

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

1962 – 1975

CH3031

Clayton G. Welch

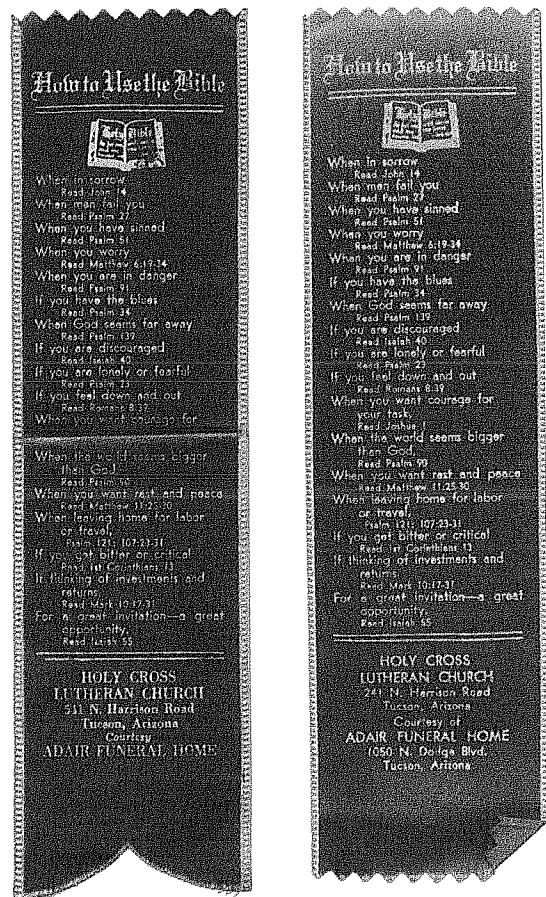
December 6th, 2004

Introduction

Holy Cross Lutheran Church has undergone many changes since it was formally organized in 1965. What once was a small mission congregation in the desert is now a self-supporting congregation in an urban area. The title of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration at Holy Cross was "Celebrating 25 Years of God's Grace." Thankfully, the members of Holy Cross have recognized the source of their blessings: the grace of God. This paper will look at how God indeed has blessed Holy Cross Lutheran Church in its early years, focusing on its beginnings and its years as a mission congregation.

A History of Holy Cross

Holy Cross Lutheran Church is located in Tucson, Arizona. The land for the church itself was bought even before the congregation was organized. In July of 1962, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Arizona-California District Mission Board bought three acres of land at 541 N. Harrison Rd.¹ They bought the land for a cost of \$20,000.² The original address of the property differs from the current address. The street numbers were changed



Holy Cross would periodically print these ribbons. The first one shows the original address of the church, while the second shows the current address.

¹ *Celebrating 25 Years of God's Grace* (Tucson, Arizona: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1990). Hereafter cited as *Celebrating 25 Years*.

² *A Brief History of Holy Cross Lutheran Church* (Tucson, Arizona: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1968). Hereafter cited as *A Brief History*.

as Tucson grew.

Land alone does not make a church, however. Pastor Norman Schlavensky was called to the, as yet, non-existent congregation by the District Mission Board. He arrived with his wife and began serving on July 4th, 1963.³ Since there were no members of the church to begin with, the first members of Holy Cross were drawn from other Tucson area churches, mainly Grace Lutheran Church. The pastor at Grace was E. Arnold Sitz, who also happened to be the president of the Arizona-California District at that time. He encouraged some of his members to attend the new mission congregation that was being started in Tucson. One of them was Ralph Seefeldt.⁴



Pastor & Mrs. Schlavensky, July 1963

Mr. Seefeldt was one of the people who installed Pastor Schlavensky in 1963. This is an interesting turn of events, because Pastor Schlavensky had confirmed Mr. Seefeldt in Grover Township, Wisconsin (near Peshtigo) years beforehand. Mr. Seefeldt would serve as the first Sunday school teacher at Holy Cross.⁵ The first Sunday school class was held on September 22nd, 1963,⁶ and the Sunday school program was one of the strengths of the fledgling church. Classes were held even before the first worship service. Pastor Schlavensky had found three more children to attend the Sunday school from nearby Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and the attendance of the Sunday school outnumbered the adults attending worship.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ralph Seefeldt, interviewed by author, Tucson, Arizona, 5 May 2004. Hereafter cited as Seefeldt.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *A Brief History.*

⁷ Seefeldt.

