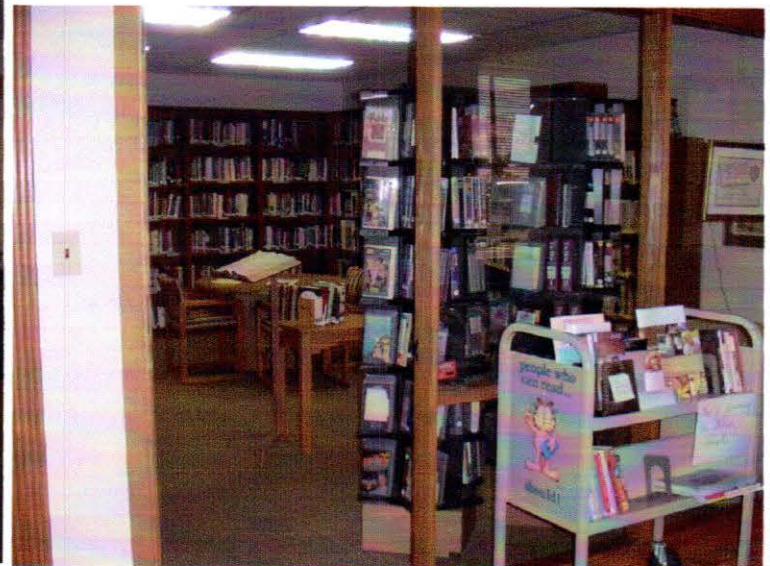
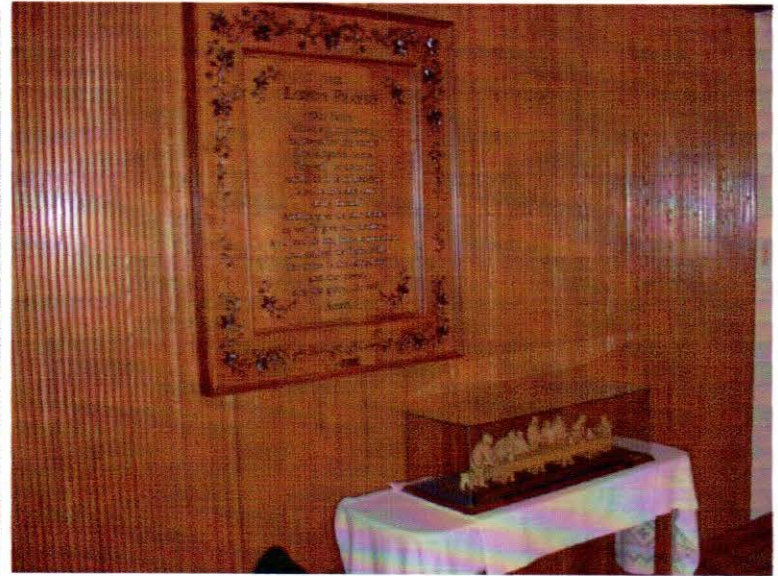


Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church, Sun City, founded 1960.
Exterior front and side views seen on June 17, 2008
Bell tower erected 2002 to replace original removed from roof in 1987
Reception area, library and meeting room with portraits of pastors





Old kitchen added on to and doubled in size to create a new, commercial grade kitchen.
Special training required of all users.



Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church
Walton Hall built in 1973 and in its third renovation.
Women's Luncheon June 17, 2008

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church
Sun City, Arizona
June 16, 2008

Today we are going to build a church. But first, let's set the stage. In the summer of 1959, Del Webb, a building contractor, and James Boswell, a cotton farmer, went into partnership to develop 20,000 acres of land on either side of Grand Avenue. Just south of this land was a brand new community called Youngtown, the world's first city to be restricted to people over 60 years of age. Del Webb's executives had researched the concept of retirement communities and decided to take it one step further...the world's first active retirement community.

Just five months later, on New Year's Day, January 1, 1960, Sun City had its grand opening. A fountain marked the entrance to the new shopping center and Safeway grocery store that was ready for business. Then came Oakmont Avenue where a recreation center and completely equipped crafts building overlooked lawn bowling, shuffleboard, horseshoe pitching and croquet courts, a swimming pool and 9-hole golf course. Five cement block model homes, tastefully furnished and priced from \$8500 to \$11,500, stood ready for inspection. Everywhere else was empty land and cotton fields.

On the eve of the big event, the men of Del Webb Company wondered if anyone would show up on a holiday to see their accomplishment. It represented a \$2 million dollar investment. Success depended on hundreds of 50+ year-old people deciding to forsake their old lives and start new ones in the middle of the desert.

The answer to this question came pretty quickly. Original plans called for selling 1700 homes in the first three years. But by the end of the first weekend, over 100,000 people had poured down Grand Avenue to see the new development and 237 houses had been sold. Two months later, when the second tract of 675 homes was started, Devco was advertising "Arizona's fastest growing city."

It took just 90 days to build each of the new houses so by April 1960 people were moving in. These were a mixed lot who came from all 50 states and several foreign countries. Some lived on Social Security and some were millionaires with every other income level between. They brought their many different faiths with them so that by October 1960 the first church group was meeting at Oakmont Center.

The honor of being the second church to organize in Sun City belongs to...YOU! A notice in the November 7, 1960 *News-Sun* read:

Initial Lutheran Church services in Sun City will be held at 9 a.m. this Sunday at the Sun City Community Center.

The Board of American Missions in New York City has sent the Rev. Albert B. Schwertz, D.D., L.D. to serve as resident pastor.

Dr. Schwertz, who retired recently from a downtown Los Angeles pastorate, which he served for nearly two decades, announced his initial sermon will be on "First Things First."

Dr. and Mrs. Schwertz, who will reside at 12013 Cherry Hills Drive, said a warm welcome awaits any Sun Citian who desires to call on them. They will be home to callers after Monday.

