

Centennial Temple Talk – 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!

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