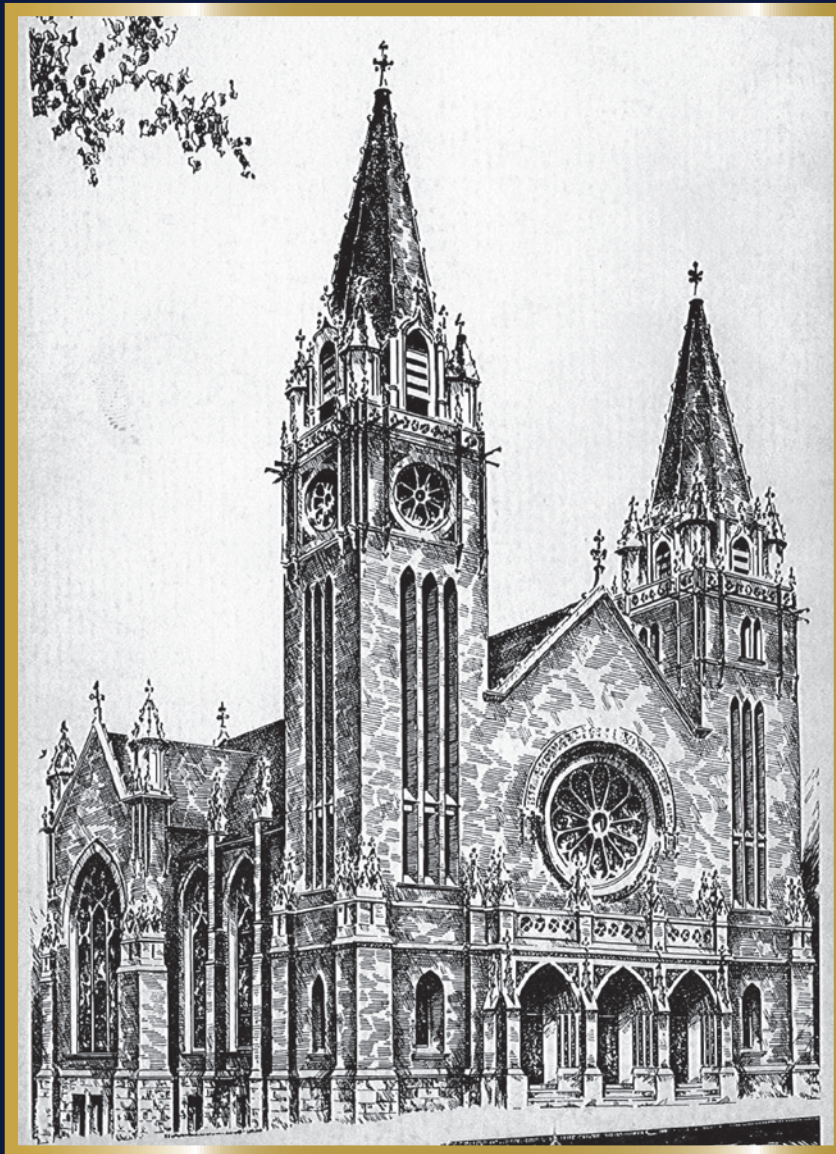


From Generation To Generation

175 YEARS OF GRACE







GRACE

LUTHERAN CHURCH

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

GROWING in Grace

GATHERED in Grace

GOING with Grace

GREAT is His Grace

Grace Lutheran Church celebrated its 175th anniversary
in 2024 with a reception on Sunday, May 19,
the Day of Pentecost.

INTRODUCTION

by Pastor James Huebner

What was the weather like on May 13, 1849? What did the neighborhood look like? How many people gathered at the meeting in a rented facility on what is now 3rd and Juneau to sign the constitution of a new congregation? We don't know those details, but we do know the meeting took place, and a new Lutheran congregation was begun, to be planted on the corner of Broadway and Juneau right here in Milwaukee. Since there already was a "Trinity Lutheran Church," in short order we became "Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church."

Think of it! The name of the congregation tells the story of the past and guides our future:

Grace - the undeserved mercy of God has been poured out to us, sinners though we are, so that we can live with God

Evangelical - that grace is truly "good news," centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and has been, is now, and will be proclaimed

Lutheran - holding to all of the Bible as God's inspired, inerrant, holy Word

Church - a gathering of people to glorify God for his grace, grow closer to him and each other in his grace, and go with the good news of God's grace to everyone in our ministry area and to the world

Special thanks to the 175th Anniversary Committee for hours and hours of planning and preparation — Professor-em. John Brenner (chairman), Carolyn Barsch, Kevin Becker, Jeanne Carbon, Lori Hassler, and Nicholas Jorgensen. Their efforts are a testimony to their faith-filled gratitude to the Lord of the church and a blessing for us all!

