

50 YEARS OF
GRACE

MEMORIES OF GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR CHURCH, 1964-2014

Writings from the pastors, members and friends of Grace as they reflect on the first fifty years of ministry within and beyond these walls

FALL 2014

For Grace Lutheran Church, Apple Valley 2014 By Pastor Gerhard Knutson (served 1964-1971)

It was in June 1964 that I received a letter of call from Dr. Melford Knutson (no relation), District President of Southeast MN District of the ALC, to begin a new congregation. I was serving Ascension Lutheran in Thousand Oaks, CA. My wife Gloria and I and our three small children said our farewells and moved to Apple Valley. Orrin Thompson, developer, had allocated 5 acres on County Rd #42 for a church. The ALC bought it, as there were plans to start 40 new congregations that year.

A home on Oriole drive was purchased for \$17,000 and construction was begun on the church before there was a congregation. I was given the privilege to select the name, so I chose **Grace Lutheran**. A temporary worker named Ina Bell Thompson and I made over 600 visits to homes, no congregation yet. We invited folks to come, not knowing who would come. I even invited a family from Iowa so someone would be there.

Blue folding chairs, hymnals and a small organ were delivered and the first service was announced for Oct 12, 1964. Amazingly, 212 people came and we began an exciting ministry together. Almost immediately we moved to have two services to accommodate people. Sunday School began with kids and teachers in every nook and cranny. It was noisy and busy but fun.

The congregation was made up of young families with children, lots of kids. People were enthusiastic and willing to be a part of a new venture of faith. Homes sold for \$13,000-\$17,000. All had an apple tree and sod to lay, so a common experience bound us together. An appointed steering committee began making decisions and planning for the future. It was an exciting time and folks pitched in.

It was in January of 1965 that District President Knutson came for the charter signing, and I believe there were some over 400 signed up. By 1971 we had grown to 1,400, had refinanced the loan, and were talking about expanding and building!!

Anecdotes on the life of Grace Lutheran

1 Baptisms

Many babies were born, about 50-60 a year for several years. Most of them were born at Fairview Southdale Hospital. Since we did have a formal baptism font for the first years we used a silver bowl we had received as a wedding gift. A family with 9 children requested baptism, the oldest had been baptized in Hawaii when the father was in the Navy. The mother was not baptized, so on a Sunday we baptized the mother and 8 children at one time!!

2 Church Bell

At a brainstorming session it was suggested that we have a church bell. So a committee was formed and a bell tower was erected. A bell was obtained from a church in South Dakota. We had a bell for some years!

3 Nursery School

There were lots of children, hundreds! It was decided to begin a nursery school. It was begun, materials were purchased. Neoma Isaac was the first teacher and soon added staff.

4 Animals

Since we were built on open prairie many animals shared our space. An occasional bird would enter the sanctuary; many mice lived there and made weddings exciting. They delighted the children but parents took a dim view of them.

5 Seminary interns

The work load was enormous membership was reaching 1000, so a young man from the congregation (Dennis Nelson) was hired and was a godsend.

6 Leadership

People were so willing to step into positions of leadership; training events and retreats were held often to encourage and support men and women leaders.

Graceful Memories of Grace

By David Quarberg Pastor (served 1984-1997)

A fond memory from my first years at Grace

That's going back a ways! I recall that finding a competent youth director was a problem in those early years at Grace. In working with that committee and the church council I proposed that we consider a different model – that of a youth and family pastor. That was agreed to and the District Office gave us the name of Brice Smith, a recent seminary graduate who was awaiting a call and who was seeking a position in the area of youth ministry. When Brice came for his interview he was dressed casually and prominently displayed a large pin of a Holstein cow on his sweater. (What was that about?) Brice's energetic and enthusiastic manner swayed the opinions of the committee in his favor and we elected to extend the call to him to serve as Youth and Family pastor. All of you who know Brice can remember that Brice lit up whatever space he entered. Sometimes his behavior was more teenage than the teenagers, but that forthright and honest presentation of himself endeared him to us. As the months went by he noticed a young woman who played the piano for the Saturday service. He asked me who she was and I gave him the name – Jan Eichler. He followed up and it wasn't much longer that we were all invited to a wedding. Cow pins were on display that day on the groomsmen's lapels (where did that come from?). However, a confrontation between the mother of the bride and the groomsmen brought that display to a speedy halt and the wedding proceeded with nary a moo!

