

Faithful Notes: Jim Grace's Lifetime of Music at UMCL



For over 66 years, Jim Grace has been the main organist and pianist for the United Methodist Church of Libertyville. Jim started his musical journey in the third grade when he started taking piano lessons. From there, his love of music has only grown. He proceeded to study music education at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois.

This was followed by a Master's degree from Northwestern University in Music Education and another Master's degree from Roosevelt University in Education Administration. Following his education, Jim taught sixth grade for over 30 years in Lake Forest.

Jim began his UMCL career in 1959 when he stepped in as the Children's Choir Director. At that time, Ida Morris was the current organist and had been playing since the 1920s. Jim would fill in for Ida whenever she was unavailable to play. It was during this time that he met his late wife, Nancy, who was the choir director. From they met, the two worked to spread the joy of music within the church.

From 1959 to 1969, Jim took organ lessons to refine his skills. These lessons not only helped when he filled for Ida, but were in preparation for the new sanctuary and organ. In 1969, the two switched roles, and Jim took over as the main organist for the church. With Ida's 55 years of service and Jim's current 66, the two have been UMCL's only organists for 121 years.

Jim's ministry in music continued when he decided to start the bell choir to bring more life into the services. For 35 years, this bell choir has continued to bless services with their beautiful and moving songs. In the early 2000s, contemporary worship songs started to gain popularity among younger people. During this time, many organists began to leave their positions — but not Jim Grace.

Even when things were uncertain during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jim continued to play for UMCL. When asked why he stayed with UMCL for all these years, he simply said, "It's been wonderful." This church has not only become a family to him but also continuously shown support for his music and holds a special place in his heart.

Today, Jim remains the current Music Director at UMCL while serving as the main organist and pianist. No matter who you speak to, the UMCL congregation feels incredibly blessed to have him and his music every Sunday.

UMCL's Lead Pastor, Jeffry Bross, speaks out about just how rare and special a man like Jim is: "Jim Grace is one of the most talented musicians I've ever met, and to still be playing as strong as he is at this time is amazing. The only thing that outdoes his ability to play is his kindness and humble spirit, and this church is just so appreciative of him. His last name truly reflects the way he does ministry within the church. He lives by Grace."

Written by Meg Nostrand, recent college graduate of UMCL