

Declining numbers force parishes to combine resources

ANNIE BOON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Three area Methodist Churches uniting under one umbrella may be another sign of changing times.

The Greater Parish of Sun City and Youngtown was approved Sunday after leaders of Youngtown United, First United and Lakeview United Methodist churches decided it was time to pool resources, including pastors, church staff and volunteers.

"As years have passed, the church membership is getting older, and of course you have deaths, so the climate changes with the different people moving into Sun City," said the Rev. Don Bommarito, who was pastor at First United Methodist Church in Sun City and will now be part of a parish team of seven pastors who rotate leading services at the three churches.

"The settlers (of Sun Cities area Methodist churches) were from the Greatest Generation who went to church," Bommarito said. "The younger people, Baby Boomers, moving in aren't as trusting. Now we have to ask, what are the challenges? Can we create a vitality and reach a much younger niche?"

The Rev. Roland Brammeier, who has been serving Lakeview United, will be senior pastor of the parish. He said the Greater Parish of Sun City and Youngtown, which now combines about 1,630 members, is the first of its kind in the Southwest. It was formed with the input from an Advisory Council, composed of five members from each congregation. Each of the seven parish pastors will specialize in a different area of ministry, such as church growth, hospice, stewardship, pastoral care and more, he said.

Some changes for reaching the younger,

working population of retirees may include additional evening meetings and choir practices and more public outreach efforts.

Generally, voluntarism in the Sun Cities is declining, according to local leaders. Nonprofit organizations, community service groups and churches alike are now faced with finding new ways to cope with a dwindling stream of willing residents.

"Voluntarism is on the decline, not only here but all over," Bommarito said, adding that church volunteers are critical to operations such as ushering, folding programs, coordinating ministries or special projects and answering phones.

More than 44 million Americans today are between the ages of 55 and 75, and with the aging Baby Boomers, that number is expected to grow to 80 million by 2020. With mega

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UNITE: Dwindling numbers indicative of changing culture

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churches in surrounding communities attracting thousands of parishioners, smaller Sun Cities area churches are challenged with attracting and keeping members, including potential volunteers.

"Volunteering is a part of ministry. It helps keep the doors open," Bommarito said.

Beverly Sisler, president of the Sun City PRIDES, said the number of volunteers may be at an all-time low. While the PRIDES, a community beautification group, has 300 members

on its roster, less than 100 will actively volunteer this summer.

"It's not looking too good. We're just scraping by," Sisler said. "We have certain volunteers that are called on to do a lot more because of the lack of newer volunteers. We have a lot of volunteers that are older and don't get out and do much outdoors.

"Those people are still willing to help, but they're limited by their health."

Sisler said the change in population and volunteer philosophies is causing a hardship.

"For some reason, the

younger retirees don't want to volunteer as much, I'm sure everyone has found that out."

Greater Parish Advisory Council member and Common Council of Youngtown member Margaret Chittenden said Lakview United has been stable, but the other churches, such as Youngtown United, have struggled with membership and volunteers.

"This was a volunteer community, but they don't do that anymore," she said. "You see the same people volunteering. The woman doing the coffee is 87, her husband is 90, what

happens when they're not around?"

Marshall Esty of Sun City, head coordinator for the local Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and a retired Methodist pastor, is hopeful that Sun City residents, new and old, will step up and fill in where they are needed.

"People are saying they'll have to change the Sun City signs to 'Former City of Volunteers,'" Esty said. "But we can either long for what was or find a new way to cope."

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7/06/07

Membership drop prompts outreach

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: Recruitment effort targets new, unchurched Sun Cities neighbors

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A drop in church membership has spurred one Sun City church to form an outreach effort to bring new members into the fold.

First United Methodist Church, according to Sarg Magyar, pastor of the church's evangelism and care ministry, will try to attract residents from the 40 percent who do not attend a church in the Sun Cities.

On Thursday, the church formed nine teams, with two members per team. The teams will hit the streets in Sun Cities neighborhoods in hopes of attracting new members.

But before heading into their outreach work, Magyar said, the nine teams will go through some basic role playing to understand what types of questions they are to ask and how to counter certain responses.

The nine outreach teams will meet once a month to share their progress with church administrators.

"All we are going to do is form a questionnaire," Magyar said. "What would they like at church?"

