

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The congregants of Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church in East Setauket mourned the passing of their founding pastor last week.

Pastor Henry Koepchen, of Setauket, died April 12.

Born Sept. 27, 1931, according to the church's website, he received his associate of arts from Concordia Junior College in Bronxville and his bachelor's and master's of divinity from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After serving his vicarage in Wisconsin, he became a missionary to Long Island for the Atlantic District.

In 1957 he started a small congregation that a few years later would become the church that is now located on Pond Path.

According to an article in The Village Times Herald Jan. 23, 2003, written by the pastor and Franklin Neal, for the first eight years the congregation gathered at a hall inside VFW Post 3054 on Jones Street in East Setauket. The initial goal of the congregation was to be near Stony Brook University.

In the early 1960s, Ward Melville made 10 acres of land available to churches along Nicolls Road at \$2,000 an acre. Originally, the congregation reserved land across from the college's entrance, but when Nick Pastis offered 7.5 acres on Pond Path, his parcel was chosen instead.

The construction of the building began in 1964, and a church dedication was held Palm Sunday 1966. Koepchen laid the cornerstone of the church building.

The pastor went on to serve the church at large as the secretary and chairman of the board of directors of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and was acting president of the Atlantic District. He retired in 1996 and was given the

title of pastor emeritus. He continued to serve as a member of the Atlantic District board.

Thom Brownworth, retired senior master at The Stony Brook School, said he and his wife, Barbara, first met Koepchen in 1963 when they would worship at the VFW Hall in Setauket.

The pastor married the couple three years later. The wedding was the first to be held in the new church on Pond Path.

"We knew him in many roles," Brownworth said. "He was a man of faith and of conviction. He was always, at heart, a pastor of his Savior's flock. Even though he advanced in roles in our denomination's hierarchy, to the point of being the president of the board of the denomination, he was always the pastor of the Messiah flock."

Brownworth said all four of his children were baptized and confirmed by Koepchen. Before the pastor's passing, Brownworth was able to share messages from his family with the pastor at his hospital bedside.

Brownworth's son, Lars, a teacher at The Stony Brook School and author, was confirmed in 1988 by the pastor.

"In many ways, pastor is what I imagine Luther must have been like," Lars Brownworth wrote. "The exuberant way he sings, the great sermons on grace and the ready stories around a table. But most of all, I'm grateful for the reverent tone he always set."

Koepchen was predeceased by his wife, Louise, who died in 2017. Funeral arrangements were entrusted to O.B. Davis Funeral Homes in Port Jefferson Station. Visitation was held at the funeral home April 15, and a service at Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church followed the next day. Interment took place at Graceland Memorial Park in Kenilworth, New Jersey.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to either the church or Good Shepherd Hospice.