

SLEEPY EYE HERALD

Brown County's Oldest Newspaper



DISPATCH

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Programmed for higher things

Draper named pastor at St. Johns Lutheran Church

*By Joshua Dixon
Managing Editor*

Seven years ago, when Kevin Draper programmed computers for IBM in Fort Worth, Tex., his wife Sallie had a standard joke for him: "Don't you think you'd make a good preacher?"

Until then, Draper had always said no. But one day, he found himself saying "Maybe so."

"Her jaw dropped," he said last week, sitting in St. Johns Lutheran Church in Sleepy Eye, his first assignment as a pastor.

Why the change in attitude?

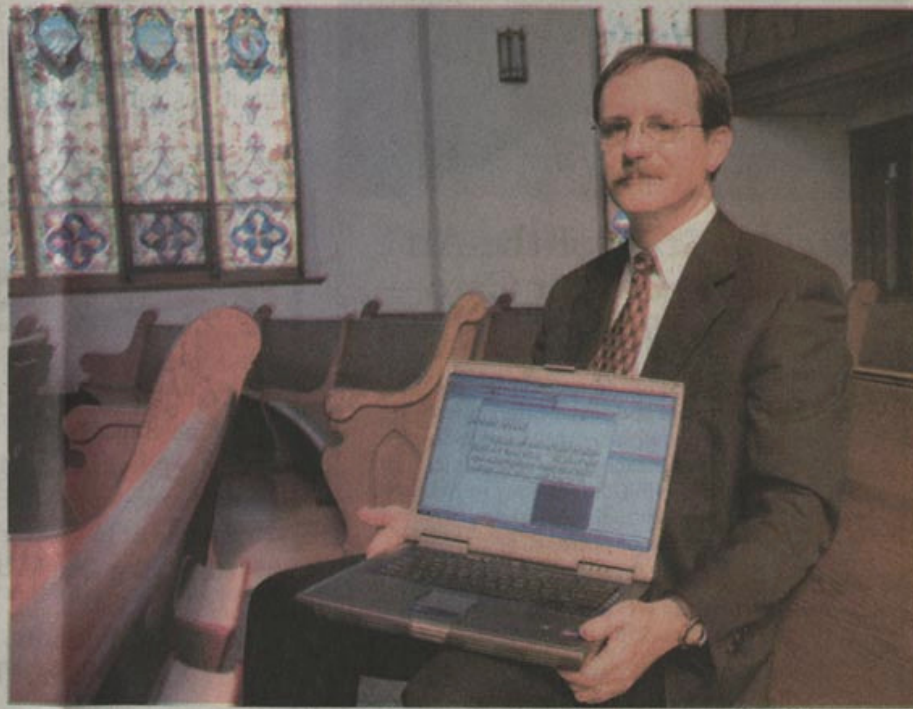
"With a career in technology, you're constantly learning new things," he said, "and those new things become obsolete. In some ways it all starts to feel meaningless."

"As a layman in the church, people can serve, and serve well. I don't want to discount that. But I was looking for something different. The ultimate way to become involved is as a pastor. I don't think you can get more involved than that."

Growing up in Flint, Mich., Draper attended a seminary high school for aspiring preachers. In a way, it backfired, since he graduated with little desire to become one.

After graduation, Draper was more interested in computers. He eventually moved to Texas to get a

Draper see 3A



PASTOR KEVIN DRAPER, a former computer programmer, started his new career as a pastor last week, at St. Johns Lutheran Church in Sleepy Eye.

Draper

from 1A

degree in business computer information systems.

For the next 14 years, Draper programmed computers for IBM. He met his Mississippi-born wife there, and their three sons—now aged 12, 9, and 7—grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

As with programming computers, Draper had to learn whole new languages—in this case, Latin and Greek.

"They're a little more complicated," he said with a smile. "Computer programs are more logical. Language changes over the

centuries."

The transition in careers was gradual. While he was in seminary, he still worked 20 hours a week for IBM's Texas branch. He took classes in New Ulm and Milwaukee, then got on the Internet to collaborate with his co-workers in Texas.

On July 15, after seven years in seminary, with stops in Madison and Milwaukee, Wis., Draper was installed as the new pastor at St. Johns Lutheran Church. He and his family were already familiar with Sleepy Eye from their years

in New Ulm while Draper attended Martin Luther College.

"We've been to two Buttered Corn Days festivals already," he pointed out this week.

"We were pleased to find out we were coming here. After experiencing the contrast between New Ulm and Milwaukee, we really enjoyed the small town."

One of the biggest changes in his previous career is, "I'm dealing with people a lot more. St. Johns has about 500 members; that's a lot of names to get to know."

When Draper was assigned to

St. Johns, the congregation got a new IT guy as well as pastor.

"I'll be able to use my skills as a programmer to do some things here, such as streamline the records," he said.

Draper's favorite Bible verse is only natural for someone willing to make a career change in mid-stride: Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

For the time being, the future is here.