In order to have worship services and a Sunday school, there has to be a place to meet. The first service was held on October 6th, 1963 at the parsonage at 8510 E. Hawthorne in Tucson.⁸ The house was rented from a man named Ed Durfey. Myron Nelson was the man who rented the house on behalf of the new congregation.⁹ In attendance at this first worship service were: Pastor and Mrs. Schlavensky, Ruth Schlavensky (Pastor's daughter), Ralph Seefeldt, Myron Nelson, and Paula Schmugge.

By the grace of God, more people began to worship at the new congregation started in

Pastor Schlavensky's home. A new family

which had recently moved to Tucson in June of 1963 from Charles City, Iowa

became very involved. The Handt family

started attending worship and participating

in activities that went on at the new

congregation. Jeffrey Handt was involved

with setting up the house for worship every

Sunday. Soon twelve or fifteen people were

coming to worship on a regular basis.¹⁰

It did not take too long for the new

congregation to outgrow the parsonage.

They moved their services to the (then)

PERMIT: BUILDING <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> USE <input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPANCY <input type="checkbox"/> Pima County, Tucson, Arizona			
Map No. 53	No. 48958		FEE \$ 10.50
Street & No. 541 N. Harrison Rd. (NEW CONSTRUCTION)			
Lot No. _____	Block No. _____	Zone SR	
Subdivision N200 NE1/4	Parcel No. 37		
SE1/4	Section 10		
	Township 14	Range 15	
Owner Lutheran Church Wisc. Synod PH.			
Address 8500 E. Hawthorne			
Builder Same			
To Permit Church			
2900 sq. ft.			
(Brick)			
Est. Cost (Labor & Material)		29,000	
Date Issued 2-25-64			
Date Expires 11-25-64			
Inspection Date _____			
Conditions Imposed by B/A Case _____			
This permit is issued on the basis of your application and plot plan. Any changes must be cleared by the Inspector.			
Applicant Rev. Herman Schlavensky Owner <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Builder <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agent <input type="checkbox"/>			
Zoning Inspector _____			
Sanitary Facilities:		Sewer <input type="checkbox"/>	Septic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Remarks:			

This is a copy of the original building permit for the present church structure. Note the old address and Pastor Schlavensky's signature.

⁸ Celebrating 25 Years.

⁹ Seefeldt. Myron Nelson was another member of Grace and served on the Arizona-California District Mission Board. He also would later redraw the plans for the permanent structure.

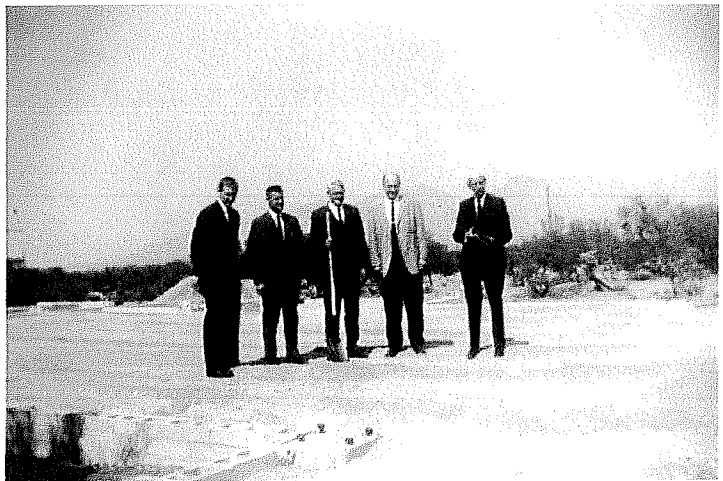
¹⁰ Jeffrey Handt, interviewed by author, Tucson, Arizona, 6 May 2004. Hereafter cited as Handt. Mr. Handt is the only charter member who still regularly attends services at Holy Cross.

