

Centennial Temple Talks

Grace's History from 1923-2023

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Grace in the 1920s

During 2023, Grace Lutheran Church in Rock Hill, South Carolina is celebrating her 100th Anniversary! The 100th Anniversary Task Force has chosen to commemorate this in part with a look back at our history through centennial temple talks the first Sunday of each month from March until December. Each will highlight a specific decade and contain information about what was happening in our church, city and nation.

Today we begin with the 1920s, the “Roaring Twenties,” a decade known for its prosperity, prohibition, flappers, silent movies and jazz. The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920, and Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. In Rock Hill, the twelve-acre Confederate Park opened in 1924 featuring a pavilion and swimming pool, and in 1925 electric lights were extended down Oakland Avenue.

Rock Hill was incorporated in 1870 and had a population of 8,809 in 1920 compared to over 74,000 now. Founded in 1886, Winthrop was officially named “Winthrop College, the South Carolina College for Women” in 1920. The enrollment was 1,898 in 1928 (compared to approximately 6,000 students today) making it the largest women’s college in the south and 2nd largest in the nation at the time.

The first Lutherans known to gather in Rock Hill for worship met in a classroom on the campus of Winthrop in 1914. Sunday morning worship was led by Miss Fanny Beckman, a Lutheran who taught mathematics at the college. At times there were as many as 25 students in attendance. When they were no longer allowed to meet on campus, Miss Beckman organized Lutheran student reading circles in her room at home on Sunday afternoons until her resignation from Winthrop in 1918.

The first official attempt to organize a Lutheran church in Rock Hill occurred in 1920, when the president of the South Carolina Lutheran Synod proposed this idea. A temporary Lutheran church was established in April of 1923 with fourteen charter members who met on Sunday mornings in the “dingy rooms” of the Rock Hill Chamber of Commerce. In June 1923 members adopted the ULCA (United Lutheran Church in America) model constitution, chose the name Grace and called their first pastor, the Rev. Henry A. Schroder, who served at Grace from 1923 until 1931. When the charter membership roll was closed, there were twenty-three members.

A few years later an architect from Charlotte was hired to construct the church building, with the cornerstone being laid on December 12, 1925. According to an oral history account from life-long Grace member Richard Denton, “the building was designed and built in the shape of a cross with the two chancel wings. One side held the baptismal font, and the right side was the elevated choir.” The building was ready for occupancy on May 2, 1926. At that time, Grace’s membership had grown to thirty-five, and thirty-seven Winthrop students and five faculty members regularly worshiped with the congregation.

The total cost of the church building, fully equipped, was approximately \$32,000. The Women’s Synodical Society of South Carolina pledged and paid \$20,000 of this by asking each member to contribute \$3 a year over a 5-year period. The thirteen women of Grace in this organization “raised \$1,000 in thirteen months for church furnishings by sponsoring a booth at the York County Fair....which featured home cooked specialties.” Early records indicate that contributions for Grace came from people in the Rock Hill community and throughout the Carolinas. By the end of the decade, Grace’s portion of the building debt was reduced from \$12,000 to \$3,700.

By the end of the 1920s membership at Grace was up to forty-six, and according to an early church report, “Winthrop students have been exceptionally active and faithful in attendance”. One early history of Grace states that her members were “bound by faith, endowed with vision, and held together by the spirit of God”. Their faith would soon be tested, however, and their resolve challenged when the stock

market collapsed on October 24, 1929, plunging the nation into the depths of the Great Depression during the 1930s.

Grace in the 1930s

Today's Centennial Temple Talk will highlight the 1930s, a time of deprivation and suffering during the greatest economic calamity in our nation's history, the Great Depression. It was a time of massive layoffs and high unemployment, banking panics, declines in productivity, and increases in poverty and homelessness. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was first elected president in 1932 and began to implement governmental stimulus and relief programs in hopes of stabilizing the economy. Looking for inexpensive escapes from reality, Americans turned to radio programs, music, dance marathons, board games, and movies to provide entertainment and distractions.

