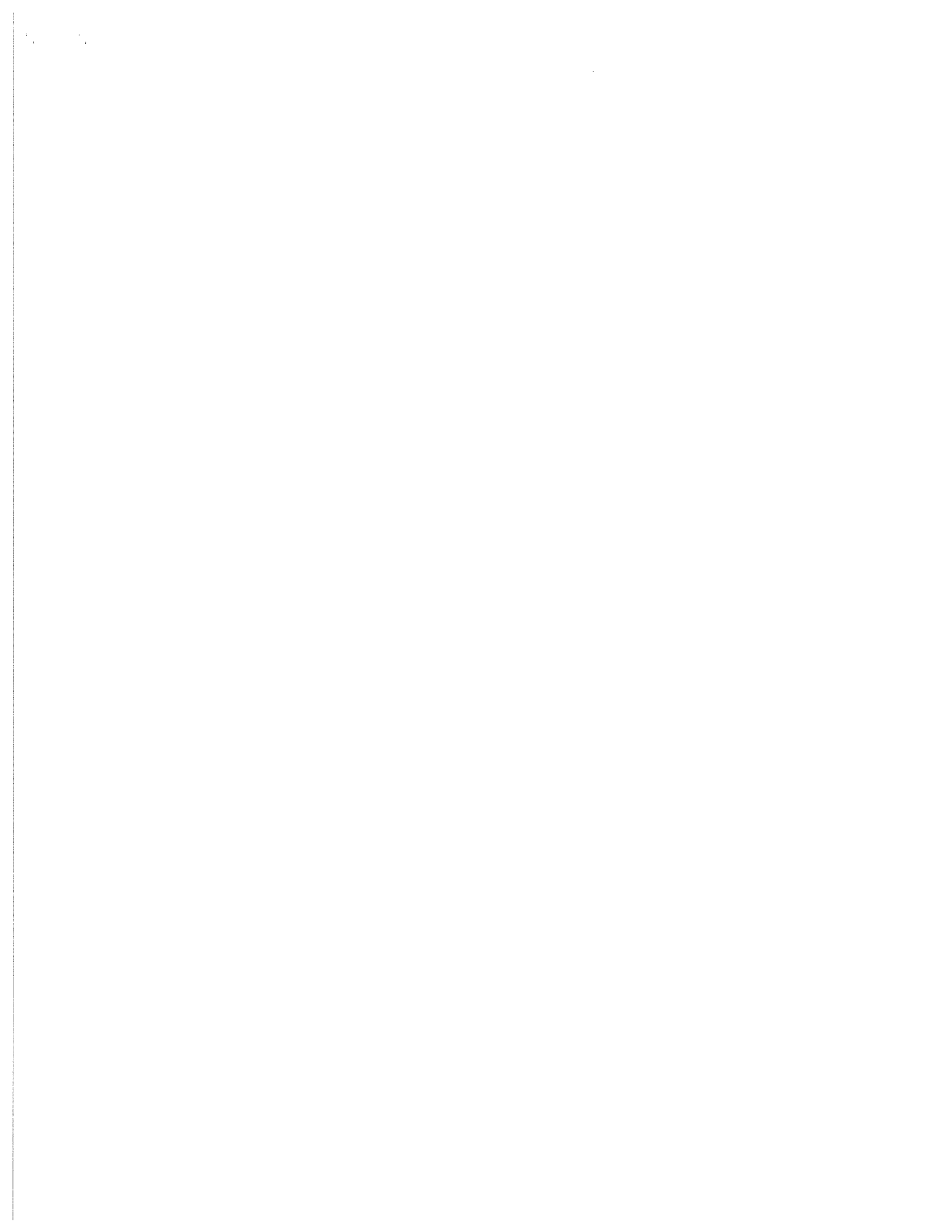


# **God's Tidings of Grace**

A Congregational History of the 30 Years of  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Waupun, WI

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## ***The Early Beginnings<sup>1</sup>***

In the small, but growing, community of Waupun, Wisconsin, not many people realized what they were starting when in 1966 they asked the Mission Board of the WELS for permission to start a mission congregation. Even fewer of them were prepared for the answer that came back in response to the letter written by Pastor Jon Mahnke<sup>2</sup> --**No**. The Board felt that the tiny community was unsuited for a mission church when there was already a good sized Missouri Synod church (Pella Lutheran) there and a community made up largely of Christian Reformed (Hollanders). The Mission Board felt that the WELS had no chance in a community “that was completely churched,”<sup>3</sup> and pointed out that there were many WELS churches already formed in the surrounding communities, one even as close as seven miles from Waupun. There was no “need” for a WELS church and no way it could be supported by the Waupun community.

The Mission Board underestimated the desire of these people for a church. They were hurt by the response and were driven to action. A spot survey of Waupun was done by a group of the ladies to find out if the perceptions of the Board were true. They were not. The survey revealed that about half the city was not “Christian Reformed Hollanders”, but were rather German in origin. Also, they found that their little community was not quite as “churched” as was originally thought. The persistence of the group and the already large size of the core group led the Mission Board to ask Pastor Llyod Wenzel, pastor at St. Paul’s in Manchester, WI, to conduct services for the Waupun congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately all of this information had to be pieced together from interviews and the memorabilia of the members since no church minutes exist from before 1971, and only sparse ones of 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Then Pastor at Mt. Lebanon in Milwaukee, WI. Some of his members had moved to Waupun and had wanted to join the Missouri Synod church. Because of the break, he refused to give his blessing to such a move.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ronald Roth. (4/4/96)

An advertisement was placed in Waupun's "newspaper," inviting anyone who desired to come to the worship service at 827 Grace St. at 1:30PM on January 19, 1966. Pastor Wenzel led the service which took place in the living room of the Gedamke home. Four families attended this initial service, totaling 21 people. A card table served as the first altar, with a cross brought from Manchester by Pastor Wenzel. "Dining room chairs and kitchen chairs served as pews."<sup>4</sup> This small mission group did have the luxury of having an organ to lead the singing, since Mrs. Gedamke taught lessons at her home.