Thirty years later, Reverend Schwertz' widow Lula remembered scouring Sun City in search of support for their new endeavor. **"We visited every home – that's not boasting because there weren't too many people here then."** They gathered a small group of residents and met to organize in the home of John and Ruth Zilien in the fall of 1960. About 85 people attended the church's first Sunday service. **"We were all kinds of Lutherans"** Lula said. By April 1961, the congregation of 125 members had been recognized by the United Lutheran Church in America and was meeting for services at the Community Center on Oakmont. The Schwertzes moved on to serve a church in Carlsbad, California, and Reverend H. Maxwell Walton became the first pastor.

Because Del Webb realized the importance of churches as centers of community activity, large lots were set aside for each of the various denominations. Just two years later, in December 1962, the newspaper reported:

Clear skies and 80-degree temperatures prevailed at the ground-breaking ceremony Sunday, December 9, for the building of the Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church at 111th Avenue and Montana Avenue in Sun City.

Reverend ...Walton, pastor of the church, used a unique and effective arrangement to include the members and friends in the ground breaking. Before the ceremony the audience was asked to take its place along a white line that marked the foundation of the building, thus presenting the actual design of the proposed building.

Reverend Walton opened the ceremony with prayer after which the members sang the hymn "The Church's One Foundation." After the benediction, Reverend Walton turned three spades of the earth in dedication to the Trinity. [Then the] members also turned the earth along the outline of the building so that when each had participated a trench was made around the entire foundation. "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" was sung with all joining hands. The ceremony was closed by Reverend Walton in prayer.

The original church building was completed in 1963. According to Emil Fischer, who wrote and illustrated *The Churches of Sun Cities* in 1987, ***“The architecture of the interior is more traditional than most of the recently completed Sun City churches. One is conscious of a nave, chancel and transepts in this cruciform plan. The height of the nave is accentuated by the upward sweep of the pointed, laminated wooden arches supporting the roof. The altar is flanked by delicately outlined symbolic figures depicting the ‘Shepherd of the Desert.’”*** While other Sun City churches began by building a large, open social hall that also served for worship, the interior of Shepherd of the Desert ***“conveyed a sense of relaxed meditation... receptive of the liturgical mood it attempts to create. The congregation [can] feel this sense of worship as it enters the sanctuary.”***

Another remarkable feature of the church was its steeple with bells that could be heard for miles around the flat desert landscape. Topping out at 100 feet above ground, it was generally considered the highest recognizable landmark in the southern portion of Sun City.

Ten years later, Walton Hall—an office and lounge area connected to the church—was completed and dedicated. It was later converted into a choir rehearsal room, meeting room and storage areas. Moveable walls could be rearranged to open the small areas into a large space seating up to 500.

In 1986, the congregation raised \$850,000 to completely renovate the original facilities, including Walton Hall, a social hall, choir rooms and an educational unit.

By the year 2000, the venerable church steeple had undergone numerous repairs to stop roof leaks, which had damaged the wood panels and altar of the interior. Tar, foam and other sealants had been tried but the expansion and contraction of the metal structure defeated them all. There was no way to fix the problem other than to remove it. On October 11, 2000, crowds of people stood and watched as a work crew sawed through the angle bar and beams that anchored the steeple. A huge crane attempted to lift the steeple away but it held fast. Only after the sheet metal of the structure had been entirely cut around was the 10,000-pound monument lifted away. A job that was supposed to be over by noon took over 12 hours of exhausting work.

“When the steeple came down yet another surprise waited. The [tower] had been inhabited by a swarm of bees. The honeycomb filled the bell and surrounded the ball-peen hammer.” Avery Poling, known as the ‘Sun City bee man’ was summoned to take care of the estimated 75,000 bees within the bell area. Fortunately, most of the crowd had already disbursed and no one was stung.

Having disposed of the bees, Shepherd of the Desert proceeded with the rest of its \$200,000 renovation project, which included new handicapped-accessible rest rooms, a new coat of paint inside the sanctuary and new roofing where the steeple had stood for 37 years.

In his book, Emil Fischer wrote that Shepherd of the Desert *"is particularly known for its caring and serving ministry."* From the start, special groups for members were organized. Lula Schwertz recalled that *"We had men's and women's groups, and every week the choir went to nursing homes, where we had little services. We started that immediately so that everyone was geared to serving others."*

Under Reverend Walton, who led the church for 21 years, and his successor Reverend Russell Swanson who retired in 1987, church membership grew to over 1000. Many original ministerial programs began in this church.

In 1963, the church joined six others in support of the American Cancer Society "Reach for Recovery" program in Sun City that provided equipment and comfort for those dealing with cancer.

In conjunction with Interfaith Services, which is dedicated to keeping residents independent in their homes as long as possible, the church sponsored a Day Care Center.

Although 95 percent of the church's members were from Sun City and Youngtown, there were also families with children from El Mirage and Peoria and youngsters visiting their relatives. For them, the church provided a Sunday School and Vacation Bible School during the summer.

By the time the church celebrated its 30th anniversary under Reverend Harold Peterson, service programs to its 850 members included :

- A biannual Love In when shut-ins and homebound members were individually escorted to church and hosted throughout a communion service and luncheon. *"These people just love to get back into the sanctuary,"* said Reverend Peterson.
- Care N'Share members visiting fellow members and providing them with transportation or errand running.
- Emotions Anonymous, a support group for those coping with personal or family problems
- Growth through Grief, an outlet for men and women to discuss their grief process
- Love Corps, a woman's group that contacts members recently released from the hospital

The Stephens Ministry, which trains lay people to be spiritual caregivers to shut-ins, was initiated by Reverend Bruce Ayers. *"When we were talking about*

the ministry, we realized we needed about \$3,000 to get it going," Ayers said. **"I went out and got the funds from many very generous contributors."** Although a heart attack caused Reverend Ayers to resign his pastorate in 1996 after only five years, the ministry program continues to this day. And, happily, so does Reverend Ayers who is still doing what he loves best, one-on-one visiting with parishioners.