In the 1930s, Grace was still a mission church seeking to become a thriving congregation. Her first pastor, the Reverend Henry Schroder, resigned in November of 1931 and was replaced one month later by the Reverend Carl B. Caughman. During this time, according to accounts, "there was a close fellowship that helped members and Winthrop students deal with the gloom of the Depression." Twenty-two new members joined the church during Pastor Caughman's two-year tenure.

Grace's third pastor, the Reverend W. J. Roof, began his pastorate in April of 1934, placing an emphasis on young people and the community. Pastor Roof strengthened relations with Winthrop by organizing the Lutheran Student Association on campus. He and his wife offered their house as a "home away from home" for many students. He began the Light Brigade and Luther League for the youth at Grace. By being active in the community and serving as President of the Lions Club for two years, Pastor Roof also drew attention to Grace, which was known at the time as the "Little Stone Church".

Like many churches during the Depression, there were times when Grace was unable to pay Pastor Roof's salary. Members of the congregation shared crops from their gardens with the pastor, as well as canned and preserved food. Others, when

able to purchase groceries for their own families, often bought food for the Roof family as well. As stated in one history, “creative compensation kept food on the table; dedication to the Lord’s work kept the pastor in the pulpit”. Pastor Roof resigned in January of 1938, to accept another call; however, upon retirement, Pastor and Mrs. Roof returned to Rock Hill in 1959, and he “assisted in the services at Grace from time to time” until his death in 1962 at the age of 81.

Life-long member of Grace, Richard Denton, who was baptized by Pastor Schroder in 1929, shared many personal memories of Grace in an oral history account in 2017. Mr. Denton recalled that in the 1930s, “it was a challenge to increase the congregation and pay on our debt. One time when we were in danger of losing the mission, other congregations were eyeballing a possible opportunity to obtain the nice piece of property.” He also stated that “the church was heated by a coal furnace which had to be attended by one man, with two large return vents down the middle aisle, which sometimes would tangle a lady’s high heels.” Another memory was that “the choir room was next to the chancel where they would dress. They cracked the door open and sang a call to worship tune to begin the service. Then they proceeded to the choir area.”

Dr. Henry Smith Petrea, the fourth and longest serving pastor, began his 16 years at Grace on March 1, 1938. By the end of the 1930s the country was recovering from the Great Depression, and financial recovery was also occurring at Grace. At this time, the congregation had a debt of \$3,600 with an interest rate of 6%, which was refinanced to 2% and repaid in full nine years later.

Challenging times were again on the horizon. The world watched in trepidation as Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, beginning the war in Europe, which would soon spread to the United States and across the globe as World War II.

Grace in the 1940s

For the first half of the 1940s, from 1941-1945, all aspects of life in the United States were consumed by World War II. More than 16 million of our country's young men and women enlisted in the Armed Services, while those remaining stateside sustained the Homefront and worked in the factories producing wartime equipment and munitions to aid the Allies. It was a time of rationing, victory gardens, savings bonds and FDR's Fireside Chats. Locally, according to the book The "Good Town" Does Well by Lynn Willoughby, "a reported 390,000 military personnel participated in maneuvers in the Rock Hill area because the hilly terrain....resembled the countryside of Belgium and France." Even though it was still a women's college, around 1,200 male cadets attended Winthrop for one year as they completed the Cadet Pilot Training Course on campus. The influx of troops helped create a boom for the local economy, and "wartime jobs were available for all who wanted work."

In a December 1944 church bulletin, six young men of Grace Lutheran Church, who had answered the call to military service, were sent Christmas cheer and greetings. The church was saddened when one of those, Corporal L. C. Denton, Jr., a radio operator and son of L. C. and Mattie Denton and brother of Richard Denton, was killed when his plane crashed on the coast of Russia on June 9, 1945.