Although attracting new members is one goal, the pastor said, there are other facets to the outreach effort.

"We are finding there is a group of single people who are lonely," he said, adding that one church member has offered to teach a woodworking class. "It's a community outreach."

Magyar said the membership drop can be attributed to deaths and retirees moving back to their hometowns.

"New people who are moving in are not church-going people," he said. "We need to change our service format for it to be user-friendly. We are going to work on our service more in the line of what appeals to them."

Magyar said there will be some current members who will feel uncomfortable with the new format, but added that in order to grow, change is necessary.

The church, he said, expects to have a significant number of responses by June, and it will then use the responses to redesign its services. The new format will likely begin in September.

"We have a plan," he said. "Come September, we will be able to meet the new people in town."

The new generation moving to Sun City is comprised of couples, as opposed to the single households that make up a good percentage of the community now, he said.

In addition, the church is planning to keep track of current and new church members in order to judge the effectiveness of its effort. New members will be asked to sign in, Magyar said.

"We will make a concerted effort to make them feel at home," he said.

Michael Maresh can be reached at mmaresh@aztrib.com or at 623-876-2521.

Friday, June 6, 1997 Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz.

Pastor honors Jews, gentiles

Incoming First United Methodist preacher converted to Christianity 25 years ago

By RUTHANN HOGUE
Staff writer

He was born the son of Orthodox Jewish parents who named him Samuel Lewis Lyon and trained him in the Jewish religion and faith.

Next month, "Louie" Lyon will become the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Sun City. The church assignment is his sixth since he became a Methodist pastor in June of 1984.

"I am a person who feels honored to have the opportunity to serve God and them, and I am here for them whether they are members of this church or any church," Lyon said. "I am there to listen, and for them to talk to. My door is always open."

Lyon, 50, accepted Jesus Christ as his savior 25 years ago. His journey toward becoming a Christian - and eventually a Methodist pastor - began during childhood as Lyon questioned various aspects of Judaism. At the age of 24, while earning his bachelor of science in business economics at Woodbury University in Los Angeles, he read the New Testament for the first time.

"I found a God of love, and as a Jew, the only God you know is a God of fear," Lyon said.

Lyon turned to professors with questions of theology. And he started dating a Christian woman of the Methodist faith.

When Lyon told his parents of his activities, they issued an ultimatum.

"It's either her or us," Lyon's father reportedly said, warning his son that dating a gentile might lead to marriage outside of the Jewish faith.

"My father was right," Lyon said. "I asked her to marry me."

But first, he began taking his wife-to-be to Westwood United Methodist Church in West Los Angeles, where she had once been an active member. On Palm Sunday in 1972 he was baptized.

Although Lyon is not shy about admitting that he is a former Jew who accepts Jesus, he is adamant that he believes in the same God that he was raised to worship.

"There is one God. Whether you believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is one and the same," Lyon said. "I preach Jesus Christ. Whether someone is Baptist, Catholic or Methodist, we all have the same God."

Lyon's parents don't see things the same way. When they learned of their son's conversion they promised to "sit sheva," which means to shut him out and mourn their loss as if he were dead.

They kept their promise until the early 1990s when Lyon's first wife, Gwen, was diagnosed with cancer.

"When Gwen was found to have cancer, my mother came on her knees and begged for forgiveness," Lyon said. "Her cancer brought my parents back."

Lyon remarried a year after Gwen's death. He and his second wife, Joyce, will celebrate their third anniversary in July.

The Apache Junction congregation where Lyon will serve until June 30 was there for him when he lost Gwen, and later welcomed Joyce with open arms. So leaving Desert Chapel United Methodist Church, he said, will be like, well, leaving family.

"Yes, I lost my family, but I gained



Steve Cherek/Daily News-Sun

The Rev. Louie Lyon is the new pastor at First United Methodist Church in Sun City.

so many Christian brothers and sisters," he said.

As a pastor, Lyon believes in being available to his flock and in offering his services as often as possible. So the Lyons plan to move to Sun City from Scottsdale to be closer to the congregation. Age restrictions, however, prevent them from moving in until September.

"If there's one thing that bothers me more than anything else is to hear after the fact that somebody was sick or in the hospital and didn't

let me know because they thought I was too busy," Lyon said. "Because if there's a need, let me know. And I'll be there for them."