In 2001, to further its goal of making the church totally handicapped-accessible, Shepherd of the Desert purchased a Ford 12-passenger van with wheelchair lift and space for up to three wheelchairs. A second van transports people who can no longer drive. **"The really important thing about the ministry is the breadth that it gives,"** said Associate Pastor Barbara Duhlstine-Robarge. **"We need to be committed to helping [those] ..with special needs. It keeps people coming when they have a setback."** Other changes include automatic doors and shortening the pews to accommodate wheelchairs. According to Pastor Ronald Pechauer, who had to be on crutches following a recent accident, **"I remember how hard it was to get into places that weren't handicapped accessible. We actually had one couple who started attending church again after we shortened the pews so that the wheelchair wasn't out in the aisle. It makes people feel comfortable."**

In November, 2001, Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church celebrated its 40th birthday with plans for a new bell tower to be dedicated on Easter Sunday 2002.

Starting with nothing but the faithful, dedicated Lutherans of Sun City and Youngtown, a church rose in the desert and made a difference in peoples' lives. I hope that collectively, as a church, you will build on this beginning so that by 2010, when you celebrate the church's 50th Anniversary, you can share your story with the whole community.

Presented by
Carole Parnell
Sun Cities Area
Historical Society

Carole Parnell is a retired teacher/school librarian from Ohio, who moved to Sun City West in 1997. She has worked in customer service at the Daily News-Sun and as a church secretary. For six years she was on the board of Habitat for Humanity of the West Valley and is now on the board of the Sun Cities Historical Society.

This history was made possible because of Jane Freeman, who founded the Sun Cities Area Historical Society and who comes in everyday to glean articles from newspapers and other publications for the collection.

The collection proved its value on this occasion because Sandra Heatherly, who organized the Tuesday, June 17, 2008, luncheon, called on Friday to ask about her speaker. When it turned out that no one was scheduled, Carole met with her on Saturday morning at which time Sandra asked for a history of the church. The above presentation was compiled out of a few newspaper articles, Jubilee and The Churches of the Sun Cities. The group was satisfied with the result and voted \$30 to thank the Society.

Lutherans hold first services

(November 7, 1960)

Initial Lutheran Church services in Sun City will be held at 9 a.m. this Sunday at the Sun City Community Center.

The board of American Missions in New York City has sent the Rev. Albert B. Schwertz, D.D., L.D., to serve as resident pastor.

Dr. Schwertz, who retired recently from a downtown Los Angeles pastorate which he served for nearly two decades, announced his initial sermon will be on "First Things First."

Dr. and Mrs. Schwertz, who will reside at 12013 Cherry Hills Dr., said a warm welcome awaits any Sun Citian who desire to call on them. They will be at home to callers after Monday.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

NOV. 7-13, 2001

**Lutheran church
marks 40th birthday**

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church 11025 N. 111th Ave., celebrates its 40th anniversary this weekend. Guest preacher will be the Rev. Harold Peterson, senior pastor of the congregation from 1988 to 1995.

The church, one of the first congregations established in Sun City, held its first worship service in 1961 at Oakmont Recreation Center.

The congregation is looking forward to construction of a new bell tower in 2002. The new tower will replace a 100-foot tower removed last year and is expected to be dedicated on Easter Sunday.

Bus adds to Shepherd's flock

HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBILITY: Lutheran church in Sun City makes strides to accommodate those with physical challenges

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

After 12 years as a member of Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church, John

Moline can now make it to the services a little easier.

Moline, who was diagnosed with polio when he was 17-years-old, has been confined to a wheelchair most of his life, and driving has always been a bit of a burden to him. But getting to his place of worship is much easier now that the church has purchased a new handicapped-accessible bus.

"I have my own van with a lift, but it isn't always dependable," Moline said. "Now I can call up the church and they will come and get me."

Church members purchased the bus last fall, and

it has been growing in popularity with many members, according to congregant Jean Swanson, a winter resident who has attended Shepherd of the Desert for the past eight years when she's in the desert.

"It's a very active program and is growing all the time," she said. "The church has a goal to make the entire building handicapped-accessible too."

The bus has a state-of-the-art wheelchair lift and enough room to fit three wheelchairs. The church also has a second bus to provide transportation for able-bodied members who do not

or cannot drive.

"The bus that's not handicapped-accessible opened a ministry to those who didn't drive," Pastor Ronald Pechauer explained. "With the new bus, we are opening up a ministry for those who are in wheelchairs or walkers."

The bus provides transportation for each Sunday service, but also for all other church functions, Pechauer said.

In the past couple of years, the church has gone through several upgrades, including installation of automatic

See Crutches stint, A5

From A1

doors and shortening the pews, to more easily accommodate those in wheelchairs.

"It sure has come a long way from when I was younger," Moline said. "It used to be that there were very few places I could go in my wheelchair, and to just look at the church (now), it really is a great thing they did."

The church also has upgraded its bathrooms to make them handicapped accessible.

"I think what we did is open up the ministry to those members who are active, but weren't able to attend because of lack of accessibility," Pechauer said. "We actually had one couple who started attending church again after we shortened the pews so that the wheelchair wasn't out in the aisle. It makes people feel comfortable."

Pechauer said he has been a big supporter of the bus and church renovations, and following a recent accident,

he gained empathy for those with physical challenges.

"I was on crutches, and I remember how hard it was to get into places that weren't handicapped-accessible," he said. "I guess sometimes that's all it takes to get it motivated — when you actually see how things are from someone else's point of view."

All the renovations have been a welcome change at the church, and even more are planned in the future.