Dr. Henry Smith Petrea continued as pastor of Grace during the decade of the 1940s, a time with fifty-seven members and fifty-seven students worshiping. With so many men called into service, the pastor, according to early reports, completed much of the church maintenance himself, including "dusting the sanctuary, washing windows, repairing the roof, and keeping the grounds in order." "When it was time to paint the sanctuary....it is said that Pastor Petrea placed the ladder in the archway over the chancel, looked a long time at the great height, said a prayer that his courage not fail him, then ascended the ladder and got the painting done".

The church basement was also renovated during this period "with all the work done by the congregation. The rearranged area provided Sunday School rooms, and an area large enough for social gatherings". When Grace was unable to secure a loan

to build a parsonage, Pastor and Mrs. Petrea financed the construction themselves and at times also made the monthly payments. The congregation had satisfactorily repaid the Petreas for their generous financial assistance by the time of his resignation in 1954.

Other physical improvements to the church building during the decade included the installation of a new roof at a cost of \$600 in 1947 and the purchase of an electronic Hammond organ for \$2,250 in 1949. The organ was dedicated as a memorial to Corporal L. C. Denton, Jr., who had given the first \$100 to the organ fund in 1943. The fund was completed by his parents and was a “fitting tribute to Grace’s only gold star veteran”.

The United States was tested and had survived the challenging times of the Great Depression and World War II during the past twenty years. Americans were anticipating a time of peace, prosperity and growth as the decade of the 1950s approached.

Grace in the 1950s

The 1950s was a decade of prosperity and growth in the United States, and life seemed to be easier and more innocent following the Great Depression and World War II. It was a time of rock ‘n’ roll, soda fountains, poodle skirts, and drive-in movies, and the demand for televisions and automobiles skyrocketed. Rock Hill’s population grew 63%, its largest increase ever, between 1940 (15,009) and 1950 (24,502) according to U.S. Census reports, and the post-war baby boom was in full swing. Segregation in America began to be challenged in 1954 with the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which overturned the “separate but equal” mandate in public schools. It was a “stormy era of race relations” in Rock Hill, as the Civil Rights Movement, inspired by individuals like Rosa Parks, was gaining traction nationwide. Tensions were high worldwide with the beginning of a conflict in Korea in 1950 and Vietnam in 1955, as well as the continuation of the Cold War between the Soviet-led communist bloc countries and the Western powers led by the United States.

Dr. H. Smith Petrea remained pastor of Grace during the early 50s until his resignation in February of 1954, at which time the church was completely free of any debt. In April of that year the congregation issued a call to senior seminarian student Everette L. Lineberger, who became Grace's fifth pastor on June 6, 1954, following his graduation from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia.

Pastor Lineberger's four years as pastor were times of tremendous growth at Grace; "baptized membership grew from 142 to 248; and the operating budget doubled." Emphasis was placed on developing a sound education program which included Sunday School, Weekday Church School, Catechetical Classes and two weeks of Vacation Bible School each summer. The Afternoon and Evening Circles of the church women and the Luther League for youth were active and involved organizations, and the Brotherhood was established for the men of Grace in 1956. There were renovations to both the church and parsonage during the 1950s. The sanctuary was painted, and the church aisles were carpeted in 1955 at a cost of approximately \$2,500. The congregation purchased the seven-room Parish House and lot at 420 Oakland Avenue for \$16,000 that same year, which "provided office space for the pastor, five Sunday School classrooms, and an adequate nursery." The church doors were painted red in 1955 to symbolize "the Blood of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit," and they remain a community landmark to this day.

Pastor Lineberger was very active in the community and was a charter member and president of the Rock Hill Civitan Club. Relations with Winthrop also strengthened during this time, and Grace continued to participate each year in the traditional "Blue Line Sunday," which dated back to 1895. Led by Winthrop's president on the first Sunday in September, the entire female student body "walked from the front campus along Oakland Avenue to the churches of their choice. It was called 'Blue Line' because students wore the navy-blue uniforms issued by the school, where only navy-blue and white garments were approved campus apparel. This was an impressive event for the entire town."