From small beginnings to what the congregation is now, there have been changes in the congregation's size, in the called workers, and in the community. But one constant remains — **We are here to proclaim Jesus so more and more people can live with God now and forever!**

"Grace be with you all!" (Titus 3:15).

April 24, 2024

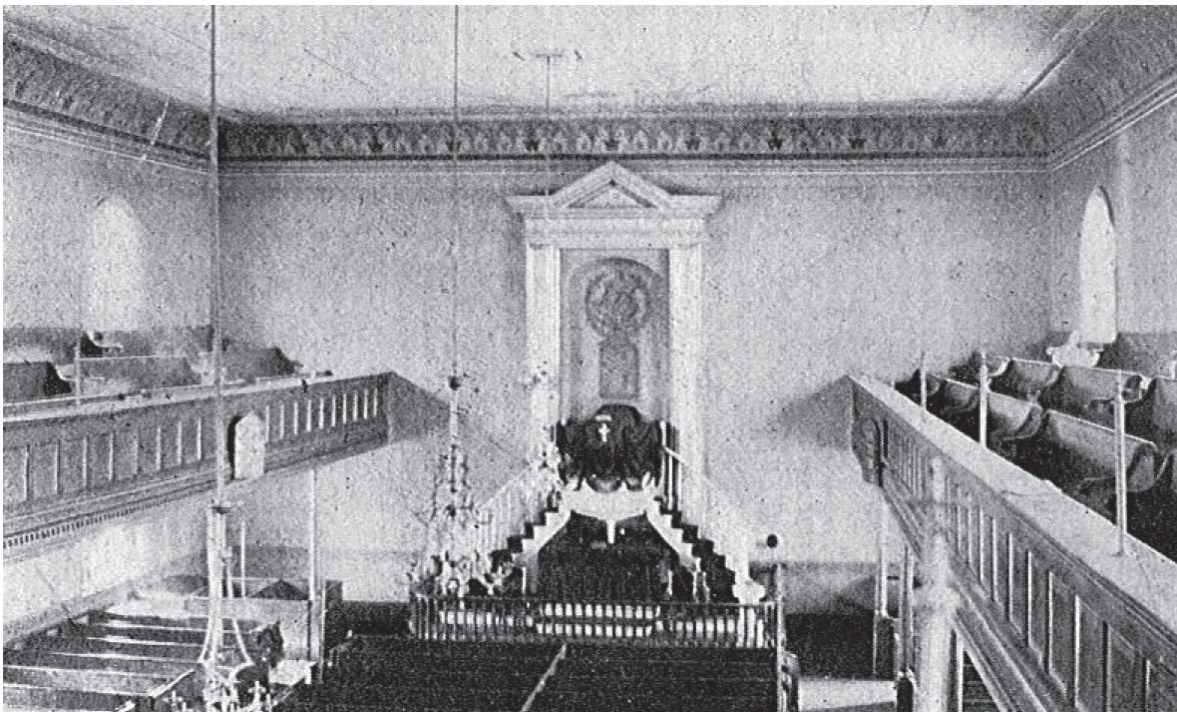
GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

175 years of God's Grace • 1849-2024

A Brief History

The history of a congregation is intertwined with the history of its community, nation, and church body. Grace Lutheran Church is no exception. The growth of the congregation paralleled the growth of Milwaukee and subsequent changes in the downtown area. World wars, the Great Depression, times of economic prosperity, and pandemics affected the congregation to a greater or lesser extent. The congregation experienced good times and times of difficulty, even tragedy.

A brief history cannot begin to relate all the blessings that God has showered on this congregation. Nor can we mention every individual or organization. A brief history can merely serve as an overview and summary of God's work among us and through us and at times, in spite of us. It is the story of 175 years of God's grace.



The interior of Grace Church in 1876



Grace Lutheran Church has faithfully served its members at the corner of Juneau and Broadway Avenues for 175 years.

The Early Years

1849-1867

Wisconsin became a state in 1848 having been carved from the old Northwest Territory. Pastor John Muehlhaeuser arrived in Milwaukee that very same year. Muehlhaeuser had been trained at the mission school in the German city of Barmen and was one of the first two missionaries sent to America by the Langenberg Mission Society. He served a congregation in Rochester, New York, for about ten years before coming to Milwaukee at the suggestion of Pastor John Weinmann. Muehlhaeuser had gone to meet Weinmann and Pastor William Wrede on the dock in New York City and welcomed them to America. The two newcomers traveled to Wisconsin, and Weinmann sent Muehlhaeuser reports on the great need for pastors because of the large number of immigrants that were coming to the area.



Wisconsin became a state in 1848. Pastor John Muehlhaeuser arrived in Milwaukee that very same year.



