

The Early Years of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Phoenix, Arizona

By
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Modern Christianity
Prof. Brenner
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In 1946 the Arizona Mission Board of the Wisconsin Synod decided to start a new congregation on the far north end of the city of Phoenix. The area was mostly undeveloped but the Board saw the potential for growth in this part of the city so they purchased two lots for the mission congregation to build on at the corner of 7th Avenue and Thomas Rd. The board also purchased a parsonage in early 1947 in preparation for the work that would have to be done. The parsonage was about a mile and a half away from the initial land purchase, located at 1634 West Encanto Boulevard and cost \$14,309¹. The Board then called Pastor Victor C. Schultz to be the pastor for this mission congregation.

Pastor Schultz and his family moved in the area in January of 1947 and he started by canvassing the northwest side of Phoenix. After a few months of work the first worship service was held on Sunday, March 16, 1947 in the parsonage on Encanto Boulevard. This service was a solid success with 19 people in attendance and the congregation continued to grow steadily from there:

Although the attendance numbered only 19 on that first Sunday, the number grew steadily and during the heat of the summer, with no “cooling system” in the rooms used for worship, our group often numbered 50. Sunday School also was begun, with an enrollment of 23 children, three teachers in charge².

The rapid growth quickly made worship in the parsonage impossible, so after two services there the congregation started meeting in Franklin School on 17th Avenue and Campbell. The young congregation, which decided to call itself Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, knew that the stay at the Franklin School was only a temporary solution and they began to plan for a worship facility of their own. It was quickly realized that the two lots of land originally purchased would not be enough space

¹ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, 50th Anniversary History 1997 p.11

² Mrs. V. Schultz, *Brief History of our Church*. Bulletin insert 1952

for the congregation, so they were sold in June of 1947³ and four new lots were purchased two blocks north of the original location at 7th Avenue and Earll Dr. These lots cost \$6,500⁴ and were paid for by a loan from the Church Extension Fund.

Even though they were a young mission congregation and still working on finding a permanent place to worship, there was zeal to help Lutheran brothers and sisters out even if they were far away. Already in the summer of 1947 the congregation learned of Polish refugees from our former missions who had to flee their homes when Russia took over. So the members of Good Shepherd congregation took it as a special task to gather food and clothing for these people. By September they were to the point where they would send a care package of food every month and they were sending over clothes every time they gathered enough for a 22lb package⁵.

On August 24, 1947 they broke ground on their own building, only six months after the congregation had celebrated its first public worship service in the parsonage. The building was funded by a loan from the Wisconsin Synod Church Extension Fund of \$12,000⁶. Progress on the building went smoothly and as it was being completed the congregation was formally organized and a constitution was drawn up and adopted. On September 21, 1947, the congregation officially transferred into membership 13 souls⁷.

Finally on December 21, 1947, the building was complete and they had a new church home just in time for Christmas. The dedication service was a time of rejoicing for Christians throughout the valley of the sun and all of Arizona:

³ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement, June 29, 1947

⁴ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, 50th Anniversary History 1997 p.11

⁵ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement September 28, 1947

⁶ Tenth Anniversary Service of Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, A Brief history of Good Shepherd Church, Bulletin Insert, November 24, 1957

⁷ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement September 21, 1947

Pastor F. Uplegger, San Carlos, Ariz. preached the first sermon, following the "opening of Doors" service. The newly formed Choir sang several anthems for both morning and evening services. Pastor R. Schaller served as liturgist. This was, indeed, a day of rejoicing and a memorable one for the 275 who had attended the two opening services.⁸

The large number of people in attendance in this service reflects the large amount of effort that had been put into making this congregation a success by the other congregations in the valley. Many members from nearby congregations of Grace in Glendale, Zion in Phoenix, and Resurrection in Phoenix, had contributed time and effort to making this new church building a reality. The roof, waterlines, heating system and fixtures were all installed by members of these congregations, in addition to other help given in acquiring materials and leveling the property. The completion of this building was a group effort and the enthusiasm for the new congregation was shown in the crowd that turned out for the dedication.