Only three services were held at the Gedamke home before they found that they just simply required more space. Inquiries were made and a site that was free to any group in Waupun was discovered, the VFW Clubhouse.<sup>5</sup> The congregation moved to these rather dismal surroundings at the corner of Fox Lake Road and West Street in February of 1966. Cards were played in the hall the night before services were held and "no amount of airing out seemed to get rid of the smell."<sup>6</sup> It may not have been much to look at, but it was a God-send to this group, even if they had to put up with the cigarette smoke and stale beer odor.

As their needs for space had grown, so also their need for a more regular pastor grew. Manchester was simply too far away for Pastor Wenzel to have as much contact as was needed. In June of 1966, the Mission Board called Pastor Ronald Roth, the pastor at Good Shepherd in Beaver Dam, WI (only 15 miles away), to serve this growing group in Waupun.<sup>7</sup> He accepted, much to the joy of the people in Waupun. Pastor Roth was able to move services to the morning,

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from a piece written by Donna Gedamke (undated)

<sup>5</sup> i.e. Veterans of Foreign Wars

<sup>6</sup> Taken from an interview with Donna Gedamke (12/28/95)

<sup>7</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

even if it was just to 11AM to begin with, and to start a Sunday School--two things the congregation eagerly desired but were unable to really have before.

Services continued at the Clubhouse after the arrival of Pastor Roth, who commented about the conditions in this way-- "It made me a better preacher. There was no lectern or pulpit and so I got to 'play Billy Graham,' standing in front of the people with Bible in hand. I did have to remember to avoid the puddle that would form in front if it rained though."<sup>8</sup> They stayed at the clubhouse for over a year though, singing their praises to God for this miraculous gift of grace that He had given.

Then some wonderful news came in September of 1966--the Synod approved Waupun's petition for the formation of a church.<sup>9</sup> It was what was hoped and prayed for by these diligent and enthusiastic people of God. They were to have their own church! Things began to fall neatly into place. A constitution was put into effect and on December 4, 1966; the charter officers of the congregation were elected-- President: Arnold Jensen, Secretary: Robert Graf, Financial Secretary: Harvey Buss, Treasurer: Ronald Gedamke.<sup>10</sup>

And having elected new officials it was also time to take up new residence. The congregation moved out of the VFW Clubhouse, much to the joy of everyone, and rented a room in the basement of the Waupun Christian School, a Dutch Reformed grade school, at the corner of McKinley Street and Beaver Dam Street. This facility had its own pluses and minuses. It was a much nicer facility than the VFW Clubhouse, after all it didn't have a bar and it didn't smell nearly as bad. Also the congregation was able to use the basement during the middle of the week

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the Dedication folder (6/14/70)

<sup>10</sup> Taken from the Waupun Leader News (date unknown)

“allowing for midweek meetings and services for Advent and Lent.”<sup>11</sup> However it was also rather cluttered since this was the multi-purpose and storage room for the school.

**“This House of Worship Has Been Built by the Grace of God”**<sup>12</sup>

God’s grace and love <sup>for</sup> on this group of believers was clear and evident and He continued to bless them with spiritual and physical growth--growth that would soon demand more space than the basement of the school provided. On July 10, 1967, the Voters approved the purchase of a piece of land 170 feet by 980 feet at the proposed price of \$8500 in the Harris Park Subdivision.<sup>13</sup> Yet they did this despite the fact that Synod refused to aid them in purchasing such a large and awkwardly shaped piece of land.

Once again these people showed their ambition and desire for their own church. Not to be denied this opportunity to buy their own land, the members formed their own “paper” corporation, collecting funds from various members by selling stocks so as to have assets and moneys to pay the legal fees. Having formed this “corporation” they took out a loan for the property. Their plan was to then sell the portion for the church to the Synod and the remaining portion to a developer who was interested in preparing lots for some homes behind the church. It was bold and daring plan that nearly blew up in their face.

The land was purchased and the western section sold to WELS. However there was the little matter of selling the remaining part to the developer, who had also already purchased the adjoining property. The city surveyor came in to take a look at the land for the purpose of determining where the street and sewer and water lines could go. But he discovered that the land

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<sup>11</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>12</sup> Taken from pg. 3 of the Dedication folder (6/14/70)

<sup>13</sup> Taken from a letter from Ron Roth to the Congregation, dated July 3, 1967.

was four feet below the required grade, meaning the land was unable to be sold until it was raised that four feet.<sup>14</sup>

The men did not panic, although Pastor Roth admitted he was quite concerned. They simply put up signs around the property and the town that said “Clean Fill Wanted.” At the same time, one of the members worked for the city, which was in the process of putting in curb and gutter all over Waupun. They needed to get rid of the dirt, gravel and clay, and this member knew the perfect place they could dispose of it--a little field just off Park Road. This was a tremendous step forward but it still was not all the fill needed. It did give a certain boost in confidence though that they would be able to meet the requirements before the two year deal with the developer expired.<sup>15</sup> Slowly but surely the fill came, and the land was raised to meet the requirements--once again God’s grace showered down upon these people.<sup>16</sup>

Yet they realized that there was still a problem with what they did have, a piece of land 170’x980’, not exactly ideal for what they had in mind. The 170’ width was required by the city because it had planned to put a road through that area, just north of where the property was, to help develop it. But after some negotiations with the city, the congregation persuaded them not to put the road (which latter was named Church Street for just this reason) all the way through. The adjoining piece to the north was purchased for \$4000 from the developer, who also had bought one of the 170’x980’ sections. Also included in the deal was the swap for the eastern half of their property measuring 170’x380’. On September 5, 1968, more than a year after the initial

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<sup>14</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>15</sup> Taken from an interview with Larry White

<sup>16</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

land purchase, the land size changed to 340 feet by 600 feet (or about 4.8 acres),<sup>17</sup> a much nicer piece of land on Park Road (County Trunk MMM) in Waupun.