Two funny stories

The Grace adult choir was a "showcase" musical ensemble of which we were justly proud (and I assume you still are!). Fred Hilary conducted the choir and his wife, Joyce, accompanied. Fred and Joyce were accustomed to being showcased so they proposed a change in the choir's location to the right of the chancel. A large set of risers was constructed and an elevated podium for Fred appeared. **And** a colored line was painted on the floor demarcating the choir area (shades of the flight deck of an aircraft carrier!) – no non-choir people were allowed beyond that line. I can't remember the occasion, probably a fifth graders' first communion on Ash Wednesday – a **big!!!** service -- with an overflow attendance anticipated. We were not disappointed. The church was packed and people were waiting to find seats. Pete Eisele was on the usher team that night and he took the initiative to start setting up chairs that encroached on the sacred space protecting the choir seating. Joyce was at the piano playing the prelude and I was standing by the entry to the sacristy and was able to observe the anticipated confrontation between Joyce and Pete. When she saw Pete putting those chairs in place (in the choir's space!) she quit playing, jumped up from the piano bench and marched toward Pete, pointing her right index finger at him and threatening him with gestures that signaled: "Not here you don't do that!" Pete gestured in the direction of the people waiting to be seated, seemingly appealing to Joyce, "What am I going to do? We can't let those people sit on the floor!" Happily, Joyce and Pete negotiated a compromise: one row of chairs could be allowed to invade choir territory. Armageddon had been

forestalled – for the present at least! Joyce returned to the piano bench and resumed playing the prelude as if nothing had happened. I was collapsing with laughter. But what do you do? A proper demeanor was adopted and worship began with a sobered pastor laughing inwardly for days. The second story comes from a confirmation service. The confirmands were instructed to choose a Bible verse that was meaningful to them. Each confirmand came forward when Marge Johnson called their name. Marge called the name of this one young man and he read his Bible verse: “Jesus wept.” Then he looked at me with a sly grin and went to the altar rail. I looked out where his parents were sitting. Mom and Dad had both buried their heads in their hands and ducked down as low as they could get in the pew. The kid looked at me as if to say, “Gotcha!” I had great difficulty mustering up pastoral decorum as I spoke the words of the confirmation blessing to him!

What Grace came to mean for me

One of the staff positions put in place during my tenure at Grace was that of Shared Ministry. Marsha Collin was the first director and performed admirably. I think that the title, “Shared Ministry,” is an apt way for me to describe what Grace came to mean for me. I was a pastor and was expected to minister to the congregation. But what I experienced was the congregation ministered to me! I am very grateful and thankful for that experience, and I trust that the Spirit of Christ is at work among you with more of the same!

Faithfully,

David Quarberg (aka “Q”)

Cherished Memories of Grace

By Pastor Scot Turnbull (served 1978-1984)

Congratulations on your 50th anniversary celebration! It looks like you have much planned and I appreciate your invitation to participate. Regretfully I will not be able to attend because of a wedding I have scheduled for that weekend. Greetings to those in attendance!

“What is most meaningful about my time at Grace?” Being my first call, the variety of ministry certainly helped me as I sought to pastor other congregations. I have often said, “I gained about 30 years of experience in those 5 ½ years.” Certainly those times spent with people in worship, struggles, wonderful life events, friendships formed, trying to help in establishing a firm faith relationship for young people to move into the future – all continue to be cherished memories. Time has passed and we look back, but also experience contentment in the present and anticipate the future, celebrating our God who has been faithful to us, is faithful, and will fulfill God’s promises in ways which are beyond our imagining.

May God’s grace be sufficient for you. May God’s love, joy, hope and peace flow through you to others.

In Christ,

Scot Turnbull

“Grace is a perspective and a place”

By Pastor Brice Eichlersmith (served 1985-1994)

Humans spend their whole life being cajoled and challenged to see their life through God eyes. Grace is a way of seeing, perspective, which gives us a way of being a beloved child of God. Grace is God’s plan, purpose and promise for you and me.

Grace, a church in Apple Valley, MN, gave me a gift to see from God’s perspective. I was ordained there, met my wife Jann and married her there, daughter Martha was baptized there. I was mentored by Pastor Q, the staff and the community of beloved children of God there.

Grace the place changed my life, so I could see God’s Grace active in my life and lives of others. God’s Grace uses all of the world as a conduit for His Divine Love. That Love changes our perspective. Life then becomes filled with gratitude and being a conduit of that love rather than life as a commodity to be used to satisfy ego needs or wants.

Happy 50th Anniversary Grace! Welcome to middle age, it is fabulous!

Love,

Pastor Brice Eichlersmith

By Pastor Christine Hunziker (served 1999-2003)

Dear friends,

I will not be able to be with you to celebrate your anniversary in October, but I wanted to send my greetings and, with your permission, would like to share with you a story about God’s Grace – Grace Lutheran, that is. It remains one of my favorite stories. Some of you know the story because you were a part of it, and I hope you will find my retelling of this story acceptable. It’s a great story about just one of the times when Grace lived up to its name.

