

In good graces

Grace Bible Church expects growth with expansion

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City is about to be endowed with a lot more Grace.

Grace Bible Church is undergoing an estimated \$1.6 million expansion and renovation on its campus at 19280 N. 99th Ave. that Pastor Bill Bjork believes will expand the membership as well.

"The congregation has been growing since I became the pastor in September 2001," said Bjork. "We feel we are on the cutting edge and we think this will help."

Like all Sun Cities churches, Grace's population booms in the winter and wanes in the summer. In the winter, the church gets about 1,000 to 1,200 attendees. Bjork said he believes that will grow to about 1,400 to 1,500 after the renovation.

The church focuses on the Bible and a warm, caring congregation, Bjork said.

"Grace Bible Church continues to be true to its heritage and its calling," he said. "It takes pride in the most positive sense in our middle name — Grace Bible Church."

One of the church's greatest showpieces is its choir, led by Dr. John Gustafson, said Tom Wallace, Grace's business administrator and a member since 1988.

"The biggest attraction we've had is our choir. They're fantastic," Wallace said. "We're doing more to feature the music."

The choir loft is being centered and expanded in the renovation, which will increase its visibility and sound quality. In addition, a sound room that previously was elevated will be brought down to the congregation's level to help increase the sound quality.



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Rev. William Bjork looks over the construction at Grace Bible Church in Sun City Thursday.

"What they would hear in the little room was sometimes different than what the congregation was hearing," Bjork said.

Right now, the church is little more than its facade.

"They took it right down to the bare bones," Wallace said.

Drivers on 99th Avenue north of Union Hills can stare in through one side and out the other. Monsoon rains and winds haven't been much of an issue, though.

"We had quite a bit of wind and rain, but we checked the roof after," Wallace said. "There was no problem."

New carpeting and pews will be installed. Purchasing new pews ended up being cheaper than reupholstering the old ones, so the church donated the outgoing pews to smaller churches in need, Bjork said. Some, for example, made their way to the Navajo reservation.

"We made good use of

what we were basically getting rid of that was still usable," he said.

Other features of the renovation include the addition of a large lobby and walkway to connect Gerig Hall to the church itself; the two are currently two separate buildings. In addition, the choir's robing area will be expanded; the library is being relocated and expanded; and a multipurpose room mirroring the choir room is being added and can be used for choir practices.

Gerig Hall was the first structure for Grace Bible Church, which began as a Bible study in 1974 in a now defunct theater. The church incorporated in 1975 and construction on Gerig Hall started in 1980.

Construction on this latest renovation started at the end of June, and congregants are meeting in Gerig Hall until the project is complete, estimated to be at the end of September or beginning of

October.

"If this construction is not finished by October when many of our people start coming back and what not, we may have to go to three services to accommodate them," Bjork said.

A dedication ceremony is tentatively scheduled Nov. 9.

Some of the funding for the 10-year loan is coming through memorial funds and \$80,000 the congregation has donated already this year.

"Our hope is to motivate the congregation to pay that loan off in maybe three to five years," Bjork said.

"Interestingly enough, our giving has been growing more than the congregation despite the downturn in the economy," Wallace said. "We don't have any explanation for that other than the Lord's been blessing this church."

Katy O'Grady can be reached at 876-2514 or kogrady@aztrib.com.

Pastor brings missionary zeal to Sun City

Seniors represent both resource and challenge

By JEFF OWENS
Staff writer

When the congregation of Grace Bible Church in Sun City welcomes James W. Carlson to his new community on Saturday, they'll be getting a lot more than just a new senior pastor.

They get James Carlson, clergyman, of course. But they also get James Carlson, nationally recognized theology professor, international traveler and author.

Quite a resume. You'd think the guy would take a cue from above and rest on the seventh day, but Carlson begins his new duties as senior pastor this Sunday.

A formal installation service is scheduled for Jan. 18th.

Carlson, 55, is exchanging the sub-Arctic temperatures of Grand Rapids, Mich., for what must seem like subtropical Sun City, and has some strong opinions on preaching to a retirement community.

"I am convinced there is a great need

'Seniors make up a large segment of the population which needs to be reached for Christ.'

**James W. Carlson
Pastor, Grace Bible Church**

to reach seniors with the Gospel and to be part of a ministry which can meet the unique needs of senior adults," he said.

"Seniors make up a large segment of the population which needs to be reached for Christ. Senior believers are a powerful resource for doing God's work in the world and the church should be a mobilizing, equipping and encouraging component in that work. I believe the church should be an influential entity within the community."

For the last nine years, Carlson was associate pastor of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids. The 6,000-member church is considered innovative among evangelical churches, and quadrupled in size during Carlson's tenure there.