With land in place and desire to praise their Lord in their hearts, in January of 1968, they began their move to build (even though the land deal was not finished yet). They tried to raise funds, but at first, Synod was unwilling to move too quickly. Then suddenly on June 25, 1968, the congregation received acknowledgment that Synod would OK \$40,000 for the church.<sup>18</sup> This loan was made up of \$25,000 from the Church Extension Fund and another \$15,000 in the form of a Chapel Expansion Loan.<sup>19</sup> This was almost too abrupt a move; they were unprepared and needed to get ready to answer questions for Pastor Norman Berg, the Executive Secretary of the General Board for Home Missions. But the meeting went well and the church prepared to move ahead. In July, 1968 the congregation established a building committee made up of three men-- Chairman: Earlin Krohn, Secretary: Arnold Kamp, Member: Richard Lamers. (At this time Earlin Krohn had also become President of the congregation. This will be important <sup>later</sup> in the discussion.)<sup>20</sup>

As this small group of people looked at all that had happened for them already in such a short time they knew that it really had been none of their own doing but that God had graciously blessed all their efforts. Many names for the church were set forth. The name Grace was placed before the group, not because that had been the street where the church started, but because these people recognized that all of this was nothing less <sup>th<sup>an</sup></sup> an act of God's grace among them. "It was amazing to see how quickly this name was unanimously accepted." It was the name that

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from an article clipping from the Waupun Leader News (date unknown)

<sup>18</sup> The General Board for Home Missions at first wanted to push a parsonage/chapel idea on the congregation, but that quickly fell through. Although, it would have easily kept the cost under \$40,000.

<sup>19</sup> Taken from "Tidings of Grace," the church newsletter written by Pastor Ron Roth (6/30/68)

<sup>20</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth



most accurately described what had happened in the last three years--nothing but God's pure grace.<sup>21</sup>

After becoming incorporated on September 5, 1968,<sup>22</sup> the Grace Evangelical Lutheran Association of Waupun, Wisconsin, went ahead and chose an architect on September 30, 1968. They chose Fields-Carter Architects, A.I.A. from Sheboygan, WI, out of a group of five candidates. Louis Fields and Associates were chosen for a couple of reasons. First they promised that their new construction techniques would be able to yield the highest amount of usable square footage for the church in comparison to the designs offered for the lowest price. They were using a design, which was new and relatively unused at that time, involving concrete slab construction.<sup>23</sup> The second reason, and a questionable one at that, was that Louis Fields, the architect, and Earlin Krohn, chairman of the Building Committee and president of the congregation, were very close friends.<sup>24</sup>

The bidding by Louis Fields<sup>25</sup> had been very friendly and promising to Grace. He had indicated in January, 1969 that he felt they could provide a building of 4,000 square feet for the \$40,000 that the Synod had loaned to the church. Yet he seemed to drag his feet in getting bids from construction companies and did not always have answers ready for the church when they asked questions. Two months later, still with no firm bid in hand, Louis Fields began to indicate

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> This was also the time when the land size changed to 340'x600'

<sup>23</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>24</sup> Taken from an interview with Donna Gedamke

<sup>25</sup> Mr. Fields was paid a percentage of what the final building would cost. It would have been in his best interest to increase the price of the church. On this building project he was paid 6% of the total cost of the building plus any other additional services that were performed apart from the actual design. His final fee for the project was in the neighborhood of \$7,000 (in 1969). Was there deception here or just incompetence on the part of Mr. Fields? We will never know for sure in this life. But these facts certainly would raise some suspicions in other members of the congregation.

• Taken from a letter from the Board of Trustees to Mr. Fields (9/26/69)

that he no longer had the confidence that he could deliver what was originally promised, a building close to Grace's budget of \$40,000, which had been one of the reasons that they chose him in the first place. Mr. Duane Anderson, the General Board for Home Mission's architect, had the same reservations upon examining the plans of Mr. Fields. In a letter to the congregation by Pastor Berg, he says, Mr. Anderson reported that "The budget which has been established at \$40,000 is not sufficient to include the site development, landscaping, furnishings, or any contingency needs."<sup>26</sup> Mr. Anderson's reservations would prove to be true.

In April, Mr. Fields came back again and said that it would take somewhere in the neighborhood of \$51,500 to build the designed church--a 28% increase, which still was not an unreasonable increase. On May 6, 1969 the General Board for Home missions reluctantly approved the additional funds for the building, \$6,500 in interest free loans and another \$5,000 that would bear interest.<sup>27</sup> Then, as if it wasn't already bad enough, Louis Fields came back to the congregation in August of 1969 and told them that he had badly missed on his cost estimates and that it would cost the \$88,387 to build the facility.<sup>28</sup>

Suddenly the congregation <sup>w45</sup>is faced with having to abort their building project and start all over or come up with the additional funds to pay for the proposed structure. Deciding it was better to push forward than to start from scratch, the church went to the Mission Board for help. Once again God's hand is clearly at work, as the Mission Board responded by approving the request for an additional \$37,000. This was \$37,000 of the \$100,000 that they had to give out to

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<sup>26</sup> Taken from a letter from Pastor Berg to Pastor Roth (3/19/69)

<sup>27</sup> Taken from a letter from Pastor Berg to Grace Church (5/12/69)

<sup>28</sup> Figures all taken from the "Tidings of Grace" newsletter by Pastor Ron Roth (1/26/68--8/24/69)

ALL home missions for the year, which led Pastor Ron Roth to write, “May we never forget the great grace which God has permitted us to enjoy!”<sup>29</sup>

The final budget was approved by Synod on September 13, 1969 and so the congregation prepared itself for ground breaking. On September 21, 1969, the church held the ground breaking ceremony on a beautiful fall day on which they were glad to see that Westra Construction, the contractor from Waupun, had already put in the footings for the church.<sup>30</sup>

Fortunately there did not seem to be any more misunderstandings or difficulties, other than the concrete panels that the church originally had desired had to be eliminated due to the already massive cost overruns.<sup>31</sup> Construction went as smoothly as <sup>could</sup> can be expected. Grace was offered the old chancel furniture from St. John’s in Juneau, WI, but Grace kindly declined since it was too massive for the tiny area and because it had been stored for some time in a local barn. They did however take their old pews, which the members shortened to fit the nave and painted them a “delightful” yellow.<sup>32</sup> The remaining furniture was purchased from the Manitowoc Church Furniture Company, largely by donations from the Central Circuit of the Lutheran Women’s Mission Society.<sup>33</sup> The organ was a Baldwin house organ, the one used at the first exploratory service four year earlier, which was donated by Mrs. Donna Gedamke.<sup>34</sup> Carpeting was donated by the local Kohl’s company. True to form, the members of the congregation in order to help defray costs did all of the painting in the church and whatever other work that they could.