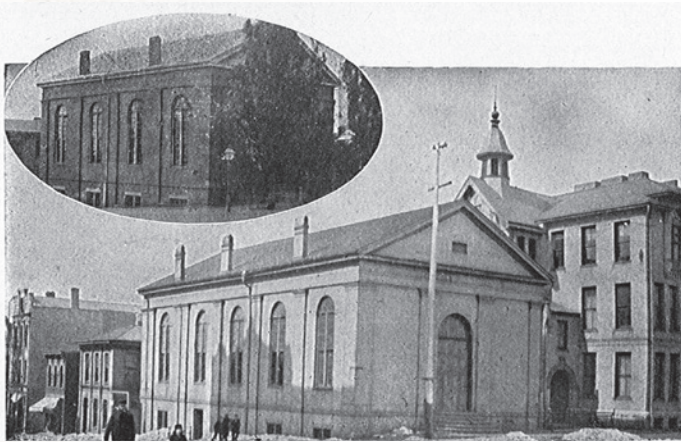
Muehlhaeuser arrived in Milwaukee at the end of June 1848 and supported himself for a time as a colporteur or religious tract salesman. He began conducting services in October of 1848 and founded the Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Dreieinigkeit Kirche (German Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church) on May 13, 1849. The name of the congregation was changed to Ev. Lutheran Grace Church when the church was legally incorporated on April 25, 1851, because the Missouri Synod already had a Trinity Lutheran Church in the area. Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede met in Grace's rented facilities on December 8, 1849, to organize what is now known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. No doubt, because of his age, experience, and organizational ability Muehlhaeuser was elected the first president of the synod. He served in that capacity until 1860. The synod's first constitution was signed by Muehlhaeuser and others on May 26, 1850, at Salem Lutheran Church in Granville, Wisconsin.

After Grace was founded, one of the first orders of business was to erect a church building. A brief history written on the occasion of the congregation's 100th anniversary explains,

Realizing that, if the congregation should continue and grow, it must have its own place of worship, the members, however, being too poor to contribute the necessary money, Pastor Muehlhaeuser decided to collect funds in the East. Looking to Jesus for His blessing, he departed on June 3, 1850, and gathered contributions mainly in New York and the New England States. Six months later he returned, bringing the sum of \$2,106.17.

He also received another \$1,655 from English churches (Presbyterian and Congregational) in Milwaukee. On March 20, 1851, the congregation purchased a lot on the corner of Main and Division (now Broadway and Juneau) for \$700. Pastor Muehlhaeuser bought his own house north of the church along Broadway. It was separated from church by a gravel playground for the school children. The 100th anniversary booklet describes the next developments.

Plans for a church building were immediately made. A brick church, 65 by 43 feet, with a school room 10 feet high, and the interior of the church 24 feet high, was given in contract for \$1900. On July 15th, the cornerstone was laid, in which copies of the New Testament, Luther's Small Catechism, and the Augsburg Confession were deposited. During the ensuing summer Muehlhaeuser collected an additional \$700 in the East.



The old church (top) and the enlarged old church (below) with school on the right (north) side — the footprint of Grace's current location on Juneau and Broadway Avenues

The building was dedicated on Christmas Day 1851. The entire cost including the lot, the church building, and furnishings for the school room in the basement was \$4,160.12. The congregation purchased and installed a pipe organ in 1857 for \$900.

Grace congregation prospered under Muehlhaeuser's leadership. Already in 1850, he baptized 40 children and confirmed 18. Those numbers increased in the next years. By 1863, 100 voters had signed the constitution and the school averaged 200 students in attendance. Muehlhaeuser was a missionary at heart, known for his evangelistic zeal and charitable work among the poor German immigrants who were streaming into the city. His reputation was enhanced

when his pastoral heart and Christian love led him to remain in Milwaukee to care for the sick during a cholera epidemic in the 1850s while others fled the city. He started an orphan asylum, a Sick Man's Aid Society, and helped found the old Lutheran Hospital in Milwaukee. Under his leadership over 20 other churches were directly aided by Grace Church.

Although he considered himself a Lutheran pastor, he had never received solid Lutheran training. He was willing at times to ignore doctrinal differences with other denominations as evidenced by the fact that he allowed a Methodist preacher and other English preachers to participate in the church's cornerstone laying ceremony and had a Congregational minister preach for one of the three dedication services. As the years passed, he seemed to gain a better understanding of confessional Lutheranism and did not stand in the way of the Wisconsin Synod becoming a truly confessional Lutheran church body. Wisconsin Synod historian, Prof. J. P. Koehler, offers this evaluation.

By and large it must be said that Muehlhaeuser's influence was not along the lines of confessional development which the growth of a Lutheran Synod among the Germans of the Midwest called for. His aim was directed toward the gathering of souls. Still, he did not oppose the endeavors of pastors who were more intent on precise Lutheranism in the government of the body, he did not reject their advice and offers of help, but appreciated their



Pastor John Muehlhaeuser (1849-1867)

work even when it meant his taking a second seat. And after he resigned from the presidency, he continued with his ready and unselfish support and in practical matters very often proved the better adviser, as the future revealed. (J.P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod. p. 72)

When Muehlhaeuser died on September 15, 1867, he left a thriving congregation and a growing synod. He was one of the first to be buried in Union Cemetery, which was owned by Grace, Trinity at 9th and Highland, and St. John at 8th and Vliet. The cemetery had just been dedicated during the summer of 1867.