newly constructed MaGee Junior High School in December of 1963.¹¹ At first, they worshipped in the school auditorium. But this proved to be too big, and it was difficult to hear. So, services were moved to the choir room. This room was suitable for the size of the group and had better acoustics.¹² The worship area still had to be set up every Sunday.¹³

In February of 1964, a permit was acquired to build a chapel of 2,900 square feet on the site purchased by the Synod and District Mission Board back in 1962. The estimated cost of the building project was to be \$29,000.¹⁴

1964 turned out to be a very active year in the life of the young congregation. On May 17th, the first youth confirmation took place when David Michael Handt was confirmed. On September 28th, a contract was signed with Bowman Construction Company to build a parsonage on the land for \$16,000 and the church proper for \$38,000.¹⁵ The groundbreaking for the church was on October 11th, and the cornerstone was laid on December 6th.¹⁶

The first service to be conducted in the new church building was on January 24th, 1964. The building was not even finished yet, and the service was held with only the walls and roof completed. The members were



Those participating in the ground breaking ceremony were (left to right): Ralph Seefeldt, Charles Handt, a representative from Grace Lutheran Church, William Karr, and Pastor Schlavensky.

¹¹ *Celebrating 25 Years.*

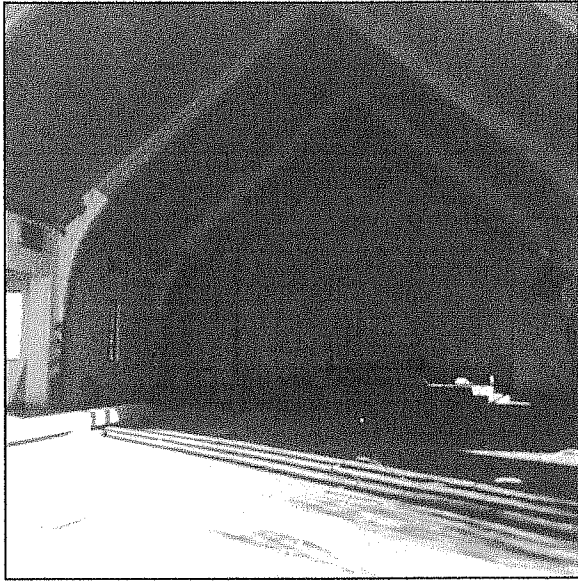
¹² Seefeldt.

¹³ Handt.

¹⁴ *Celebrating 25 Years.*

¹⁵ *A Brief History.* According to Mr. Seefeldt, the Bowman Construction Company was chosen because Mr. Bowman was a Christian man.

¹⁶ Ibid.



Here is a picture of the unfinished building. Note the scaffolding and the sun streaming in through the open wall. Before services, this area would be cleaned and set up.

proud of their new building and did not mind having to sweep up and set up chairs in order to use it.¹⁷

On April 4th, 1965, the church building was complete and dedicated. The parsonage was also dedicated at this time, even though it had been finished a bit earlier.¹⁸ Shortly after the dedication of the church building and the parsonage, Pastor Schlavensky took a call to be a teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.¹⁹ He never lived in the new parsonage.²⁰

Before he left, Pastor Schlavensky conducted the first wedding of Holy Cross' history. He married Ralph Seefeldt and Judith Coder on May 22nd, 1965.²¹

With the departure of Pastor Schlavensky, a call was extended to Pastor Richard Paustian. He accepted and was installed on July 25th, 1965. At the time of his arrival, there were twelve communicant members at Holy Cross.²² He was familiar with Arizona, having served the tri-parish of Globe, Morenci, and Safford the three previous years. He also had served as a vicar at Grace in Tucson in 1959-1960.²³

¹⁷ Handt.

