

Narrative of Casa de Cristo's History

September 12th, 1970 marked the beginning of a journey for a group of people in Phoenix, Arizona, then known as Phoenix Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). This church was formed to serve the Gay and Lesbian community of the greater Phoenix area. This was the first MCC to be established outside the state of California, and only the third MCC to be established.

With humble beginnings at their location on the Maricopa Freeway, this young congregation faced many challenges and difficulties. A number of incidents involving harassment, threatening phone calls, and various acts of vandalism plagued the young congregation, but their zeal and enthusiasm could not be daunted by the mere acts of man since their focus and vision were on heavenly things. In 1975, under the leadership of Reverend Paul Brenton, the church members and GPA activists battled the House Bill 2024 that banned same-sex marriage in Arizona by protesting and fasting outside the House Chambers.

On October 23, 1977, the congregation faced the destruction of their church by an arsonist's fire. All of the church records were destroyed in the fire which leaves questions about the first seven years of Casa's Church History: membership and leadership. Arizona newspaper articles reported this to be a seven alarm fire.

With new determination and "fire in their bellies", the congregation "looked to the hills from whence their help came" and began the search for a new location. The property at 1029 East Turney Avenue was found, purchased and construction commenced in January 1978. The new sanctuary, Worship Center of Metropolitan Community Church, was completed and dedicated on October 7, 1979. One hundred and seventy-eight (178) people crowded the room for a three hour dedication ceremony honoring the labor of love, blood, sweat and tears of the devoted members, electricians, plumbers, contractors working under the direction of Brother Joseph Sombrio, making this dream a reality. This in itself was another history making journey, because this congregation was the first in the Gay and Lesbian Community to build their own church building. Since then, remodeling and expansion of this property has continued on through 1988. Even today, the congregation of Casa de Cristo Church and Apostolic Center periodically remodels various offices or meeting spaces in the current office and church buildings.

In the earlier years of the church, it was said to be very political and more of a social club than a church. The services during this time were of the high church tradition and resembled a Catholic service. However, the worship style transformed as different pastors took over the leadership.

In 1977, Fred L. Pattison was the first pastor to come from an evangelical background, and he introduced the "Baptist" style of worship. He was the first to preach the plain and simple

gospel of Jesus Christ and the necessity for everyone to accept Jesus as their Savior. Under Pastor Fred's direction, Phoenix MCC became known throughout the nation and beyond as a strong biblical church and a strong defender of the historic biblical faith. In June, 1987, still under Fred's leadership, Phoenix Metropolitan Community Church changed its name to Casa de Cristo Evangelical Church, MCC. Then in October 23, 1988, Casa de Cristo Evangelical Church withdrew from the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches to become an independent Evangelical congregation.

Also in 1987, under the leadership of Pastor Fred Pattison, The Evangelical Network (TEN) was born. TEN was an answer to Pastor Fred's belief that there was a need to network with fellow evangelists. February, 1988 the first TEN Weekend Conference was held. For many years to follow the TEN Conference was held on the last weekend in February on the Casa de Cristo campus. To this date, TEN conferences are still hosted in different cities throughout the United States by the TEN organization now headquartered in Pacifica, California.

Besides the inception of TEN, under Pastor Fred's leadership other ministries were established as follows: Cristo Press (later named the Olive Tree Ministries), Cristo AIDS Ministry (an outreach to those living with AIDS or affected by it), and Christ Evangelical Bible Institute. In 1995, the Christ Evangelical Bible Institute was renamed the Phoenix Evangelical Bible Institute. In July, 2009, Phoenix Evangelical Bible Institute was renamed Casa de Cristo Theological Seminary. In July, 2012 renamed P. A. Crane Theological Seminary (PACTS) in honor of Dr. Crane's memory whose wealth of experience in teaching Theology evolved the Bible Institute into a Theological Seminary. To date, many students participate in classes offered by PACTS plus many members and friends attend Bible Studies offered throughout the week.

After Pastor Fred's retirement in 1996, Ronnie Pigg assumed the spiritual leadership of the church. Pastor Ronnie was from a Pentecostal background and led the church into a Full Gospel Movement. During his leadership, the Holy Spirit had free reign in the praise and worship service.

In 2009, Pastors Adero Allison, Lisa Arias, Jim Simpson and Charlotte Strayhorne assumed leadership as Co-Pastors. In 2011, after Pastor Lisa Arias moved out of the state and under the leadership of the three remaining Co-Pastors, the church changed its name from Casa de Cristo Evangelical Church to Casa de Cristo Church and Apostolic Center to better reflect the calling of the church's ministry.

In 2015, the Pastoral Staff had grown to five pastors and two ordination candidates. Subsequent ordination candidates periodically held leadership roles in the ministries of Casa. In November of 2018 Robert Shamblin was ordained. It did not take long to realize God had selected Pastor Rob to join the staff and fill the void left when Pastor Arias left the

state. Casa continues to reach out to the LGBT community, to Phoenix, to Arizona, to other areas in the U.S. and overseas in Africa and India.

In 2020 Casa celebrated its' fiftieth anniversary. We began our celebration in February with a Worship Night led by Shawn Thomas, shawnthomasonline.com. As we approached March the COVID pandemic progressed across the country and our church services were forced to continue remotely. We created pre-recorded segments contributed by members of the worship team, deacons, teachers and pastors. Throughout this season the leadership continued to minister to the membership, staying in touch using phone, email and socially distanced visits. Morning Worship services, Mid Week Christian Growth classes, Pastors' Bible Study and our monthly Casa Out'N'About continued as we added Zoom and a streaming license to our technology tool bag. Our online Bible Studies attracted new attendees, from as far away as Michigan and Ohio.



In October we celebrated our anniversary with three days of Zoom events. Here are links to those events:

[Welcome to our 50th Anniversary Celebration](#)

[Spiritual Banquet – Food for the Heart](#)

[50th Anniversary Sunday](#)

As we begin continue to serve the kingdom, Casa de Cristo Church and Apostolic Center stands today as a testimony of those men and women who went before us and paved the way so that we can stand in the perfect liberty of the Lord. Space does not allow all the details, but this paints an overall picture of the loyalty and dedication of God's people at 1029 East Turney Avenue as we continue to minister to all who are disenfranchised throughout the world, not limited to the LGBTQ+ community.