In July of 1958, Pastor Lineberger submitted his letter of resignation after four years of “amazing physical and spiritual growth”. Grace’s sixth pastor, the Reverend Charles J. Shealy, Jr., began his ten years of service in January 1959. As Pastor Shealy wrote in that year’s annual report: “A reception was held for the Pastor and his family the week after his arrival at which time the congregation presented him with a crisp \$100 bill. The parsonage family considers this one of the most loving gestures ever to come its way.”

Pastor Shealy continued to lead Grace into and through the 1960s. Vietnam War protests, assassinations of major American political figures and accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement helped to define this decade of conflict and unrest.

Grace In The 1960s

The 1960s was a decade of political unrest, feminism, environmentalism, and civil disobedience in the United States. It was a time of peace signs, Beatlemania, go-go boots, hippies, and Woodstock. The decade began on an optimistic note with the election of President John F. Kennedy in 1960, but many hopes and dreams were dashed with his assassination in 1963 and the murders of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. Students protested on college campuses in opposition to perceived injustices, the draft, and the unpopular Vietnam War. The space race between the United States and USSR culminated in Americans landing on the moon at the end of the decade.

The Civil Rights Movement continued into the sixties as a nonviolent means to abolish discrimination, racial segregation, and disenfranchisement. Many protests occurred in Rock Hill, including a “sit-in” staged by the “Friendship Nine” at the segregated lunch counter of McCrory’s Department Store in January 1961. One month later, six groups of local NAACP adults and students staged “kneel-ins” at downtown churches, including Grace. According to historical accounts, “the Methodist, Baptist and Nazarene churches turned the demonstrators away, while the Presbyterians and Lutherans welcomed them”.

Winthrop continued to grow, and its enrollment topped 3,000 by the mid-sixties. Even as the college remained segregated, the first African American graduate student was admitted in July 1964. This student, Cynthia Plair Roddey, was a teacher at the all-black Jefferson Elementary School in York, SC. The Reverend Doctor Roddy first visited Grace in 1953 while a student at Immanuel Lutheran High School in Greensboro, NC. The next year she was invited to worship at Grace by Mrs. Eleanor Smith, owner of a dress shop named Eleanor's, when she sold Dr. Roddey two pairs of high-heeled shoes (her first) as part of her fall wardrobe. A Friend of Grace for 70 years, she recently stated that "each time I sit in a pew I am at peace".

Pastor Charles J. Shealy, Jr. continued to lead Grace into and through the sixties. Early in his ministry the educational curriculum was coordinated among all age groups, the new *Common Service Book and Hymnal* was adopted, and Grace became a member of the new Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

In 1960 the "South Carolina Synod gave a special fund of \$500 to Campus Ministry to renovate and decorate a room at Grace for Winthrop Lutheran students.... which triggered a major property improvement program" at the church over the next two years. The complete renovation of the church basement included the updating of kitchen facilities. The church exterior was thoroughly cleaned, sandblasted and treated with silicone, while the interior was painted; air conditioning, new light fixtures in the nave, and a new altar rail were installed.

When Grace commemorated her 40th anniversary in 1963, there were 238 baptized members and "the church property value was assessed at \$114,000 – a far cry from twenty-three charter members and property value of \$40,000 in 1923". The theme of the celebration was "A Fellowship Where You Feel At Home With God", and a special church service was held on September 22nd. "Returning to deliver the sermon was the recently retired Reverend Henry A. Schroder, who had been Grace's first pastor." Pastor Shealy commented that "because of the close ties over the years between us and the Winthrop students, it is fitting that our anniversary celebration be held on Church Line Sunday (formerly known as Blue Line Sunday)".

Pastor Shealy was honored by the congregation for his 25 years of Lutheran ministry in 1968. He submitted his resignation to answer another call in August 1969, thus ending his ten years of service at Grace. In late 1969, a senior seminarian, John E. Boyd, Jr., preached at Grace during the time without a pastor. The congregation was impressed, and some of the youth at Grace approached the call committee to express their approval of this seminary student. John Boyd accepted the call from the congregation in January 1970, was ordained and began his ministry in July of that year and led Grace through the first half of the 1970s.