¹⁸ *A Brief History*.

¹⁹ *Celebrating 25 Years*.

²⁰ Handt.

²¹ This date was arrived at with a little mathematical gymnastics. The *Celebrating 25 Years* publication gave the date of their wedding as 1967. While Mr. Seefeldt did not give the date of his wedding in his interview, he did share that Pastor Schlavensky performed the ceremony (and even made the kneeling bench for their vows), which would have been impossible in 1967. The church ledger confirms that the wedding date was May 22nd, 1965.

²² Richard Paustian, unnamed audiocassette, November 2004. Hereafter cited as Paustian.

²³ Ibid.

At about the time Pastor Paustian came, there was a significant jump in the congregation's membership. Not only did Pastor Paustian and his family (wife Valerie and his two children at the time, Steve and Lea) increase the size of the congregation, but about ten families joined the church at this time, either newly moving into the area or transferring from Grace Lutheran Church in Tucson. Some of these new people would be instrumental in Holy Cross' future programs.²⁴

In December of 1965, Holy Cross Lutheran Church was formally organized when they drafted and accepted their constitution. In June of 1966, Holy Cross was received into district synodical membership at the Arizona-California District Convention. Holy Cross had undergone a lot of growth since the land was bought in 1962. When the constitution was ratified in 1966, there were sixty-six souls who belonged to the church, one of whom was the congregation's first recipient of holy baptism: Kurt Michael Jarcik on April 17th.²⁵

God continued to bless this little mission congregation. On January 9th, 1967, a new education wing was added on the north side of the church at the cost of \$4,500. Also in 1967, Pastor Paustian began serving Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Benson, Arizona along with Holy Cross.²⁶

Now that the congregation was more established, many new programs were being set up. The first was the Lutheran Women's Guild in October of 1967.²⁷ In January of 1968, the Boy Pioneers program at Holy Cross was recognized by the national organization when it received its train number of 191.²⁸ Under the guidance of Ziegfried Jarcik, more than thirty boys would become involved with this program.²⁹

²⁴ Seefeldt.

²⁵ *Celebrating 25 Years*.

²⁶ Ibid. He would continue to serve Bethlehem until November of 1978.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *10-Year Anniversary Bulletin* (Tucson, Arizona: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1965).

²⁹ Seefeldt.



Here is a south and east view of Holy Cross, 1970.

Holy Cross showed its commitment to Lutheran education from early on. In 1969, a program was adopted which supported people who sent their children to Good Shepherd Lutheran School in Tucson.³⁰ They even instituted a bus program, and eventually Holy Cross was sending twenty children to the grade school.³¹ In 1973,

scholarships were made available for students attending any secondary school of the Wisconsin Synod.³²

Throughout the 1970's, the church building was being improved. Pews and altar rails were added and dedicated in 1971. Also, the front porch was enclosed that year. In 1973, plans were made for the extension of the church. The addition was completed in May of 1974 and the entire church was repainted. The new addition as well as a new Conn organ was dedicated on May 5th.³³

Membership continued to grow during the 1970's. Many new members were coming because of the influx of employment transfers to Tucson. Since more families were joining Holy Cross, more and more children were becoming part of the church as well. As a result, even more programs were started. The Girl Pioneers received their national charter in May of 1972. The following year the Sunbeams and Buckaroos were organized.³⁴

³⁰ *Celebrating 25 Years.*

³¹ Arden & Lois Holstad, interviewed by author, Tucson, Arizona, 6 May 2004. Mr. Holstad drove the bus for this program. Hereafter cited as Holstad.

