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Pastor plans to exit at top of game

SUN CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH: Senior shepherd has led congregation longer than any other in area

ERIN SELIGMAN
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Having established a growing congregation, raised money for numerous charities and instituted communitywide dedication to helping the needy, the Rev. Donald Farrior will retire from his position as senior pastor of the Sun City Christian Church.

Currently the longest-tenured pastor in the Sun Cities area, Farrior has led the 21-year-old church, located at 98th Avenue and Palmeras Drive, for more than 12 years. His last day will be Dec. 31.

"I'm retiring because I feel good, I'm happy, I'm healthy and I want to go out on top," the 62-year-old minister said.

Dedicated to helping those in need, Farrior quickly boasts about the church's charitable heart, which has grown immensely since he took over. A strong supporter of Interfaith Services, Westside Food Bank and the Salvation Army, Sun City Christian Church has raised \$8 million in the last 12 years, built a Habitat for Humanity home in El Mirage and financially supported three seminars, four church-related colleges and a number of shelters for unwed mothers, disabled children and victims of domestic abuse.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Senior Pastor Donald Farrior of Sun City Christian Church says he has always used encouragement and a positive attitude to shepherd his flock. He will step down on New Year's Eve.

"We have a major mission program to give to people generally in need," he said.

"We don't preach a little gospel, we preach a big gospel," Farrior added, noting that the church will assist not only those in Sun City, but across the world. "We just say 'you are a child of God,' that's all that matters to us."

Along with an increase in charitable donations, Sun City Christian Church has enjoyed a growing congregation under Farrior's direction, expanding from 475 members in 1988 to 750 today.

"I think I have the gift of encouragement," he said. "I have been joyful. I have a joyful spirit, I have a confident spirit and it's rooted in my faith in God. When people come (to this church), they leave here happy that they came."

A pastor for 41 years, Farrior was drawn to the pulpit after hearing the preaching of Billy Graham, whom he eventually met on numerous occasions. As for his charitable heart, Farrior attributes that to his parents.

As a child he was taught the only things that matter in one's life are a love for people, a love for God and a desire to help people in need, he said: "I was taught that early and I believed it. I still believe it."

Upon retiring, Farrior anticipates his time will be spent traveling, perfecting his golf game and completing a collection of funny stories titled, "I Did Not Burn the Church Down, But I Did Start the Fire."

"My book's on humor," he said. "I think too many of us are too heavy, too sad. ... I think people need to laugh. ... Humor adds sunshine to your life."

"The strength of this church is that the people are happy," he added, noting that members will greet newcomers with a hug, a smile or a helping hand. "This congregation is sunshine, joyful, celebrative, and the people are extremely charitable."

Temporarily filling Farrior's shoes, Dr. Howard Schenk will serve as acting pastor until March 1, at which time an interim senior pastor will take over. A permanent replacement will be called by the winter of 2001.

Despite the wave of changes expected to flow into Sun City Christian Church in the coming months, Farrior remains confident the congregation will continue its mission to serve others.

