



Grace Lutheran Church

Grace Lutheran Church officially came into being on March 29, 1959, the result of mission planting efforts begun by Army Chaplains from nearby Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and the mission developer and first Pastor, the Rev. Harold Tessmann. Pastor Tessmann was called by the then Western District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod to begin work establishing a Lutheran congregation in Clarksville (prior to this there was no Lutheran congregation from Paducah, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee). Preparation for this day formally began on Sunday, October 5, 1958, when some forty-eight people met at Fort Campbell to begin a two week effort canvassing, calling on prospective families, and getting out publicity about the new mission.

The first Lutheran service held by Pastor Tessmann took place at the Clarksville Servicemen's Center on October 19. There were 39 children and adults in Sunday School and Bible class and 84 in attendance at the worship service. The next day Pastor Tessmann was commissioned as Missionary-at-Large of the Western District of the LCMS, at Concordia Lutheran Church in Nashville.

Negotiations began with the Seventh Day Adventist Church at 784 N Second Street for this use of their building on Sundays. The rent was \$40 per month. The first service there took place on November 2, 1958. On December 7, 1958 the congregation chose a name for the new mission. Every adult could propose a name. The three names receiving the most votes were Grace, Faith, and Hope. After a vote, the people chose Grace Lutheran Church and thus the mission had a name.

On Easter Sunday, March 29, 1959, one hundred and forty-six people attended the service establishing Grace Lutheran Church (in a building designed to seat one hundred and four). Sixty-five people signed the



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original charter scroll and became the charter communicant members of Grace Lutheran Church. On June 1, 1959, the Voters Assembly extended a call to Pastor Harold Tessmann to become Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church. Pastor Tessmann accepted the call and was installed as the first pastor of Grace Lutheran Church on August 23, 1959. Groundbreaking for a new church building took place on March 6, 1960, less than one year after the church officially began.

Since many families traveled from Hopkinsville there was an early desire to see if that community could support its own church. Pastor Tessmann was authorized to served the mission in Hopkinsville as well as Grace Lutheran Church. For several years the two missions were served as a dual parish arrangement. Pastor Tessmann presided at the charter membership Sunday of what the people chose to call Faith Lutheran Church on January 7, 1962. Within three years of their own birth, Grace Lutheran Church had daughtered another congregation.

Pastor Tessman died on All Saints Day, November 1, 1969, shortly after the congregation's 10th anniversary. A Call was extended to Pastor Donald Cherney and he accepted and was installed as the second pastor of Grace Lutheran Church on April 19, 1970. The congregation grew to some four hundred baptized members during this time and the need for more space became critical. A building committee was formed and a local architect engaged to study the needs and present a plan to provide more educational and fellowship space. Ground was broken on an educational and fellowship wing in April of 1974 and the changes included remodeling the old fellowship and kitchen area of the old building for classrooms, narthex, and nursery.

Pastor Cherney had enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program of Vanderbilt University of Nashville and later he resigned from Grace



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Lutheran Church to pursue an internship in Clinical Pastoral Education. After a short vacancy the call was extended to Pastor Robert Mader who accepted and became the third pastor of Grace Lutheran Church. Pastor Mader was installed on Reformation Sunday, October 29, 1978. An added emphasis on evangelism and outreach came during the leadership of Pastor Mader. In addition several men from the parish pursued the Pastoral Ministry as a second career during Pastor Mader's tenure.

Pastor Mader accepted a call to become a pastor in Johnson City, Tennessee, in November of 1991. After the long vacancy during which Grace again depended upon Faith Lutheran Church and their pastor James Redmann, a call was extended to Pastor Larry Peters of Cairo, New York. On January 1, 1993, the Peters family arrived in Clarksville and he was installed on Sunday, January 17, 1993.

In just a few months the church raised nearly \$20,000 over their budget for a new parking lot and lighting system, the first of many changes to come. A committee prepared a 5 year master plan for the congregation including staff, program, and facility. In 1996 the congregation embarked on its first ever capital campaign to pay off all debt and provide the funds for part of the ambitious building project they had planned. In 1999 the congregation broke ground on a new addition of some 20,000 square feet including a new sanctuary, 10 classrooms, new administrative offices, restrooms, library, and a nursery. Key to this was a decision to begin a Lutheran preschool.

In September of 2000 work was complete enough to begin the first year of the preschool under the leadership of Director Elizabeth Hurlbut. She was one of several new staff members that had been added to the congregation over the previous several years, including Directors of



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Christian Education Diane (Damrau) Weber and Jo-Ann (Severin) Thomack, Cantor and Director of Music Rocky Craft, Pastoral Assistant the Rev. William Childress, and Parish Nurse Marilyn Nesbitt.

In October of 2001 the building was dedicated and in November 2001 the 60+ rank pipe organ was dedicated signalling the completion of this major \$1.5 million endeavor. The congregation completed the remodeling of the oldest portion of the building and put a new roof on the A-frame, old classrooms, and Fellowship Hall in 2008.

On March 29, 2009, the Congregation began a year of celebration for our 50th anniversary featuring visits by Dr. Dale Meyer, former Lutheran Hour Speaker and current President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Dr. John Nunes, then President of Lutheran World Relief!

On September 14, 2014, Grace voted to extend a call to a Seminary graduate to be an additional pastor of this growing congregation! On April 28 we were assigned Daniel Ulrich. He was ordained and installed as our first Associate Pastor on Sunday, July 12, 2015. He and his wife, Katie, have made their home in Clarksville and are working to strengthen and expand the pastoral care and support of God's people and the mission in this place.

In June of 2019 the congregation celebrated the 22 year service of Cantor Rocky Craft on the occasion of his retirement. Rocky has been responsible for Music at Grace, helping us purchase two pipe organs, and establishing a church music program noted for its excellence. The congregation undertook a search for a worthy candidate to continue the good work of Cantor Craft and this resulted in the choice of Jonathan Rudy as Cantor. Cantor Rudy began work at Grace in August of 2019 and at the end of 2019 the congregation added Katie Rudy as Assistant



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Cantor. Jonathan Rudy became Dr. Rudy in early 2020, having been awarded a doctorate from Indiana University in Bloomington.

The future is even now being written as the pastor and people take up the challenge and calling to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of we have been blessed and enriched by the people who made the commitment to do what needed to be done to see the mission fulfilled here and throughout the world. The names and contributions of these people would fill many books and we are forever indebted to their vision and dedication.