³² *Celebrating 25 Years.*

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

1974 and 1975 were important years for Holy Cross. In December of 1974, the voters elected that Holy Cross should no longer be a mission congregation. As a result, it was withdrawn from mission status that very month. Holy Cross was no longer dependent on the Synod for its support. It was its own, self-supporting congregation. It had paid off all of its loans. In celebration of this blessing, the mortgage was brought to the front of the church and burned.³⁵

1975 marked the ten-year anniversary of the ratification of Holy Cross' constitution. There was a large celebration. Plans were also made that year to make a new building at the back of the property for Christian education. This building would eventually be completed and dedicated in 1980, and bring the property to its present-day layout.

Throughout all of the blessings that Holy Cross received, the focus remained on God's grace. Here is an excerpt from the tenth anniversary celebration literature:

Our tenth anniversary affords us the opportunity to thank the Lord for His blessings of the past and to come to Him in prayer humbly seeking His continuing grace in the years that now lie before us. His hand and His blessing are most evident as we review the events of the past ten years. We have grown from a handful of souls dependent upon fellow members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to a self-supporting and growing congregation. All thanks and praise be to our God who has so richly granted this increase. May His blessing ever rest upon the preaching of His Word in our midst. May He grant to our congregation a rich measure of the spirit's [sic] blessing so that we may become the more faithful in doing the work He has placed before us. May we all rededicate ourselves to His service and may the doors of our church ever prove open to all who mourn and need comfort, and to all who are friendless and need a friend. To all who are homeless and need sheltering love, to all who pray and to all who do not, but should, to all who sin and need a Savior, may it ever make free a place and in the name of Jesus, the Lord, Say, "Welcome, world!"³⁶

Statistics

The charter members of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in 1965 were: Mrs. Harold Baumeister, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Handt (Helen), Mr. & Mrs. Samuel Price, Mr. Ralph Seefeldt, Mrs.

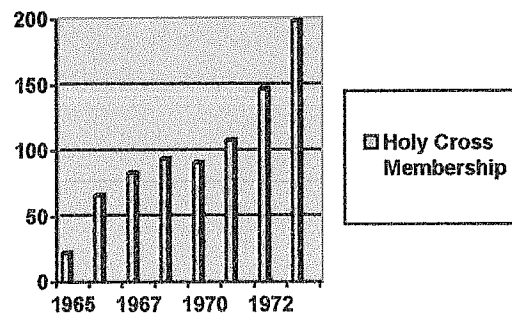
³⁵ Ziegfried Jarcik, interviewed by author, 10 July 2004. The loan they had received was through the Church Extension Fund. Hereafter cited as Jarcik.

³⁶ *Membership Directory, 1975* (Tucson, Arizona: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1975).

Viola Braunschweig, Mr. Daryl Braunschweig, Mr. & Mrs. William Karr, Rev. & Mrs. Norman Schlavensky, and Miss Ruth Schlavensky. The first Sunday school children were Doris Baumeister, Debra Boen, David Boen, Gail Boen, Gary Boen, Daniel Handt, Jeffrey Handt, Beth Karr, and Michael Karr.³⁷

1965, the total operating expenses for Holy Cross Lutheran Church were \$7,341.08 for the entire year. Here is the breakdown of those expenses: rent: \$450.00; pastor's salary: \$4720.00; organist's salary: \$250.00; C.E.F. loan \$420.00; missions: \$162.00; water: \$133.37; gas: \$141.16; electricity: \$217.56; phone: \$121.49; newspaper advertising: \$243.66; printing, bulletins, mailings: \$76.90; insurance: \$219.44; hymnals: \$76.70; office window: \$51.20; miscellaneous: \$153.60.³⁸

Membership at Holy Cross climbed steadily throughout its years while it was a mission congregation. What follows is a chart reflecting total membership (souls) from 1965-1975.



The Membership of Holy Cross Lutheran Church increased from 22 in 1965 to 199 in 1975.³⁹

³⁷ *Celebrating 25 Years.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Church Records* (Tucson, Arizona: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1965-1975).

