

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Early Years

by Richard S. Denton

I have the honor and privilege of being the oldest baptized member of Grace church, performed by the Reverend Schroder in 1929 and I remember most all of the transitions since.

I write these memoirs as well as I can remember hoping that some of you might be interested in a little history of our church. Grace was a mission church established by the SC synod in 1923. It was primarily built for the benefit for Lutheran students enrolled at the all-women's Winthrop College in Rock Hill and partly financed by the Lutheran Women's Circle of South Carolina. The all-girls school as it was called had uniform code of all, Blue. In the fall the first Sunday after the enrollment the students would form a blue line and march down Oakland Avenue, with group dropping off to their favorite church. The Lutherans had the shortest trip. The College President and his wife and the staff were at the front of the line. It was interesting to watch. The enrollment at Winthrop was about 900 and the size of our church about 85, not counting the students which varied.

The layout of the building was designed and built in the shape of a cross with the two chancel wings. One side held the baptismal fount and the right side was the elevated choir. An aerial view would show the site as a beautiful Rock Cross...it is unique with Gray Rock exterior construction from the natural Rock Quarry at Winnsboro, SC. Windows with colored panes down the sides and an impressive trio window rising over the altar showing Jesus ascending to the highest. With the bright sun through in the early morning it is like a beam from Heaven.

The depression was going on developing hard times and it was a challenge to increase the congregation and also pay on our debt. At one time we could not meet our obligation and a threat of losing the mission. Our Pastor stepped in and made some payments out of his personal fund and other congregations were eyeballing a possible opportunity to obtain the nice piece of property. We came out of the threat stable. We paid our Pastor back recognizing him and expressed our thanks.

In the beginning the Pastor did it all, secretary, visitation, bulletins, church news and worship preparation and with the help only of one mimeograph machine. There were no hired personnel. the men of the church did all the maintenance especially the property committee. The ladies of the church handled cleaning, communion preparation, and most of the Sunday School, especially teachers.

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. Later on when we attained the money we installed an automatic feed furnace, so that man could go to worship. No such thing as an air conditioner, so on a hot Sunday we opened all windows, had two ceiling fans and cooled our bodies with fans placed in the pews by the local funeral homes and they were needed especially with a hot Sermon! We would come to the altar for Communion which was held once a month. I constructed the altar for communion which was held once a month. I constructed in my workshop two lecterns, a line of clothes hangers for in the narthex, and a five inch stand for the gold

cross on the altar, to raise it upward, which was located in the center of the altar. One lectern was placed in the narthex for the registration of visitors. All the pieces were finished in red mahogany.

There was no shrubbery at the time. The men kept the grass cut with push reel mowers. The choir room was next to the chancel where they dress, and they cracked the door open and sang a call to worship tune to begin the service. Then they proceeded to the choir area. The choir needing men, so I joined the choir with three other men, and we learned to usher, which required patience gathering men to serve for some of them serving two months. As the church grew, we added an early service at 8:30 AM. There was so much to handle that I appointed a head usher for the 8:30 service. One pastor wanted the ushers list for the year. This was hard to do for that period of time. But I had the church mail postcards to the ushers that were due to come in as a reminder. During the start of the service, when the liturgy there were certain times to enter, and it was marked in the bulletin. To avoid interruptions for that part of the worship, this was later discontinued.

The parsonage behind the church had the church office and one Sunday School room upstairs. Since we needed more space is why we used the parsonage. Later on we went into debt and bought the brick house next to the church on Oakland Avenue, after some controversy, when Paster Lineberger left. It was used for a Sunday school room and the church office in the front. Then the church basement was used as a fellowship hall as needed. The property committee men painted the interior of that house. During the time the men worked a night to build a kitchen in the basement of the Fellowship Hall.

I remember way back when the church budget total was around \$11,000.00. We were still small but active.

World War II came, and it is sad to say that it took a war to bring the United States out of a deep depression. Some of the church's young men joined or were drafted into the Armed Services. L. C. Denton, Jr. who started the organ fund in 1943, was killed in action. His parents finished the fund. We installed the electronic organ, and it was dedicated to him in his memory. Maxine Caulder was organist and choir director for many years. As the years went by, we finally were able to purchase a pipe organ. It was a beautiful change, as the acoustics were great in the sanctuary. The choir and organ were moved to the balcony for a change for a few years. but it was decided to move the assembly back to the altar area where it is today. Each Sunday back then at 10:00 AM we had an assembly for Sunday School with a program, then we would break off to classrooms.

I love Grace Lutheran. In my time, I have served on just about every committee: Church Council, Assistant Sunday School Superintendent, Sunday School Teacher - fifth grade, Sunday School Treasurer when it was separate from the General Budget. The Property Committee where I served a long time and I was head usher for 15 years.

The church has been remodeled to accommodate expansion and is a beautiful addition to Rock Hill and serves the community with participating programs, and receptions, a voting place precinct. The beautiful cathedral interior of the sanctuary all is reverent. The worship is formal with a confession and communion each Sabbath. You feel refreshed with God's Word, and then you leave from Grace Church you will feel enhanced with your faith. It is a holy place.

Composition by: Richard S. Denton, Writer, February 2017