

Grace Rocks the First 89 Years

A Condensed History of Grace Lutheran Church

1923 – 2012

On April 15, 1923, a temporary church was established and on June 21st the church adopted the ULCA (United Lutheran Church in America) model constitution and chose the name Grace. June 21st the congregation called its first pastor, Reverend H. A. Schroder.

This was the culmination of nearly ten years of efforts by a small band of Lutherans to form a church in Rock Hill. In 1914 at Winthrop College a group led by Miss Fannie Beckman and college librarian Clara Louise Voight began holding services each Sunday morning in one of the college's classrooms. When the group had to abandon the classroom, Miss Beckman organized a Lutheran students' reading circle which met each Sunday afternoon in her room at Winthrop. They read from *The Lutheran Church Visitor*. Three of those students later became members of Grace Lutheran Church. They were Mrs. T. L. Bridges, Sr. (Lucille Lathan) of Newberry, SC, Mrs. H. H. Felder (Lottie Hipp) of Ellore, SC, and Mrs. Ashley Wannamaker (Pearl Haigler) of Orangeburg, SC. These ladies were joined in 1923 by the following signers of the charter: Mr. and Mrs. D. E. Hood; Mrs. M. E. Rudisill, Barbara, Lois, Lena, and Jason Rudisill; Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Lutz; Mr. and Mrs. W.C. Corzine, Gladys and David Corzine; Mr. E. H. Barr; Mrs. F. W. Enniss; Mrs. J. P. Tatham and William Tatham; Mrs. W. L. Reinhardt; Mrs. W. J. Tally; Rev. and Mrs. H. A. Schroder.

From 1918, when Miss Beckman resigned, until 1920, there was little interest in conducting Lutheran services in Rock Hill. Those of Lutheran background sought other church homes, until the decision was made to begin a Lutheran congregation in Rock Hill. Local Lutherans gladly accepted and organized a congregation of 14 charter members listed above. Synod President Dr. Black and students from Southern Lutheran Seminary in Columbia conducted services during the winter months, but few services were held during the summer. The Rock Hill Chamber of Commerce offered the use of their hall as a place of worship, and thus Grace Lutheran became a reality!

Pastor Schroder served Grace as its first minister from June 1, 1923 to November 1, 1931. His salary was paid by three sources. The Women's Missionary Society of the ULCA agreed to pay the major portions of the pastor's salary, the Board of Education, ULCA, promised support because there were Lutheran students at Winthrop, and the congregation paid the remainder. After a few years and much work, the small congregation was ready to start building a church of their own, and on December 12, 1925 the cornerstone of Grace was laid. The total cost of Grace Lutheran Church, completely equipped, was approximately \$32,000. The WMS contributed \$20,000 leaving the congregation with an obligation of \$12,000.

On May 2, 1926, the beautiful stone church was ready for occupancy. The membership had grown to 35, and Sunday School attendance numbered 46. In addition, 37 Winthrop students and 5 faculty persons worshiped at Grace. Clearly Winthrop meant much to the life of the congregation.

Grace financed its church building in a unique way, asking each woman in the South Carolina Synodical Society to contribute three dollars per year for five years. The women at Grace earned \$1,000 in thirteen months for the church's furnishings. Many fund raisers were held and a booth at the York County Fair helped to raise money. Many contributors toward the building of Grace were townspeople of other denominations and interested parties throughout North and South Carolina.

In 1927 Grace hosted the South Carolina Synodical Convention. Among the tremendous duties of hosting was the task of finding lodging for around 200 delegates from visiting congregations. The people of Rock Hill gave generous assistance to Grace by providing necessary housing for delegates for two days and one night.

During Reverend Schroder's eight years at Grace, WMS paid in full their pledge of \$20,000, the Men's Federation(Brotherhood) paid a portion of \$5,200 on the lot and \$1,000 on the paving assessment. In 1930, the Synod took over the balance of the unpaid portion pledged by the Brotherhood, and the congregation indebtedness was reduced from \$12,000 to approximately \$3,700. The membership had grown from 14 to 46. Pastor Schroder resigned in October, 1931, to become pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Durham, North Carolina.