The first Christmas Eve service was held 3 days later and 31 children participated while 104 people attended the service. As is usual though after the holiday attendance returned back down to the high 40's and low 50's per Sunday⁹.

Attendance did not stay at those levels though. As the year 1948 continued on the congregation gained 80 more souls for a total membership of 128.¹⁰ Of these new members the vast majority were transfers in from other congregations, but there were also evangelism efforts being made since there were two Adult baptisms and six Adult confirmations that year. With this tremendous growth in membership the congregation decided that they wanted a Christian Day School to educate their Children. They had strong reasons to support Christian education:

⁸ Mrs. V. Schultz, *Brief History of our Church*. Bulletin insert 1952

⁹ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Treasurer's Report, December 31, 1947

¹⁰ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Parochial Report, January 30, 1949

Four Reasons Why Christian Parents Prefer the Lutheran Parochial School for their Children

1. The Lutheran School assists Parents to meet their God-given duty to teach the Word of God to the children and to train them in godly living.
2. The Lutheran School uses God's method in character training.
3. In a Lutheran School the Word of God sheds its light on every subject that is taught.
4. The Lutheran School serves to make the education promised in behalf of the child at his baptism as thorough as possible.¹¹

They wasted no time in implementing the decision for a school and called Mrs. Ruth Cook to serve as their first teacher. The school opened its doors on September 13, 1948, almost a year after the official formation of the congregation. That first year the school had 31 students¹² and they charged no tuition for children of members. Non-members were asked to pay an entrance fee of \$5 and \$1.50 tuition per month¹³.

It is interesting to note that during the entire year of 1948 they only conducted six communion services total, meaning it was only offered every other month. Also during this year Pastor Schultz made 140 pastoral visits and 210 missionary visits¹⁴.

Growth for the congregation continued through 1949. Good Shepherd gained 43 souls and 30 Communicants for totals 171 souls and 104 Communicants. Again many of these were transfers, but outreach work was still being done since there were five^a Adult confirmations and one^a Adult baptism. This year they raised the number of Communion services to 12 so that it was offered once a month. Pastor Schultz also kept up his practice of making^p Pastoral visits, making an impressive 550 visits in 1949¹⁵. School enrollment for 1949 was down 13 students to 21, and it is hard to say what the reasons for this^{were} are.

¹¹ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement, August 22, 1948

¹² Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Parochial Report, January 30, 1949

¹³ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement, July 25, 1948

¹⁴ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Parochial Report, January 30, 1949

¹⁵ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church Annual Pastoral Report for Year 1949, January 27, 1950

There were only two graduates from 8th grade¹⁶ so that leaves eleven who left for other reasons, perhaps transportation concerns as one of the plans for the next school year ^{was} is to have school provided transportation¹⁷. Despite the fewer number of students the congregation began to feel the limitation of the building they were in since it had to serve double duty as a worship facility and a school building. In response to this they began to draw up plans to add a wing onto the existing building to serve as the school.

The new wing ^{was} is finished in the spring of 1950 and the space ^{was} is much appreciated. However 1950 was a rough year for the congregation compared to the previous years of unabated growth. Although 55 new souls were added, 68 transferred out leaving the congregation with its first drop in membership down to 151 souls. However, evangelism work was still being done and there was one adult baptism¹⁸. They also continued to have one communion service a month.

After the previous school year Mrs. Cook wished to go her separate way so the congregation called Mr. Kurt Petermann to be the Teacher and Principal of the school. At the start of the school year, enrollment was only 13 students, but due to bringing in several children from outside the congregation the enrollment met the previous year's total of 21¹⁹. They addressed the previous year's issue of transportation for the students this year by purchasing a seven passenger car to help those who would otherwise be forced to use public transportation²⁰.