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<sup>29</sup> Taken from the “Tidings of Grace” Newsletter written by Pastor Ron Roth (9/28/69)

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Taken from pg. 4 of the Dedication folder (6/14/70)

<sup>34</sup> Taken from an interview with Donna Gedamke

Finally the work was done. The church, a 68' by 68' square with a worship area that would seat 200,<sup>35</sup> was completed and ready to be dedicated to the Lord who had so wondrously blessed all their efforts. The church had grown from those 21 first members, meeting at the home on Church Street, to 133 souls and 80 communicants with a church of their own. On June 14, 1970, the church was dedicated at 10AM with Pastor Ron Roth leading the service. Pastor Marvin Radtke, Chairman of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board, preached for the morning dedication. A festival service was also held in the afternoon at 2PM at which Pastor Llyod Wenzel did liturgy and Pastor Norman Berg, Ex. Sec. of the Home Mission Board, preached. That evening at 7PM the Senior Choir at Grace, made up of 13 members and directed by Mrs. Gedamke, led a choir service. God was greatly praised and welcomed into this new place of worship, set up to His holy name.<sup>36</sup>

### **A Pastor of Their Own**

Up until this time Grace had been sharing the pastor of another church. Pastor Roth was watching over Grace at the request of the Mission Board; Grace had never officially called him.<sup>37</sup> Good Shepherd had been running their own building project at the same time as Grace's. Grace dedicated in June, Good Shepherd in July. Grace was blessed by the faithful, if not amazing, work of Pastor Roth, but his work at Grace was done. This congregation of 151 souls and 82 communicants<sup>38</sup> knew that it was time for a pastor of their own.

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<sup>35</sup> Taken from an article written by Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>36</sup> Taken from pg. 5 of the Dedication folder (6/14/70)

<sup>37</sup> Taken from and interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>38</sup> Taken from the 1971 Yearbook and Directory of Grace Ev. Luth. Church

In June of 1970, Grace called Pastor Theodore Olsen, and in July they called Pastor Wayne Schulz, but both men declined.<sup>39</sup> In July the voters received an interesting proposal. St. John's Town Trenton had just had their Pastor, Walter Zank, called to his eternal home and were in the process of calling a pastor as well. They offered to share a pastor with Grace in Waupun, but the Mission Board led Grace to move away from this option since it would probably become a similar situation <sup>to</sup> as what they had with Pastor Roth.<sup>40</sup> St. John's had a parsonage, Grace didn't.

Then God acted on behalf of Grace again in September, moving Pastor Kenneth Gawrisch, then pastor at Trinity in Dexter Township, rural Austin, MN,<sup>41</sup> to accept the call to be the first resident pastor at Grace in Waupun. He would not be available to begin the new position until November. He was also watching over the congregation in Rochester, MN, while Pastor Waldemar Hoyer was serving as a chaplain in Vietnam. Pastor Hoyer was scheduled to return on November 1 and, after a short vacation, Pastor Gawrisch would come to Waupun.<sup>42</sup> Pastor Gawrisch<sup>43</sup> was installed on November 15, 1970 at 7PM by Pastor Roth, with Pastor Carl Henning assisting with liturgy.<sup>44</sup> When he arrived and was installed, there was no parsonage for him and his family. A house was rented for them at 528 Grandview in Waupun.<sup>45</sup> But the congregation knew that this would not be the best situation, and began to move to build their own parsonage.

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<sup>39</sup> Taken from the "Tidings of Grace" Newsletter written by Pastor Ron Roth (6/28/70--7/26/70)

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* (7/26/70)

<sup>41</sup> Taken from the Installation Bulletin (11/15/70)

<sup>42</sup> Taken from the "Tidings of Grace" Newsletter by Pastor Ron Roth (9/27/70)

<sup>43</sup> **Point of Interest**--Shortly after his arrival in Waupun, the suggestion was made that the Ladies' Aid might offer to prepare a meal for the Seniors that came from the Seminary to take their walk-through at the Prison. This tradition has continued through the years to the present time and hopefully will be a wonderful opportunity for service into the future. May the Seniors also remember thankfully these women who so joyfully welcome into their church home the future ministers of their synod.

<sup>44</sup> Taken from a clipping from the Waupun Leader News (date unknown) and the Installation Bulletin (11/15/70)

<sup>45</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Gawrisch

The congregation, now having grown to 164 souls and 106 communicants,<sup>46</sup> prepared a section in the north-east section of their property, gaining access for the parsonage to the street and utilities through the already developing area that had been sold three years earlier. The Building Committee was formed, made up of Chairman: Ronald Gedamke, and Members: Arnold Kamp and Roland Klug. On May 9, 1971, ground breaking for the parsonage took place at what would later be 1016 Church Street.<sup>47</sup>

Just four months later the parsonage was prepared by the contractor, Alvin Severson of Markesan, at a cost of approximately \$25,000. The greatest portion of this was financed through the Synod's Parsonage-Teacherage Fund, which loaned Grace \$23,100 for the project.<sup>48</sup> "The bi-level home" contained "three bedrooms, living room, and dining area, kitchen, 1 1/2 baths, the pastor's study, a utility room, a 24'x24' garage."<sup>49</sup>

Much of the finishing work on the parsonage was not contracted out, but instead was done by members of the congregation. In fact, one man in particular was "loaned to the congregation for one year by the Lord."<sup>50</sup> The president of the congregation at that time was Mr. Earl Boettcher. About the time that the building project was scheduled to begin, Mr. Boettcher was laid off from his job at Schaler, Inc., of Waupun, WI. During that time, he was able to supervise the work that was being done as well as helping a great deal with finishing off the inside work.

