

A SHORT HISTORY OF
THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
GREEN VALLEY, ARIZONA 1986-2001

In Psalm 127:1, we read: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."

The Evangelical Free Church of Green Valley has been blessed exceedingly by the Lord in the fifteen years of its existence.

The 15th of February, 1986, Bill and June Smith invited a group from the First Evangelical Free Church of Tucson to explore the possibility of planting a church in Green Valley under the sponsorship of the Tucson church, a thriving congregation with several pastors on its staff. The first public service was held on March 13th, with Pastor Dick Haglund leading the worship. Thirty-two were in attendance.

From the very beginning, Bible Study was the foundation of the meetings. Many Bible Study groups have been formed over the years and several women and men have taught and been part of the Bible Study Fellowships in Tucson, also. On April 29th, a business meeting of the Sunday Evening Bible Study Group invited Rick Penner, District Superintendent of The Evangelical Free Church of America, to be present for assistance and guidance in finding a pastor for both morning and evening services.

June 1 8th a steering committee and spouses met at the home of Art and Genevieve Hall. Gene Johnson acted as chairman and Art Hall was elected to be chairman of a Pulpit Search Committee.

On the Fourth of July, the first potluck social was held at the Southwest Savings building (now La Placita, a Mexican restaurant) in the Green Valley Mall. Two days later, the fledgling congregation held its first Communion service. The following Sunday, both morning and evening services were held with Rev. Dick Haglund preaching. Pastor Haglund continued his dedicated service to the Green Valley church until November 14, 1986.

Because of his involvement with evening services at First Free in Tucson, the time of Sunday evening services in Green Valley was established as five o'clock, and has remained so for the years following.

Papers for incorporation of The Evangelical Free Church of Green Valley were filed with the State of Arizona on August 17, 1986. The EFC of Green Valley then became a legal entity! On September 27, 1986, the Constitution and By-Laws were finalized by the committee chaired by Floyd McNicol with others: Jim Creagh, Gene Johnson, Jayne Pyle, Melania Scherer and Harry Stowell. As sponsor of the Green Valley congregation, First Free of Tucson sent representative Elders on November 2nd to meet with candidates for membership. Thirty-one candidates were accepted as Charter Members of the Green Valley church.

On November 14, 1986, a dinner and service of dedication were held with Pastor Dick Haglund bringing a charge to the congregation of thirty-one. The following week, November 21st, the first annual business meeting was held. The Constitution and Bylaws were adopted, church officers were elected, a budget was approved and the steering committee was dissolved. God had

blessed the congregation with persons of unusual commitment and talent to lead in its organization.

At the first annual meeting, Jim Creagh, was elected to be the first Church Chairman. Several motions were approved: a prayer chain was established, an Elder Board was named with Bill Rockhill as its first chairman. Art Hall was named chairman of the Pastoral Search Committee. Gene Johnson, Chairman of Missions Board, suggested the policy of giving 10% of total receipts to missions, and the motion made the policy retroactive to the organization of the congregation. The motion passed and approximately \$ 1400 was transferred to the Missions Fund. That was soon increased to include approximately 16% of the undesignated funds. These funds had specific commitments to Overseas Missions, Home Missions, Southwest Border District and ministries of The Evangelical Free Church of America..

By 1996, the Missions budget had become \$30,435.,twenty-five (25%) of our General Budget. The Missions Committee encouraged our people to become involved with both Crossroads Nogales Mission and an orphanage (Rancho Feliz, now renamed The Arms of Love) in Agua Prieta, Mexico. Assessment was made of the work in Douglas, Arizona, as well. The response of our people has been commendable both in giving funds and many days of hands-on work. The number of mission agencies and individuals we support has steadily increased over the years and more dollars are invested each year in the work of the Lord at home and abroad. In 1999, 2000 and 2001, Herb and Sue Paton, members of the Missions committee, ministered in English as a Second Language as short term ministries in Turkey, the Czech Republic and Russia along with others from a team at First Free of Tucson. In 2001, they were joined by two other couples: Sterritt and Patty Fuller who went to Turkey and Chuck and Marilyn Warner to China as Short Term Missionaries.

The Missions committee hosts a Missions banquet each March and designates a specific mission for the offering. In 2002, Ron Cline, the President of HCJB World Radio, will be the conference speaker for the Missions weekend. In 2001, HCJB World Radio received funds designated for the support of Steve and Pauli McCracken. Steve is the son of Dave and Jackie McCracken of our congregation.

Eleanor Carlson, Edna Walls, Lurna Seeger and Kathy Taylor have been Social chairmen in organizing monthly fellowship dinners and programs.

Early blessings to the church came from EFC of Tucson including an organ, choir music and blue choir robes which gave unity of color and dignity to worship services. Tucson EFC also gave the gift of Pastor Dick Haglund's ministry. Both the Music committee and the Dorcas committee worked effectively, presenting music for worship services and help for those whose health needs were known.

