Centennial Temple Talk – 2010-2023

The period from 2010 until 2023 was marred by mass shootings that continue to plague America's schools, places of worship, malls, nightclubs, and businesses. The mere mention of Sandy Hook, Parkland, Uvalde, Pulse and Mother Emanuel will forever bring tragic, shocking images to mind in most Americans. Covid-19 shut down the world, same-sex marriage was legalized and *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Popular trends included the ALS ice bucket challenge, fidget spinners, selfie sticks, food trucks, and Baby Shark. All schools, including Winthrop, switched to online classes during the global pandemic. "In 2017 over 3,000 BMX riders from 48 countries came to Rock Hill for international competition drawing over 50,000 visitors, and in 2021 Miracle Park opened to rave reviews." In 2019 Rock Hill was chosen as the site of the Carolina Panthers Training Facility, until in 2022 it wasn't.

In May 2010, Grace began a *Time of Holy Conversation* to provide "understanding, clarification and discussion" about the ELCA statement on human sexuality. In July 2010, Pastor Ray Mohrmann submitted his resignation after 14 years of ministry, making him the second-longest serving pastor at Grace, and the Reverend Linda Anderson was appointed interim pastor. "When the *Advancing Christ's Ministry* campaign ended on October 31, 2010, the building mortgage had been reduced from $1,347,000 to $695,000, with a projected payoff date of April 2024".

In August 2011, Grace issued a call to the Reverend Christine Stoxen who was installed as Grace's 13th pastor on October 9th. The property next door on Oakland Avenue was purchased in 2012, named Place of Grace, and after renovation, housed non-profit agencies including The York County Free Medical Clinic. In July 2012, Grace welcomed two new campus ministers, April Lovegrove and Pastor David Ludwig, who became Grace's first associate pastor and 14th pastor the next year. New staff members in 2013 included Matthew McCall as Director of Music and Lisa Peterson as Office Manager, who replaced Pat Kirk after 20 years of faithful service.

“The congregation was saddened by the loss of Pastor Stoxen’s husband, Craig, in 2013. Grace member Pastor Herbert Wood served as interim minister while Pastor Chris took extended family leave.” The same year “Grace participated in the first Apostles Build Habitat for Humanity House in York County. This was a national Thrivent Financial initiative to get churches to work together to raise dollars and donate time to build a house.”

In 2014, Wi-Fi access was added throughout the church, and a combined fifth Sunday worship service occurred each quarter. Pastor David Ludwig resigned as associate pastor in March 2015 and was replaced by Pastor Rebecca Lord in July, following her ordination at Grace in June, making her Grace’s 15th pastor, and Linda Rhead became Office Administrator. Disbursements could now be made from the Extended Ministry Endowment Fund, with the first being a $750 grant to the Backpack Ministry. To finance and grow this fund, the 1923 Grace Society, an end-of-life estate giving plan, was established.

Pastor Stoxen submitted her resignation in April 2017. Associate Pastor Rebecca Lord-Phillips was joined in ministry by Interim Pastor Ken Gillikin in August. “On October 31st, Grace celebrated the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation,” and a new banner with the “image of the Luther Rose and the dates 1517 and 2017” was dedicated.

More staff changes occurred in 2018. Music Director Larry Petersen resigned in February followed by Associate Pastor Rebecca Lord-Phillips’ departure in April, while The Reverend Scottie Burkhalter replaced Pastor Ken as interim pastor from July until November. The congregation welcomed Dr. Jeremy Mims as Director of Music in May and Dr. Olga-Maria Cruz as Campus Minister in August.

Since there was a vacancy for both pastor and associate pastor at Grace, “the call of a clergy couple seemed to be God’s response to prayer.” The Reverend Gregg Hoffman (Senior Pastor) and the Reverend Rachel Hoffman (Pastor) became

Grace's 16th and 17th pastors as they began their ministry on December 5, 2018, and were officially installed on February 24, 2019. The new pastors brought "youth and energy" to Grace and "introduced the *Following the Light* program, where small groups met in members' homes for a meal and to share faith, fellowship and a vision for the future of Grace." In December 2019, Michelle Cunningham became Parish Administrator.

In March 2020, Covid-19 changed the way we worshipped. Grace was closed, and online worship, followed by a Facebook Live Coffee Hour, began. Choir members individually recorded tracts at home that were "downloaded, edited, and combined" into anthems. Creative measures, including front porch visits, program kits, and Zoom and outdoor meetings, kept members connected. In 2021, Grace cautiously began in-person worship with face mask and social distancing requirements while continuing to enhance the online worship experience. WELCM's name was changed from the Winthrop Episcopal Lutheran Campus Ministry to the Winthrop Ecumenical Lutheran Campus Ministry following the "withdrawal of longtime partner" Episcopal Church of Our Savior the previous year. "The Grace Outreach Partnership Grant Program was established to partner with local charities, both financially and with volunteers, with Hope of Rock Hill, Pilgrim's Inn and Community Café being the first recipients of monetary grants."

In 2022, a Grace church family generously donated $50,000, thus beginning the *Striking the Match for Burning the Mortgage* campaign. "Led by the Holy Spirit, members met the challenge, surpassed the goal" and the mortgage was burned on November 13, 2022, marking the "third time in Grace's history that she was debt-free." Youth ministries remained strong, and Children's Word Time was added during the sermon.

In 2023, 100th Anniversary celebration events took place throughout the year. Centennial temple talks highlighting the ten decades of our church's history were presented during worship from March through December. Members were encouraged to make a special donation to the Grace Endowment Fund during our

anniversary month of June, and many participated in a six-week congregational summer book study on The Color of Compromise. A "holy experiment" of having one combined 10:00 worship service each Sunday from July until Labor Day was met with enthusiasm and support. Members purchased 100th Anniversary shirts and commemorative beer steins and celebrated at a festive anniversary dinner on September 17th. In October, the Grace Festival Choir and Winthrop Chamber Singers combined to present a concert entitled "Celebrate 100 Years of Music", and Grace members joyfully sang together at Beer & Hymns. The anniversary year culminated in December with a Cookies, Cocoa and Carols event featuring our Young Youth Choir's musical *Journey to Bethlehem*, as well as by Grace hosting the final concert of renowned singer/songwriter Peter Mayer's 24th annual Stars and Promises Christmas tour entitled *Simple Gifts*.

Dr. Olga-Maria Cruz submitted her resignation as Campus Minister in July 2023 to start an "internship on her path to becoming an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament," and Parish Administrator Michelle Cunningham resigned in August to begin her retirement. New staff members hired this year included Katherine Romero as Parish Administrator and Pastor Norbert F. Hahn, Ph.D. as Campus Minister. Members adopted a new strategic plan as well as "mission and vision statements that are better reflections of what the Spirit is leading Grace to do and be in the coming years."

So, here we are at the end of our first hundred years – an amazing journey that began with a Lutheran, Miss Fanny Beckmann, leading female students in worship on the campus of Winthrop College in 1914. From the 23 charter members of Grace in 1923 and the construction of the "little stone church" two years later, through the lean years of the Great Depression and the uncertainty of World War II, to the inclusivity demonstrated by Grace during the Civil Rights Movement, and our shared apprehension following 9/11, Grace Lutheran Church of Rock Hill, South Carolina has been and remains vital and strong! But as we remember our history, we rejoice that it is always HIS story that we celebrate! Thanks be to God!!