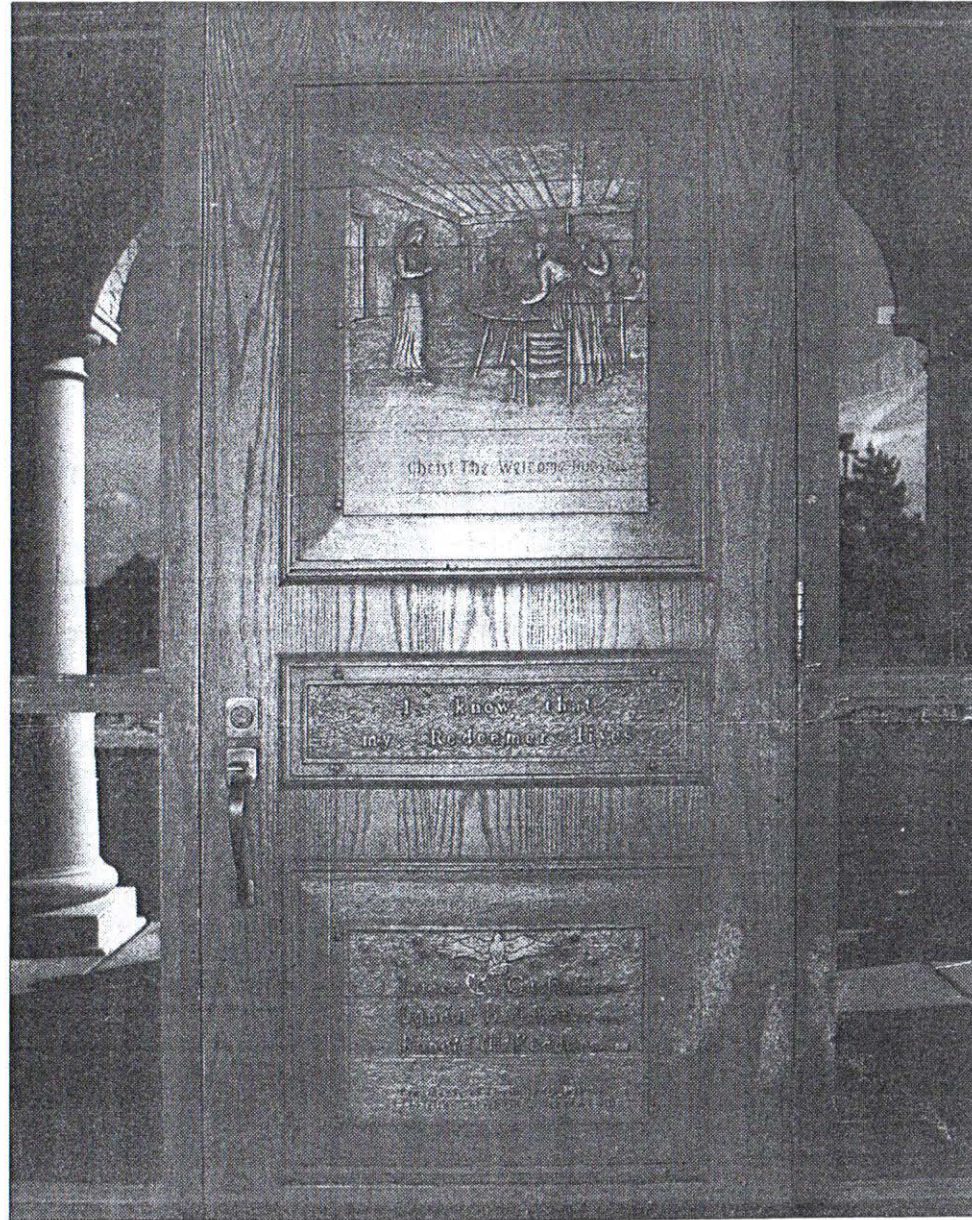
"This is a very — extremely strong congregation with very capable leaders and extremely generous people," he said.

Doors depict apostles' images



Two of the panels on the outside chapel doors of Sun City Christian Church depict the apostles Andrew, left, and Phillip. The apostle images were carved by Oliver J. Knutson using photographs taken by H.A. Hollett.

Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun



Gregory Harris/Daily News-Sun

This carving, on the door to the Fellowship Hall of Sun City Christian Church, depicts "Christ, the Welcome Guest."

Local residents served as models

By JULIA DE SIMONE
Staff writer

The wooden doors at the Sun City Christian Church Chapel talk to the Rev. Dr. Donald Gene Farrior.

Carved with the faces of the 12 apostles — Simon Peter, Andrew, James the less, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon and Judas Iscariot — their voices echo from the inside of the Elsie Laybourn Memorial Chapel to the outside world.

The church is at 98th Avenue and Palmeras Lane, Sun City.

"The wood doors speak of the majesty and glory of God and the dignity and worth of human personality," Farrior said.