I had been an associate pastor at Grace Lutheran in Apple Valley for less than a year and I had just returned from a summer vacation when this all happened.

At a morning staff meeting I was told about some terrible weather that had hit the area when I was on vacation and about how several homes in Eagan had been flooded with water that storm drains would not handle. One of those homes belonged to members of our congregation – Mark and Brenda Christenson.

Pastor Swenson was out of town, so I was told that it was up to me to go out to their home and “offer our prayers.” I thought about those “little instructions” as I drove out to Eagan that same morning. I had no idea what I would find at the Christenson home or just what I might have to offer. When Brenda answered the door and asked me to come in, I saw a home that had been emptied of furniture and was in the process of being torn apart by this young couple. Mark and Brenda told me that they had two little girls, and they were all living, “for now,” in a motel room that Mark’s employer was renting for them. They were still responsible for their mortgage payments on the house, and insurance would not cover the losses on the houses that were flooded. They were left on their own to rebuild their home.

I told them that I had been sent out to “pray,” but as I looked around, I knew that **“God was not going to accept any prayers that didn’t have feet!”** I think those words came out of my mouth before I

even knew what they meant. Mark and Brenda looked at me like I was crazy. I then explained that I thought the church, which was large enough to have the resources, would just have to rebuild their home for them; and, I added, they should give me a few days, after which I would return and ask them to just give us the keys to the house and trust that we would do the work.

That Sunday I was scheduled to preach on the text about “The Feeding of the Five Thousand.” I asked the congregation if they knew how that “miracle” worked and what it might have looked like to the people present that day on the hillside with Jesus. I suggested a few ways it “might have worked,” but ended with the acknowledgement that we will probably never really know how a miracle works until we participate in one ourselves. Then, I told the congregation about the Christenson family and suggested that it was an opportunity to participate in one of those miracles. A special collection that morning was taken to help purchase supplies that would be needed, and signup sheets in the narthex listed the many ways that people could help get the work done. The response was incredible, and a few days later I got a call from the Property Commission chairperson telling me that they would take on the project. After that, I told Mark and Brenda that their house was not only going to be as good as it had been, but that it would be even better. While the work was being done at the house, we hung a sign across the living room wall that read “Jesus Still Works Miracles.”

So, that’s my version of the story. I’m sure that a lot of people still remember other details, and I hope they still find as much joy in remembering that time as I do. It was just one of those times when Grace lived up to its name.

God has blessed you to be a blessing, and so you have been.

My fondest regards,

(Retired Pastor) Christine Hunziker

"What is most meaningful about my time at Grace?"

By Pastor Therese Helker (served 2004-2013)

There wasn't a single year that I had the privilege of serving Grace Lutheran that didn't have something -- and I would say multiple things -- of meaning happen. It was where my girls were confirmed, the place where I met and married my husband, the place where my husband was ordained. I worked with congregational leaders and staff that were and still are exceptional at what they do in service to God. If there was one thing that I would uplift, however, it would be the trust of the congregation in allowing me to care for them. It is what prepared me so beautifully for the hospice ministry I do today. I will always be grateful to them for this.

Memories of Grace

By Dick Russell (Charter member with wife Ginger)

1. Fire

Thinking back over the years at Grace, one event that I recall vividly is the fire that occurred in the church office of the old building. I remember hearing the voice coming from my pager saying there was a fire at Grace Lutheran Church. Since it was later in the evening when the building was not usually occupied, and knowing that there was no fire alarm system, I figured it must have a good start for a passer-by to notice and call it in.

As we arrived, I could see smoke coming from the building and thought, "Where are we going to meet to worship with our building gone?" As we entered the building, I could see that the smoke was coming from the southeast corner where the office was located and thought that at least most of the building was not involved. We went into the office area and quickly extinguished the fire.

As we investigated the fire point of origin, and ruled out the possibilities of accident or electrical failure, it was apparent that the origin of this fire was suspicious. After using our hydrocarbon sniffer detector we could pinpoint where an accelerant had been poured on papers and desktop items on a corner desk. I remember thinking, "How could someone deliberately commit this act and destroy a part of our church?"

I remember Pastor Jim commenting on how devastating it was to lose much of his office contents.

2. Another one of my memories of Grace:

I remember way back when when Arlie Thorberg and I were on our hands and knees laying the black and white tile to cover the cement floor in the sanctuary of the first building. I remember feeling that I was really a part of Grace as I was helping to build it. I think many folks would have more feeling for and attachment to Grace if they would donate some time doing projects for the church. This is a feeling that you cannot purchase, it is received by giving of your time and talents.