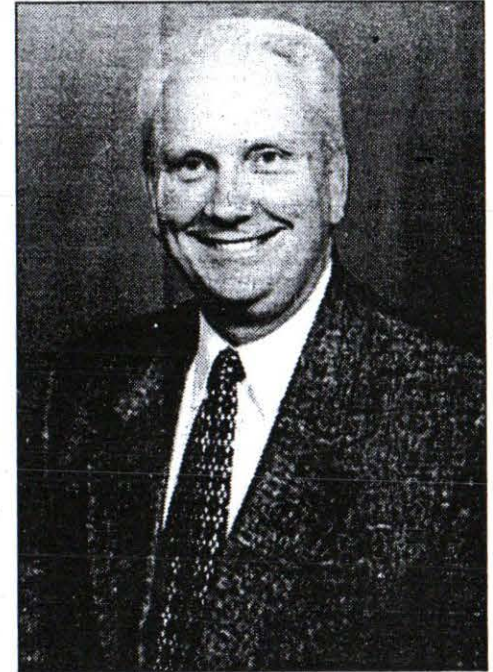
He has written prolifically for several Christian publications, co-authored a book titled "The Lonely Pew," and is currently helping to prepare a new study Bible for the Zondervan publishing house.

Carlson is involved extensively in mission work and has traveled the world on mission projects, including several trips to India and the Ukraine. This year, he will be traveling to India and Israel.

The Minneapolis native received his bachelor's degree at Northwestern College, and his master's and doctoral degrees at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He and his wife, Karen, have four children.

Carlson spent six years as director of Christian education at Berean Church in Seattle. He was professor of practical theology at Grace Bible College in Grand Rapids from 1971-74, and again from 1987-90. In 1974, he became senior pastor at Berean Church in Muskegon, Mich., a post he held for 14 years.

At Grace Bible Church, Carlson replaces interim pastor Dr. Jim Nelson, who replaced Dr. Robert Warren, who retired in November 1996.



Submitted photo

The Reverend James W. Carlson takes over as senior pastor of Grace Bible Church in Sun City Saturday.

Spirit at Grace

SC church celebrates growth over 15 years

DAILY NEWS-SUN
MARCH 1, 1991

By ROSA De SIMONE
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The congregation of Grace Bible Church has grown from a group of 23 meeting in a shopping mall and recreation centers to one that is 550 members strong celebrating its 15th anniversary.

Grace Bible Church, 19280 N. 99th Ave, will have anniversary activities Sunday. During the anniversary events, members who contributed to the congregation's growth and successes will be honored.

"This is the most friendly church that I've ever pastored to," said the Rev. Jared F. Gerig, who, along with his wife Mildred, will be recognized for their work Sunday.

Gerig, 83, served as pastor for Grace Bible Church from January 1978 to April 1987 — during the church's building program.

In early 1978, land for a worship center was purchased, and the entire congregation was on hand for the ground-breaking ceremony for the fellowship hall on Oct. 7, 1979.

A second phase of construction for the congregation ended when a new sanctuary seating 600 was dedicated in 1986.

"The church grew faster and larger than we had any anticipation that it would in the early years," Gerig said.

The Gerigs were active in churches long before they came to Grace Bible. In Fort Wayne, Ind., Gerig was president of Summit Christian College for 20 years. Gerig met his wife during that time. They then moved on to California and to Gerig's post as minister of Van Nuys Missionary Church.

In 1976 Gerig retired and the family moved to their present Glendale residence. It was not long after this that Gerig brushed retirement aside to be the pastor for the Sun City church.

Mildred is responsible for supplying service music for six years and for founding "Grace Gals," a monthly fellowship for single women.

"She had compassion for single women and felt they needed something that would bring them together with common interests," Gerig said of his wife.

Although Gerig is no longer senior pastor, he has been

named "pastor emeritus" and fills whatever role necessary.

In honor of the Gerigs and the church's anniversary, the fellowship hall will be dedicated in their honor and renamed "Gerig Hall." A plaque bearing their names and a photograph of them will be placed in the hall's entrance.

"We wanted to honor him while he was still very much alive and vibrant," said the church's pastor Robert Warren. "We just wanted to give him that encouragement while he was still around to enjoy it."

The former pastor attributes the evangelical church's growth to not only members' common needs and problems, but to the institution's unique practices and programs, he said.

"Their are a lot of people who enjoy Bible teaching," Gerig said.

Almost all who attend Sunday worship arrive with Bible's in hand, he said.

"The spirit of the church is great," the pastor said. "Members come from all across the United States and represent all kinds of denominations and theological backgrounds which makes this a unique mixture of Christian people."

According to Gerig, adding to this spirituality is the experience of Christian ministry possessed by some members — 24 retired pastors and 20 retired missionaries.

The congregation is split into 18 to 20 flocks, groups formed according to members geographical location, that meet for fellowship.

Grace Bible Church's 50-member choir and "Grace Notes," 30 women singers, also attract members, Gerig said.

These unique characteristics will be brought together Sunday for the anniversary service. The Rev. Donald E. Hescott, executive vice president of The Masters College in Santa Clarita, Calif., will be guest speaker for the 9:55 a.m. Sunday worship.

"The People of Grace," an audio-visual presentation of the church's history given by Ed Simpson will be presented at 6 p.m. Sunday.