Grace extended a call to the Reverend Carl B. Caughman, a native of Mississippi who was just back in the States after serving as a missionary to India. His first Sunday at Grace was December 1, 1931. During the two years that he served Grace there was a close fellowship that helped members and Winthrop students deal with the gloom of the Depression. Twenty new members joined Grace during Pastor Caughman's tenure. He resigned in 1933 to accept a call to Grace Church in Prosperity, South Carolina.

Reverend W. J. Roof served as pastor at Grace from April 15, 1934 until January 1, 1938. Pastor Roof believed in young people and in community. The organization of the Lutheran Student Association created a closer bond between Grace and Winthrop students. Mrs. Roof was the link between college girls and the congregation, and Pastor Roof conducted Vespers at Winthrop many times talking to the entire student body. A new youth group was developed by Pastor Roof called the Light Brigade and Luther League, forerunners of LCY (Lutheran Church Youth.) Pastor Roof was determined that the church should serve the community and neighborhood. He served as President of the Lions Club where he was instrumental in providing glasses for the near blind. Soon Grace became known as the "Little Stone Church," and its pastor became a voice know to the sightless. The Roof's laid the spiritual foundation for the building of a

parsonage, but it was not until 1939 that it became a reality. During the Depression, many times the congregation was unable to pay the pastor's salary. Church members shared the harvest from their gardens with the pastor and his family. Also, when a member could purchase groceries for his own family, he bought enough for the pastor. Creative compensation kept food on the table while dedication to the Lord's work kept the pastor in the pulpit. Pastor Roof accepted a call to become pastor at Vale, North Carolina on January 1, 1938.

Dr. Henry Smith Petrea became Grace's fourth pastor on March 1, 1938. He became the longest serving minister in the history of Grace Lutheran, serving until February 1, 1954. Many things happened during these years: a church loan was paid in full by May 18, 1947; the parish completely paid the pastor's salary and increased it each year; a new roof was put on the church; a Hammond organ was installed. The parsonage was also built during this time period, and provided a popular gathering place for Winthrop students each Sunday afternoon. Another improvement at Grace during Pastor Petrea's tenure was the renovation of the church basement with all the work done by the congregation.

Reverend Everett I. Lineberger was called to become Grace Lutheran Church's fifth pastor in April 1954. He accepted the call effective June 6 after his graduation from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary and served faithfully until July 1958. Among his many achievements while at Grace were: creation of a Parish Education Cabinet; congregation adopted a Sunday School Constitution; Grace began a sound education program; repair work began on the church and parsonage; carpet was installed on the church aisles; a seven room parish House on Oakland Avenue was purchased to serve as an office for the pastor, five Sunday School classrooms, and adequate nursery. Membership grew from 100 to 157 and the operating budget doubled. In 1955 the congregation painted the doors to Grace Lutheran red to symbolize "Blood of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit." The doors became a landmark for Rock Hill and a welcome to all those who wished to worship within. Pastor Lineberger submitted his letter of resignation in July 1958 to become pastor of Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Charleston, South Carolina.

The sixth pastor of Grace Lutheran was the Reverend Charles L. Shealy, Jr. Pastor Shealy came to Grace from St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Thunderbolt, Georgia. He served as pastor at Grace from January 10, 1959 until August 15, 1969. During Pastor Shealy's tenure many things occurred: education was a priority, Bible School was extended to two weeks instead of one and Weekday Church School began its eighth year; Grace began using the new *Common Service Book and Hymnal*; the church became a member of the new Lutheran Church in America (LCA.) From 1960 to 1962 extensive physical improvements continued at Grace. A room was renovated and decorated for Winthrop Lutheran students, the church basement was completely renovated, and the kitchen facilities were updated. The outside of the building was sandblasted and treated with silicone, while the inside was painted, an air conditioner installed, and new light fixtures added to the nave. In 1963 Grace celebrated its 40th anniversary with an increase of 238 baptized members and 158 confirmed members. Pastor Henry Schroder returned to Grace to help the congregation celebrate with a special service on September 22, 1963. While at Grace, Pastor Shealy celebrated his 25th year of Lutheran Ministry. On May 12, 1968 the Grace congregation honored him for this service. In August 1969, Pastor Charles Shealy accepted a call to Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Pomaria, ending a decade of service to Grace.