Grace History

By Stan Nickles (charter member with wife Marlene)

1. How We Became Members at Grace

I was working in the front yard of our new home in Apple Valley in 1963, when a little black VW Beetle drove up and stopped. A large, friendly man got out and walked up to me, and introduced himself as Pastor Knutson of Grace Lutheran Church, which would be opening soon. We shook hands, and I couldn't help but notice his super-large hands. I always thought my dad's hands were big, and it thought that anyone with such big hands, and such a soft, friendly voice, like my dad, must be OK. We talked about family, what I did for a living, the kids, and our church background. He asked us to visit Grace, in a warm, friendly way, and we did. We became charter members, and have been members through thick and thin, since the first service, and it's always been our church home.

2. Some Grace History

I remember our first visit...to a square brick building, with cement floors, folding chairs, a simple pulpit, and a piano. Soon, even before the official opening at Grace, the future members had laid tile in the building, and even a small choir was formed. It was a young members' church, and I only remember one funeral in the first many years, but I do remember many baptisms. The church grew, Sunday folding partitions were added, and after several years, Grace Preschool was added. Space was always a problem

with the rapid growth, an addition was built, and even the use of trailer houses for a while. Years later, the sanctuary building was built. It was a cold walk between the two buildings for years, before the connecting building, and Koinonia Hall was added. Pastors and congregational members have come and gone. Also, church debts and other problems have come and gone. Through all this history, God's guidance has prevailed and has given strength to the people. God will continue his guidance long after the charter members are gone.

Memories of our 50 years at Grace

By Marlene Nickles (charter member with husband Stan)

I have many memories of our fifty years as members of Grace. One special memory comes to mind... It was the year 1990 and our youngest daughter, Barb, was being married at Grace. It also happened to be the summer of construction...of the link between the original building and the new main sanctuary building. I remember the walk into the church, under ladders, dodging sawhorses, and avoiding other construction hazards, working our way into the sanctuary along with all of our guests. It turned out to be a beautiful and meaningful day for all. Just one of many memorable days at Grace.

Stories of Grace

By Betty Ferrin (member since 2004)

My early day story of Grace is of my granddaughter Rachael Ferrin, who had made a [5th grade 1st communion] chalice and went up to communion with our family. After the service she said, "Grandma, I really liked that wine." They have since moved to Duluth and were members of First Lutheran; my son Shawn's funeral was held there in 2004.

My funny stories of Grace are of my two great-granddaughters, Chloe Niemi and Cyla Schiro. Chloe kept telling me she wished her mom would get married at Grace to her stepdad, which did happen. And Cyla has come to Bible study circle and 1st Wednesday with me sometimes. After one Circle visit, Cyla said to me, "Grandma, I love going to Circle with you. I just love all those grandmas."

Grace has given so much love, and I know of no other pastor that is so patient and loving. Pastor John graduated from college with my twin nieces, so I can always keep track of his age. One twin was active in Waconia where Pastor John's son-in-law was pastor. Pastor John was always there for me when my late husband Lloyd was in the hospital, and then in hospice. And he was there for me when I had surgery. The nurse came in, and she asked if he was my son. I told her he was my spiritual son. In one of his previous churches, I had two sisters and a nephew, and he officiated at the marriage of one of my nieces, so I feel he is part of my family.

Grace is my second home and family. Thank you all for your love, care and service to Grace.

A Funny Story from Grace Bible School

By Dodi Matti (member since 2007), as told to me by Sally Schumack

A funny story of our son Logan Matti when he was in Kindergarten GBS:
The class was discussing the events that happened prior to Jesus' death.

Teacher Sally: "So Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. Does everyone know what 'anoint' means?"

Logan: "It's when someone won't leave you alone."

Sally (with a chuckle): "That is 'annoy'."

(I have written this in his baby book and it still makes me giggle!)

High School memories of Grace

By Kyia Knutson and Kathryn Schaefer (young adult members)

We remember in high school spending three of the seven days of the week at Grace, some weeks even more! We made best friends at this place where we are even friends ten years later, going to church together. Happy times in the youth room, from Bill [Helker] building the stadium seats, to Nooma with Anna, and Mama J [Julie Martin] and Mama Dub [Cheryl Willert] painting the youth room in all pastels. SO HAPPY!!!

Youth at Grace

By Nancy Hemmah (member since 1995)

We joined Grace so our children could be confirmed with some of their school classmates. I think Grace does a great job with youth. The tradition of high school ages doing a mission trip was a great impact on our son Scott. It gave him a view of how other children live with less. He was in Juarez, Mexico with Bill Helker, then the youth leader. He came home and said "We fixed someone's roof, and the mom made us tacos on a wood stove. It was the best meal I ever had!"