"It's a great thing, and has been very helpful to many of our members," Swanson said.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Bob Luger helps John Moline board the Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church bus Wednesday evening. The new handicapped-accessible bus can hold up to three wheelchairs and eight additional passengers.

LENDING A HAND

Church's new van proves boon to handicapped

By JULI NESSETT
Independent Newspapers

Recognizing the special needs of some of their parishioners and prospective congregation members, officials at Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church recently decided to purchase a new handicapped-accessible van.

Funded solely through contributions of parishioners, special gifts and memorial donations, the Ford E-450 van was received last November.

Parishioner Robert "Bob" Luger drives the new van for church functions and says about 30 people use the service.

Those wanting to attend a church service or another church event, are

picked up at their homes and then taken home following the function.

The van has seating for up to three wheelchairs, perfect for the parish, which has three members in wheelchairs.

Maintenance, gasoline and insurance for the van are all funded through a special van ministry fund.

There is no charge for the service and any donations given to the driver for rides are directed into the van fund.

Currently the new van is used three to four days a week.

Before the congregation received the new van, Mr. Luger would have to borrow Good Shepherd Care Center's handicapped-accessible van to transport wheelchair-bound

individuals.

Helen Normark, a member of Shepherd of the Desert's congregation since 1974 who is currently in a wheelchair due to a bad hip, says the van is a great help.

"You would have to depend on friends otherwise. It's a tremendous help for me. I probably wouldn't get here if it wasn't for this," she said.

Cost of the 12-passenger van was approximately \$55,000, according to Associate Pastor Barbara Duhlstine-Robarge.

Pastor Duhlstine-Robarge said the van has been a very exciting addition to the ministry.

"It's a good addition. I think it offers something to people in the community," she noted.

Since receiving the van, the ministry has made other changes, seeking to accommodate people with special needs.

Several pew areas in the sanctuary were altered to allow people in wheelchairs several areas which to choose.

The church also recently joined the national organization, Accessible Congregation Campaign.

"The really important thing about the ministry is the breadth that it gives," said Pastor Duhlstine-Robarge. "We need to be committed to helping handicapped people with special needs.

"You have a lot of barriers to overcome when you are handicapped. And this is something that can encourage them to become more holistic in accepting who they are, even if they are now physically challenged," she said. "It keeps people coming when they have a setback."

Users of the van service do not have to be members of the congregation, the associate pastor stressed.

According to Mr. Luger, approximately five individuals who are not members of the church are currently using the service.

Anyone interested in attending a church function at Shepherd of the Desert who is in need of transportation or handicapped-accessible transportation is invited to call the church office at 933-1359.



Photo by JULI NESSETT/Independent Newspapers

Robert Luger assists Helen Normark out of Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church's new handicapped-accessible van. Ms. Normark said the van service is a tremendous help to her.

PASSING OF AN ERA

Congregation bids farewell to landmark steeple

By JULI NESSETT
Independent Newspapers

A longtime Sun City landmark has disappeared from the local skyline.

The steeple that had been atop Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church, 11025 N. 111th Ave., was removed Oct. 11 to prevent further water damage to the church's interior.

The bells, which could once be heard for miles around the steeple, which was erected in 1963, were silenced.

Members of the church had tried everything and removing steeple was the only solution in the eyes of the congregation. Wood panels inside the church had suffered water damage, as did the altar.

Tar, foam and almost every other type of sealant available had been tried.

The church began thinking about removing the steeple a few years ago but it was only in March that a drive began to raise the funds necessary for the removal of the steeple and other renovations.

In only a few months, the congregation of Shepherd of the Desert raised \$200,000 for the project.

"In a way I hate to see it go," said Ed Aho, a retired pastor and member of the church. "It was a good landmark but it was poorly engineered," he said.

Rick Hayduk, the project manager, explained there was really no way to fix the problem other than to remove it.

"Most of the ones I've dealt with before have been wooden but this one here is all metal and when it's so hot the metal expands and contracts and the joints just start to loosen up," said Mr. Hayduk.

"They have had people up there constantly trying to fix it and unfortunately this is their last resort," he added.