Grace in the 1970s

The 1970s was a decade of equal rights protests, high inflation, and political upheaval. Eighteen-year-olds got the right to vote in 1971, the Watergate break-in precipitated President Nixon's resignation in 1974, and two years later, Americans celebrated our country's bicentennial. There were rising oil prices and gas shortages leading to long lines at the gas pumps. Popular trends included bell-bottomed pants, sideburns, tie-dyed clothing, disco music, and leisure suits. Rock Hill's population was nearly 34,000, and major improvements were taking place thanks to millions in federal funds awarded through the Model Cities program. Winthrop's enrollment surpassed 4,000 in 1970, and the college officially became coeducational with the admission of male students in 1974.

In July of 1970 the Reverend John E. Boyd, Jr. was ordained and officially installed as the seventh pastor of Grace Lutheran Church. Pastor Boyd and his wife Linda did not live in the parsonage, but instead were the first to be given a housing allowance. The Boyds brought much enthusiasm to Grace which generated excitement with the Youth Ministry program. Some of the young people formed a contemporary and folk music singing group and wrote many of their own songs. There was a renewed interest in scouting programs, particularly the Girl Scouts.

Grace's Golden Anniversary was celebrated the week of June 17, 1973, with a special 11:00 service and congregational picnic on Sunday, followed by worship services and receptions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights. Services were led by former Grace pastors Reverend Everette Lineberger and Reverend Charles Shealy, as well as two presidents of the South Carolina Lutheran Synod.

A new custom-built Zimmer Pipe Organ was purchased for a price of \$17,970 in 1975. "Space availability and tonal quality dictated that the organ be installed in the balcony area of the sanctuary." A Dedication Service was held on Sunday, May 25th and was led by Grace's organist, Mr. Shannon Hunter, and a guest organist. Pastor Boyd was active in the community, serving as chairman of both the Drug Abuse Council and the Junior Women's Club Girl's Home. As a member of the Rock Hill Ministerial Association, "his messages were frequently heard on local radio". A food pantry and the Good Samaritan Fund were established at Grace during his tenure. In 1961, the SC Synod had approved a position for a lay campus pastor for Winthrop, and Naomi Bridges served in this capacity from 1961 - 1979.

Grace was thriving with 385 baptized members when Pastor Boyd submitted his resignation in August 1975. Grace's eighth pastor, the Reverend Hollis A. Miller, along with his wife Susan and sons Jeffrey and Jonathan, began their ministry on July 1, 1976.

Growth continued at Grace under Pastor Miller's leadership, and a capital funds drive began in March 1977 to raise \$271,000 to build an 8,300 square foot educational-multipurpose building. When the final plans were drawn, the actual cost was \$325,000; however, the congregation voted to proceed with the project in August 1978. "Room for the new building was made by demolishing the old parsonage and parish house." The adjoining property had been purchased and "the church offices were moved into the Ward building". "Groundbreaking for the first major building for Grace since 1925 was set for December 10, 1978." Because of the successful bond sale, construction began, "and the new building was dedicated on November 4, 1979".

Grace began participating in the Parish Life and Ministry Development (PLMD) program in 1978. "With the assistance of the South Carolina Synod and Lutheran Church in America (LCA), Grace began to evaluate its ministry and develop goals for more effective outreach to the congregation and community." In April 1979, a Statement of Mission was adopted, and in July the congregation approved five priority objectives to fulfill the new mission statement. These objectives were: Service, Witness, Learning, Worship, Support. By the end of the decade, Grace had 590 baptized members and was poised for continued growth into the 1980s.