Union Cemetery along with Graceland Cemetery is owned by Grace, Trinity, and St. John Lutheran Churches. Pastor Muehlhaeuser was one of the first to be buried at Union Cemetery.

Years of Growth

1868-1906

The years 1851-1900 saw huge numbers of Germans immigrating to America. During these decades Germans totaled nearly one third of all those who were coming to America. Many of these Germans settled in Wisconsin, including the Milwaukee area, providing a fertile mission field for Grace. As new pastors joined the Wisconsin Synod the synod also became more thoroughly Lutheran. Men like Pastor John Bading, who succeeded Muehlhaeuser as president of the synod in 1860, Pastor Philipp Koehler, Pastor Gottlieb Reim, and Pastor Adolf Hoenecke, who became the second director of the synod's seminary, were instrumental in moving the synod in a decidedly Lutheran direction. One of these newcomers was Theodor Jaekel who was received into membership in the synod in 1865.

The first pastor called to replace Muehlhaeuser at Grace was the synod president, John Bading, who was serving at St. Mark in Watertown. When Bading declined the congregation's call, Pastor Theodor Jaekel, who was serving a congregation in Winchester west of Neenah, was called by Grace in January of 1868. He accepted and served faithfully until his death in 1906, having served as the pastor of Grace for almost 38 years! During his years at Grace Jaekel was a member of the "Bading-Hoenecke-Jaekel Saturday morning coffee club." These three men helped make the synod a staunch Lutheran church body.



Grace Lutheran School students

The years 1868-1906 were years of numerical growth. Records indicate that in 1875 there were 132 baptisms and 52 were confirmed. In 1890 there were 178 baptisms and 70 were confirmed. In 1900, 109 were baptized and 61 confirmed. The increase in pastoral responsibilities led the congregation to call Professor Adolf Hoenecke as a pastoral assistant.

The Lutheran elementary school continued to enroll large numbers. In 1875 enrollment totaled 242 children of which 104 were members and 139 were non-members. A three-story school was constructed on the north side of the

church building in 1894 at the cost of \$21,285.15. The new school building was dedicated on November 4. The 100th anniversary history notes the importance of the school for the congregation and the special care that was taken of the building. "Expensive improvements were repeatedly made. A large amount was spent on the school so that it met all modern requirements. Those who know its educational work cannot but accord it high praise. Our school was the foremost missionary institution of our church."

The Bennett Law

In 1889 the Wisconsin State Legislature passed the Bennett Law which caused consternation for Roman Catholics and Lutherans who operated parochial schools. Among its provisions were the requirements that there be a school year of at least 12 weeks; that reading, writing, arithmetic, and U.S. history be taught in English; and that students could not attend schools outside their districts. The practical result of the law would have been the closure of many Wisconsin Synod schools because they would have had trouble acquiring teachers with good English skills. The requirement that students must attend a school within the public school district in which they lived was a problem because the areas from which congregations drew membership did not necessarily correspond with those districts. On March 24, 1890, the church council issued the following statement:

We feel that this law is very dangerous for the existence of our parochial school; a) it orders the parents to send their children to a designated school and if they refuse the parents will be prosecuted; b) the schools have to follow a certain timetable and could force our school out of existence; c) all of our schools will be under the supervision of the State School Administration and this agency will designate the subjects of instruction. We see this as an attack on our religious freedom. We demand repeal of this law.

Because of the uproar throughout the state over the Bennett Law, the sitting governor was voted out of office and a new majority took control of the state legislature. The law was repealed in 1891.



The interior of Grace Lutheran Church after the new 1901 church was built

services were held in the large assembly room of the school. The cornerstone for the new building was laid on April 9, 1900. Dedication took place on August 4, 1901. This building continues to serve as the place of worship for Grace to this day.

New Church Building

By the end of the 1890s it became clear that the old church building was in need of some major work. Instead of spending money on the old church, it was decided to build a new church at the same location. Within a month of the proposal, it was reported that “\$30,000 had been collected for the new church and this from only fifteen members.” The building committee chaired by the Milwaukee publisher, George Brumder, recommended the design by the architectural firm, H.C. Koch & Co. The cost was not to surpass \$38,000 and another \$12,000 was allowed for new furnishings. After the old building was torn down,



Pastor Theodor Jaekel (1868-1906)

Jaekel's Death

Tragedy struck on January 30, 1906, when Pastor Jaekel suffered a stroke while teaching a children's confirmation class. A newspaper report contained the following information:

While delivering religious instruction to his class of candidates for confirmation in the classroom in the basement of his church at Broadway and Juneau Avenue, the Rev. Theodor Jaekel of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church at 2 pm yesterday afternoon dropped suddenly from a seizure of apoplexy. His end came without warning, though he had suffered [a] similar attack last week. The class had just been opened for the afternoon recitation, the aged pastor was in the midst of a dogmatic discussion, when he felt a sudden and overpowering weakness come over him. Murmuring to himself, "I must hold myself," he grasped a desk, but had hardly taken hold when he began to reel, falling to the floor. Seized with consternation, some pupils rushed out of the room to inform their teachers in the adjoining school of what had befallen Jaekel while others in their impotent way

tried to offer some relief. Several others ran to a drug store a block away and still others speeded to telephones to call medical aid. The three teachers and the druggist arrived almost simultaneously, but stimulants which were administered had no effect on the dying man's condition. When Dr. W.E. Kremer arrived a few minutes later life was extinct . . . Jaekel was for many years the treasurer of the Wisconsin Synod. He took an active interest in its educational institutions and was one of the men to whom their rise and progress was due in a great measure.



Changing Times in Milwaukee, at Grace, and in the Synod

1906-1935

Pastor Jaekel's untimely death in 1906 marked the beginning of the passing of an era in the Wisconsin Synod. Seminary director, Doctor Adolf Hoenecke, died in 1908 as did Pastor Philipp von Rohr, the president of the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor John Bading, who was the longtime pastor of St. John at 8th and Vliet and successor of Muehlhaeuser as president of the synod and had guided the synod to be more thoroughly Lutheran, died in 1913.

There were also many other changes. Milwaukee continued to grow, but residents, including Grace members, began moving out of the downtown area into other parts of the city. Wisconsin Synod congregations in Milwaukee multiplied. The synod and Grace began the transition from German to the English language. The Spanish Influenza pandemic, two world wars, and the Great Depression impacted the congregation and its members.



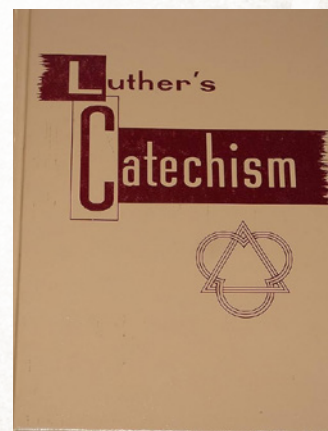
Pastor Carl Gausewitz (1906-1927)

Pastor Carl Gausewitz

Grace called Pastor Carl Gausewitz of St. Paul, Minnesota to replace Pastor Jaekel on February 15, 1906. Gausewitz was well respected as the president of the Minnesota Synod and the president of the Federation of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other states. The federation was organized in 1892. The synods in this federation merged in 1917 to form the Wisconsin Synod as we know it today. Gausewitz declined the call in March. The congregation delayed holding a second call meeting until July and chose Gausewitz again from the list of candidates. The second call was delivered by George Brumder in person, who had traveled to Minnesota to convince Gausewitz and the congregation in St. Paul of the need at Grace. Gausewitz declined the call the second time. Brumder proposed increasing the annual salary from \$1,000 to \$1,500. Gausewitz was then called a third time by Grace.

He accepted and began his twenty-one-year service at Grace. The parsonage was enlarged to accommodate his family. It was at this time that the congregation resolved to have two plaques made, one in memory of Pastor Muehlhaeuser and one in memory of Pastor Jaekel, and to display them at a designated place in the church. The passage on Muehlhaeuser's plaque is Hebrews 13:7. Daniel 12:3 is inscribed on Jaekel's plaque.

While serving as pastor of Grace, Gausewitz continued his service to Lutheranism beyond the congregation. He was elected president of the federation once again in 1913 and served until the synods merged in 1917. He also served as the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America from 1912-1927. He authored the Wisconsin Synod's exposition of Luther's Small Catechism published in German and English editions in 1917. This Gausewitz or "Tan"



Gausewitz "tan" Catechism

Catechism remained in use until a new exposition appeared in 1982—the so-called Kuske or “Blue” Catechism. He served on the boards of both Northwestern College and the seminary. He actively encouraged the members of Grace to support the work of the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference. When Gausewitz was asked to preach for the 50th anniversary of the founding of Northwestern College in Watertown, Grace decided to cancel services on that Sunday not only because Gausewitz would be in Watertown, but because “all other pastors from town will be there.” Special envelopes were sent to members with the request that they dig deep into their pockets for this anniversary celebration.

Transitions to English

Most immigrant groups coming to America adopt the language of their new homeland within a generation or so. German Lutherans were slow to adopt English for worship and religious instruction because of the lack of good Lutheran material in English, among other reasons. The transition to English began at Grace in 1910. On November 7 of that year the church council minutes record, “It was suggested that we should conduct Sunday evening services in the English language, and the council unanimously resolved: 1) that these services should start on the first Sunday of Advent; 2) that we should through the mail invite all of our members and their friends; 3) that we have some material printed for these services.” On May 21, 1911, at a special meeting of the council “the pastor announced that two of the adult confirmands would like to be confirmed in the English language. He suggested to conduct the examination at the evening Ascension service and asked the councilmen for their assistance.” Since the younger generation preferred speaking the language of the land, it was becoming evident that English was the language of the future for Lutherans in America. In January of 1914 the Wisconsin Synod began publishing its first English periodical, *The Northwestern Lutheran* (today called *Forward in Christ*).