As the project came to a close, Mr. Boettcher was in the lower level of the home, putting up the last of the shelving in the basement. He put down his hammer, turned to the pastor and

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<sup>46</sup> Taken from the 1971 Yearbook and Directory of Grace Ev. Luth. Church

<sup>47</sup> Taken from a clipping from the Waupun Leader News (date suggested -- 5/20/71)

<sup>48</sup> Taken from the Dedication bulletin (9/26/71)

<sup>49</sup> Taken from the Waupun Leader News (date unknown)

<sup>50</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Gawrisch (4/10/96)

said, "Well, I guess my work is done here." Leaving to go home for lunch, Mr. Boettcher promised to come back later and pick up his things. Pastor Gawrisch recalled vividly Earl's return. With a huge smile on his face, Mr. Boettcher informed the pastor that during lunch he had been called back to work at Schaler.<sup>51</sup> The parsonage was done, but God's gifts to Grace were not.

The building was completed and a service of dedication took place on September 26, 1971, which was led by Pastor Gawrisch. Pastor John Chworowsky, the Dean of Students at Northwestern College in Watertown, preached the sermon of dedication to a crowd of 111 at the morning service. A second service was held in the afternoon at 2 PM where 100 were in attendance.<sup>52</sup>

And so in 1971, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Association of Waupun, WI had their church and a parsonage, and also a large debt. Yet as eager as many in the congregation had been to build both the church and the parsonage, there were others who felt that it had been done in an inappropriate manner. In fact some even went so far as to accuse members, and one man even accused Pastor Roth, of wrong doing in the construction of the church.<sup>53</sup> This was a situation that fell squarely into the lap of the new pastor on the scene.

About three years later it all came to a head, leading to hard feelings and suspicions toward one man in particular, Earlin Krohn, who had hired a friend to be the architect for the church. Emotions ran high in one man in particular, Robert Graf, who was the president of the congregation at one time during the building projects, and vice president during the building of

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Taken from the Dedication Bulletin (9/26/71)

<sup>53</sup> Taken from the Church Council Minutes (9/16/74)

the church. He felt that the Building Committees had forced these things on the congregation instead of asking for the permission of the church members. In protest, he stopped coming to the communion table for a number of years and refused to even set foot in the new parsonage.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately he failed to realize that he was only hurting himself and his family. Whether his accusations were correct or not became irrelevant as he let his zeal get in the way of seeing that nothing could be done about the situation, the church was built and so was the parsonage. Yet he was the kind of man who was never one who did things in an half-hearted way<sup>55</sup> and continued to insist that wrong had been done.

Initial moves to excommunicate had failed due to members' high respect for Robert Graf. But for some reason they soon sent a letter to Mr. Graf stating that if his communion attendance did not improve and his attitude towards the church did not change he would not be given a Christian burial, even though he would still be considered a member.<sup>56</sup> This only enflamed the situation even further and set Mr. Graf in his resolve that he was correct.

In the end for his own good, trying to impress upon him the necessity to forgive those who ask for it,<sup>57</sup> they finally voted to excommunicate at the Quarterly Meeting of the Congregation on October 13, 1974 after eleven month of consideration.<sup>58</sup> Emotionally charged situations like this one are ones in which neither side wins. Mr. Graf overreacted to a situation that no longer could be changed by his suspicions or accusations. Yet the congregation did not seem to listen to what he was saying and acted in questionable fashion at the beginning of this

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<sup>54</sup> Taken from the Church Council minutes (8/14/74)

<sup>55</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Ron Roth

<sup>56</sup> Taken from minutes of the Annual Meeting (1/13/74)

<sup>57</sup> It is in question whether they asked for forgiveness or stated that there had been no wrong doing.

<sup>58</sup> Taken from the Congregational Meeting minutes (10/13/74)



all, adding fuel to the fire, until the only correct outlet was to excommunicate<sup>59</sup> because of his unforgiving attitude<sup>and impetuosity</sup>. A sad ending to a sad event in Grace's history.

### **Changes in Leadership**

Only about one year after this disappointment, in July of 1975, Pastor Gawrisch received a call to serve as pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waukegan, IL. The congregation was quick to encourage pastor to stay, but it was not the way that the Lord led him to go and he accepted the call. The vacancy was filled by Pastor Steve Stern of St. John's in Markesan, WI for the six month interim.<sup>60</sup>

But the church still needed a pastor. On September 25, 1975 the first call meeting was gathered to present four candidates for consideration.<sup>61</sup> The first ballot determined that Pastor Allen Capek of Union Grove, WI, should be extended the call.<sup>62</sup> Near the end of October, the call was returned. A second call meeting took place on October 30, 1975 at which Pastor Paul Zittlow of Faith in Elizabeth, IL was chosen. This time the Lord led Pastor Zittlow, who was only three and a half years into his ministry, to accept the call to Grace. A new pastor was on his way.<sup>63</sup> It would be another three months before the Pastor would arrive and so Pastor Stern continued to administer to the needs of the congregation.

On January 11, 1976 Pastor Zittlow was officially welcomed and installed as pastor of the congregation, which had been self-supporting for two and a half years.<sup>64</sup> The 7PM service was

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<sup>59</sup> This was the only excommunication that Pastor Gawrisch has ever had to carry through in his 25 years.

<sup>60</sup> Taken from Council Minutes (8/4/75)

<sup>61</sup> **Point of Interest**--At both these meetings, a then younger John F. Brug of West Newton, PA was on both ballots and defeated, easily on the first but narrowly on the second. If they would have known then that they could have chosen a future Sem professor, would they have chosen differently?

<sup>62</sup> Taken from the Call Meeting Minutes (9/25/75)

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* (10/30/75)

<sup>64</sup> Taken from page 7 of the Anniversary Booklet (6/16/91)

- Grace changed from a mission congregation to a self-supporting one on July 15, 1973.

led by Pastor Fred Bartling, Emeritus, who preached about the responsibilities of the Pastor and the Congregation.<sup>65</sup> Pastor Zittlow began leading the growing congregation, now up to 206 souls and 136 communicants, during the Ten Year Anniversary of the church.