He said the idea for the wooden doors stemmed from photos taken by Harry A. Hollett, a Youngtown photographer, of everyday men dressed to look like apostles. The photos are featured in his and Clarence E. Macartney's book "The Chosen Twelve Plus One," which focuses on the lives of the founders of Christianity. Many of the models for his photos were local Sun Citians. Hollett died in October of 1989.

Farrior said in 1987, church officials called upon Oliver Knutson, an award-winning, world-renowned wood carver in Colorado, to duplicate Hollett's photos into wooden faces of the disciples for their doors.

"We told him that we wanted these blocks of wood to look like these people," he said.

Farrior admitted that church officials were initially nervous about whether Knutson could duplicate the photos onto

wood, but were at ease when they received the carvings three months later. He said they cost "thousands of dollars," which was donated by church members. Knutson died this past spring, Farrior said.

"The blocks of wood looked like these people," Farrior said. "The features were outstanding. People were just overwhelmed with joy."

Dr. George Cannon, owner of Cannon Medical Clinic in Sun City, said he was featured as Andrew in Hollett's book. He was not paid for his services but did receive several copies of the 111-page, hardbound book.

"The prerequisite for the photo was you had to have a beard," he said. "At the time, I had a full beard."

Cannon said it wasn't until one of his patients told him of the carvings a few years later that he realized he was on the church doors.

"I've been on worse places before but at least it's not on the post office walls," he said with a laugh.

Farrior said the doors are among more than 70 wood carvings found at the church.

He said all the outside carvings are waxed almost every week to preserve their beauty.

"We have the second largest collection (of wood carvings) of Protestant churches in America," he said. "We have visitors that come from every state to see the doors."

Farrior said artists are also moved by the realness of the wood carvings, frequenting the church two to three times a day to paint them.

"All these (doors) are in a sense real people," he said. "They will live on."

Visitors flock to SC's 'white dove'

By **KIMBERLY HICKS**
Daily News-Sun staff
Last in a series

It is among the most captivating buildings in Sun City, enticing hundreds of photographers and artists every year to capture its likeness.

It even graced the cover of the Sun Cities telephone directory two years ago.

Sun City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at 98th Avenue and Palmeras Lane is more than a vivid example of Spanish-colonial architectural style. It is Sun City's version of "The White Dove of the Desert" — San Xavier Del Bac mission — built by the Franciscans between 1783 and 1797 in the desert southwest of what is now Tucson.

The Rev. Donald Farrior, senior minister, said Phoenix architect Duane Von Fange used the famed Tucson mission as a model when designing the Sun City church "to capture the essence and primitive simplicity of pure Spanish architecture."

"We told the architect we wanted something that fit the desert, that fit the mind set of the Southwest and its people and the Spanish and native American cultures," Farrior said. "And we wanted the rest of the people to be drawn to its simple beauty."

At first glance, however, the church is anything but simple.

Two covered walkways extending outward from the sanctuary are adorned with arches.

A large fountain is the central motif of the garden in front of the church.

Twin towers, each crowned with a cross, jut into the sky.

The San Xavier mission also has twin towers, but one was never completed.

'We told the architect we wanted something that fit the desert, that fit the mind set of the Southwest and its people and the Spanish and native American cultures.'

Rev. Donald Farrior
Sun City Christian Church

"Ours are complete," Farrior said, adding that the towers provide "balance and architectural completeness."

They also symbolize the importance of loving God and loving man, he said.

"One tower points to the realm of the spirit, specifically to God. The other (tower) points to our need to help people. You cannot have one without the other. They remind us that you can't say you love God and ignore people."

As for the two covered walkways, Farrior said they are symbolic of the two arms of the cross "reaching out to embrace the church."

While the congregation wanted to retain the Spanish architectural style, members also wanted a church rich in warmth.

That meant deviating somewhat from the Spanish style, which rarely included carpeted floors, and typically made use of crude wooden benches.

"This sanctuary adds the dimension of warmth with carpet, large chandeliers and magnificent stained glass windows," Farrior said. "The stark harshness of the 'Wild West' is missing in this building."

The church also includes a 430-seat sanctuary, a 70-seat chapel, a kitchen and offices.

However, wood is a primary element inside the church, and on its 76 doors which feature carvings with religious themes.