Grace Lutheran Church after the 1901 church was built

Changes and Challenges

Being a downtown church was advantageous during the early years of Grace's history. But as the city expanded and people moved to other parts of the city the congregation was presented with some challenges. It was often logical for Grace members to consider transferring to Wisconsin Synod congregations in their new neighborhoods. At the 75th anniversary of the congregation Gausewitz expressed some concerns for the future.

When our church was first started, our city was a small town. In 1924, there are around fifty congregations, large and small, that are one with us in faith and confession. Whilst our members live far scattered, our church and school are downtown and near the business center of this large city. The other Lutheran churches and schools form concentric circles to the north, west, and south of us. But just because of our location our church has an important mission to fulfill. This can be done only if our members in the future, as they have heretofore done, faithfully help and stay with our dear Grace Church.

The congregation's work continued. The church building was redecorated, and improvements were made to the organ and balcony area in 1921. In 1923, the council decided to purchase the Smith residence at 439 Newberry Blvd. for \$17,500 as a parsonage [now 2107 E. Newberry]. Pastoral ministrations went on unabated. In 1916 there were 59 baptisms, 38 confirmations, and 40 weddings. In 1919, there were 58 baptisms, 24 weddings, 36 burials, and 31 confirmed. In 1924, there were 63 baptisms, 28 confirmations, 19 weddings, and 29 funerals. Although these pastoral acts were reported regularly in the church council minutes, communicant membership numbers did not appear in them until 1930. The minutes at that time record that the church had approximately 850 communicant members, and about 200 voting members. Total church membership is not indicated; but with 850 communicants the total membership was probably around 1,100. Most people today would look at those statistics during this period and see no reason for alarm.

The Closing of Grace School

The school, however, was experiencing declining numbers and a change in the percentage of students who were Grace members. Enrollment in the previous century was usually in the low 200s. In the early twentieth century enrollment was in the low 100s. It was reported that in 1914 Principal John Helmreich and Teacher Gimmler had visited over 50 members who have children about to go to school in order to encourage them to send them to



The original pulpit from 1901

Grace School. Nevertheless, in 1915 there were only 69 students enrolled. In the next years enrollment increased with a peak in 1924 of 134 students. The 100th anniversary history notes that “the missionary spirit of and activity of our parochial school teachers brought in many of the unchurched of our neighborhood through annual canvasses, so that the school held its attendance at about 100 students under 4 teachers.” In January of 1934 there were 126 students: of which 28% members, 30% were unchurched, 42% were from other denominations. In September 1934 the school opened with an enrollment of 104. It was noted at the time that “the transient character of the neighborhood brought on a large turnover in the enrollment of pupils in the course of every year.”

The Great Depression was also causing severe financial difficulties. In January 1933, the church council was informed of the dire circumstances and was forced to make some hard decisions.



Principal John Helmreich

Our treasurer reported that the receipts during the year dropped off considerably, and that we now have an indebtedness of about \$16,000. In view of this fact it was resolved after due deliberation to recommend the following to the congregation: Not to abolish the school at this time, but to apply to the Aid Association for Lutherans for a mortgage loan of \$20,000; also, we recommend to cut all salaries 10% and to pay the lady teachers on a 10 month basis.

There were some valiant efforts to demonstrate the spiritual value of the school, but the downtown location and continuing budget deficits led to the closure of the school. The council minutes of January 7, 1935, report:

After the financial situation was again brought to the attention of the members, and the fact shown that our deficit during the past year was over \$4000, also that to combine with some other parochial school was out of the question because of our location, and as no plan, that would incur a considerable saving was forthcoming, it was resolved by a large majority vote to discontinue the school with the end of the school year.

The voters in assembly on January 14 reluctantly concurred with the council in the recommendation. There was a final attempt to save the school by sending out a questionnaire to the congregation. The small number of communicants who responded left the council with no other course of action than to implement the original decision. Grace Lutheran School brought blessings to Grace and the students who attended for more than eight decades.

Other Challenges

Grace congregation also weathered other difficulties. The Spanish Influenza pandemic (1918-1920) caused disruptions for both the church and school. By order of the Health Commissioner in October 1918, services and meetings were canceled for a time and students were not allowed to attend school for about three weeks. A couple of months later the children’s Christmas service was canceled because of the flu.