Reverend John E. Boyd Jr., of Statesville, North Carolina accepted the call to be the seventh pastor of Grace Lutheran while still a senior at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. One Sunday morning in late 1969, while Grace was without a pastor, the congregation heard a very promising senior seminarian, John Boyd. The congregation liked what it heard, and young people were impressed and expressed their approval to the committee searching for a pastor. The call to the young seminarian was issued and accepted in January 1970, but the congregation had to wait until July, after the ordination of Reverend Boyd, before he could become official pastor.

Before Reverend Boyd and his wife, Linda, moved to Rock Hill, the church council had begun updating residential policy for a pastor of the church. Council suggested that the parsonage no longer be used for a pastor's residence, but that it be turned into office space and much needed church

school rooms. The pastor would be given a housing allowance, choose his own housing, and be responsible for its upkeep. The congregation voted in favor of the new policy.

Pastor and Mrs. Boyd brought an enthusiastic approach to Grace Church. Reverend Boyd, a graduate of Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina, received his Master of Divinity Degree from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. He served his internship at Christ Lutheran Church in San Diego and worked as Youth Director of a Lutheran Church in Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii. His varied background provided a good foundation for the work he was to do for Grace.

Early on, Pastor Boyd's community interests became well known. He served as chairman of the Drug Abuse Council and Junior Women's Club Girl's Home. As an active member of the Rock Hill Ministerial Association, his messages frequently were heard on local radio.

During Pastor Boyd's tenure many exciting things happened: the Youth Ministry program grew and the confirmation classes set a precedent for future graduating classes by presenting Grace Church with a beautiful dogwood tree for the church lawn; the Golden Anniversary was held in June 1973, with a week of events featuring former ministers and guests ministers from the synod; energy at Grace showed revitalization by greater activity in the LCW and scouting programs; a new seven and one-half rank Zimmer Pipe Organ including chimes was purchased and installed January 23, 1975; a food pantry for elderly and infirmed persons was begun; a Good Samaritan Fund was established for those needing assistance on a one time basis.

The Lutheran student program began moving toward a social ministry approach, concerned with tutoring and work with area underprivileged children. By January 1, 1975, Grace church had 385 baptized members. When Pastor Boyd submitted his resignation in August 1975 to accept a parish in Savannah, Georgia, Grace Church was strong in fellowship. Youth Ministry participation was at an all-time high, and many other church programs including the women's circles were reaching out to the Rock Hill community.

The Reverend Hollis A. Miller came to Grace Lutheran from St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a mission congregation in Southport, North Carolina. Pastor Miller, his wife Susan, and sons Jeffrey and Jonathan began their ministry July 1, 1976. During Pastor Miller's tenure many things occurred: a new educational/multipurpose building was constructed; Grace received 89 new baptized members in 1976; the old parsonage and parish house were demolished to make room for the expansion, and the adjoining property with a house was purchased. Programs at Grace continued to grow including the LCW, confirmation classes, youth groups, scouting programs, and basketball teams. In March 1981, Pastor Miller announced his resignation to accept a call to Zion Lutheran Church in Lexington, South Carolina effective June 15.

Grace Church issued a call to Reverend R. E. Lybrand, Jr., in April 1982. Pastor Lybrand, his wife Jackie, and children Mauri and Brett, quickly became a much loved and respected first family of Grace. During Pastor's initial message to the congregation in August 1982, he outlined his pastoral policies and procedures, giving the congregation ready access to the pastor. He signed his message "Pastor Rammy," and from that day forward that was how the congregation addressed him.