Because the church is fashioned after a Roman Catholic mission, several Roman Catholics have mistaken the Protestant church for one of their own, Farrior said.

"They have come in to worship, thinking they were in a Catholic church."

Others visit the four-acre church grounds to take photographs or to draw or paint.

"As many as 60 to 70 artists come here a year. They'll spend half a day painting pictures of this building. We think it is probably the most photographed church building in the Northwest Valley," Farrior said. "Some people say it's among the most beautiful buildings they have ever seen."



Artists and photographers are drawn to Sun City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at 98th Avenue

and Palmeras Lane. The church resembles the 210-year-old San Xavier Del Bac Mission near Tucson.

Stephen Chernek/Daily News-Sun

Support circle

Church expansion complete, paid for

JOHN NICK

News-Sun staff

IN CITY — It isn't every day that a church expands and the addition is already paid for. That's the case with the Sun City Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Members and friends will dedicate the church's new business offices and new chapel this afternoon.

The dedication ceremonies begin at 2 p.m. at the church, on the southeast corner of 98th Avenue and Palermas Drive.

The new addition will be completely paid for as of the dedication," says the Rev. Mark Randle of the Sun City Christian Church.

The additional office space and chapel have been planned for more than a year. Construction took more than six months and the cost was more than \$250,000, Randle says.

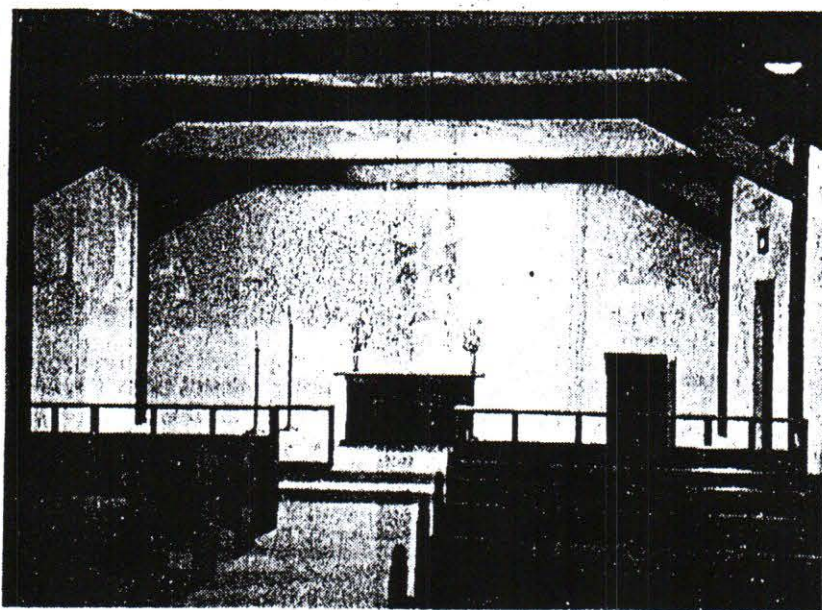
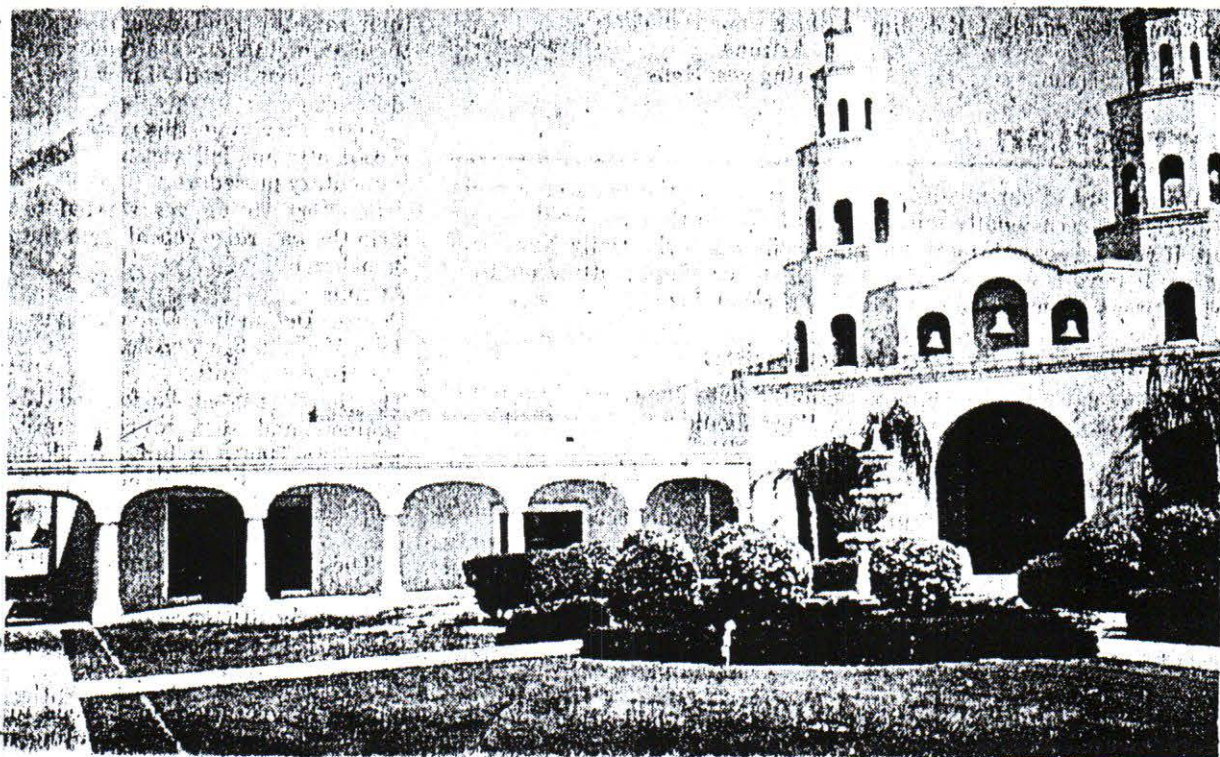
The church's employees moved into the office area about two weeks ago. It has been the Carl F. Wymore Memorial Offices for a former chairman of the church's board of directors. That panel runs the business affairs of the church.