Lyon believes that serving mostly retired folks from the Midwest in Apache Junction, where the median age of his congregation is 80, has prepared him to serve well at First United Methodist Church in Sun City, where the median age is 84.

"It's the folks who are here," he said. "Really friendly folks. People are people."

Pastor embraces SC warmth

By MICHAEL P. HEGARTY
Daily News-Sun staff

The Rev. Dennis Clarke has been preparing for Sun City his whole life.

The 59-year-old pastor of First Presbyterian Church was born in Bangor, North Ireland, and served at churches in Canada and Ohio before coming to the warmer climate of Sun City last month.

"All my 35 years in the ministry is good preparation for a challenge like this," Clarke said. "Each place is getting a little hotter. I think this is it."

While the exclusively senior congregation is unique to Clarke, he has spent the past four decades in the ministry working with the elderly.

At Greenville Presbyterian Church in Ohio, he began an organization for seniors that grew in excess of 1,000 people.

Clarke created programs like indoor lawn bowling, travel clubs, luncheons and card games for his group.

It is this background, mixed with his Irish heritage, that is filling the pews each week.

"There are lots of inquisitive people about the new kid on the block ... about my Irish connection," he said.

Clarke equally is impressed with the involvement of Sun Citians in the church.

"The church means more to these people than the other places I've worked in the United States and Canada," he said. "Most have served in the church before. They bring a lot of experience and a lifetime of dedication. They all come from different backgrounds. It's nice to see them joining together and cooperating."

The churches in Ireland are a bit more informal, Clarke said.

"The church life is not as well organized; there are no offices or secretaries or bulletins," he said. "They concentrate on the Sunday worship, and much of their work is done by word of mouth."

Clarke doesn't mind the extra work involved with American churches, even though it did take a little time to get used to it, especially in Sun City.

"The big surprise for me was there

is more work to be done in less time," he said. "You have to get everything done between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m."

See Pastor hails, B2



Steve Cherek/Daily News-Sun

The Rev. Dennis Clarke, a native of Bangor, Northern Ireland, has assumed duties as pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Sun City.

SC church celebrates 30th year

Daily News-Sun staff

The First United Methodist Church will celebrate its 30th anniversary Sunday in the spacious comfort of its own facilities at 9849 105th Ave. in Sun City.

It's a long way from the church's first service which was held in the Oakmont Community Center on March 15, 1964.

Bishop Elias Galvan of Phoenix will be the guest preacher at the 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. services.

Both services will recognize charter members of the church as well as consecrate the ministers who completed their training last month.

The United Methodist Women will host a birthday party at 2 p.m. in McInay Hall.

Refreshments and birthday cake will be available and a slide presentation highlighting the first 30 years of the church will be presented by John Sybenga, president of the Sun Cities Photography club.

Sybenga developed the slides from scrapbooks maintained by the church's Records and Archives Committee.

The church's first service in its own building was July 24, 1966, after its founder, E. Dwayne Thistlethwaite, was able to secure the space, money and members needed to create the church that began in his garage with a handful of people.

There are about 800 members of the church today under the leadership of the Rev. Howard Wariner Jr.

Sun City Methodist church cares for young, old

By CANDACE S. HUGHES
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Mildred Mumma considered shopping around for a church when she moved to Sun City in 1982, but she was sold on First United Methodist Church during her first visit.

Mumma, who was raised in the Methodist church, attended a Lutheran church before coming to Sun City, but chose to visit First United Methodist Church because it was in her neighborhood.

She now is the church's lay leader, and has been chosen for the position by the congregation for four years.

The caring, friendly atmosphere keeps members returning to the church, Mumma said. "We are concerned about anybody and everybody," she said.

Mumma, who is treasurer of United Methodist Women and a member of the Priscilla circle, said that circle members are responsible for each other when someone has a death in the family or an emergency.

The circles meet monthly except during the summer and

'Our church is an adult church with adult members, but that doesn't mean we don't care about ministry to children and youth.'

The Rev. Don Bassett
First United Methodist Church

concentrate on raising money for the Methodist church's missions.

First United Methodist Church's first service in the current building at 9849 N. 105th Ave. was April 24, 1966.

Church members generally live in Sun City south of Grand Avenue, but anyone is welcome to attend, said the Rev. Don Bassett, the church's senior pastor.