In just ten short, God-blessed years, Grace had grown from a group of 21 members meeting in the living room of a home to 206 with a wonderful church and parsonage of their own (and also a debt in the neighborhood of \$100,000).<sup>66</sup> In ten years they had multiplied nearly ten-fold in a community that was “completely church-ed.” Over the next six months Pastor Zittlow visited nearly all the families of the congregation<sup>67</sup> and began the preparations for the tenth anniversary.

Just nine months into his tenure as pastor, on September 19, 1976, the <sup>a</sup>Anniversary service was held. Both Pastor Roth and Gawrisch were in attendance and had been invited to preach in the two services. Pastor Roth preached at the 9:15 AM service, looking back on the first ten years of the congregation, while Pastor Gawrisch preached at the 7 PM service about what the Lord might have in store for them in the years to come.<sup>68</sup>

After things settled down again following the celebration, normal church activities resumed for a while. Pastor Zittlow continued to make evangelism calls, run Adult Information Classes and a Sunday Morning Bible study, taught his own Confirmation class<sup>69</sup>, watched over

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<sup>65</sup> Taken from the Installation Bulletin (1/11/76)

<sup>66</sup> Taken from Church Council minutes (9/13/76)

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* (5/10/76)

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* (8/9/76)

<sup>69</sup> **Point of Interest**--Grace has never had a school of its own. However they made good use of the one at St. John's in Fox Lake, WI. Many children from Grace went there. Many others chose to simply use the local public school. However at the school in Fox Lake, the 7th and 8th grade class had regular Confirmation classes during the school day. For some reason, Pastor Meyer refused to allow any child that did not belong to St. John's Church, Fox Lake, to attend classes or be confirmed at his church. Pastor Zittlow asked and met with Pastor Meyer to try and change this, but to no avail.

• See Quarterly Meeting minutes (10/26/80)

Sunday School and VBS programs, and started a Pioneer program for both the boys and girls of the congregation. Pastor even was able to help Pastor Lenz, pastor of Institutional Ministries, with some of the work load at the institutions by taking a few Bible Classes at the Dodge Correctional Facility.<sup>70</sup>

In 1981, the church was in need of a different organ. Mrs. Gedamke had generously donated the fine organ from her home, but it was time to do something else. The Methodist church in Waupun had been talking about buying a new organ for their church, but they weren't sure what they could do with the old one. Mrs. Gedamke heard that they were looking to sell the Baldwin organ. It was too good a deal to pass up. She agreed to let the old organ be sold from Grace, and the money set aside for the purchase of the Methodist organ. Between the money from the sale of the old instrument and moneys collected from the church for the purchase, Grace easily raised the \$2,000 that the Methodists were asking.<sup>71</sup>

The tube organ was brought to the church, but it was difficult to find a place to put the large speaker that went with it. No suitable location could be found anywhere else in the church except behind the altar. The organ was a little too loud for the small worship area, but it would serve them well for many years.

All went very smoothly for Pastor Zittlow until Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac, WI, called him. For the 1980-81 school year, they needed a pastor to fill in for about two classes a day. Pastor Zittlow agreed to take over these duties as well for a time.<sup>72</sup> He taught

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<sup>70</sup>Taken from a phone interview with Pastor Zittlow

<sup>71</sup> Taken from an interview with Donna Gedamke

<sup>72</sup> Taken from Quarterly Meeting minutes (4/26/81)

some first and second year Latin as well as a Religion class. This part time position ended up lasting four years. But it was an enjoyable experience, that he looked back upon fondly.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile his wife, Sally, had also received a call to teach at the school with which Grace has had the most contact, St. John's in Fox Lake. She had taught there during that same four year time span when Pastor Zittlow was also teaching in Fond du Lac. She taught mostly fourth and fifth grades, and some kindergarten.<sup>74</sup>

But all of this was to soon change for them. In the spring of 1984, after spending eight and a half years in Waupun, Pastor Zittlow<sup>75</sup> was called to Mandam, ND. After careful thought and prayerful consideration, he was led to take the call. Grace was once again without a pastor.

At Call Day in 1984, Pastor Timothy Mueller was assigned the call and was inclined to drive the hour north-west to see his first congregation, where he was able to meet the man for whom he was about to take over. Pastor Zittlow was pleased to meet him and was eager to show <sup>him</sup> them around the church. Not much was said about the members, however, because Pastor Zittlow felt that it was important to give them all a clean slate with the new pastor, but he did speak about how wonderful the members of Grace were.<sup>76</sup> Pastor Zittlow commented that it was a rare treat to be able to meet one's successor.

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<sup>73</sup>Taken from a phone interview With Pastor Zittlow (4/12/96)

<sup>74</sup>This author happens to be one of those school children at Fox Lake who was taught well by Mrs. Zittlow.

<sup>75</sup>**Point of Interest**--Pastor Zittlow mentioned that his greatest joy in his ministry at Waupun was, in 1982 or 1983, being able to welcome back into the church and God's family Robert Graf, who had left under such bad circumstances years before. He gave the credit to the Lord and His wonderful blessing of a wife who was instrumental in leading Bob back to the church.

<sup>76</sup>Taken from a phone interview with Pastor Zittlow

The new pastor was installed at the congregation on July 8, 1984.<sup>77</sup> At the time of the installation, Pastor Mueller inherited a growing congregation that now numbered 259 souls and 174 communicants, that still contained a number of the original founding members.

This was also a congregation, however, that was adding younger members as well and the need for a good Christian education was at a premium. Many were still making use of St. John's in Fox Lake, but many more were depending on Grace to supply the guidance and mechanism necessary to help educate their children in God's Word. Pastor was faced with a growing Sunday School program and Confirmation Class.<sup>78</sup> Yet there was also a growing number of High School age children who were not receiving a continuing education. Pastor tried a Youth Bible Class, but felt that more was needed.

