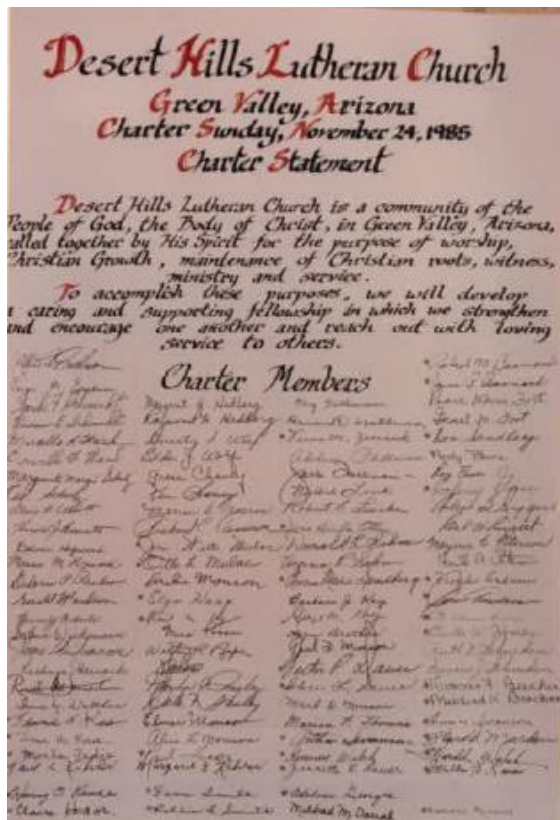


40th
Anniversary
Special
Edition

DHLC Compass

40 Years in God's Grace



The original charter hangs in the pastoral hallway today.



The installation of Pastor Willis Erickson, DHLC's first pastor, was in May 1986.



The installation of Pastor Michael Sager, current senior pastor, was March 2022.



Charter Members

They had a vision. We are making it come true.

Desert Hills Lutheran Church held its first service on December 4, 1984, led by The Rev. Willis F. Erickson, who served as the pastor and developer of the new congregation. It was established by a visionary group of individuals who shared a dream: to build a church that preached the gospel, welcomed all who love the Lord, and believed in the awesome grace of God.

For that inaugural Sunday morning worship service, a meeting room at the Desert Hills Social Center was rented. Members volunteered to prepare the room for worship. A storage cabinet contained banners and other necessary materials for the service. Hymnals were kept under lock and key in an adjoining room, while items needed to provide coffee after the service were stored in the kitchen. Pastor Duane Lokken noted in an article about the church's history that people remarked, "It was like watching a drill take place, as everyone moved about without wasted effort to prepare for worship and coffee hour." After the service, everything had to be dismantled and stored away until the following weekend.

Charter Sunday was November 24, 1985, when 98 charter members signed the church charter, including 35 associate members. A capital fund for building construction was

quickly established in December. Pastor Erickson was called to be the first pastor during the initial congregational meeting on April 20, 1986, and he was installed on May 18, 1986.

"An important first step was for us to form a committee to search for land for our church building, and that came with many roadblocks and obstacles. Our prayers and God's direction led us to the site that we are currently on, but our current land was unfortunately federally owned. This was a great barrier to our mission, but God made a way, and we were able to agree on a lease, eventually with that lease converting to a land purchase. This congregation is incredible, as we did not carry that purchase debt long," Merle Fedje, a charter member, shared in an interview in 2024.

For the past forty years, our congregation has been built on the foundation provided by our charter members, growing from 98 individuals in 1984 to a weekly attendance of over 1,000 people, both in-person and online.

Desert Hills Lutheran Church is not a "maintenance" church but rather a mission-driven congregation. We firmly believe in our mission. In fact, any member will tell you, "At Desert Hills, we celebrate grace, make disciples, and make a difference."



Volunteers install pews on the west side of the sanctuary.



Pastor Martin Overson delivers the children's sermon.



Gordon Swanson shares hymns during worship services.