Grace in the 1980s

The 1980s was a time of Reaganomics, Cabbage Patch dolls, Rubik's cubes, MTV, and AIDS. The decade provided many firsts for women: Sandra Day O'Connor was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1981, and Betty Jo Rhea became Rock Hill's first female mayor in 1986, the same year that Dr. Martha Piper was installed as Winthrop's first woman president. It was during the eighties that Mount St. Helens erupted, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded, Piedmont Medical Center and Cherry Park opened, and Winthrop College celebrated its centennial.

Grace Lutheran Church was growing and thriving at the beginning of the 1980s. There were 590 baptized members, and sixty active participants in the Lutheran Church Women. The 1980 confirmation class's eleven young people was the largest to date, and there were several new scout troops and two basketball teams. Pastor Hollis Miller submitted his resignation which became effective on June 15, 1981.

Grace's ninth pastor, the Reverend R. E. Lybrand, Jr., along with his wife Jackie and children Mauri and Brett, began their ministry on July 5, 1982. Pastor Rammy's six years at Grace were a period of phenomenal growth and vitality. According to records of the SC Synod, "Grace Church received the largest number of new members in the state in 1983" and was "cited as one of the top fifty fastest growing LCA congregations in worship attendance" in 1984. At that time, there were over 700 baptized members, and more than 300 consistently worshiped on Sundays.

“Financial contributions were so strong that the church was no longer plagued by debt.” Grace continued her community service through support of Project Hope, Good Samaritan Fund, Meals-on-Wheels, the Christmas Giving Tree, Jobs for the Jobless, the Boys’ and Girls’ Homes, Children’s Attention Home, the Bible in the Schools program and York County Hospice. Youth participation was so strong that a van was purchased to transport the young people to activities. The Jubilees, a group for those age 50+, was organized, and Grace Supper Club became a reality. The need for a second Sunday worship service was evident, and the 8:30 a.m. service began in August of 1983. “The Chicago Folk Service, which had been used for more than ten years at Lutheran Campus Ministry gatherings,” was used three times a month at the early service and once every quarter at the 11:00 service. Handbells were also purchased for the music program during this decade.

Grace began participating in the Intern Program through Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia during this time, with Debbie Wood and Kathy Chartier serving as intern pastors at Grace in 1985 and 1986 respectively. In early 1988, “area Lutheran ministers met with the SC Synod Bishop regarding a proposed mission congregation” in the area near Northwestern High School.

Also in 1988, Pastor Rammy submitted his resignation and preached his final sermon on May 29th. The Reverend Guy Shealy, a professional counselor and member of the congregation, became interim pastor until the Reverend William R. Cobb accepted the call and became Grace’s tenth pastor on January 1, 1989.

In April 1989, additional property was purchased for parking lot development, and pavement of all lots began in May. The youth program remained strong and members enjoyed retreats where they could work and worship with “young Lutherans from other congregations.” In July 1989, the Reverend Jeffrey Lingle was introduced as the new pastor to develop Epiphany Lutheran Church in Rock Hill.

Around midnight on Thursday, September 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo slammed into the South Carolina coast near Charleston and continued a destructive path through Columbia, Rock Hill and Charlotte. A writer for *The Herald* described it this way:

“South Carolina does not suffer her villains easily, and she will rank Hurricane Hugo up there with General Sherman, carpetbaggers, and the boll weevil”. Eighty-five people gathered in the dark at Grace on Sunday morning for worship and gave thanks that there was no loss of life in the Rock Hill area.

Grace in the 1990s

The 1990s was a decade of relative peace and prosperity in the United States. It ushered in the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the internet. Americans borrowed and spent more on bigger and more expensive homes and cars. It was a decade when Bill Clinton was impeached, Princess Diana died, and O.J. Simpson was acquitted. Trends of the times included Harry Potter, boy bands, Beanie Babies, fanny packs and the Macarena. Local developments in the 90s included the settlement of the Catawba land grant dispute, the Galleria Mall becoming the “premier shopping locale” in the area, and Winthrop attaining university status.