Congregational Life at Holy Cross

When the Wisconsin Synod bought the land on Harrison Road that would eventually become the building site for Holy Cross Lutheran Church, there was nothing there but desert. The eastern “edge” of Tucson at that time was Wilmot Road, which is exactly four miles west of Harrison Road, the street the church is on. In 1968, there were still no buildings east of Wilmot Road.⁴⁰ The roads east of Wilmot Road were dirt, and there were no bridges over the *arroyos*.⁴¹ In 1965, the population of Tucson was 236,877. By 1975, when Holy Cross became independent, the population of Tucson was 298,683.⁴²

The activities that took place during the early years of Holy Cross Lutheran Church reflected the fact that it was in the middle of the Sonoran Desert. The desert was well suited for Lutheran Boy Pioneer activities. Many of these activities took place on the church property, including bonfires and camping. The Pioneers even repelled off the top of the church building!⁴³ At that time, people were able to hunt quail and other small game on the church grounds.⁴⁴

But Holy Cross’ Pioneers program also made use of the other resources of the desert. They went on deer hunts, backpacking and spelunking trips, and on trips to old mines. The philosophy of the program was, “Keep things interesting, and the kids will keep coming.”⁴⁵

Living in the desert poses its own unique challenges. According to Mr. Seefeldt, “Living in Arizona is a love/hate kind of thing.”⁴⁶ Indeed, this was the case at Holy Cross. The congregation’s

⁴⁰ Holstad.

⁴¹ An *arroyo* is a riverbed and is also known as a “wash.” Most of them are dry throughout the year, but flood during the rainy season.

⁴² <http://www.ci.tucson.az.us/planning/histpop2003.pdf> (accessed 5 December 2004). Today, Holy Cross is landlocked, and its three acres is the only land in the immediate area that still has desert vegetation. The population of Tucson in 2002 was 507,085.

⁴³ Jarcik.

⁴⁴ Handt.

⁴⁵ Jarcik. Mr. Jarcik has an intimate knowledge of the desert. He also knows the mining industry well since was employed by mining companies until 1985. Many attribute the success of Holy Cross’ Boy Pioneers program to Mr. Jarcik. He is currently the Southwest Regional Director of Lutheran Boy Pioneers.

first pastor was not enamored with the desert. Pastor Schlavensky “had [an] interim call, [and] didn’t intend to stay.” This was no secret since Pastor Schlavensky kept a home in Wisconsin the whole time they were in Arizona. It was also well known that Mrs. Schlavensky did not find Tucson her favorite place to live.⁴⁷ But in the short time that Pastor Schlavensky served, he accomplished much, and it must not be forgotten that he is the one who got the congregation up and running.⁴⁸ This certainly was a blessing from God.

While Arizona did not necessarily suit Pastor Schlavensky, the exact opposite was true for his successor, Pastor Paustian. He was acquainted with the state for the first time when he served as a vicar at Grace Lutheran Church in Tucson. Upon graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1961, he served as a tutor for one year in the now defunct school in Mobridge, South Dakota. At the end of his year in South Dakota, he received a call from the assignment committee to serve in Arizona once again. His call was to the tri-parish of Globe, Morenci, and Safford. He was informed of his assignment by phone since he was not able to attend the call service. But when he received the actual call form in the mail, it was to start a new church on the east side of Tucson (what would become Holy Cross only a few years later). Obviously there was some kind of error. Upon calling the Arizona-California District President E. Arnold Sitz, who also happened to be his supervising pastor while he was a vicar at Grace in Tucson, he learned what had happened. Pastor Sitz had gone to the assignment committee with two calls from the district: one for the tri-parish of Globe, Morenci, and Safford, and one for the mission congregation on the east side of Tucson. Indeed, Pastor Paustian *had* received the call to the tri-parish. But for some unexplained reason, Pastor Sitz tore up the call to the tri-parish and mistakenly sent the other call to Pastor Paustian. So, to Globe,

⁴⁶ Seefeldt.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Handt.