The closest Lutheran High Schools were Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Lakeside Lutheran or Northwestern Preparatory School. Some members were already sending their children to Winnebago and there had been contact with the Academy through the teaching position Pastor Zittlow. The natural connection was with WLA.

About a year after Pastor Mueller's arrival, talks were begun about joining the Academy's Association. This would allow the members to send their children to WLA at a lower tuition rate, while giving the church a chance not only to support Christian education but also to gain an added connection to the area congregations. A meeting was held with the principal of WLA, John Schibbelhut, to discuss the possibility of Grace becoming members of

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<sup>77</sup> Pastor Mueller is the current pastor at the time of this writing.

This information taken from the Installation Bulletin (7/8/84)

<sup>78</sup> The situation with St. John's has not changed at the writing of this paper. Pastor Meyer is still the pastor there and refuses to confirm anyone who is not a member of his congregation.

the Association. On February 23, 1986, the meeting took place at which the financial commitment of the congregation was discussed. It was not happy news for the church.

Principal Schibbelhut laid out before the group that a required commitment, based on the number of potential students sent from Grace, would be approximately \$5,000 per year. This took into consideration the distance of the congregation from the school (25 miles--Zone 3 for WLA) and he explained that this was a lower number than others would be required to commit who were closer. However this was not a commitment that would be expected to be met at first by this new member congregation, but over time it was to be the goal.<sup>79</sup>

After nearly half a year of discussion of how to pay for this endeavor, the motion was made and passed at the Quarterly Meeting in July of 1986 to join the Winnebago Lutheran Academy Association. But there was still the matter of actually funding this project with which to contend. The decision was made to have a special envelope and a special Sunday for WLA, so that funding would be separate from budgeted expenses, but would make the project open to the whole congregation to support.<sup>80</sup> Their membership was approved and two students from Grace attended WLA that fall.<sup>81</sup>

### *Looking Forward, Looking Back*

The church continued to grow, especially in the area of Sunday School. The classroom facilities that were being used were slowly but surely becoming inadequate for their needs. Something had to be done. After some investigation in June of 1988, some people felt that a trailer or pre-fabricated construction might be all that they needed to ease the overcrowding. It

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<sup>79</sup> Taken from minutes of the meeting with Principal Schibbelhut (2/23/86)

<sup>80</sup> Taken from Quarterly Meeting minutes (7/27/86)

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* (10/26/86)

was felt that this would be an inexpensive alternative to what was inevitable. The congregation was shocked when they found out that to put up a pre-fabricated structure to fit their needs would cost about \$40,000.<sup>82</sup> Something better had to be done.

A Building Investigation Committee was started to take a look at what could be done about this situation. Careful consideration was given to what the members had to say about the project. Two meetings, one on June 23 and another on July 11, were held to give the members opportunity to voice their objections and support of various plans. Overwhelmingly the decision came back to build a permanent facility.<sup>83</sup>

In August of 1988, congregational President Sieber appointed a Building Committee and Building Finance Committee to look into what the church's options were.<sup>84</sup> They came up with their initial recommendations, which were way out of the league of what Grace could really handle financially--a \$400,000 facility was not what they had in mind. After further consideration and nearly three years of work, in July of 1991, Grace finally decided to build a new worship facility and remodel the other structure for use as classrooms and a fellowship hall.<sup>85</sup>

In the midst of all of this, the 25th anniversary of the church was also being planned. 1991 marked 25 years of God's continued grace and blessing upon this church, and wondrous growth. Grace now had 389 members and 110 in Sunday School.<sup>86</sup> During a building project and during a time of growth it is easy for people to become focused on self rather than on God. Pastor Mueller's opening to the anniversary booklet reminded the congregation to focus on their

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<sup>82</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Mueller (4/9/96)

<sup>83</sup> Taken from Quarterly Meeting minutes (7/31/88)

<sup>84</sup> Taken from Council Meeting minutes (8/14/88)

<sup>85</sup> Taken from Historical Highlights (12/95)

<sup>86</sup> Taken from page 7 of the Anniversary Booklet (6/16/91)

name--Grace--and what that term really meant. His opening article brought home that beautiful fact that even as they remembered all that had happened at Grace over the last 25 years none of it would have been possible without the wonderful works of God that guided them along. "...the name of our congregation reminds us to give all glory and credit where it belongs and that is to God, our Lord."<sup>87</sup>

On June 16, 1991, Grace remembered God's wonders among them in two services at 10AM and 2PM to sing His praises, to recall what He had done for them, to look ahead to where He was continuing to guide them. All four pastors who had served Grace over the first 25 years were to be on hand for the services. Pastor Mueller performed the liturgy and Pastor Roth preached at the morning service while Pastor Zittlow was to lead the service<sup>88</sup> and Pastor Gawrisch offered words of encouragement from the Lord in the afternoon, accompanied by the choirs and the organist, Mrs. Gedamke<sup>89</sup>, who had worked with all four men.<sup>90</sup> Also present were 8 of the charter members of the congregation that was never to be in Waupun. From those 21 nearly 400 had grown. "By God's GRACE we will continue to grow."<sup>91</sup>

After the anniversary celebration, the work on the new church, known as "Building His Sanctuary" taken from Exodus 25,<sup>92</sup> was just beginning. Decisions were finalized the following month and preparations for the new building were underway. It was time to begin to pour their efforts into the new church. Yet they wanted to avoid some of the past history of the church. Grace wisely decided to choose the contractor first, a method currently known as the Turn Key

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<sup>87</sup> Taken from pages 2 and 3 of the Anniversary Booklet (6/16/91)

<sup>88</sup> Pastor Zittlow was unable to attend at the last minute due to a death of a member in his congregation.

• Taken from the Anniversary Bulletin (6/16/91)

<sup>89</sup> Mrs. Gedamke still is the organist at Grace at the writing of this paper.