Kitchen Memories

By Betty Pankuch (member since 1987)

The original kitchen was in the northwest corner of the original building. It was more like a counter – little storage, small stove! The women of the active women's group which met close to monthly earned money to equip the new large functional kitchen. Nancie Brendan was "Keeper of the funds." They were spent with great deliberation and care – new dishes, silverware, large pans and plenty of coffee pots and pitchers. How fun it was to finally be able to make and serve a large meal! Look at how it has grown to Community Meals.

Rummage Sale Memories

By Lexi Wolt (grade 7)

I remember a story from just this past summer. I volunteered with my mom to work at the rummage sale. My friend Jess said that she wanted to come and volunteer, too. She came and helped. We found new strength by lifting all of the heavy tables. ☺ We bought cookies and rode around in the rollerblades for sale. That is my favorite memory of Grace.

Sunday School musicals

By Ginny Stensrud (member since 1969)

I remember when we did the musical with the entire Sunday School. One of the little girls has a line, "With all this singing and dancing..." Instead, what she said was "With all this sinning and dancing..." Of course the congregation got a big laugh and maybe a bit of truth!

Another time working on a "Mellow Drama" with the 6th, 7th and 8th graders, there were not enough parts for all who wanted one. So with some improvising, we created a sheriff, sheriff, sheriff, like a shadow from tall to short, and everything the sheriff said was echoed by the next two. It turned out pretty funny and served the purpose!

One Christmas, Debbie and Scott played Mary and Jesus sitting outside our downstairs family room window with their baby in the cold snow for the Glory group! Very beautiful!

"You've Come a Long Way, Baby!"

By Dick Stensrud (member since 1969)

You remember the old commercial, "You've come a long way baby!" Well the same could be said for Grace and contemporary services. Back in the early 1970's, a number of people wanted to have a contemporary service as well as a traditional service.

I had been a band musician for many years. There were others in our congregation with musical talents as well. Some were family men like myself, some were very talented youth. So we formed a group to play for a contemporary service. Many of you remember this and I would name all of them except for my fear of forgetting someone.

We had blue folders printed with words to contemporary songs, camp songs, Gaither songs and many more. Some Sundays we would put the chairs in circle rows and pass our communion along the rows.

We would distribute the song books on the chairs and at times small groups of women would help us teach the songs to the congregation. We tried to select songs that went with the scripture and sermon for that day. It was totally fun and seriously spiritual. We were not as good as John Koziol and his bands but we were free and dedicated and loved every minute of it.

Youth Memory

By Rachel Munkberg (grade 7)

I loved it when we got to go to Buck Hill and go skiing with our Grace youth friends!

Some Grace memories

By Marsha Collin (member since 1985)

--Our daughter and son-in-law, Karin & Kent, were married at Grace on a very hot, humid day in August. At the time, we were in the midst of building the addition to connect the old building with the sanctuary. Before the service began, Gene's Aunt Elsie spotted something hanging on the brick wall and asked if it was a bird. A quick look confirmed it wasn't a bird, it was a BAT! A bat swooping over everyone during the ceremony or Mary Boehlke's solos? Yikes, I didn't think so! I had brought a sheet to cover the dusty concrete for Karin to stand on for photos under the atrium skylight. Our son Dave and some of the groomsmen rolled up the sheet and swung it at the bat and succeeded in getting it into the atrium - quite a sweaty task while wearing tuxes. They finally caught it near the office. Phew! And of course the wedding was wonderful!

--Reflecting on my nearly 30 years at Grace, I'm very thankful for Pastor Quarberg's vision to have a "Shared Ministry" staff position and for council's approval to hire me and support my attendance at a Share Ministry Workshop. My days as coordinator were incredibly fun and exciting - creating the program, meeting visitors, matching member's gifts with ministry needs and working with very helpful, caring and supportive pastors and staff.

--I'm also thankful for the myriad of Bible Studies and theological book reviews and discussions providing me with deeper insight into the Bible and a clearer understanding of being Lutheran and "Christ for others." It was a faith enriching experience and continues to be.

--All churches have mice, right? Back in the 90's when I was on staff, I recall a Community Meals person telling me they found a dead, engorged, yellow-orange powdery mouse by a Cheetos bag in the pantry closet near the old kitchen. I thought well, Grace has always provided for the needy, but that mouse got a bit too greedy.