By 1952 things had headed back onto the track of growth. School enrollment was up to 31 students, and as the congregation celebrated its five year anniversary it looked to

¹⁶ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement, May 22, 1949

¹⁷ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church Annual Pastoral Report for Year 1949, January 27, 1950

¹⁸ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church Annual Pastoral Report for year 1950, February 7, 1951

¹⁹ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church Annual Pastoral Report for year 1950, February 7, 1951

²⁰ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church Bulletin Announcement, September 3, 1950

expand the property further by buying two new lots. They acquired the two lots on the south side of the property for \$6,000²¹. These two lots were turned into a playground for the school children to spend their time at recess.

During the spring of 1952 Pastor Schultz received an^d accepted a call to Wisconsin. To replace him the congregation called Pastor I.G. Frey from Douglas Arizona. Pastor Frey accepted the call and was installed on October 5, 1952²². Under Pastor Frey's care the congregation started a second series of significant growths. When he was installed the congregation had around 100 communicants²³. By 1957 that number had grown to 185 communicants and 325 baptized members²⁴.

One might wonder why this congregation was able to get off to such a fast start back in 1947. In a summer they went from 19 to 50 even without any sort of cooling system, no small feat for location that is regularly over 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. And then the next year was even more impressive with 80 new members joining. There are a number of factors that figure into this growth. For one Good Shepherd had a large advantage in that even before it^{was} founded or the area had been canvassed there were already plans to build a church building. By purchasing land and pushing toward that goal it gave all the people involved a project to get excited about. In addition to this it gave the congregation a place to call home early on in its life. Another factor to consider is the explosive growth of the city of Phoenix around that time. Between 1947 and 1957 the city of Phoenix grew in population from 156,000 people to

²¹ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, 50th Anniversary History 1997 p.11

²² Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bulletin Announcement October 5, 1952

²³ Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, 50th Anniversary History 1997 p. 3

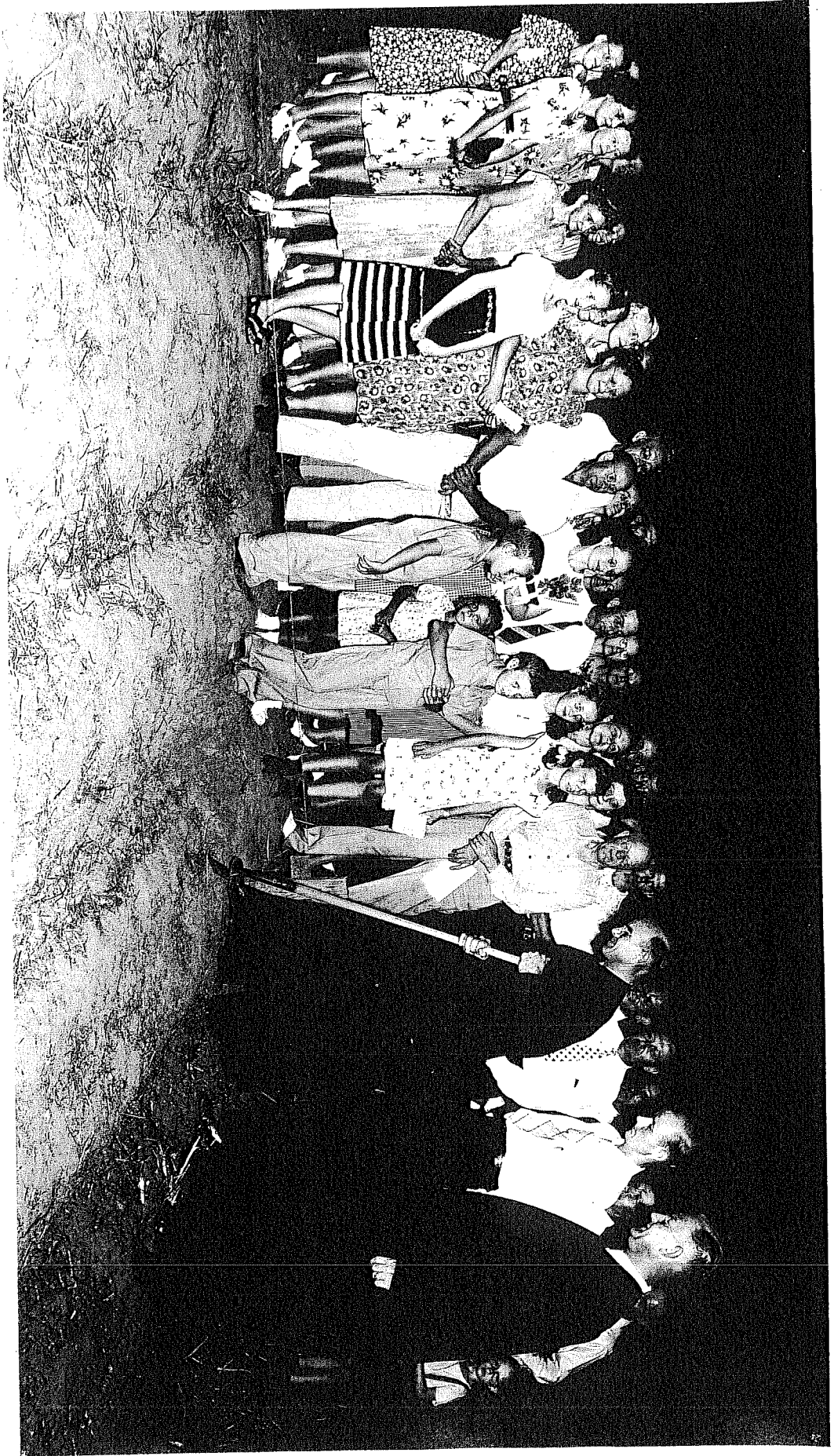
²⁴ Tenth Anniversary Service of Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, A Brief history of Good Shepherd Church, Bulletin Insert, November 24, 1957