By 1987 Pastor R. E. Lybrand, Jr. had instituted many new programs, strengthening and growing the congregation of Grace. Pastor Rammy was instrumental in forming a second Sunday morning service held at 8:30. This service began as a folk service and has grown into a contemporary worship attracting many different worshippers. Grace continued to grow in outreach to the community, supporting local agencies such as: Boy's Home, Girl's Home, Project Hope, Good Samaritan Fund, Meals-on-Wheels, Christmas Giving Tree, Children's Attention Home, and numerous others. Youth ministry at Grace increased to the point that a van was purchased to transport the young people to their many retreats, scouting activities, and sports competitions. LCY worked hard to raise money toward and promote interest in the van acquisition. Many new organizations were developed at Grace during Pastor Rammy's service as minister. Grace Supper Club was formed, Lutheran Men's group began meeting, and a new vibrant organization of members aged 50 plus was born! This group offered study opportunities, travel, and service to the community. During Pastor Lybrand's

tenure, Grace participated in the Intern Program through Southern Seminary in Columbia. Two interns served at Grace during this time. Debbie Wood was the first intern and Kathy Chartier became Grace's second intern. Other improvements to Grace during Pastor Rammy's ministry were beautiful stained glass windows, installation of a handicap ramp, and the purchase of handbells that added to the much valued growth of Grace's music program. In 1988, Pastor Lybrand announced his decision to accept a call to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia, NC. He preached his last sermon at Grace on May 29, 1988.

Grace continued to grow, and Pastor Guy Shealy was appointed interim pastor. On November 6, 1988 Grace voted to call Reverend William R Cobb. He accepted the call on January 1, 1989. A Long Range Capital Development Fund was established by the church council shortly before Pastor Cobb's arrival. On April 19, 1989 Pastor Cobb wrote that many good things were happening at Grace and the Capital Development Fund was growing. New land for a parking lot was bought and landscaping was established. Meanwhile inside of Grace new programs were growing and developing. Youth Ministry experienced growth in scouting, sports programs, LCY, and children's choirs. Grace welcomed the formation of a new mission church in Rock Hill, Epiphany Lutheran, and its minister Pastor Jeff Lingle. September 1989 brought about disaster in the form of Hurricane Hugo. Rock Hill was one of the many cities that felt the force from this hurricane. Thankfully, Grace was spared much damage. Only the age-old oaks were damaged and landscaping took days to restore. The congregation's ministry to the community remained a vital facet in the life of Grace. During 1990, Grace was recognized by many service agencies as being one of the "most actively involved" churches in Rock Hill. In October 1990, Pastor Cobb announced his resignation that was accepted effective October 15, 1990.

Changes for Grace were enormous in the late 1990's. The director of campus ministry since 1979, resigned to begin a full-time position elsewhere, and the church secretary resigned leaving Grace with vacancies in three critical areas of church life: pastor, director of campus ministry, and secretary. Still the Holy Spirit continued to move throughout the congregation encouraging lay members to do the work of the church with

dedication and perseverance. The presence of a pastor was sorely missed, but there was no lack of enthusiasm for the ministry Grace was commissioned to fulfill. The church council called for volunteers to help perform the visitation ministry in the absence of a pastor. A job description for a new campus minister was established requiring a four year degree from an accredited college and a flexible thirty hour week. Secretarial duties were assumed by a member of Grace and a group of volunteers. By December 1990 a new secretary was hired, and Reverend Dr. Carveth Mitchell of Charlotte was sent to serve as interim pastor. In February 1991 a new director of Campus Ministries was hired. Gradually a new feeling of optimism began to spread throughout the membership of Grace.