A powerful sermon

By Chris Collin (former member), daughter of Gene and Marsha Collin

There is a story Pastor Brice Eichlersmith shared in a sermon that has stuck with me after all these years. It spoke of how powerfully God can work through us to be His hands in the world. It was a story of two high school boys who were very close friends. When the mom of one of the boys died, the other boy was at a loss for how to comfort his friend. After weeks of visiting his friend - who was so weighed down by grief he could not get out of bed - the one boy finally crawled in his friend's bed and hugged him, and wept with him, and simply said, "I miss her too."

I participated in Pastor Brice's peer listening program, where we learned about how to be good listeners and worked at being a support network for each other. Looking back, I wonder if that effort

was inspired by these two friends. I think Pastor Brice understood how much we teens needed to learn how to listen to each other, not just to the words that we spoke, but to the ways our hearts were calling to be known. It's been many years but I carry this lesson with me, that when I listen with my heart, I honor God's commandment to love all of His beloved children.

Good Grace memories

By Lois Askvig (member since 1968)

When we first visited Grace after moving here in 1968, meeting with Pete & Phyllis Eisele was what caused us to join! Many thanks to them! And our realtor told us, "Pastor Knutson is the best thing since sliced bread – go visit!" We did!

In the early days of Grace, families had to run (!), especially in winter, from the education building to the current sanctuary prior to the connecting addition.

Pastor Chris [Hunziker] had the insight and follow-through to begin our Parish Nurse program at Grace! That, and also First Wednesday and Faith Partners, all programs that continue today! Very grateful!

A Favorite Grace Memory

By Kacy Schumann (grade 7)

One of my favorite memories is when my brothers got confirmed, and watching them grow up since they were kinda young, to grow up to be BIG kids!

Blessings of Grace

By Vicki Christenson (member since 1990) and family

Grace has meant so much to our family: our grandchildren were baptized here; we had so much loving support when Russ (my husband) passed away; and all the faithful church family helped rebuild my son's home after being flooded out. Truly a blessing!

Maturing in Grace

By Brad Ullery (member since 2005)

When we moved to the area we had a difficult time finding a church. The first time we attended Grace, we knew this was where we wanted to belong. All of my daughters were confirmed at Grace and it has been such a great experience for each of them. Each of them have grown up to be great children and Grace was a big part of this.

Mother/Daughter memories

By Amy Larson (member since 1971)

I remember mother/daughter banquets that we held in the '70s at Grace. I was in preschool and elementary school, and my mom would make us matching outfits to wear to the banquet each year.

The Blessings of Grace

By Dorothy Dornfeld (member since 2000)

Ted and I have been members of Grace for 14 years. We were impressed by the friendliness of the people and staff then, and we enjoy that friendliness now.

This is a church blessed by God. May we, the people of Grace, continue to be a blessing to others.

Why We Joined Grace

By Nancy Miller (member since 1979)

When asked, "Why did you join Grace?" we laugh and say, "We felt needed!" We moved to Apple Valley 36 years ago and visited a few churches. The Sunday we walked into Grace, my husband Chuck was handed folding chairs that needed to be set up. The girls were needed to hand out hymn books and I noticed that the choir needed me. The pastor, in his sermon, cried because they needed money for the fabulous new building. As we left, a board fell of the wall and hit my head! Was this a sign? Maybe!

We marvel at the gift of our huge circle of "Grace best friends!" We need each other! Thank you!

Have Patience, Have Patience...

"Have patience, have patience. Don't be in such a hurry. Remember that God is patient too..."
(from The Music Machine kids' musical)

I remember this being sung by my daughters Kristine and Tami as they walked arm in arm, and I thought of it while on a family vacation last summer. It made me so happy! I'm thankful that our family benefitted from the fabulous kids musicals like, "The Music Machine," "Bullfrogs and Butterflies," "Super Gang," etc. presented in the early 80's. Thank you to Ginny, Marge, Nadine and so many others for loving kids, music, and giving us the gift of good stuff!

I ♥ Grace!

By Ella Arntz (grade 3)

I ♥ GBS

I ♥ VBS

I ♥ Family Camp

I ♥ SEEDS! (Camp Wapo weekend for 2nd & 3rd graders)

Childhood Memories of Grace

By Heather Meyer (member since 1984)

I started attending Grace when I was in 4th or 5th grade. I will always remember the fresh-baked bread for communion. I thought it added that extra piece of faith and love to communion.

God's Love in Grace

By Laurel Jacobson (member since 2004)

Every single day that I spend at Grace -- which adds up to a lot, given my full-time job here! -- I see evidence of God's love and care through the people who gather in this space. From the love and care in the simple questions I hear being asked ("How was your weekend?" "What's the update on your ailing loved one?" "How can I help?"), to the love and care I see given to those in need (making and offering Grace Delivers meals, visiting hospital patients and shut-ins, supporting the needy in our community and in the world), to the love and care that goes into tending our building and grounds (mowing, painting, vacuuming, gardening)...I could go on and on for pages! What a privilege it is to witness the extraordinary love of God in the faces and words and actions of this faithful community, and my prayer is that we continue being the presence of Christ for others for the coming fifty years, and beyond. Happy golden anniversary, Grace Lutheran Church!