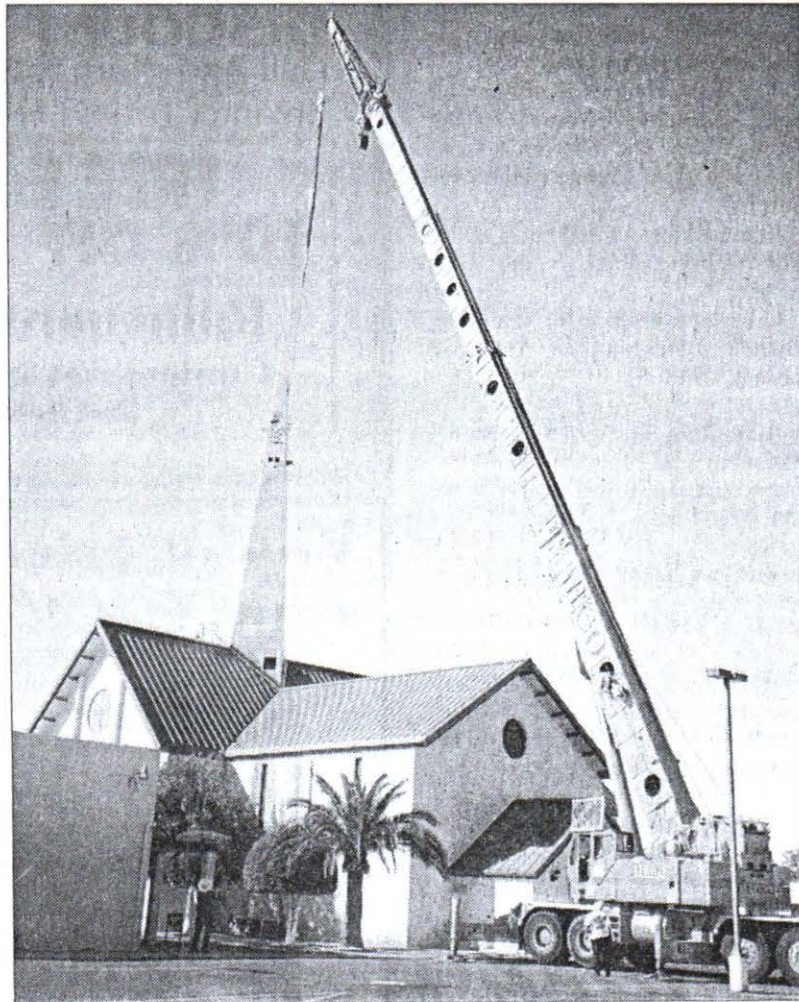


Photo courtesy of TED LEE

Employees of MAC Demolition prepare to remove the steeple of Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church on Oct. 11. In what turned out to be a long, arduous task, the steeple was finally removed shortly after dark.

The steeple was originally scheduled to come down on Oct. 10 but rain kept the demolition crews away. So, at 9 a.m. Oct. 11, as crowds of people stood and waited, demolition time was at hand. But it didn't happen. Then at 10:30 a.m. it was going to come down and it didn't.

It was much more of a job than the work crew had anticipated. The steeple was held up by six-inch angle bar and though this usually could be easily cut with a torch,

because much of the church is held up by wooden beams, a torch could

(over)

have caused a fire.

When all of the beams had been cut, a huge MARCO crane attempted to lift the steeple away, but it stubbornly held fast. The crew then did more cutting and again, the steeple didn't budge.

It was only after the sheet metal of the structure had been entirely cut around that the 10,000-pound monument was lifted away. And although the crew had anticipated being through by noon, Murphy's Law came into play and it wasn't until 7:50 p.m., and over 12 hours of exhausting work had been completed, that the steeple finally fell.

Mike Cook, president MAC Demolition, said it was an unusual event for his crew. "We usually put them up, not take them off," he said.

When the steeple came down yet another surprise awaited. The entire bell had been inhabited by swarm of bees. The honeycomb filled the bell and surrounded the ball-peen hammer. A local beekeeper was summoned to the scene.

"Because the bell hadn't been operated in several years, they were able to make their home there and it (the nest) was undistributed," said Avery Poling, Sun City's resident

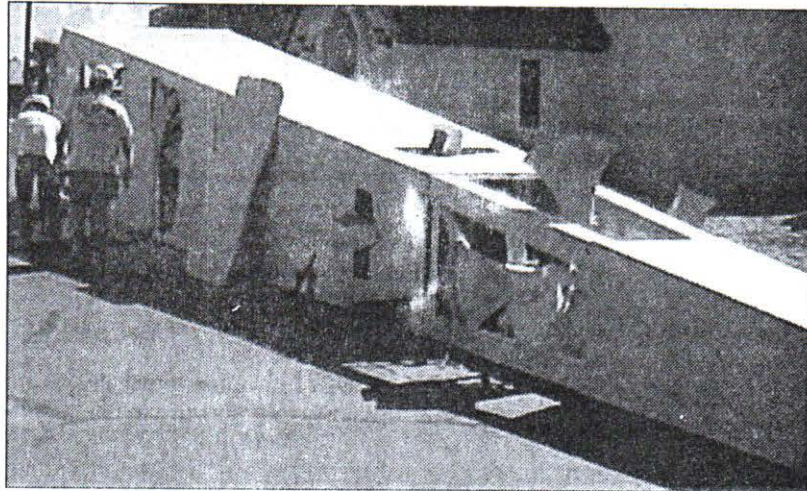


Photo by JULI NESSETT/Independent Newspapers

The morning after the felling of the steeple workers check the status of the bees that had nested in the structure.

beekeeper.

Known as the "Sun City bee man," he estimated there were over 75,000 bees within the bell area.

Mr. Poling could not remove the bees because the honeycomb was too large. Instead, he used a biodegradable solution designed by the Beekeepers Association to eradicate the problem. Fortunately much of the crowd had dispersed by the time the steeple was removed and no one

was stung.

After the renovations are finished, Shepherd of the Desert will have new handicap accessible rest rooms, a new coat of paint inside the sanctuary and new roofing where the steeple stood for 37 years.

The congregation is hoping to one day erect a free-standing steeple.

Church's steeple coming down

LANDMARK: Phase I church plans to remove steeple

PATRICK O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

One of the highest points in Sun City is coming down.

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church Tuesday is bringing down its steeple and removing what probably is the highest recognizable landmark residents of the southern portion of Sun City have known.

"The steeple is quite a landmark in town," said Chuck Carlson, vice president of the council for the church at 11025 N. 111th Ave.

Erected in 1963, the steeple rises about 60 feet above the church's roof, which is 40 feet above the ground at its high point. Its pinnacle, 100 feet above the ground, is visible from various points around Sun City.

The problem is the aging roof around the steeple began to leak. Repairs were made, but nothing ever stopped the water from coming in, Carlson said.

"It was guaranteed up until the first rain hit us," he said.

The steeple removal is part of an overall \$200,000 church remodeling project, which includes making the building's restrooms wheelchair accessible, as well as painting and other smaller remodeling jobs, Carlson said.