<sup>90</sup> Taken from page 5 of the Anniversary Booklet (6/16/91)

<sup>91</sup> Taken from page 7 of the Anniversary Booklet (6/16/91)

<sup>92</sup> Taken from the "Building His Sanctuary" proposal (date unknown)



Method.<sup>93</sup> They chose Westra Construction, a local firm, that had also been involved with the construction of the first church. In turn they suggested that Grace use Tesch-Tesch and Associates as the architect on the project.<sup>94</sup>

Grace went to the contractor first in an attempt to assure themselves of an accurate cost the first time. Westra came back to the congregation with a cost estimate of approximately \$267,500.<sup>95</sup> Grace would not be disappointed in their decision. On August 18, 1991, ground breaking for the new church took place and they began to “build His sanctuary.”

Funds to build the church were not difficult to raise. The congregation, early on, had started a special Building Fund to try to raise a sizable down payment for the church. One month prior to the ground breaking they had already gathered over \$60,000 for the Lord’s house. Only \$204,000 had to be borrowed.<sup>96</sup> Grace turned to the National Bank of Waupun, which was more than happy to loan the church the funds to complete the building.<sup>97</sup> At first they were concerned about the 11.5% loan that they had taken out for 25 years. However they did not lock in at that rate and when interest rates fell, their loan rate decreased to 9.75%, cutting 2-3 years off the loan.<sup>98</sup>

The building, measuring 84’x54’, went up quickly on the west side of the original structure. By December of 1991, the new sanctuary was ready for use. On December 15, 1991,

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<sup>93</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Mueller

<sup>94</sup> **Point of Interest**--Tesch and Tesch received \$7,525 for their work as architects on this building project more than twenty years later. See Footnote number 25 and compare the costs.

<sup>95</sup> This number was higher than the Committee’s later recommendation of only \$175,000 to be spent. However that number was really unsuited for what they felt they needed to do.

• Taken from a Building Recommendation (date suggested -- 11/11/89)

<sup>96</sup> Taken from the Building Project Recommendation (7/14/91)

• As of the writing of this paper just under \$175,000 remains to be repaid.

<sup>97</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Mueller

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

Grace Lutheran Church held their first worship service in the new church. The addition was much larger than what they had been worshipping in. Seating for 275 people on the floor and room for an additional 30 in the balcony was considerably more than the 200<sup>99</sup> that they had previously.

It had also gone much smoother financially. The congregation was very careful to keep everyone informed about the building situation throughout the entire project. Financial updates and what the costs were had been shared freely. Everyone who wanted to know what was going on could easily get a hold of that information.<sup>100</sup> When the final costs came in no one was surprised. There had been some areas on which the costs had overrun, such as the costs on the parking lot which ran considerably over, but there were many other areas that came in under budget that balanced them out, much of which was due to the willingness of the congregation to do whatever they could.<sup>101</sup> The final cost was \$267,408, less than \$100 off the original estimates given by the contractor.<sup>102</sup>

Yet as close to budget as the whole project was, it was also a very tight budget. It did not include any of the stained glass windows. These would have to come from outside the budget if people wanted them, and they did. Pastor Mueller was asked if money might be donated apart from the regular building project funds for stained glass windows and a stained glass cross in the front of church. Pastor assured them that if that was what they wanted to do that it was possible. He made it known to the congregation that this would happen and, if anyone was interested in donating a whole window or a part of one, what each one would cost. All the windows were

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<sup>99</sup> The figure of 200 may have included chairs that could be set up on the outside aisles and in the narthex.

200 would have been a very tight squeeze in the old sanctuary.

<sup>100</sup> Taken from and interview with Pastor Mueller

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Taken from the Building Project Recommendation (7/14/91)

quickly purchased by the members and money even had to be turned away, although the people were guided to donate it to other things for the building project.<sup>103</sup>

It would be another nine months before all the final work was done in preparing the old church as classrooms and a new fellowship hall. On September 13, 1992, all the preparations were complete and it was ready to be dedicated. At 3PM that day,<sup>104</sup> the congregation, numbering nearly 400 members and 265 communicants,<sup>105</sup> gathered with President Mischke at the new church and fellowship hall for the dedication service.<sup>106</sup> His sanctuary was complete.

Important events would continue in the history of Grace over the next few years. They began the first Men's Group at the church, which already has 15 regular members. Grace is working on a functional church library, with a computer database to aid in finding materials. Grace has established "The Grace Higher Education Student Fund" to help with the tuition of those who wish to study for one of the Preaching, Teaching or Lay Ministries. The church voted to hire the first full time custodian, Mrs. Joann Neumann, and "the church has never been cleaner, mostly because of the fine person that has been chosen." The old Methodist organ is beginning to fall apart after 15 years of service, and an Organ Committee has been formed to decide how to best replace it.<sup>107</sup> An "Exploratory Committee for a Christian Day School" has been working to inform the congregation on the importance of Christian Education and gathering

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<sup>103</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Mueller

- One woman wanted to donate for four windows after all had been purchased. The response was overwhelming.
- One of those other projects was the roofing. The old roof on the original church was not very sound. It regularly leaked because of "bubbles" that would form underneath the surface, causing holes to let water in.

<sup>104</sup> Taken from the "Grace Line" newsletter written by Pastor Mueller (9/92)

<sup>105</sup> Taken from the Council Meeting minutes (9/20/92)

<sup>106</sup> Taken from the "Grace Line" newsletter written by Pastor Mueller (9/92)

<sup>107</sup> A \$15,000-\$20,000 electronic organ will most likely be purchased.

data as to the feasibility of a Lutheran Elementary School for Grace<sup>108</sup> with the goal of some day adding on to the present structure once again to the glory of the Lord.<sup>109</sup>

And so the church, that was never to be, continues to grow by the Grace of God in the city that was completely churched. The congregation of 21 has grown past the 400 member mark and looks forward to God's continued blessings as they watch the city begin to grow up around them. May God continue to watch over them, protect them and guide them until He comes to call His faithful people home with His final Tidings of Grace.

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<sup>108</sup> This is being done in accordance with the current Four-Step procedure set up by the Synod. Grace is currently at step one, which is gathering data and information, while encouraging people in their use of Christian Education.

<sup>109</sup> Taken from an interview with Pastor Mueller.

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