Sunday School humor

By Yvonne Dovick (member since 1994)

I dressed up for the Sunday School teacher dedication that would be in front of the congregation. I wore a red and white sweater and red accessories. I proudly marched in with my class, and stood proudly beaming until we went back to class. I found I had accidentally worn hot pink slacks -- not red, but my face sure was red!

Grace Friends

By Dani Wilcox (grade 7)

Grace means a lot to me. I have basically grown up here. My best friend Ashley and I go to different schools. We don't even live in the same city! Wednesdays have always been my favorite day because I get to see her and I get to learn about God.

Family memories of Grace

By Robert Dennistoun, charter member of Grace

Pastor Matthews and members of Grace Lutheran,

I want to congratulate Grace Lutheran on its 50 years of ministry and service. Our family (my parents Rollin and Edna, brother Rollin and me) were charter members and I would like to share with you a few memories.

I remember Pastor Knutson printing the constitution of this new congregation in our house. My mother was the recording secretary of the GBBA (Glass Bottle Blowers Association) local union for Brockway Glass Company in Rosemount, and as such we had in our house a Gestetner mimeograph machine that Pastor Gary used. The church had its own mimeograph machine but the model in our house was powered, so that the tumbler ran on electricity instead of the hand cranking model that Grace had. I remember very well Pastor Gary in our kitchen several times changing stencils (remember them with the occasional black dot where the center of an "o" or a "p" or such letters might fall out?) that I believe he himself typed and made copies of this multi-page document for the organizational meeting.

I saw the picture in the newspaper of Pastor Gary in the original sanctuary and saw the black and white checkered floor of vinyl tiles. It fell to volunteers to periodically come in on Saturday and clean that floor, which we did. My memory is that I always wondered if we were getting it clean because it showed scuff marks quite easily as well as having little flecks in its design. I guess we removed the dirt but it never really seemed clean. But it is a good memory that Dad and my brother and I worked together, moved the blue metal folding chairs around to sweep and mop the floor thoroughly.

Everything was volunteers. When the day came to pour the concrete patio (I can't remember the actual name for the area but it was to be surrounded by a wooden colonnade) to the east of the original building, and many volunteers showed up. The basic pouring from the cement truck and general smoothing went OK, especially since many of us had never pushed and smoothed cement before. After it was poured there was the realization that we needed to lay an iron sculpture into the cement. It was metal welded in the unique shape of the cross that Pastor Gary had chosen as the trademark identity of Grace Lutheran (I cannot remember that cross style). But this sculpture measured about 30' across in one piece and needed to be set into the cement so that the top edge of the metal would reveal the cross's shape with a large circle around it. But the challenge was to lay it in so that it would be level with the top of the already leveled cement. We had failed to put 2x4 supports underneath it to hold it up level with the section dividers. Somehow it did get inlaid and the footprints smoothed over, but it showed its uneven imperfections over the many years that the patio was there until a building was placed on it.

Pastor Gary was known for his small Volkswagen Beetle. He was fearless in hauling us Luther Leaguers to and from events. I remember one drive from Apple Valley on a snowy winter day to a youth gathering on old Cedar Avenue to the Curtis Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. Getting us there was more important than waiting for snow plows. Speaking of Luther League some names from the past were Gary and Sheila Calwalder who matched fun events with our get togethers. One was a trip to the Apple Rover but on a rather cool day so Pastor Gary had the wisdom to stop in Somerset, Wisconsin on what happened to be their Pea Soup Days so that we could get a warm bowl of pea soup. Another memorable youth group event was when Bill Ireland took us canoeing from Little Fork to Big Falls in northern

Minnesota. Memories of an early morning scene with a haze over the river and fresh air accented by the aroma from the campfire are will clear in my mind as well as the instructional leadership of Bill.

I was confirmed at Grace and remember well the classes leading up to the night when we sat in front of those attending who listened to us recite the Articles from the Catechism in response to the pastor's questions. That was probably the first time we, especially me, talked in front of a group of stranger and I still remember how nervous I was. Pastor Gary did a great job and his coaching and training in the months before were excellent and foundational.

There are several pastors that I remember in addition to Pastor Gary. Dennis Nelson was a member then we supported him to become a pastor late in life after a career in business. Also Pastor Quarberg who could well have been a mentee of Pastor Gary as his strength and leadership were great. My wife and I were married at Grace in April of 1995. We worked with Pastor Q in our planning and preparation. On the day of the wedding he became ill and could not perform the ceremony. Assistant Pastor Nancy Brown was quick to step in and all went well.