The chapel is named the Elsie Laybourn Memorial Chapel in honor of a church member who died in 1983.

Elsie Laybourn's husband, Al, and the rest of her family plan and pay for the addition in her memory. Randle says the Laybourns paid for 40 percent of the addition's cost and the rest was picked up by parish-

ioners. The expansion was built with a budget of \$250,000, he says. In the year, parishioners donated \$100,000, over and above the regular weekly contribution for church addition.

"We have a great group of people here," Randle says. "They saw a need and responded enthusiastically."



Top, Sun City Christian Church addition at 98th and Palermas Drive. At left is the church's new chapel. The addition was paid for with contributions from the parishioners. (News-Sun photos by John Nick)

The addition is connected to the original church sanctuary and social hall, which were built in 1979. The sanctuary can seat 400 worshipers.

The new chapel can seat 90 people and Randle says it is a general purpose worship center. Small weddings, funerals and prayer classes are being planned for the chapel in the future.

"This is going to be a very useful addition to the church," Randle says.

The chapel has a number of architectural features.

Skylights provide a warm

glow to the chapel during daylight hours. Underneath one of the skylights is a special cross, which hangs near the communion table.

The shape of the cross conveys an idea — that of the "Circle of Life." The top of the cross extends outward from its origin and curves back toward its beginning. The circle symbolizes the outward and visible sign of an inner and spiritual grace.

Suspended from the cross are the Greek letters alpha and omega, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. It symbol-

izes that Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end of spiritual life.

The entrance doors of the chapel have woodcarvings portraying the 12 apostles, the first disciples of Jesus Christ. The carvings are the work of Oliver Knutson, who also created various carvings on the doors in the rest of the building.

More than 400 invited guests are expected to attend the dedication, Randle says. The ceremony is open to the public and refreshments will be served.