Pastor A Glenn Boland accepted the call from Grace on August 12, 1991. His first Sunday was September 15, 1991. Grace began to once again flourish under Pastor Boland's leadership. Recruitment began in all areas of church life. A new active Altar Guild was formed in January 1992. The music program grew with the formation of Junior and Adult handbell choirs while the folk musicians spent hours practicing for leadership in an alternative music worship service at Grace. By April 1992, the campus ministries were active and growing. The Girl and Boy Scout troops nearly doubled in membership, new Senior High LCY and Junior High LCY were enjoying meetings, and the congregation received a special recognition, a gold star rating, from AAL, Branch 5255, Rock Hill, for their exemplary volunteer service to the community. Under Pastor Boland's tenure in December 1992, Pat Kirk was hired as Administrative Assistant. She quickly became an integral part of Grace and celebrates her 20th anniversary with the church this year! In August 1993, Garry White, former Grace member and Winthrop professor, became Grace's third intern. On September 1994, he returned to Grace as a part-time member of the staff, serving his senior year internship at Southern Seminary as Director of Youth Ministry at Grace church. Pastor White's ordination was at Grace Church on July 10, 1995. In July 1993 council established a Seminarian Fund. Michael Comer, Garry White, and Andrea Wiegand benefitted from this fund and each became an ordained minister. Outreach to the community continued to grow with Grace supporting many various organizations. In March 1994, the congregation

began participating in the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen providing meals for the hungry throughout the community. Randy Wallace became the first full-time Director of Music Ministries on February 13, 1994. A new keyboard was purchased and became an integral part of worship services. Pastor Boland accepted a call to Kimball Memorial Church in Kannapolis, NC in September 1995. Reverend Gary Lyerly was designated interim pastor and served Grace into the year 1996.

Reverend E. Ray Mohrmann accepted the call from Grace in July 1996. His first Sunday was August 25, 1996, and he quickly became known as Pastor Ray! Under Pastor Ray's leadership Grace continued to contribute to the needs of the community. A new and stronger music program was enhanced by the hiring of a full-time Director of Music, David Platts in August 2002. New opportunities developed along with the continuance of old ones. Added were The Angel Tree, the Warm Clothing Box, Habitat for Humanity, and a newly formed community program for homeless families, Interfaith Hospitality Network (Family Promise.) Also celebrated in 1997 were the 75th anniversary of Grace and the ordination of Michael Clarke Comer in June 1997. Michael became the first "child" of the congregation to be ordained in the ministry and was followed a few years later by Andrea Anderson Wiegand. During Pastor Ray's ministry many things changed at Grace. By 2002 Grace had increased its building size to 32,000-square-feet, added a new pipe organ, and included a fellowship hall that was added to the existing building erected in 1926 and 1979. Dedication of the new building was held on October 27, 2002. Many groups and organizations use Grace's classrooms and fellowship hall. This has been a blessing to both Grace and the community! Pastor Mohrmann announced that he had accepted a call to Epiphany Lutheran in Winston Salem, NC. His last Sunday was July 18, 2019.

Pastor Linda Anderson was appointed as interim pastor until a new minister was called. Pastor Anderson addressed the spiritual needs of Grace as it searched for a new pastor. During her time with Grace, the congregation began the program Healthy Congregations.

In September 2011 Grace extended a call to Pastor Christine Stoxen. Her first Sunday at Grace was October 9, 2011. Pastor Chris has already

made a big impression on Grace and the community. Programs have been implemented that have strengthened the spirit of the congregation and involved more people in the ministry of Grace. Among the new programs are Quillows (folding quilts made for those students going away to college), Faith Milestone Ministry (beginning at birth with the presentation of a chest and honoring each milestone in a child's life until they are grown), and Grace Muggers (a group consisting of teams of volunteers who visit new worshippers within 24 hours and give them a coffee mug filled with information about Grace and its ministries). Plans are being made for a first Homecoming at Grace on May 20, 2012 and new positions for youth and campus ministry have been established. With Pastor Chris' leadership and the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing in its midst, Grace is anticipating new growth and outreach in the community for years to come.