In 1990, Grace was recognized by many local service agencies as one of the “most actively involved” churches in Rock Hill. In October, Pastor William Cobb felt “his work at Grace was accomplished”. Resignations were also tendered that year by the Parish Secretary and Director of Campus Ministries, leaving three crucial areas at Grace vacant.

“Lay members continued the work of the church with dedication and perseverance.” By December 1990, the Reverend Dr. Carveth Mitchell of Charlotte became Interim Pastor, Pamela Stafford was hired as Parish Secretary and Judy Huitt became Director of Campus Ministries. Council President Dr. Hal Anderson wrote in the February 1991 *Grace Notes*: “The clock was set for a pending disaster. What has happened since, I can attribute to the Holy Spirit....”

The Reverend A. Glenn Boland became Grace’s eleventh pastor and began his four years of service in September 1991. In 1993, Council established a Seminarian Fund, which financially aided Michael Comer, Garry White and Andrea Anderson Wiegand during the nineties as each pursued theological studies leading to ordination by the ELCA. Pat Kirk was hired as Parish Secretary, and the June

Gustafson Connor Cremains Garden became a reality in 1993. Randy Wallace became the first full-time Director of Music Ministries in 1994, and Grace's playground was constructed the next year. Pastor Boland submitted his resignation in September 1995, and the Reverend Gary Lyerly was named interim pastor.

On August 25, 1996, Grace welcomed her twelfth pastor, the Reverend E. Ray Mohrmann, along with his wife Ann and children Laura and John. The congregation continued community outreach under Pastor Ray's leadership. In 1997, church leaders developed the following vision statement for Grace: "Our vision is to be a Christ-centered community of God's grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in faith, share the Gospel, and serve in love."

Grace celebrated her 75th anniversary in 1998 with the theme: "Celebrate Grace.... His Story....Our Heritage....Our Hope". As Pastor Ray stated: "First and foremost, we celebrate His story. The anniversary of a congregation is....a time to remember with humility and thanksgiving the work of God among us". Early in the year, Ed Kilbourne, a popular Christian folk musician and storyteller gave a concert to a packed house at Grace. Gracie the Church Mouse shared historical facts in person and in *Grace Notes*. The celebration culminated the weekend of June 21st with "an elegant fellowship catered dinner at McBryde Hall at Winthrop". A video was shown, prints of the church were available for purchase, and everyone present received an anniversary mug. Sunday was a day of worship and celebration, with Bishop Donges preaching at a combined service for members and visitors. A reception in the fellowship hall followed, where "pictures of Grace's past pastors, people, events and memorabilia were displayed".

In 1999, Andrea Anderson Wiegand "was the first 'daughter' of Grace to be ordained and joined 'sons' Garry White (1995) and Michael Clarke Comer (1997) as a member of the ELCA clergy." Cindy Bauldree became Grace's first full-time Director of Student Ministries this year. By the end of 1999, the congregation had paid off a loan of over \$16,000 to become debt free in preparation for a huge Master Plan for facilities improvement at Grace as the church moved into the 21st century.

Grace in the 2000s

As the 21st Century began, the peace of the 1990s gave way to terrorism on U.S. soil on 9/11/2001, and by 2008, the period of prosperity had morphed into the Great Recession. Memorable events included Hurricane Katrina, the election of the first black U.S. president and the “Miracle on the Hudson”. It was the time of Y2K, reality TV, skinny jeans, Netflix and the #MeToo movement. In the year 2000, enrollment at Winthrop exceeded 6,000 for the first time, and “the city of Rock Hill threw itself a sesquicentennial (150 years) birthday bash” in April of 2002.

Grace’s twelfth pastor, the Reverend E. Ray Mohrmann, led the church into and through this decade. In 2000, Grace members “committed nearly \$900,000 beyond their regular offerings” to the 21st Century Grace capital fund. The same year, “Grace and Epiphany Lutheran Churches were instrumental in launching Interfaith Hospitality Network of York County, which followed a national model of mobilizing congregations to host homeless families once each quarter.” In 2003, the name of this organization became Family Promise.

