

THE ARIZONA LUTHERAN RETIREMENT CENTER

or

GO WEST OLD MAN

As a Christian, we have a genuine concern for parents and elders. That concern is not forgotten as they become older but comes more into focus. Eventually the entire cycle swings as parents become dependent on their children and the church for their physical as well as spiritual existence. Unfortunately in these times, there is an increasing tendency for the younger generation not to want to accept this God-given responsibility. At the first sign of mom or dad, grandma or grandpa outliving their usefulness or becoming a burden, they will be sent away to the old folks home and forgotten. Once dumped there, the responsibility for their existence is quickly passed off to others.

Thanks be to God that this is not the reason for the establishment of the Arizona Lutheran Retirement Center (ALRC). The purpose and objective for being on this earth is "to give spiritual and material aid for the program of the retirement home and of the members of the WELS resident in the retirement home." (see appendix 1). In Christian congregations, care and concern have always been in evidence for the members of the church and especially the elderly. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Pastor Bein of Resurrection Church in Phoenix was especially concerned about the care of the elderly. He wanted to get a program started on a congregational level but soon realized that this project would require much prayer and planning. His vision of a Lutheran retirement and nursing home was not about to enjoy a hasty start. Coming to the realization that this project was too much financially for one church and that to succeed it would need the support of the Valley congregations, he brought it to the AZ-CAL district. In the proceedings from the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the Az-Cal district held June 18-20, 1974 on page 59, he starts the ball rolling.

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C. Establishment of a Home for the Aged (Memorial from Pastor William Bein). Whereas Interest has been shown in establishing a home to care for the aged in the Southwest; and Whereas we feel it would not be feasible to establish and maintain such an institution at this time; therefore be it Resolved that we encourage Pastor Bein to continue to look into the matter of a home for the aged in the Southwest.

Considerable interest was stirred but the money to finance such a project was as scarce as rain in the desert during the summer. But at least it had come to the attention of the Valley congregations. In late 1974, Mr. and Mrs. Karl Abel of Grace congregation in Glendale came to Pastor Zimmermann with a related proposition. They had just moved to a new house and their former house was standing vacant. It was located on 59th Ave. between Northern and Olive. They wanted to deed their property, valued at \$60,000 to Grace Lutheran Church. The purpose they had in mind was to establish a home where elderly people of the faith could spend their declining years "in comfort and dignity".¹ Grace Lutheran Church then accepted that proposal.

Shortly after that in January 1975, an ad hoc committee was formed to study how to implement this property. This was the first meeting that involved all the Valley congregations. That committee consisted of one delegate from each of the following congregations: Grace Lutheran Glendale, Resurrection, Good Shepherd, Redeemer, Emmaeus, St. Thomas, Paradise Valley, Zion, Grace Casa Grande, Mt. Calvary Flagstaff.²

At first it was thought that the house itself could be re-modeled into a suitable institution. Various factors made that proposition inadequate. The main one was that the lot on which the house stood was too small. Attempts were made to purchase land on either side of the Abel home, but no one was selling. Thoughts then turned to thinking in terms of selling that property and using the money to purchase a larger property. A nearby piece of land owned by the FWCA was considered, but also could not be purchased. Different properties and plans were taken into consideration but with no established

1. Personal letter from Pastor R. H. Zimmermann.
2. " " " Jack Helm.

credit status, they always ended with the problem of finances.

At the 12th Biennial Convention in the summer of 1976, Pastor Bein gave a progress report and related some of their future plans. (see appendix two). That report was adopted.

In the meantime a Corporation was formed in Jan of that year with Grace Lutheran, Resurrection and Good Shepherd signing as incorporators.

After a year and a half of no real success, a workable solution was found to deal with the difficulty. The idea of a few individuals forming a partnership in order to purchase a property suitable for this purpose was suggested. A limited partnership, called Lutheran Investors, was formed in May 1977. The general partners were John Petersen, Norbert Loeper and Jack Helm. They are all members of Grace Lutheran. A more realistic and somewhat expanded search for land was soon to end. In June 1977 the Lutheran Investors entered into a contract to purchase an apartment complex at 1928 West Orangewood between Northern and Glendale Avenues. The investors then took possession of the complex Dec 1, 1977.

Pastor Zimmermann of Grace--with the approval of the Abels--suggested that Grace Church sell the Abel property and place the money at the disposal of a Valley-wide federation. The property was sold and \$32,629 were turned over to the project. The Lutheran Investors purchased the apartment complex for \$375,000. Of that amount \$100,000 had to be cash. Of that \$100,000, \$25,000 was taken from the original Abel Fund; the balance was loaned to the partnership by various people. The balance of the Abel Fund is still held by the ALRC as a kind of reserve fund . . . in case of need.