Bringing down the steeple

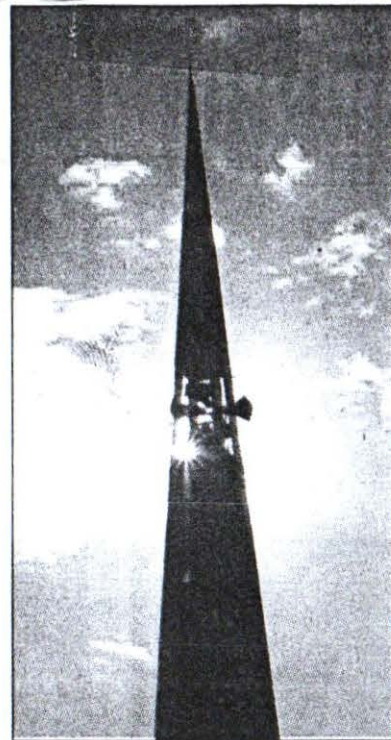
probably will be done the way it was originally assembled — in two pieces. A crane will be used to lift off the steeple in two sections and lower it to the ground. Because the steeple is not part of the church's support structure, removing it will not affect the building, Carlson said.

Officials at the Sun City Historical Society said they weren't certain if the steeple was the tallest structure in Sun City's Phase I, but said major modifications to churches built during the early days of the community are not undertaken often.

Most of the work done on buildings, particularly churches, is expansion of existing facilities and regular maintenance, such as regular maintenance, such as ical Society officials said,

With the steeple coming down, Historical Society officials are searching for the next highest landmark in Sun City.

The church's congregation has no plans to replace the steeple, but a bell tower is being planned for the church property, Carlson said.



MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

On Tuesday, workers will dismantle the steeple at Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church on 111th Avenue in Sun City. It will not be replaced.

(over)

Divine intervention

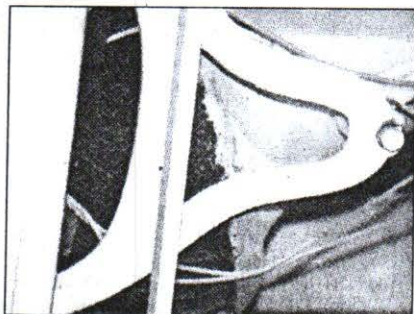


JOY LAMBERT/DAILY NEWS-SUN



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

In what seemed like divine intervention, nearly 12 hours after a demolition team started working, the steeple comes down from Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church on 111th Avenue in Sun City. Al Blaschke of Sun City was among the onlookers, who at 7:40 Wednesday night cheered under the nearly full moon as the steeple weighing 10,000 pounds was lowered to the ground. The demolition crew discovered that the main bell was home to thousands of bees, shown in the closeup below.



JOY LAMBERT/DAILY NEWS-SUN



JOY LAMBERT/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Pastor retires after heart problems



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Rev. Bruce Ayers sits at his desk Monday. Ayers retired as pastor of the Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church after six years.

By **BOB BUSHNER**
Staff writer

The Rev. Bruce Ayers was developing a study project involving detours in the Bible one morning last month when he began having chest pains.

"By 2 that afternoon, I had a severe heart attack in the hospital emergency room and I had another later in the day," the former associate pastor at Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church said this week in his Sun City home.

"I learned the next day from my doctor that my heart was very diseased, and he recommended that I no longer work.

"I guess you could say that was MY detour."

While Rev. Ayers had heart problems in the past, the June 12 heart attacks caught him by some surprise, especially their severity. The sudden health problems forced him to retire the position he had held at the church for six years.

"It wasn't my decision, it was a necessity," the 62-year-old Ayers said of the retirement. "I plan to remain as active as possible as a parishioner in the church and to maintain the strong friendships I have developed there."

Ayers, whose wife, Marylyn, works at a Sun City West dress shop, had served at churches in Canada, Prescott and California before joining the 650-member Shepherd of the Desert church in 1990.

Ayers is proud of his work on the ground floor of the church's creation of the Stephen's Ministry, which trains lay people to be spiritual caregivers to shut-ins.

"When we started talking about the ministry, we realized we needed about \$3,000 to get it going," Ayers said.

"I went out and got the funds from many very generous contributors."

Ayers said he will miss much in his forced retirement, but more than anything will be the one-on-one visiting with parishioners.

"I did a lot of individual contact with people, and I'll really miss that," Ayers said.

Among other things, the retired associate pastor will

miss preaching on topics like the parables, especially his favorites, the Good Samaritan and the prodigal son.

"Of course, I'll also miss leading the worship and the Bible study," Ayers added.

"I hope that in time I'll be able to pick up again on the one-on-one visiting."

In the meantime, however, Ayers will be spending more time with his children and grandchildren.

"This retirement has been forced on me, but I'm looking forward to the time I'll have with my family," Ayers said.

"For now, I hope to keep well."

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran

Church celebrates origin

By ROSA De SIMONE
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Leaving California for the desert and coming out of retirement, Albert Schwertz arrived in Sun City with a purpose: to found Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church.

In the early stages of development Schwertz and his wife scoured Sun City in search of support for their new endeavor.

Schwertz was sent to the Northwest Valley by the Board of American Missions of the Lutheran Church in America (now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

"We visited every home — that's not boasting because there weren't too many people here then," said Schwertz' widow Lula.

About 85 people attended the church's first Sunday service in Oakmont Recreation Center in Sun City, she said.

"We were all kinds of Lutherans," Lula said.

Thirty years later, the church located at 11025 111th Ave., is 800 members-strong, with a variety of programs dedicated to serving its congregation and community.

In recognition of the parish's 30th anniversary, the group's meager beginnings and gradual growth are being honored in 1991 with various activities.

From the start, special groups for members were organized.

"We had men's and women's groups, and every week the choir went to nursing homes, where we had little services," Lula said. "We started that immediately so that everyone was geared to serving others."

The congregation is still in



Daily News-Sun photo by Stephen Chernes

WELCOME — The Rev. Bruce Ayers, a pastor at Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church, 11025 111th Ave., greets Anna Pearson, who at 100 is the oldest member of the church, during a Love In at the church Wednesday.

high gear when it comes to helping others. Last week the church hosted their biannual Love In. The function is directed toward shut-ins and homebound members. They are invited to participate in a communion service and a luncheon. A host or hostess assists each guest during the service and remains with that person throughout the event.