Almost from the beginning, there has been a monthly newsletter. The first was called MOMENTS and was edited by Connie Elwell. Later, LIFE was edited by Lurna Seeger and Ruth Creagh. Still later, the name was retained, but the editorship passed to Pat Prill and Dolores Gibbons.

The Benevolence Fund is administered through the Pastor and the Elder Board and is replenished quarterly or as needed. The congregation prays and helps one another as needs arise.

On December 3, 1986, ten months following that first meeting with Bill and June Smith, Edward Kersten became the Interim pastor of the congregation.

February 2, 1987, the church officially requested to be affiliated with the EFCA and the Southwest Border District. Three weeks later, those affiliations were official and Dr. Thomas McDill, president of the EFCA, preached at the morning service.

March 8, 1987 the services were moved to Pima Savings (now the M & I Bank building) both morning and evening because more space had been needed as the congregation continued to grow. Wednesday evening prayer meetings were held in the Savings and Loan which has now become McDonalds.

August 23, 1987, Edward Kersten accepted the call to become the first full time pastor. By May 1988, membership had risen to 47. with 76 names in the directory.

In January 1990, growth necessitated the move to Desert Hills Social Center for morning worship. A great deal of work was necessary to convert the auditorium into a place of worship. Gene Johnson, a former professor of art, designed triptych panels to create a backdrop similar to stained glass windows. The choir grew under the direction of Rosemary Lotter and later Carlynn Dobrinski, presenting both vocal and /or instrumental music every Sunday. Visitors and members were greeted as they entered the facility and ushers seated everyone. In December, Dr. Paul Cedar, the president of EFCA, spoke at an evening service.

Then, in January 1991, Pastor Keratin had a mild heart attack. In May, after a time of sick leave, he presented a letter of resignation to the Elder Board. A Pastoral Search Committee was appointed and Chet Bricker was elected to be its chairman. Pastor Donald Shonkwiler became the Interim pastor and served in that capacity until May 1, 1992 when Pastor Eugene Ongna and his wife, Maybritt, moved to Green Valley from Yorba Linda, California to begin what became an eight year ministry.

Under the leadership of Pastor Ongna, by December 1992, attendance reached an average of 109 and the Building Fund was more than \$200,000. In anticipation of building a sanctuary at some time in the future, during the year 1987, "Red" Stewart, chairman of the Land committee, spent much time looking for the ideal site. After much deliberation, the decision was made to acquire State Land on a ten year renewable lease. In order to locate near the geographical center of Green Valley, the present site was chosen. Anticipated growth and residential construction were moving further south, east, west, and to the borders of Sahuarita on the north. Long range plans for road expansion and the mine were other considerations.

In March 1989, the congregation elected a Building committee of which Gene Johnson was chosen as Chairman and Clair Tornatore as Secretary. By October 1990, plans were submitted by the Building Committee and Francis Schultz, a Phoenix architect. In 1992, Gene Johnson resigned because he was out of the state so often, and Chet Bricker became the chairman with Jim Creagh as vice-chairman. In 1993, the architectural contract with Francis Schultz was terminated, and the congregation voted to retain Albanese, Brooks and Mackey, Tucson architects. On October 30, 1993, the congregation approved the design submitted by the architects for the sanctuary. Concord Companies was selected as general contractor and June 12, 1994, ground was broken for the sanctuary. Pima County construction permit allowed for

construction to begin immediately after July 29, 1994. On April 2, 1995, worship and the laying of the corner stone preceded the 3p.m. dedication of the completed sanctuary.

The finances of the church were blessed from the beginning. By the time construction was begun on the sanctuary, one-half of the estimated cost of \$580,000. was in hand and at the time of completion, the loan from Christian Investors Foundation needed to be only \$240,000. That debt was paid in full in 1997.

When the debt for the sanctuary was cleared, the Long Range Planning committee recommended that the new Building Committee, chaired by John "Red" Stewart, consult the architect for plans to build the Fellowship Center. The Building Fund thermometer once again began to show rapid growth. With much prayer, Red Stewart and members of the committee gained the necessary approvals to begin construction on May 30, 2000. Concord Construction had good building weather. The parking lot was enlarged to park 160 cars. Throughout the summer months, construction progressed and by December 6, 2000, the Women's Christmas Tea for two hundred was held in the new facility. It was a time of rejoicing not only because of the excellent turn-out, but also because it had not been necessary to remove all the seats from the sanctuary, as had been done for the 1999 tea, in order to turn it into a tea room.

With the construction of the Fellowship Center completed, the physical plant was as large as the land would accommodate and a service of dedication was held. The two-service plan for Sunday mornings began on January 7, 2001 and facilitated a successful coffee time of celebration and visiting in the Fellowship Center between the two services. The choir sang at both services and exited to the lovely new choir room with the singing of the Doxology during the second service. The choir loft had been moved from the side of the sanctuary onto the platform to accommodate more seating. It also gave a more pleasing acoustical excellence. The thirty member choir presented both a Christmas and an Easter cantata each year, and the Music committee hosted several special artists.