Services are at 9 and 10:30 a.m. Sunday. The church has two Sunday services through the summer to meet the needs of all members of the congregation. Members from churches that have no later service during the summer are invited to attend.

Bible study is at 10:25 a.m. in the church's John Wesley Room September through May.

The congregation's first service was March 15, 1964, in the Oakmont Community Center. Since then, the group has grown to 912 full and affiliate members. Sun Citians who live in Arizona only part of the year are welcome as affiliate members, Bassett said.

Bassett is assisted by two associate pastors. They are: the Rev. Bradley Havens, who oversees the Hand of Friendship groups who minister to church members who are homebound or are in nursing homes; and the Rev. Orla Bradford, who is in charge of recruitment, outreach and evangelizing.

Tapes of Sunday services are taken on Sunday to about 40 members of the church who are homebound or living in nursing homes. The church also provides transportation to Sunday ser-

vices. To request a ride, call the church office at 974-3631.

"This is the most exciting congregation I've ever served," said Bassett, who will celebrate 40 years of ministry on the first Sunday of July.

Bassett has been senior pastor at First United Methodist Church of Sun City seven years, and previously was pastor at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Phoenix. He lives in Sun City.

Church members and groups have a number of outreach activities including financial support of a new Methodist church in Peoria. The Sun City church

has given \$25,000 annually for three years to St. Luke's United Methodist Church.

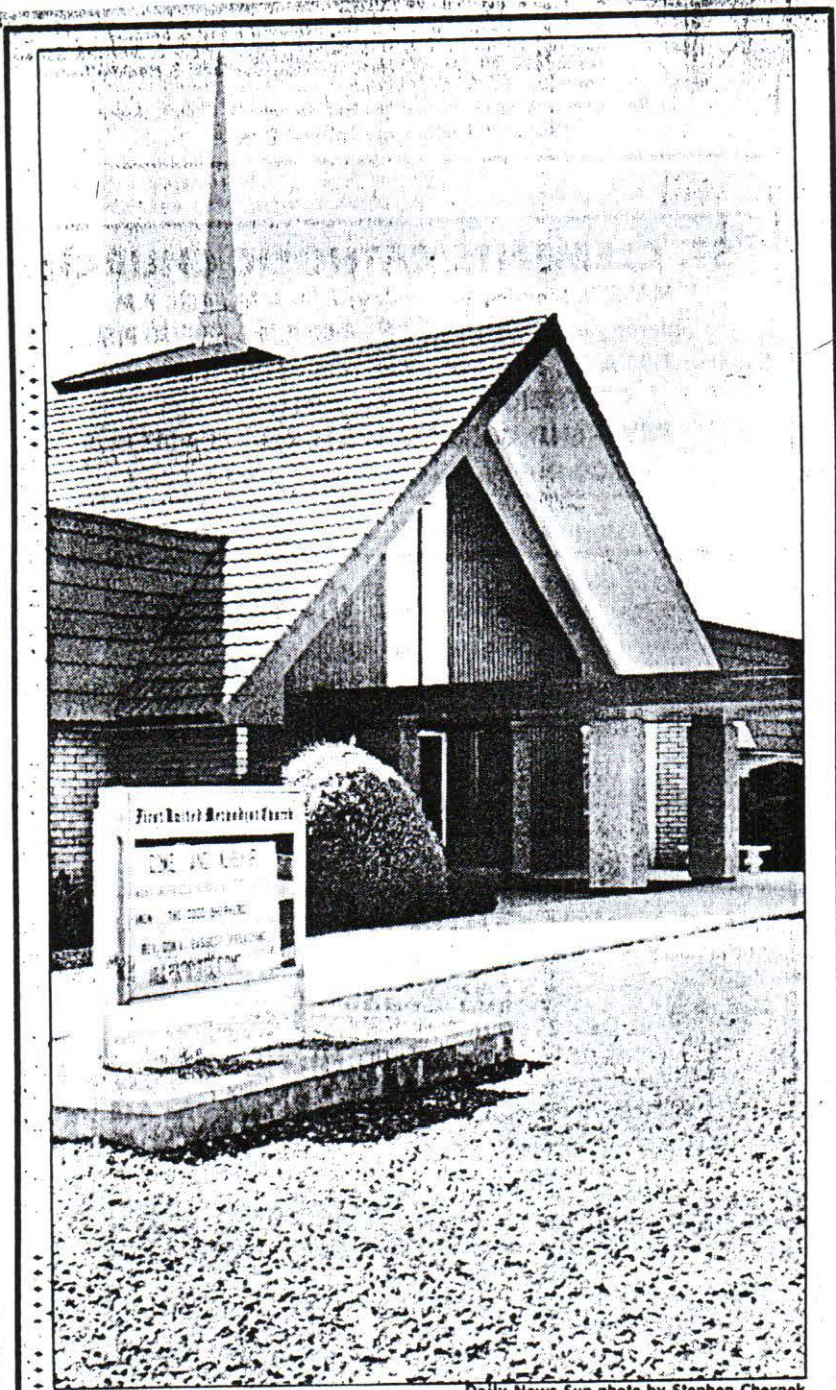
"Our church is an adult church with adult members, but that doesn't mean we don't care about ministry to children and youth," Bassett said. "We also need to help support a church