In May of 1918, Pastor Gausewitz was struck by a hit-and-run driver while walking at the intersection of Juneau Avenue and Jefferson Street. He was rushed to the hospital emergency room where it was determined that he had a fractured skull. The newspaper reported that “the surgeons rushed him to the operating table in an effort to save his life.” He was 56 years old. After a lengthy recovery he was able to resume his duties. Professor John Schaller, director of the seminary and pastoral assistant at Grace, assumed Gausewitz’s pastoral responsibilities during his convalescence.

Tragedy struck again on Sunday September 4, 1927, when Gausewitz died suddenly in the sacristy before a communion service. *The Northwestern Lutheran* (vol. 14 no. 20) contains this report:

He had been busy about the altar, preparing for Holy Communion which was to be celebrated on that Sunday. He took the Bible from the lectern and returned to the sacristy for final meditation on his sermon. It was the last time he was seen alive. He died sitting upright in his chair with the open Bible before him on the desk. Pastor Gausewitz, who was 66 years on August 29, had long been an outstanding figure in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Eminently gifted as he was, specially endowed with perspicuity and clarity of thought, paired with poise and equanimity, with sound judgment and a commanding voice, he was made for leadership.

On November 7, 1927, Grace called Pastor William Sauer of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Watertown, South Dakota. Sauer accepted the call on December 5 and was installed as the fourth pastor in the history of Grace on January 22, 1928. Sauer had been serving as the president of the Wisconsin Synod’s Dakota-Montana District and was instrumental in the founding of the synod’s Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota.



**Pastor William Sauer
(1928-1951)**

The congregation made use of developments in technology to improve the worship experience of those who had suffered hearing loss. The council minutes of March 1929 record:

It was found that quite a number of our members are hard of hearing and are therefore unable to derive the proper benefit from the services; and after a practical demonstration by reps of a firm dealing in Hear-O-Phones, it was resolved to inquire as to how many are afflicted in that way, and whether or not they were in favor of installing such phones, and after these persons had reported, to install and try out these instruments at 3 or 4 services to determine their value, and should they prove satisfactory to recommend to the congregation to install them permanently. The estimated cost of 2 transmitters and phones for 8 persons was given at \$230.

It was reported on April 8 that the Hear-O-Phones had been installed; paid for by Herman Andrae.

The move toward English gained momentum. In July of 1935, the church council recommended to the congregation to have English services on every Sunday except one each month because it was ascertained that quite a number of the congregation’s young people were going to other churches on the German Sundays or not attending any services at all.

Choice and Challenge

1936-1976

In 1936, Grace membership stood at 800 communicant members and approximately 1,150 baptized souls. In 1976, there were 365 communicants and 414 baptized souls. The decline corresponded with the changing nature of the downtown area, although toward the end of this period there were hints of a downtown renewal.

Pastor Sauer had health problems which sidelined him for two months in 1943, the same year that marked the 15th anniversary of the Lutheran radio broadcast on WTMJ with a special one-hour broadcast on March 8.

World War II saw many Grace members serving in the armed forces. In January of 1945, there were 57 men and 6 women of our members serving with 25 of the 57 men overseas. In October of the same year there were 73 men and 7 women serving. It was reported that two had been killed in action, Donald Bennett and Robert Schraepfer. After the war Grace joined in the collection of money, clothes, and shoes for those who suffered from the ravages of the war in Europe, especially for the refugees of the synod's Polish mission.



Easter Sunday worship in 1948, from the 1949 anniversary booklet

Grace celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1949 with an English service at 10:30 a.m. on May 15, and English service that same day at 3:30 p.m., a German service at 10:30 a.m. on May 22 and a centennial choir service at 8:00 p.m. In this centennial year Grace had 650 communicants and 850 baptized souls.

Pastor Sauer's health once again took a turn for the worse in 1951. In March, he was granted a leave of absence for two months and was hospitalized from March 14 to June 3. Pastor John C. Jeske who had been giving confirmation instruction conducted the confirmation service on May 27. By the fall it was evident that Sauer's



**Pastor Elton Huebner
(1951-1961)**

health would not let him resume his pastoral duties. Pastor Elton H. Huebner, the uncle of our current pastor, James Huebner, was installed as his successor on Sunday, December 2, 1951. Pastor Sauer went to heaven on October 13, 1952.

Under Sauer the number of adult confirmations had increased. The 100th anniversary booklet indicated that in the previous 20 years there had been 148 adult confirmations and 23 adult baptisms. On March 12, 1952, the church council determined to have a special service to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the church building with a jubilee offering some time

in September. The date was later changed to October.

On the very day that Sauer died, the church council passed a resolution to assist a group of fellow Lutherans. "In as much as the Latvian congregation has indicated that it is in agreement with Grace Church in doctrine and practice, Grace congregation permits the Latvian congregation the use of our church for services every Sunday 12:30-2:30 p.m." This arrangement continued until February 26, 1961. By mid-century English had become the language of worship, but some provision for German services remained. On November 10, 1952, a resolution was passed to have two English services on Sunday at 9:15 and 10:30. The resolution also stated that there should be no fewer than four German services a year.