Morenci, and Safford he went—but not for long. In three short years he would once again hold the same call in his hand to the mission congregation on the east side of Tucson. And he accepted it.⁴⁹

Pastor Paustian would serve Holy Cross not only through its tenth anniversary, but also through its twentieth. Although he received calls to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin; Toronto, Canada; Puerto Rico; and the preparatory school in New Ulm, Minnesota; the Lord led him to stay in Arizona his entire ministry.⁵⁰ Despite the long distances and challenges of serving in the desert Southwest,⁵¹ God poured out an abundance of grace on Pastor Paustian and the young mission congregation in Tucson. All of the people at Holy Cross worked together to make it a success.

Since Pastor Paustian had to travel so much, there was a lot of lay involvement at Holy Cross. The elders would help set up the altar, distribute communion, conduct worship services, and visit shut-ins.⁵²

Other people were involved too. Many people were involved in the very successful choir that Holy Cross had in those days. It numbered in the twenties, and twelve to sixteen people would even go on tour.⁵³ Every year, the choir would put on



The Holy Cross Lutheran Church Choir

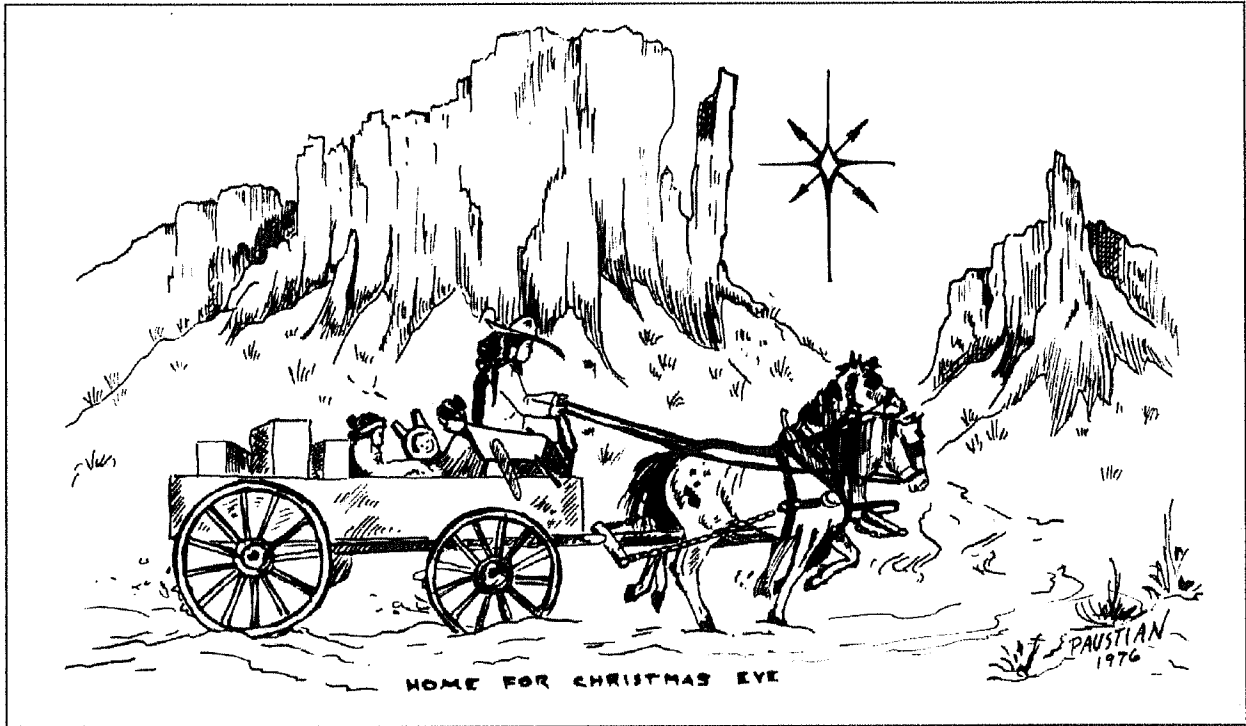
⁴⁹ Paustian.