"These people just love to get back into their sanctuary," said the Rev. Harold Peterson, Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church senior pastor.

A variety of programs and groups are offered to members, Peterson said, including:

- Care 'N Share: Members

who visit fellow members and provide them transportation or errand running.

- Emotions Anonymous: A support group for those who need help coping with personal or family problems.

- Growth Through Grief: An outlet for men and women to discuss their grief process.

- Love Corps: A women's group that contacts members recently released from the hospital.

In an attempt to keep the large congregation tight-knit, associate pastor the Rev. Bruce Ayers organized Dinners for Eight five months ago, he said.

The social program takes place in a different home for



Daily News-Sun photos by Frances Guarino

OVERSEER — The Rev. Harold J. Peterson is senior pastor for Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church.

each dinner to allow new friendships to form.

"This parish has stressed friendliness over the years," Lula said.

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church's congregation will "show off" this friendliness during 30th anniversary cele-



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY — The congregation of Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church, 11025 111th Ave. in Sun City, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year with several special events.

brations, Peterson said.

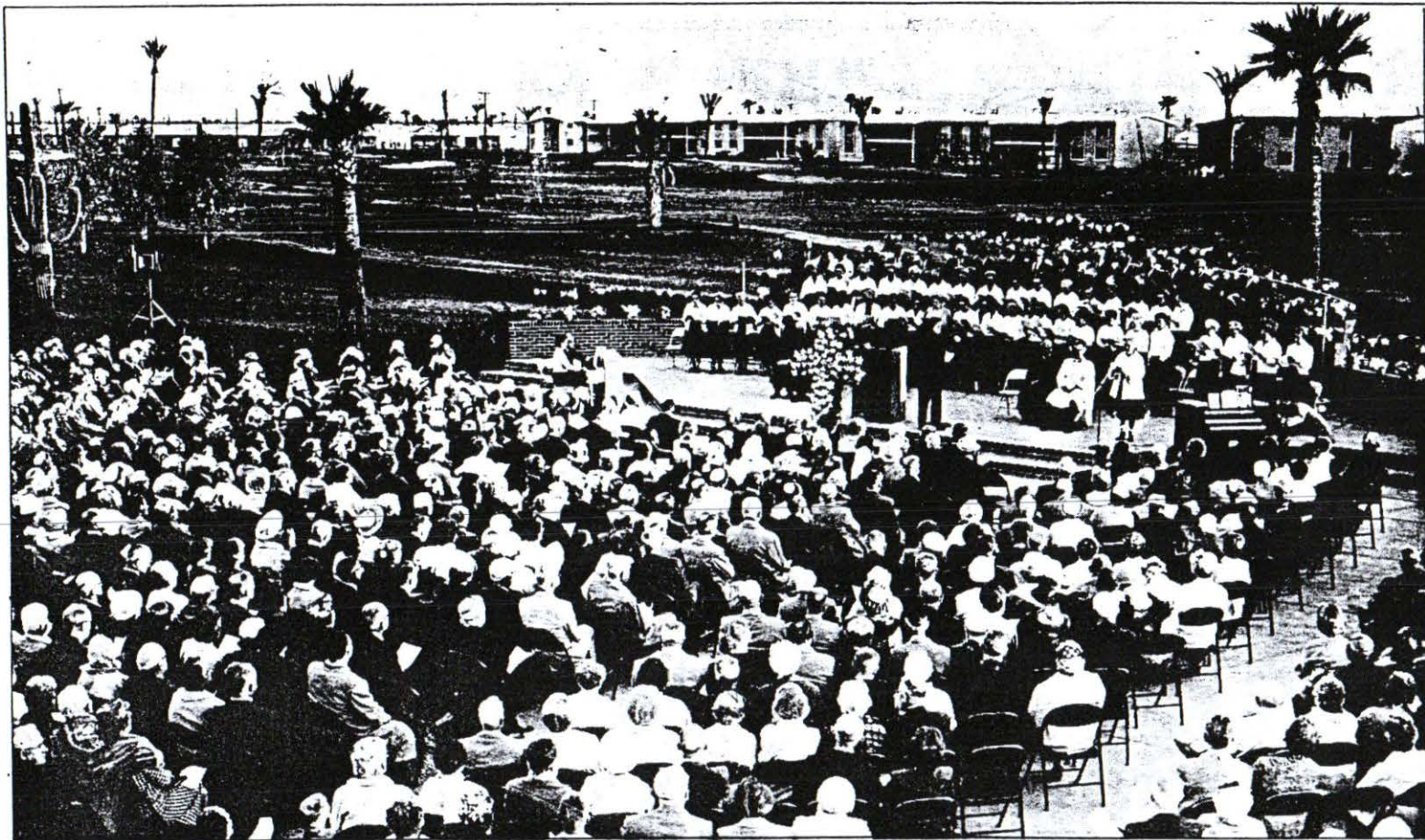
The 30th Anniversary Celebration Committee had scheduled the following events:

- April 26: Dinner at 6:30 p.m. the Lakes Club in Sun City. Former pastors and staff will be in attendance.

- May 26: Incorporation Sun-

day will be marked. Former Pastor Russell Swanson will conduct worship at 9 and 10:30 a.m.

- Dec. 1: open house. Visitors will be given guided tours of the church, and knowledgeable people will be stationed throughout the facility to answer questions.