that serves families," he said.

The Sun City church also provided \$1,200 for junior high and high school students to go to summer camps last year, Bassett said.

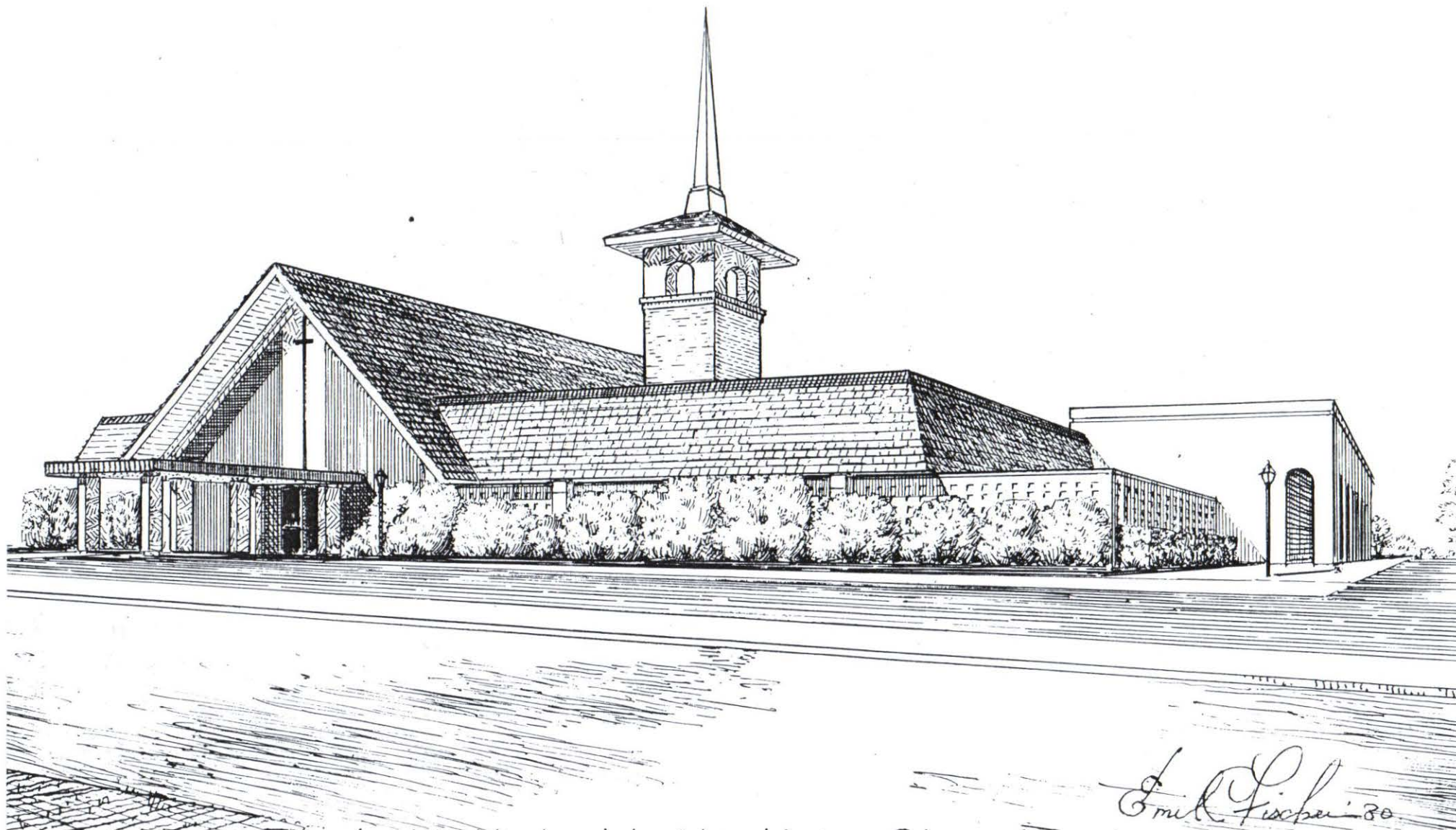
"We are concerned about the whole community of human beings," he said.