The ALRC was formed and leases apartments for WELS residents from the Lutheran Investors. The Investors manage the complex as an apartment house. As there are retirees that want to live in the center, they lease units to the ALRC. The remainder of the units are leased by the Investors to whoever wants them

with the understanding that Lutheran retirees have first priority, whenever there is an opening. It will continue as such until the time arrives when the "ALRC occupies a majority of the units and is financially able to manage the complex."³ It should be emphasized that the Lutheran Investors are not in this to make a profit. (See appendix three, article Six) When the time comes for them to turn over the ownership to the ALRC, the partners will only receive a repayment of the amount of money they originally invested. Plus there is the possibility that they may not even request their money, but leave it to the ALRC as a donation.

The ALRC receives no financial aid from the participating congregations on an organized level. There are envelopes designated for them and they receive only donations from interested parties. By depending entirely on donations, in addition to the rent from the units they lease, they have a long way to go to be able to financially manage the complex. Despite that, they, in a sense, have the best of both worlds. Their only real concern is for the Lutheran retirees living in the complex. The Investors take care of all the rest. The Investors have hired a caretaker, Sherman Kuske, who lives in a house on the property with his family. It is the Investors who have to deal with everything including empty apartments.

In the years that the ALRC has been operating, there has been steady growth. In Dec. of 1977, there were no units rented to retirees. (They just barely opened) In Dec. of 1978--7, 1979--11, 1980--13, 1981--18, at the present time in April of 1982--14 units are rented to Lutheran retirees.⁴ The decrease is a result of the fact that 2 of the residents died (promoted to the best retirement home) and 2 transferred to nursing homes.

The ALRC is a minimal care facility. It is expected that the residents be able to care for themselves. (see appendix four) They should be able to prepare

3. op. cit.

4. Personal interview with Robyn Kuske and her father Sherman.

their own meals and be somewhat mobile (not bedridden). Although no nurse is present to take care of them, all of the residents look out for one another and are very concerned about the welfare of others in the complex.

There are 24 available units and one larger unit which 2-4 people may share. At the present time there are two ladies living there along with a housekeeper who also takes care of their meals. All the other residents must provide their own meals. There is a meeting/entertainment room for the use of the residents. Once a week Pastor Bein of Resurrection Lutheran Church has a Bible study class there. The vicar at Grace in Glendale (Tom Jeske) also sees all of the members living there from that congregation on a regular visitation schedule. All of the retirees attend WELS churches of which there are quite a few in the Valley. The Phoenix area has the second largest concentration of churches (WELS) in the Synod. Once a month a different congregation brings a meal for the residents. This is not only an important opportunity for Christian fellowship but gives both the residents and supporting congregations a chance to become better acquainted.

The future for the ALRC looks like slow but steady progress. They would like to have a majority of the units occupied by Lutheran retirees in the next 2-5 years. That would give them the opportunity to have the property refinanced and turned over to the ALRC. Word is just starting to "trickle" up to the populous parts of the Synod that there is a retirement center in the Valley of the Sun. The majority of the residents are veterans of the desert heat but with family ties back in the midwest. In the not so distant future the ALRC is looking for more recognition from the rest of synod and also support in the form of prayers, gifts and retirees. If the Lord is willing, perhaps someday there will be more boarding facilities and even full care.

Right now the center is located in beautiful Phoenix, where the sun shines 86% of all possible hours.⁵ It's ideal temperature during the winter months

5. Visitors Guide, Fall and Winter 1981, page 47.

(hi 65--low 38) make it one of the most desirable vacation spots in the U. S. For elderly northerners this means that the many, many hazards, dangers and difficulties of ice and snow are still up North where they belong. The summers have temperatures consistently in the 100's, but with the pool, low humidity (10-20%) and central air conditioning the residents survive. Most of the retirees can be seen in the evening after the sun sets, sitting around the pool talking. For those who aren't sure they're going to make it, a major hospital is nearby and the ambulance will arrive in only 5-10 minutes. The complex is only 8 blocks from the freeway but far enough away to avoid noise. It is located in a clean peaceful neighborhood.

But most important, their purpose is not to provide the elderly with a heaven on earth but to provide the kind of care that results in life after death. They are motivated by a Christian concern to serve to the best of their abilities. The fellowship they are able to share with one another as well as the spiritual concern the local pastors and congregations display is very important. When the retirees come there, they don't spend their time trying to get out but are preparing for their eternal home with their Savior.

Many thanks to Pastor Zimmermann for his great wisdom, insight and memory.

Thanks to Mr. Jack Helm who filled me in on the ALRC last year and then reviewed it for me.

Thanks to Sherman and Bessie Kuske for inviting me over all the time and especially for their daughter Robyn whom they are letting me marry.

Thanks to Robyn for compiling all the information and making sure that I got it.