450,000²⁵. Much of that development happened on the ⁿNorth side of the city where Good Shepherd was located, bringing many people into contact with the church. Many people who had been Wisconsin Synod members in their home states moved into Phoenix and saw Good Shepherd as the closest church to teach what they believed. Another factor is the amount of help neighboring congregations gave to Good Shepherd. People from all the nearby Wisconsin Synod congregations in the valley contributed to make the mission a success. That kind of enthusiasm should not be underestimated. And finally the ultimate reason for the congregation's excellent growth during those years is that the gospel was preached. God kept his promise and his Word did not return to him empty, but found success among the ripe mission field that was Phoenix, Arizona, in the 1940's and 50's.

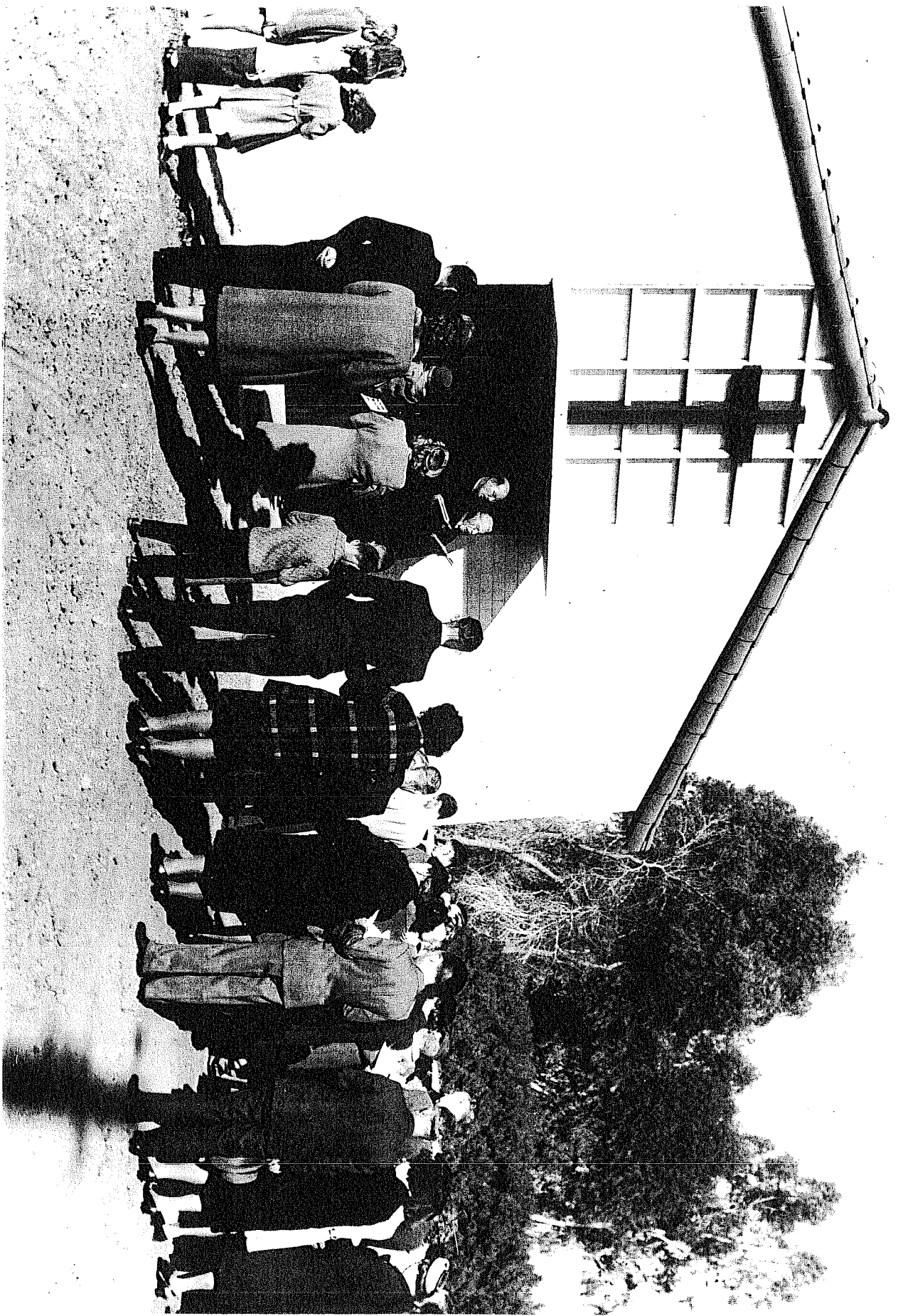
²⁵ Smith, Zachary Alden. *Politics and Public Policy in Arizona* Third Edition, Praeger/Greenwood 2002 p. 4 online resource at Google books: http://books.google.com/books?id=Y-nXqdbBzrkC&pg=PA4&lpg=PA4&dq=phoenix+az+population+growth+1947+1957&source=web&ots=S-HVZt1W7z&sig=6xPoLXbfqFSiI3leORjA_HjSfmQ accessed 12/06/07