OVER



Daily News-Sun photo by Stephen Cherek

SILVER ANNIVERSARY — The First United Methodist Church in Sun City conducted its first service at 9849 N. 105th Ave., April 24, 1966. See story, C2



First United Methodist Church

Emil Fischer '80

Drawing by Emil Fischer



REV. AND MRS. Charles A. Surber and sons Karl (left) and John

NEW MINISTER

The newly-appointed minister for the Sun City Presbyterian Church paid a three-day visit to Sun City last week, accompanied by his wife and two of his three sons.

It was only a short visit for the Rev. Charles A. Surber and his wife Glenna, but it was long enough for them to find out that they liked the place well enough to buy a home.

Although they had not previously seen Sun City, they do know Arizona, having lived four years in Wickenburg and two in Springerville during the late 1940's.

They had also thoroughly digested the Del Webb Co. literature to the point where about all they needed to do was choose a site for their home.

The Surber family was introduced to members of the Sun City Presbyterian congregation at a reception in the Town Hall art room Thursday night. With the Surbers at the reception were sons

Karl and John, who are presently on vacation from college.

Karl will graduate this year from California College of Mortuary Science and John is a freshman at Occidental College, both schools in Los Angeles. Both are unmarried.

Another son is married and in the U. S. Navy.

The Surbers are originally from Kansas, but have lived in a variety of places in the Midwest. They spent two years in El Paso and for the past 10 years have been in Palmdale, Calif.

They have now gone back to Palmdale to make preparations for moving to Sun City, which they will do as soon as possible.

Mrs. Surber is teaching in Palmdale, and she said that she will have to remain there until the end of the semester to complete her assignment.

They expressed great pleasure at their being posted to Sun City. Mrs. Surber is very vivacious and outgoing, her husband is of distinguished mien and friendly nature; so that they should prove an asset to their church group and a fine addition to the entire community.

The local church is entering upon an important stage in its development, having just purchased a building site. At present, Sunday services are held in Town Hall at 9:30 a.m.

History

The first service was held on March 14, 1964, and the Church was formally organized on the following May 13 with approximately 30 members.

The sanctuary was completed and occupied on July 6, 1966. The congregation was led by the Rev. Harold M. McIlroy from November 1966 until his death in January 1972.

The building was enlarged in 1973 with the addition of the McIlroy Fellowship Hall dedicated to the memory of Rev. McIlroy. The offices, kitchen and choir room were enlarged and the chancel reconstructed at the same time.

The membership has grown steadily and numbered 825 in May 1, 1975.

