

# Construction starts on Wyoming UMC church

It was a groundbreaking with a difference Sunday as more than 300 shovels simultaneously turned over dusty soil to mark the official start of construction of a new Wyoming United Methodist Church.

The long-awaited milestone came seven years to the day after the congregation voted to build a new facility to meet the needs of the church's growing ministries in this rapidly developing area of central Delaware.

The \$5.5 million building, with sanctuary seating for 600, will be erected on 20 acres of farmland donated by the Papen family along Wyoming Mill Road. The tract has been annexed by the town of Wyoming and will be served by the town's water and sewer utilities.

June and Richard Papen expressed their extended family's desire for the site "that a church may meet here and bring forth an abundant spiritual harvest to feed hungry souls as this land once brought forth an abundant harvest to feed hungry bodies."

Construction is expected to take about a year and will include a fellowship hall to accommodate about 600, served by a modern kitchen; an education wing with classrooms, library, nursery, music and meeting rooms; pastoral offices, and provision for a future gymnasium.

The new facility will be handicap-accessible and will have abundant parking with room for expansion – amenities lacking in the current, overcrowded building where three separate services are held in an effort to keep up with growing attendance on Sunday mornings and where off-street parking is non-existent.

The congregation has raised more than \$2.5 million so far through pledges and fundraisers. Sale of the present church will swell the building fund and a \$1.5 million bridge loan has been approved if necessary to complete the project.

"Our contractors will construct the building ... it is up to all of us to build the church," said Senior Pastor, the Rev. Patti Collett, who challenged her congregation during the informal groundbreaking. Advance Construction is general contractor for the project.

It had been a church family day, with the three morning services, the beginning of a new season of Sunday school, followed by a picnic overflowing the church lawn onto Broad Street. Then, armed with shovels, ranging from the sand-pail variety to heavy-duty diggers, the crowd boarded school buses and cars for the one-mile journey north to the site where earthmovers had already been at work and piles of steel had grown over the summer.

Among those participating in the brief ceremony were: retired senior pastor, the Rev. Frank Sutton; former associate pastor, the Rev. Curt Dotson; Merle M. Cleeton,



**The Rev. Patti Collett, senior pastor at the Wyoming United Methodist Church, talks to the crowd at the ground-breaking ceremonies.**

chairman of the committee on church location and building; Dr. Sandra Steiner Ball, former Dover District superintendent; her successor, Dr. Boyd Etter; Garry Saroukos, representing the building team; Jeff Townsend, chair of the follow-up team; Judy Field, chair of the prayer team; Pastoral Assistant Jim Dorton and Kathy DeLong, choir director.



**Jonathan Simon and his dad, Reese, loaded down with shovels, prepare to board a bus for the trip to Wyoming UMC's new site on Wyoming Mill Road.**

Wyoming Methodist Church is almost as old as the town itself. Dedicated in 1865, the building known as "the Plank Church" because of its plain vertical plank walls, was constructed on the lakefront property of John T. Jakes. In just three months membership grew to almost 100.

The existing sanctuary was built in 1882 and the church was moved to its present location on Broad Street in 1912. Several renovations and additions have been made over the years, the largest being the addition of an education wing in 1963.