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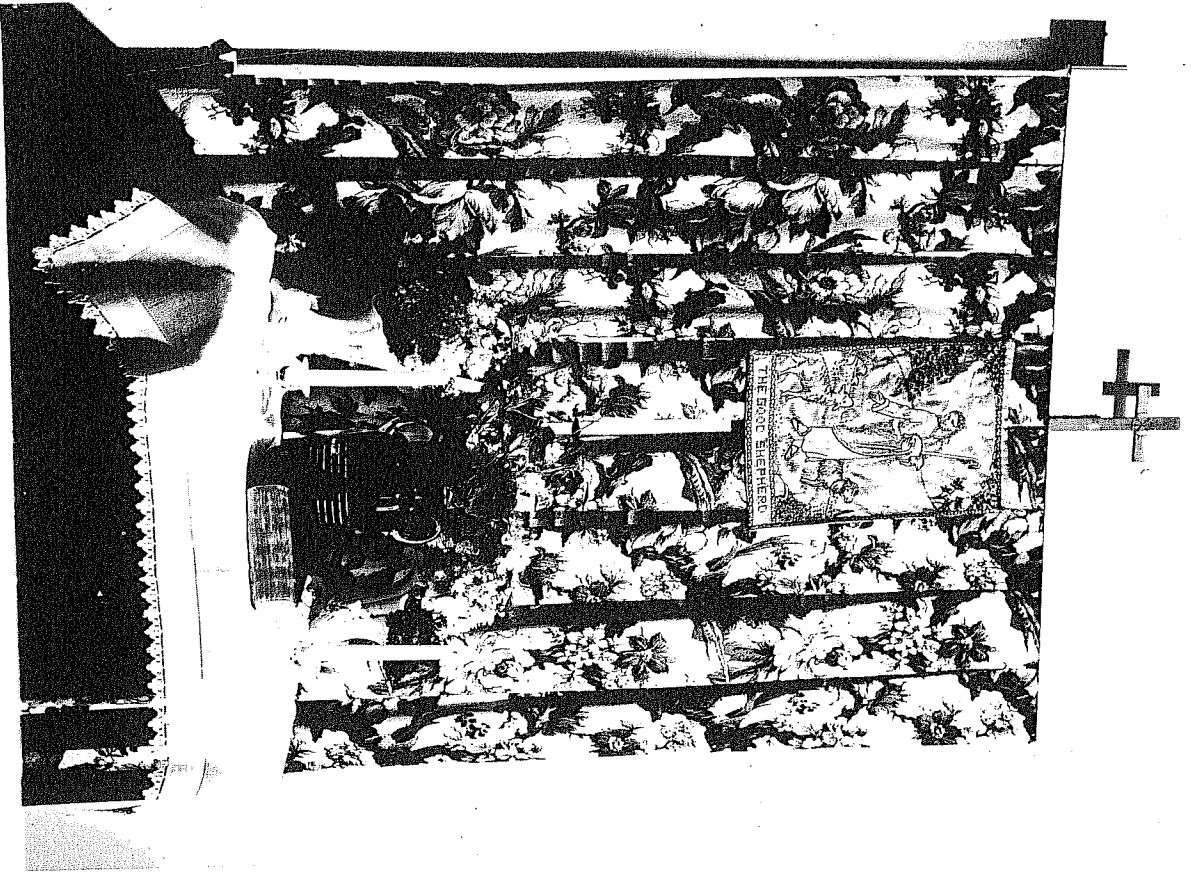
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http://books.google.com/books?id=Y-nXqdbBzrkC&pg=PA4&lpg=PA4&dq=phoenix+az+population+growth+1947+1957&source=web&ots=S-HVZt1W7z&sig=6xPoLXbfqFSiI3leORjA_HjSfmQ
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- Tenth Anniversary Service of Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, A Brief history of Good Shepherd Church, Bulletin Insert, November 24, 1957



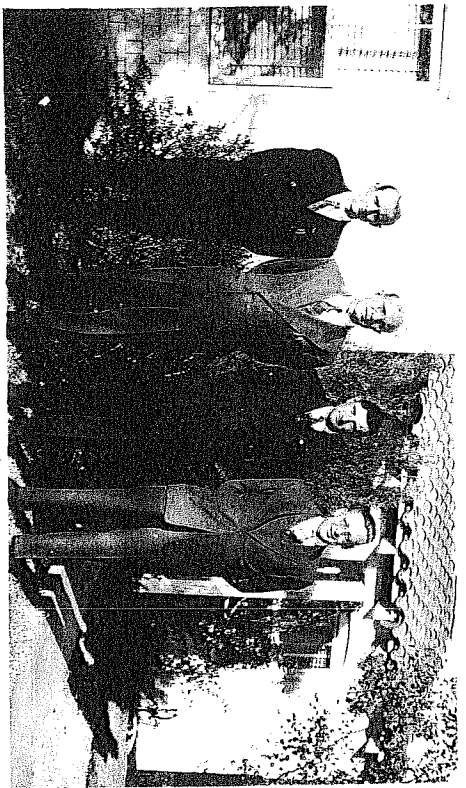
GROUND BREAKING SERVICES - AUGUST 24, 1947