DAILY NEWS SUN 3-29-91

Daily News-Sun photo

THE FIRST SUNRISE SERVICE — Thirty years ago, a fledgling ministerial association, comprised of ministers from the communities' only two churches, called residents and guests to the first Sunrise Service in Sun City. The service was held outside the old Town Hall Recreation Center at 10600 Peoria Ave. Sun City developer Del E. Webb contributed a bank of Easter lillies to beautify the occasion. The two founders of the ministerial association, the Rev. Walter Witt of the United Church of Sun City and the Rev. Howard Blackburn of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, began a tradition that has continued each year. The Sun Cities 30th Annual Community Sunrise Service will be at 6 a.m. Sunday in the Sun Bowl, 107th Avenue, one block south of Peoria Avenue, in Sun City.

B4 Religion Saturday, Oct. 10, 1987 Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz.

Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran

By GEOFF GORVIN
News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Shepherd of the Desert Lutheran Church has found itself in a state of transition, which is a rare situation for the 26-year-old Sun City church.

Shepherd of the Desert, 11025 111th Ave., was the second Christian congregation established in the retirement community. Even so, the church hasn't experienced many major changes over the years.

The few major changes that the church has encountered includes the retirement of the church's original pastor in 1982 after a 21-year ministry, a \$850,000 renovation of the church in 1985 and the retirement of the congregation's second pastor two weeks ago.

Underlying the major changes,

however, have been major improvements to the programs offered through the church, said the Rev. Russell Swanson, who retired Sept. 30 after serving the church for five years.

Swanson said he left the church after five years of strong and creative program development, enriched worship and expanded social ministry programs.

In addition, Swanson's administration added adult education, fellowship programs and improved the church image. In all, he helped accomplish seven of eight goals that were set when he joined the church in 1982.

"I'm satisfied with what we set out to do," he said. "It's an extremely strong congregation with a lot of creative juices and strong leadership. With the new leader-

ship coming in, it will probably build on the strong points it has."

The Rev. Luther Strommen, who is serving as interim pastor until a replacement is hired, has only been associated with the congregation for a week, but has noticed some definite qualities within the congregation.

"I was quite moved by the friendliness and warmth of the congregation," he said. "In one week, I've been very much impressed by the talent, the vitality, the commitment and the charm of these people."

Even though the church is in Sun City, it still provides programs for children such as Sunday School and vacation Bible school during the summer.

"The church has been committed to the ministry of all persons

Church touches many lives

even though it's in a retirement community," Swanson said.

About 95 percent of the 950-member congregation is from Sun City and Youngtown, however, there are young families from El Mirage and Peoria who participate. There are also young relatives of the church's congregation that visit during the summer.

Swanson said that in all — including the social programs in which the church visits homebound and hospitalized people — the church actually touches as many as 3,000-5,000 people in various ways.

Shepherd of the Desert was established in November 1960. Back then, the services were conducted at various locations even after April 1961, when Shepherd of the Desert Evangelical Lutheran

Church of Sun City became a congregation.

The church consisted of 132 people then, some of who are still members.

The following November, the Rev. H. Maxwell Walton began a 21-year ministry at the church. He helped establish the church building in June 1963. Ten years later, Walton Hall — an office and lounge area connected to the church — was completed and dedicated. It's since been converted into a choir rehearsal room, meeting room and storage areas. There are movable walls around smaller areas that can be opened up for seating of up to 500 people.

In February 1982, Walton retired and was replaced by Swanson, who came from Murray Hill, N.J.



LUTHER STROMMEN



Rev. H. Walton Maxwell, pastor of the Shepherd of Desert Lutheran Church, turns over the first shovel of dirt for the church's new building which will be erected in Sun City. Rev. Edward Sheldon, dean of the Arizona District, is shown reading the ritual of the service.

For Lutheran Church,

Ground Breaking Held

Clear skies and 80 degree temperature prevailed at the ground breaking ceremony Sunday, Dec. 9, for the building of the Shepherd Of The Desert Lutheran Church at 111th Ave. and Montana Ave. in Sun City.

Rev. H. Maxwell Walton, pastor of the church, used a unique and effective arrangement to include the members and friends in the ground breaking. Before the ceremony the audience was asked to take its place along a white line that marked the foundation of the building, thus presenting the actual design of the proposed building.

Rev. Walton opened the ceremony with prayer after which the members sang the hymn The Churches' One Foundation.

The Rev. Edward Sheldon, pastor of the Faith Lutheran Church in Phoenix, introduced by Rev. Walton, said "The ground breaking day is one of the happiest days for the church". He also conveyed a message of goodwill from the Pacific Southwest Synod. Rev. Sheldon was recently elected Dean of the Arizona District Of The Pacific Southwest Synod of the Lutheran Church of America.

Fred Ammon of Phoenix who will be the supervisor on the building, represented Chas. W. Harris, 8240-29th Ave. Phoenix contractor. Mr. Ammon stated the construction would be started Thursday, Dec. 13th.

After the benediction Rev. Walton turned three spades of the earth in dedication to the Trinity,

Rev. Sheldon then did the same. Members also turned the earth along the out line of the building, so that when each had participated a trench was made around the entire foundation.

Rev. Walton told the congregation of the message received from Rev. and Mrs. A. B. Schwartz, former pastor of the church and who is now serving at Carsbad, Calif. The message expressed regret of their being unable to attend the ground breaking ceremony, and sent their blessings.

Blest Be The Tie That Binds was sung with all joining hands. The ceremony was closed by Rev. Walton in prayer.

Lutherans hold first services

(November 7, 1960)

Initial Lutheran Church services in Sun City will be held at 9 a.m. this Sunday at the Sun City Community Center.

The board of American Missions in New York City has sent the Rev. Albert B. Schwertz, D.D., L.D., to serve as resident pastor.

Dr. Schwertz, who retired recently from a downtown Los Angeles pastorate which he served for nearly two decades, announced his initial sermon will be on "First Things First."

Dr. and Mrs. Schwertz, who will reside at 12013 Cherry Hills Dr., said a warm welcome awaits any Sun Citian who desire to call on them. They will be at home to callers after Monday.