For information, call 972-6414.



Daily News-Sun photo by Mollie J. Hoppes

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY — Grace Bible Church, 19280 N. 99th Ave, will celebrate its 15th anniversary Sunday.



Daily News-Sun photo by Mollie J. Hoppes

HONORED BY CHURCH — The Rev. Jared F. Gerig, former pastor of the church, and his wife Mildred will be honored and the fellowship hall will be dedicated in their names.

B4 Religion Friday, Dec. 11, 1987 Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz.

Grace Bible adheres to old-line

News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — There's a difference between being religious and being a Christian. That difference is practiced at Grace Bible Church.

"Religion is man's best effort to satisfy God," says the Rev. Robert Warren, senior pastor at the Sun City church. "But Christianity is God's effort to establish a relationship with man."

The church, which is located at 19289 N. 99th Ave., does not belong to any denomination.

"The people in the church come from a wide variety of backgrounds," says Bob Barrow, chairman of the executive board. Barrow has been attending Grace Bible Church for five years.

"We take a literal translation of the Bible," Warren says. "In essence, we believe in the old-line theory."

'Christianity is God's effort to establish a relationship with man.'

— The Rev. Robert Warren

A personal relationship with Jesus is the focus of the church. Babies are not baptized, rather they are dedicated to the Lord until they are old enough to accept Jesus as their savior.

Parents promise to raise the children to know God and Jesus. When the child accepts Jesus, a full-immersion baptism takes place.

"It can happen at any stage in life," Warren explains. "But the person must know what they are doing. They must know what they're doing is making a public announcement of their faith in Jesus Christ. They're not just becoming a member of a church."

Warren says he accepted Christ when he was 14, al-

though he did not yet have the calling to become a minister then. That came in World War II when he was a tail gunner on a B-24.

"That's when I really sorted things out and decided to dedicate my life to serving the Lord. War does that," he said. "The military put a lot of men into the ministry."

After the war, he went to college with the first batch of GI Bill students.

The church relies on the King James version of the Bible. However, Warren says he uses more modern translations if a passage is too archaic for parishioners to understand.

Grace Bible Church began in

1975 when Sun City residents who had been gathering for informal Bible studies decided to build a church.

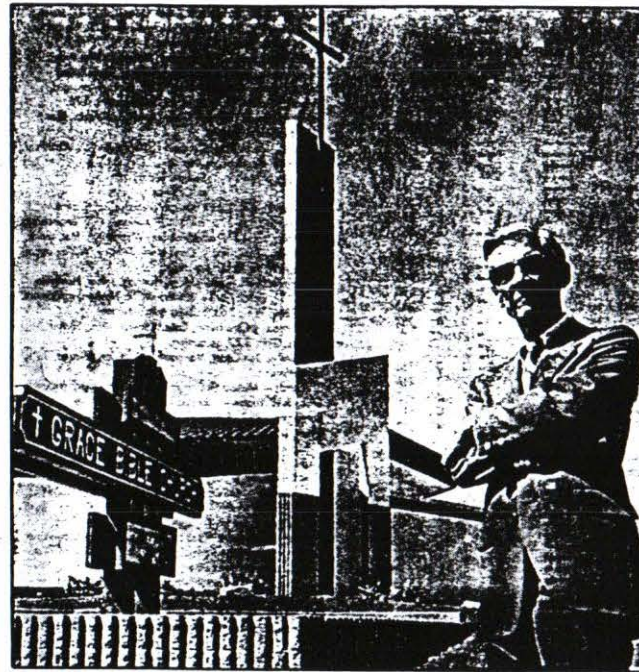
The first public services were held Jan. 4, 1976 at LaRonde Centre. The Rev. Timothy Smith was the first pastor, arriving June 1, 1976. Smith resigned on May 15, 1977.

Warren began his ministry at Grace July 1. He and his wife, Rosemary, have two daughters and four grandchildren.

Recreation centers provided temporary home for the church until early 1978, when the present site of the church was bought. Groundbreaking took place Oct. 7, 1979.

A new sanctuary was completed and dedicated on Nov. 9, 1986.

Church members number around 300. Double worship services are held in the winter at 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m.



THE REV. ROBERT WARREN — Senior pastor at Grace Bible Church.



Two Sun City churches break ground May 19

At 9:30 a.m. Sunday, members of Grace Bible Church held a note-burning for the old sanctuary and ground-breaking ceremony for a new one next door. Former building treasurer Walter

Rosner, left, and building committee chairman Ernie Gendron burn the notes as former treasurer Glenn Van Dyke looks on. Pastors are Jared Gerig, Edward Simpson and Robert Jordon.

Also Sunday, The Evangel Assembly of God Church broke ground for a building addition of fellowship hall, kitchen, offices and restrooms. From left are Pastor Taylor Davis, founding

pastor the Rev. Charles Scott, building superintendent Bob Sousa and associate pastor the Rev. Gordon Nelson. The building is to be finished by the first of the year. (Church photos)