



Pastor Keith Crouse, shown here in front of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, is leaving Welland to accept a preaching position in the Ottawa Valley. Crouse has been at St. Matthew's for the past 14 years. He will preach his last sermon here Sept. 29. /STAFF PHOTO MARK TAYTI

St. Matthew's says farewell to Pastor Crouse

By Mark Tayti
Tribune Staff/WELLAND

His desk is cluttered with a myriad of publications ranging from a daily newspaper to Jack Canfield's best-seller *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

The evidence suggests a man that is not only spiritually in tune but also in tune with the world around him.

By month's end, the periodicals and literary essentials stacked on his desk will be put in boxes and bound for Eganville, a part of the country Pastor Keith Crouse describes as a stronghold of the Lutheran faith.

After 14 years, Crouse has accepted a position preaching in the Ottawa valley. It's his fourth call in his 34 years behind the pulpit and he suspects it will be his last.

It's not a move that comes easily.

Over the years, he has valued the time spent at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. He has seen his congregation grow in ways that numbers can't express. Today the emphasis is on community outreach and empowering members to take ownership in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ as defined in the Book of Matthew.

"The church that will make it beyond 2010 is one where all members sees themselves as priests before God," Crouse said. "It is very much a 'we' ministry . . . it's not mine, it's not their's. We must do it together."

As he leaves for Eganville, he leaves with the knowledge of a strong congregation that will be able to take

St. Matthew's into the future.

"Pastors are supposed to work themselves out of a job," he says, looking ahead to his next calling.

He says Eganville's congregation is the largest he has ever led — about 900. A self-confessed urbanite, he wonders about the prospect of country living.

All this aside, the move is grounded in obedience to the Lord. He sees it as another opportunity in the North American mission field and he looks at the immediate future as being "harvest time for the Lord."

In going, Crouse leaves behind a church with a heart for the lost and hurting.

The bereavement ministry started under his leadership is just one example of the church's willingness to connect with people in crisis.

The church has also provided a strong adult education component to empower and instruct members in The Word. Growth in the spiritual sense hasn't come easy.

He says it never does.

The 58-year-old pastor has also taken a big interest in the lives of the teenagers over the years.

It's a ministry he doesn't regret.

Through it all, he says it's been important to keep his sense of humor.

"You have to be able to laugh at yourself and take things a little less seriously at times," he said.

Crouse is delivering his farewell sermon on Sept. 29.