In January 2001, Grace began a new ministry partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi when Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe preached at Grace. Bishop Joseph returned for a long weekend in August with his wife and daughters. Offerings at both visits helped build a worship center for rural parishes and “complete one church building and start another in the name of Grace”.

In May 2001 the congregation voted unanimously to accept the \$1.9 million Master Plan for facilities improvement, which included “the addition of a new Fellowship Hall and Classroom Building, enhancement of the Sanctuary, and a new Pipe Organ”. “During the planning process for the new construction, amazingly the Building Committee discovered an exact match for the original Winnsboro Blue Granite stone. The Winnsboro, SC quarry had closed in 1986, yet a supply of the blue granite stone was found in Georgia, allowing the Building Committee to perfectly match the stone of the original 1926 church building.”

As exciting as these developments were, Pastor Ray wrote the following in his annual Report of the Pastor: "Most of us will remember 2001 for only one reason: September 11th. The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon shocked the nation and the world....The following evening we gathered for prayer at Grace, acknowledging before God our outrage, our grief, our vulnerability, our fear....As we live in the shadow of 9/11, let us remember that we also live in the shadow of the Cross, the sign of God's victory over death!"

The year 2002 brought staff changes to Grace: Anne Monroe became Director of Youth Ministries and David Platts took over as part-time Interim Director of Music, while long-time custodian Mary Graham retired after 18 years of faithful service. The highlight of 2002 was the completion of the renewed and expanded facilities, with the Service of Dedication held on Reformation Sunday.

In the mid-2000s, youth ministries at Grace were strong. Grace Gang (grades 3-6) began an intergenerational Secret Pal program with Grace Jubilees (ages 50+) "to allow youth to observe Adults of Faith in action." Grace Youth Ministries (GYM) for grades 7-12 placed an emphasis on service projects. Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) for Winthrop students moved into their new home at the White House on Aiken Avenue, which had been generously donated to Grace in 2001.

In 2004, David Platts was named Grace's first full-time Director of Music and "brought talent and energy to all the music programs". Grace hosted The Carolinas Evangelism Conference sponsored jointly by the North Carolina & South Carolina Lutheran Synods and participated in "Journey Together Faithfully: The ELCA Studies in Sexuality". New activities sponsored by Parish Life Committee included a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper and Spring Clean Day. In 2005 "a Strategic Planning process helped to discern the direction of ministry for Grace" for the next five years. "Council approved Pastor Ray's request for a three-month sabbatical from July 10 to October 9" of 2006 for him to "rest my body, renew my passion for ministry and recharge my spiritual batteries."

Grace embarked on an ELCA-developed capital fund campaign, Advancing Christ's Ministry, in 2007 to "pay down the debt from church expansion". Also known as "Set Us Free From \$1.3 (million)", over \$700,000 was donated and pledged. Even though economic hardships struck with the Great Recession of 2008, Grace members faithfully contributed to the "Raise the Roof" campaign for facility repairs, and weekly church attendance averaged 300. Anne Monroe, Director of Youth Ministries, resigned in mid-2008, and Virginia McLean became the new Director of Youth and Family Ministries in January 2009. Exciting things were happening as Grace approached the second decade of the 21st Century!

Grace from 2010-2023

The period from 2010 until 2023 was marred by mass shootings that continued 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 forty-eight 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 thirteenth 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 fourteenth 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 twenty 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 fifteenth 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 sixteenth and seventeenth 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. On July 2nd, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Plair Roddey, a Friend of Grace for 70 years, presented the congregation with a resolution thanking the church for always being welcoming and inclusive. 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 catered anniversary dinner on September 17th. In October, the Grace Festival Choir and Winthrop Chamber Singers combined to present a concert called *Celebrate 100 Years of Music*, and Grace members and friends joyfully sang together at Beer & Hymns. The anniversary year culminated in December with a Cookies, Cocoa and Carols Party 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 twenty-three 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 in 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!!