There of course are many members of the congregation that have been there and gone elsewhere or to sainthood that made Grace a great memory and experience. My parents moved on to Shepherd of the Valley and a few years later (after being a part of the 40th anniversary) we followed them there where we still are. In face I believe that my brother is technically still a member of grace as he never lived in Minnesota after 1968 but I do not believe he has ever transferred his membership, so I guess that makes him very inactive in the eyes of grace.

Once again congratulations to you and on the growth you have had in the recent past as shown by the new expansion of the building. When we started there were corn fields to the north and east and Southport Airport was still operating. County Road 42 was a hazardous two lane road with deep ditches.

A church is a place to learn and practice the love of God, to live experiences and build memories while planning for the future of our lives in God's hands. At 50 you are proof that challenges can be met and with faith the Good News lives well.

Friendly Grace

By Dick and Bonnie Pooley (members since 1999)

Grace has meant the world to us! When we were looking for a church 16 years ago, we found that Grace was the friendliest and warmest congregation around! We are SO blessed!

October 2, 2014

Dear Friends at Grace,

I am missing your grand celebration in order to participate with my son for his college's Family Weekend. Amazing to think that I arrived at Grace child-less, and you helped me celebrate their arrivals from Colombia 17 and 20 years ago! I very much wanted to worship with you in that well-designed sanctuary that felt intimate even though it seated hundreds, and to greet many of you again. I know Pastor Q will remember every single one of your names, as well as where you work, where you grew up, and your shoe size! I would have enjoyed getting re-acquainted and catching up.

I have many stories I would like to share, like Sunday morning worship sitting between Pastor Q and Pastor Mark who sang in the St. Olaf and Luther College choirs respectively, and Pastor Brice who was tone deaf! I would like to reminisce about the Wednesday Lenten worship services with so many in attendance to watch actors and participate in creative activities and music. I would like to thank the dozens of big-hearted people who extended God's hospitality to low income people by cooking healthy meals. I would like to remember the saints who have gone before us, binding us in God's hope for this life and for the one to come.

But I will land on baptisms, that exciting and powerful event where God welcomes his children so generously into his family, and into Grace's clan. I loved participating with all the families in baptism preparation, where stories about birthing and feeding and loving new children were shared and new parents connected with each other. Through our conversations we all grew in appreciation of God's grace showering us before we could try to earn it. Every time we gathered the adults and I also felt gratitude for God's welcome waiting for us before we even understood we wanted to be at home with God.

The actual baptisms were very moving for me to witness God's love in action, for the babies, and for all of us gathered around the font. There was a time when a woman in her 20's was baptized and the entire assembly was filled with electricity. Here is someone who intellectually and personally endorsed this relationship with God that sometimes we all took for granted! Then there was the time we baptized 11 babies in one service! I have to admit that orchestrating the seating for so many families, allowing each family a special time around the font, plus laboring to remember each child's full name (Kirsten not Kristen, Skyler the boy and Skyler the girl, etc) was intense and a huge relief to have performed them all gracefully.

Congratulations to all of you on this important milestone. And may God continue to guide your ministries and your lives.

Warmly

Nancy Brown
Associate Pastor at Grace, 1993 - 2001

September 29, 2014

Judy Dehnel

Chairperson, 50th Anniversary Celebration of Grace Lutheran Church

7800 West County Road

Apple Valley, MN 55124

Dear Members of Grace Lutheran,

I send my best wishes to this whole congregation on half a century bringing the Gospel to the broad community of Apple Valley and beyond. Your presence and ministry have touched the lives of so many. May you not only thank God for the privilege and blessings of that ministry together, but for the gift of fellowship and growth in faith that have come through the Christian community called Grace. It is grace that is such a primary word for Christians everywhere, for the grace of God which is showed upon us day after day is perhaps the greatest gift we could be given.

I remember with fondness the joy I had in serving you in the years I was there. You are such a warm and welcoming people and I cherish the relationships with so many of you during those years. I also am thankful for the times we were brought together at those key events of people's lives: the baptisms, the confirmations, the marriages, the illnesses, the crisis times, and yes, the funerals. Those are typically the primary events for a pastor as he or she serves among you and is able to talk about the core meaning of life and our time on this earth.

I regret not being able to be with you during these anniversary events, but I will think of you and remember with you and be with you as you pledge yourselves to continue and expand your ministry in the Apple Valley area in the coming years.

May God laugh with you and rejoice with you in your joy.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Keith M. Swenson