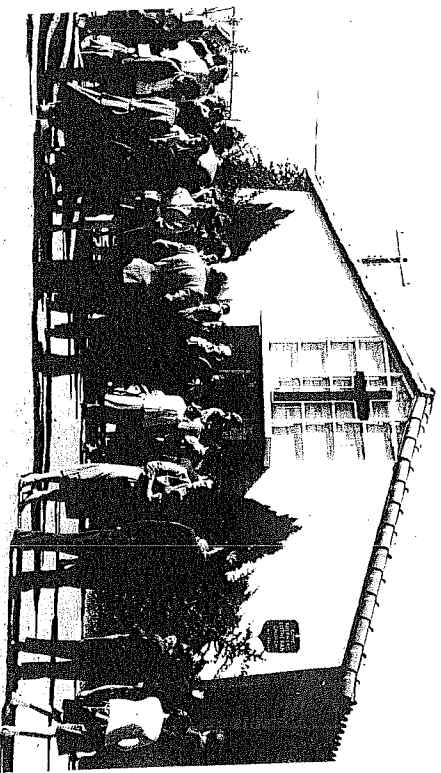
Door Opening Service - Dedication
December 21, 1947



ALTAR AT PARSONAGE
FIRST SERVICE MARCH 15, 1947



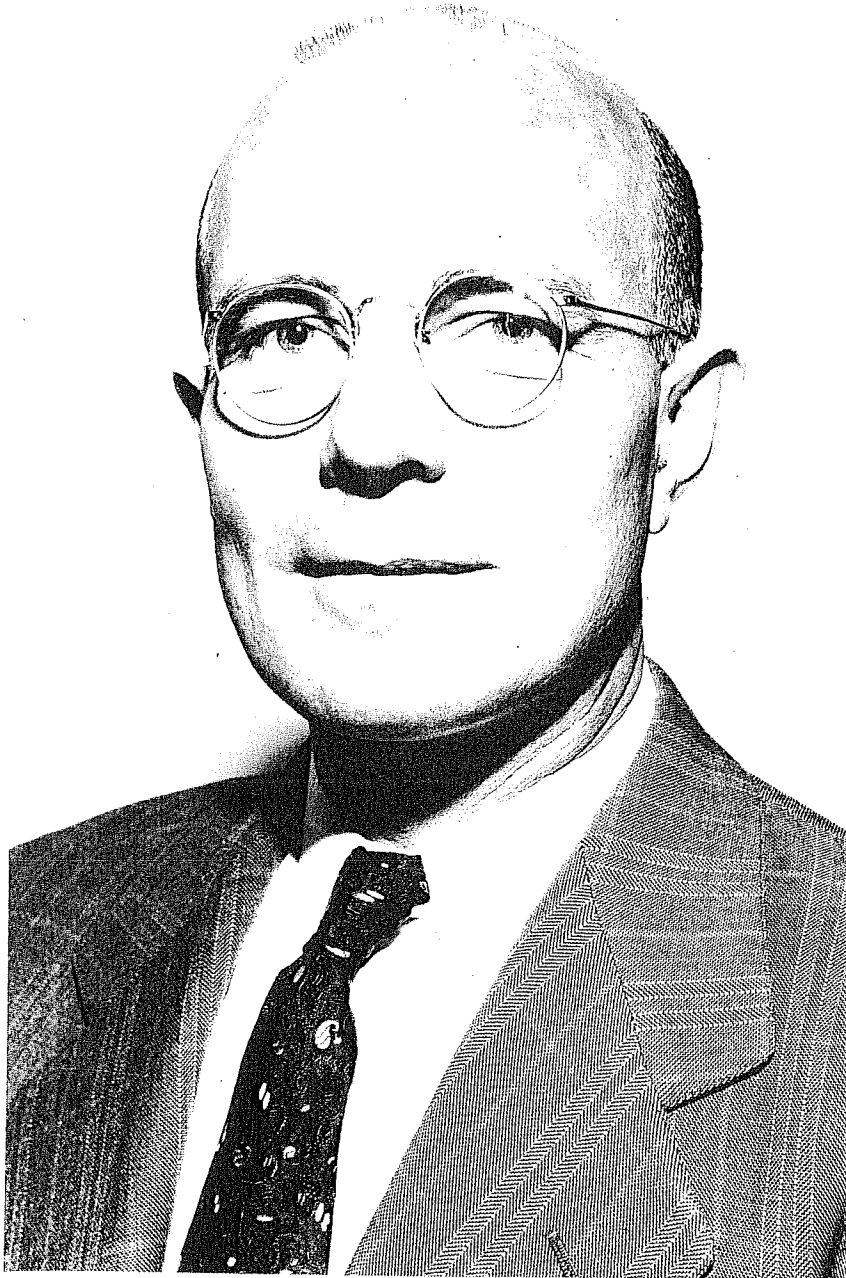
THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL, August, 1947