Desert Hills Lutheran Church

2150 S Camino del Sol

One addition at a time

On April 2, 1989, the leaders and congregation of Desert Hills Lutheran Church celebrated a joyous occasion as they watched the “golden shovels” dig into the ground for what would become DHLC. The journey to this day was not easy.

According to Pastor Lokken’s written history, “The months following Pastor Erickson’s installation were significant as a time to find a site on which to locate a church building. Discussions were held with Fairfield, sites were located on Camino del Sol and Mission Twin Buttes, but all efforts failed due to objections from residents adjoining the property.” The members remained undeterred, and records indicate that on March 9, 1987, they decided to lease five acres of land on Camino del Sol from the State of Arizona.

An official office was leased at Green Valley Mall on La Canada, and a planning committee was established on December 7, 1987. A capital fund campaign was initiated on January 1, 1988. Francis Schulz was retained as the architect to help plan and construct a 7,000-square-foot building for \$700,000. Unfortunately, the congregation faced a challenge due to a small piece of land that separated the leased state land from the Camino del Sol right-of-way, which delayed progress for nearly a year. Even with the groundbreaking in April 1989, construction did not begin until the third week of May as agreements and paperwork were finalized with Fairfield.

The contract allowed only for the construction of the building. Mr. Schulz suggested preparing a brochure listing all

the furnishing needs for the building, including pews, chancel furnishings, chairs, tables, a sound system, kitchen equipment, carpeting, cabinets, landscaping, and more. By the time of the dedication in February 1990, all items were in place and fully paid for, totaling an additional \$60,000 beyond the commitments made for the building.

The first worship service in the new building was held on January 14, 1990, after laying the cornerstone. The dedication took place on February 11, 1990. The building featured a sanctuary with seating for 270 people, a fellowship area, a food service area, office space, and parking for 97 cars. A loan of \$1.5 million financed the construction.

Desert Hills Lutheran Church continued to grow steadily. During the 1998 annual meeting, the congregation commissioned an architect to expand and remodel the church. At a special meeting in December 1998, a site plan was approved, allowing for an application to the Arizona State Land Department for a lease and for improvements on the property. The 1999 annual meeting approved an expenditure of \$1.3 million for the expansion project. This expansion aimed to enlarge the worship space to accommodate 400-450 people, enhance the Narthex, build part of a new Fellowship Hall, add administrative offices, and convert existing offices into classrooms.

The dedication of the new building, including the “Lokken Fellowship Hall,” took place in November 2001. During the 2006 annual meeting, the congregation proposed further renovations, which

allowed for an additional 80 seats in the sanctuary and a reconfiguration of office and Sunday school space. In 2006, the congregation also approved the process of purchasing the current land from the state, and fundraising efforts commenced in 2007 with a three-year capital campaign.

In 2011, construction for the next expansion was approved, and work began. At the annual meeting in 2012, Ed Bonderson reported that construction was nearing completion, and a fundraising campaign for furnishings for the expanded facility was approved. The dedication of two additional buildings, effectively doubling the size of the church, took place on March 25, 2012. The total cost was \$2.6 million, not including furnishings and equipment.

Today, Desert Hills Lutheran Church continues to grow, and discussions have emerged regarding potential upgrades and remodeling of the facilities. In 2025, improvements were made to the sound and lighting in the sanctuary as a result of these decisions.

We eagerly await what God is calling us to do next.



Desert Hills Lutheran Church Columbarium

In 1991, the congregation of Desert Hills Lutheran Church expressed interest in building a columbarium for its members. A committee was appointed in the early fall of that year, and construction plans were finalized. According to the 1994 annual report, 42% of the niches were either used or reserved. According to the 1996 annual report, reserved niches accounted for 75% of the installed niches,

and plans for a second panel of niches were expected to begin the following year. However, it wasn't until 2012 that the installation of the second panel was completed.

As of today, ten niches are still available in the second panel. The congregation has once again initiated discussions about constructing a third panel of niches.