The small library that had fit on one wall of the rear section of the sanctuary was moved to the front corner of Fellowship Center, with the addition of a carpeted area and wing chairs, etc., it became a place for reading and the selection of many books to be checked out.

The Social Committee, Women's Ministries and Men's Ministries have been active with monthly fellowships, special events, special sisters, retreats, Sunshine and helping-hands to coordinate meals and patient care for those with special needs. This congregation is blessed to have leaders and volunteers who find their niches for talent sharing.

Another significant avenue of fellowship is Adults Without Partners for those who are widowed or otherwise without a mate. The group enjoys a variety of interesting activities and is experiencing growth in numbers which extend beyond our membership. On September 14, 1996, two of its leaders, Eunice Becker and Ralph Fennig, were the first of several couples to be married in our sanctuary.

Pastor Gene Ongna gave notice that he would retire the last day of April 2000, completing exactly eight years of ministry in Green Valley. A Pastoral Search Committee was appointed by the Elder Board and approved by the congregation at the annual meeting in December 1999. Its first task was to name an Interim Pastor.

God provided the man of His choosing, Carl Smith, who had retired in December 1999 from Outreach, Inc in Grand Rapids, Michigan and moved to Green Valley to be with his wife, Rose Marie, who needed to spend the winters here because of her severe arthritis. In May, a few days after Carl began his Interim ministry, the Smiths learned that Rose Marie had pancreatic cancer. She died August 2, 2000. Carl's Interim ministry continued for eighteen months.

The second mandate of the Pastoral Search Committee was to recommend a man to become our Senior Pastor. The Pastoral Search Committee, first chaired by Mike Seeger and later by Tom Wilson, met for a period of 19 months in making its final selection of Rev. Philip H. Anderson of Groveland, California who had been the Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Free Church there for twenty-two years. The Andersons accepted the congregational call on July 22, 2001 and began ministry here the first week of October 2001.

Pastor Anderson, 56, and his wife, Mary, an elementary school teacher, have two daughters. Rebekah is married and teaches at a Christian school in Orange County, California. Priscilla, who has recently graduated from La Tourneau College, Longview, Texas with an engineering degree, is employed by Hewitt-Packard in Corvallis, Oregon.

The church has a congregational form of government which means that boards and committees make decisions that are then approved by the Church Council. In matters of hiring paid staff, the entire congregation must vote with a quorum in attendance. The Constitution and By-Laws are the guiding document and Robert's Rules of Order are followed as the Parliamentarian determines. The church has been blessed with strong consensus since its inception.

Elder Board, Deacon Board, Finance Board and Church Council meet each month. The Pastor and a designated Elder attend the meetings of the music and missions committees as ex-officio members, reporting to the Elder Board for affirmation of significant decisions made. Annual meetings are held in December when reports are given and a combined report is distributed.

Headquarters of the Evangelical Free Church of America are in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the United States and Canada are divided into various geographical districts. We are part of the Southwest Border district and support its work with monthly contributions.

On the tenth anniversary of the church, November 1996, a grand celebration was held at the Desert Hills Social Center, chaired by Laurna Seeger. As Mistress of Ceremonies, she quoted the words in I Chronicles 16: 8

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples,
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Speak of all His wonders.
Glory in His holy name;
Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad.
Seek the Lord and His strength;
Seek His face continually.
Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done,
His marvels and the judgments from His mouth.
O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,

For His loving kindness is everlasting.
Blessed be the Lord.”

Charter members, our VISIONARIES, were introduced, and the leaders of our growing church were recognized and spoke of the beginnings. It was a glorious evening of praise to the Lord for His goodness to us.

Our vision statement continues: "So to live, by worship and the Word, in fellowship with God and others, that we glorify God and bring others to know and to follow Jesus.” Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA
To God Alone be the Glory

CHARTER MEMBERS
Carlson, Wesley and Eleanor
Clark, Ida
Creagh, James and Ruth
Fessler, Christina
Gates, Tim and Betty
Hall, Arthur and Jenny
Johnson, Earl and May
Johnson, Eugene and Janet
Karna, Carl and Judy
Poppe, Marvin and Shirley
Pyle, Harvey and Jane
Quirk, Olga
Ricker, Edward and Hilda
Rockhill, Willard and Oletha
Scherer, Melania
Smith, Bill and June
Stowell, Harry
Wollum, Arthur and Chris

These applicants were interviewed November 2, 1986 by Elders of First Evangelical Free Church of Tucson and received into full membership November 14, 1986, the official date of beginning The Evangelical Free Church of Green Valley, Arizona.

Written by Tovey Talley
October 2001