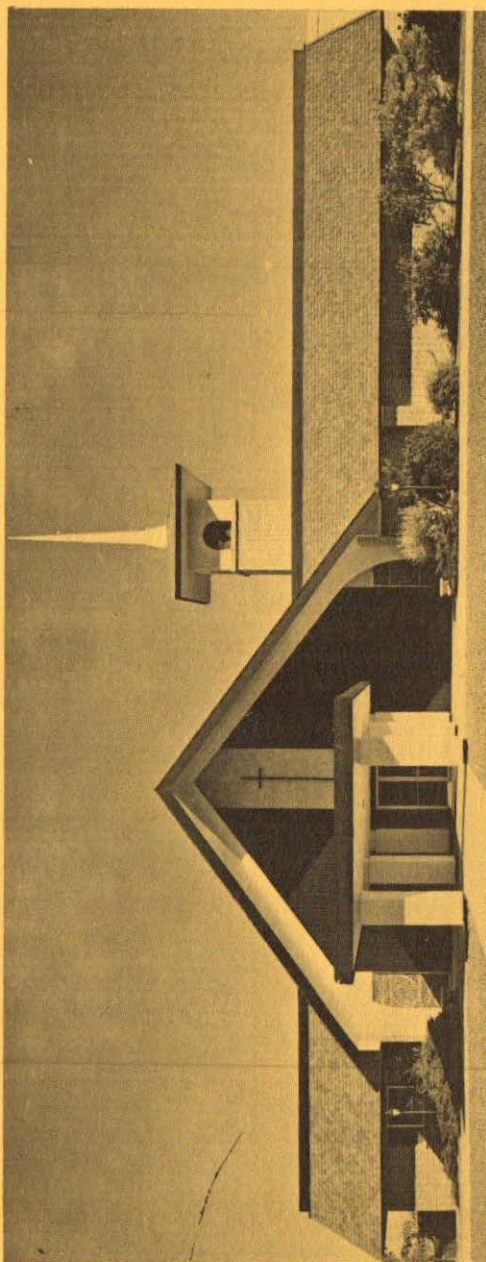
The annual budget of over \$100,000 provides \$10,000 for missions, the staff and operation of the church and programs, and \$25,000 for debt retirement.

This church is a member of the Southern California-Arizona Annual Conference and of the Phoenix District.

Our Staff and Officers

Bishop Charles F. Golden Los Angeles Area
Rev. William R. Colby . . . District Superintendent
Rev. Ralph K. Kofoed Senior Pastor
Rev. Deane W. Irish Assistant Minister
Ernest Splete Lay Visitor
Mrs. Lillian Carver Church Secretary
Donald Watson Choir Director and Organist
Owen S. Williams Chmn Administrative Board
Willard Weckmueller Chmn Council on Ministries
Foster Mohny, Jr. Pres. Board of Trustees
John Voss Church Treasurer

Welcome



The First United Methodist Church

105th AVENUE AND SALEM DRIVE • SUN CITY, ARIZONA 85351

Church Phone 933-0562 Parsonage Phone 933-1955

An Invitation



The churches of Sun City are alive and strong!

First United Methodist Church invites you to share its life and mission.

If you are searching for God . . . if you are seeking a church home as a new resident . . . if you are in need of health, security or meaning for life . . . you will find answers in our Sunday worship, Bible study and fellowship activities.

I invite you to:

- Join with us in the worship of Almighty God,
 - Share in the work of the Gospel in the church and in the world,
 - Find new friends within the community, and
 - Be a part of a community of love and prayer.
- You will find a friendly welcome.

Ralph K. Kofoed, Pastor

Divine Worship Services

Each Sunday morning (winter schedule)

- 9:00 a.m. Divine Worship
- 10:45 a.m. Divine Worship
- 10:45 a.m. Bible Study Class

Summer schedule

- 8:45 a.m. Bible Study Class
- 10:00 a.m. Divine Worship

Coffee and fellowship follow each service, providing a place to visit with friends.

A Bible Study Class is also conducted each Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. by the Pastor with enrollment open to all. The class is in recess during June, July and August.

Church Activities

In addition to the Sunday services the church offers many week-day activities for spiritual growth, service and fellowship. Regularly scheduled are the following:

Reception of members Fourth Sundays
Men's Prayer Breakfast 8:00 a.m. Tuesdays
Bible Study Class 9:30 a.m. Tuesdays
Choir Rehearsal 4:00 p.m. Wednesdays
United Methodist Women

General Meetings 11:30 a.m. Fourth Wednesday
Circles Second Wednesdays and Thursdays
United Methodist Men

Breakfast and fellowship . . . 8:00 a.m. Third Thursdays
All-Church Fellowship Dinners . 5:30 p.m. 1st Thursdays
"Hand of Friendship"—Fifteen neighborhood groups
"to keep in touch"

Activity Groups

Art Class 9:00 a.m. Mondays
Bazaar Workshops 9:30 a.m. Tuesdays
Mission Sewing (Silver Thimbles) 9:30 a.m. Thursdays
Retreats, Tours, Missions, Musicals and other special events scheduled during the year.

Where To Find Us