⁵⁰ After his twenty years at Holy Cross, Pastor Paustian was called to serve in Gilbert, Arizona, where he has served to this day.

⁵¹ Pastor Paustian shared a couple of stories to illustrate this. When he served the tri-parish of Globe, Safford, and Morenci, he would be piloted in between services in a Cessna 172. If he would have driven between those churches, it would have been a round-trip of 306 miles *every Sunday*. But he still did plenty of driving during the eleven years he served Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Benson (1967-1978). Once, while driving the forty-seven mile stretch of highway between Benson and Tucson, he was mulling over the particularly difficult visit he had just had and the equally difficult visit he was going to make. He was not paying attention to his speed, and an officer pulled him over. Something tipped the officer off that he was a pastor. He said, "Well, I'll tell you what...you don't drive as though you should. I don't go to church as often as I should. Let's call this one even."

⁵² Jarcik.

⁵³ Ibid.



Pastor Paustian would draw his own Christmas cards. Here is an example of his artwork.
— *Special thanks to Jeffrey Handt for the copy seen here*

Easter and Christmas cantatas. They would have a morning and afternoon cantata the Sunday before Easter and Christmas. Holy Cross used these cantatas as outreach tools.⁵⁴ Another musician who was actively involved at Holy Cross was Viola Braunschweig. She was Holy Cross' organist. "She played every service for ten years,"⁵⁵ and played for the tenth anniversary service.

Another way the members of Holy Cross were involved was participating in building projects. All of the building projects were done "in house" with the exception of plumbing work, electrical work, and the pouring of the foundations.⁵⁶ Members were also responsible for woodworking and interior decorations of the buildings. One member in particular, Arnold

⁵⁴ Paustian.

⁵⁵ Seefeldt.

⁵⁶ Jarcik. They probably would have done those things too if they would not have been required to be done by a licensed worker.

Christianson, did much of the woodworking. He built the cross behind the altar (seen behind the choir in the photo on a previous page) and communion rail.⁵⁷

A high level involvement by members of Holy Cross did not mean that membership was always perfectly stable, however. There was one major factor for this. A good amount of Holy Cross members served at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. They would be shipped out and move on. But through this challenge, members at



Pastor and Mrs. Paustian

Holy Cross kept their focus on their Savior. “You live through those [down times]. The Lord has a way of doing things.”⁵⁸ But new faces were also coming in all the time too.⁵⁹ This created unique opportunities. There was always the chance to reach out to single airmen and offer them a home away from home. Among these “single fellas” were not a small number of minority airmen.⁶⁰ Holy Cross always was ready to receive with open arms any and all who wanted to hear about their Savior.

In Closing...

Praise be to God for the grace He has poured out on and through the little mission congregation that started as a bare plot of ground on the far east side of Tucson in 1962. By the time Holy Cross Lutheran Church became an independent congregation in December of 1974,

⁵⁷ Arnold & Angie Christianson, interviewed by author, 6 May 2004. Mr. Christianson taught shop class at Rincon High School in Tucson. He also did other projects for Holy Cross after 1975. Hereafter cited as Christianson.

⁵⁸ Seefeldt.

⁵⁹ Christianson.

⁶⁰ Jarcik. Other (lesser) factors for the always-changing face of the congregation were the University of Arizona and Hughes Aircraft.

forty-four children were baptized, twenty adults were baptized, twenty-six youth confirmations took place, thirty-eight adult confirmations took place, twenty-eight marriages, were held, and ten funerals were held.⁶¹ May God continue to bless Holy Cross so she might always cause the light of gospel truth to shine forth in Tucson, Arizona.

⁶¹ *10-Year Anniversary Bulletin.*

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