Original Church Building



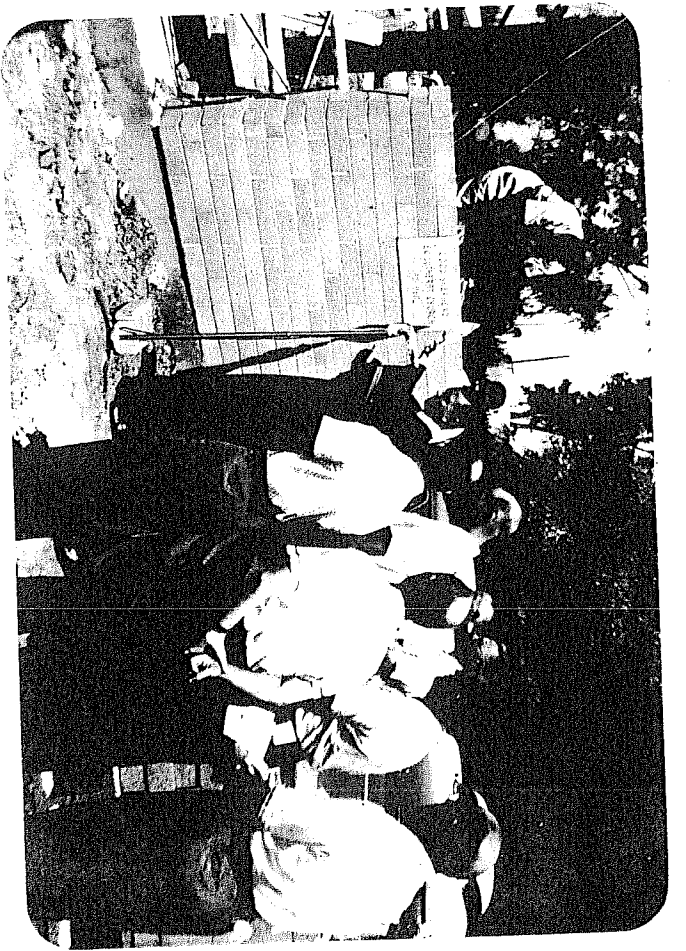
First parsonage, 1634 W. Encanto Blvd.
First services held here



THE REV. VICTOR SCHULTZ
FIRST PASTOR OF GOOD SHEPHERD



Schultz family



Pastor I. G. Foy and confirmation class