A restoration project initiated in April 1955, included the renovation of the church's interior and exterior as well as the rebuilding of the steeples and the organ. The main supports for the towers had deteriorated and needed to be repaired. An every-member visitation was undertaken. "The entire congregation was divided into 4 'divisions,' each division leader was to select 4 captains, and each captain was to select 6 workers to assist in the visitation. The purpose was to secure gifts and pledges for the \$50,000 redecoration." The rededication service was held on October 28, 1956. Pastor Harold Sauer, the son of Pastor William Sauer, preached at the 10 a.m. service. Pastor A.F. Halboth preached at the 2:30 p.m. service. The organ was dedicated on November 24 with Mr. Hawley playing an organ recital.

In 1954, Pastor Elton Huebner received calls to Kenosha and to South Dakota, the first time in the long history of Grace that a pastor had received a call to serve elsewhere. He declined both calls. In April 1961 he received a call to St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam. He declined the call, but circumstances in Beaver Dam changed and he was called a second time in May. This time he accepted.



Completed in 1956, the church's restoration project included the renovation of the interior and exterior as well as the rebuilding of the steeples and the organ.

In spite of Huebner's faithful efforts, including confirming 14 adults in 1953, membership continued to decline as older members died and younger members decided to rent or purchase homes "in more desirable communities." Efforts continued to reach out to the neighborhood around the church with canvasses conducted by seminary students. In 1960, there was discussion of whether "we should amalgamate with another old downtown congregation" and a committee was formed to look into the possibilities. At the same time there were developments in Milwaukee that could impact the congregation. The council minutes record, "Just how much of an effect the redevelopment program of the city of Milwaukee and the expressway system will have upon our congregation is not known by anyone but God alone. We pray God that He may show us what to do and then give us the wisdom and the courage to do it."

During the vacancy the Mission Board presented a proposal calling for Grace's pastor and the church's facilities to carry on the student ministry program in Milwaukee for the Wisconsin Synod under sponsorship and supervision of the Mission Board. The Mission Board believed that there was great potential for such work among students at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE). The Mission Board would pay \$165 a month toward the pastor's salary, a secretary, and use of Grace's facilities. The church council, however, decided to stress the mission potential of the immediate area and not to have a new pastor involved in campus ministry.



Pastor Elmer Mahnke
(1962-1975)

After several calls were declined, Pastor Elmer Mahnke of Moline, Illinois, was called on September 24, 1962. He accepted and was installed on October 31.

The 1960s and 1970s provided new changes and opportunities for Grace. In 1963, Pastor Mahnke presented some needs for the future of the congregation. Among his suggestions were emphasis on the function of the elders, establishing a pre-Sunday school nursery, offering envelopes for every communicant member, ushering changes, emphasis on welcoming visitors, and having a pastor's night at the parsonage. Grace also continued to make use of student assistants from the seminary. In 1963, it was decided to remove the German hymnals from the church because German services were no longer being conducted.

Important Decisions

In 1966, the church council agreed to a proposal by All Saints Cathedral to list Grace congregation and the time of our services in a brochure that would be handed out to all prospects and all tenants in the Juneau Village project. In addition, Grace sent 200 letters to new tenants of Juneau Village inviting them to our services. An additional 275 letters were mailed to the surrounding neighborhood apartments. It was reported that the evangelism committee made 269 calls - 118 were not home, 5 prospects were found, and 40 unchurched homes were visited. People were moving back into the downtown area. By 1972, it could be reported that Grace was unique among "inner city" congregations. When Pastor Mahnke arrived, there were only 47 members living in the area bounded by Wisconsin Ave., the Milwaukee River, North Ave., and Lake Michigan. In 1972, about 100 members were living in the area.

October of 1966 was momentous in the history of Grace for other reasons. Milwaukee's urban redevelopment called for some crucial decisions. All of the brewery buildings on Grace's block were to be removed by December 1, 1966. In order to retain occupancy of the Grace school building, repairs needed to be made to conform with

the city building code. The estimated cost was between \$15,000 and \$20,000. The church council directed “the Planning Committee (Mr. Kraase, Norm Numrich, Gustav Pagel, Marie Brunner) to meet with the officers of the congregation to determine needs for a future new building adjacent to the church . . . and to engage an architect to furnish preliminary plans with an estimate of the cost.” Architect Carl H. Gausewitz of Monona, Wisconsin, who was the grandson of Pastor Carl Gausewitz, was hired to help Grace with proposals for the school building.



Blatz & Pabst Brewery buildings once surrounded the blocks around Grace Lutheran Church.

On October 24, 1966, an important resolution was passed. The minutes record, “Following a discussion, it was unanimously voted to reaffirm previous decisions to continue Grace Church at its present location. This latest affirmation was sought to provide a basis for future planning necessitated by urban redevelopment plans for the area and safety requirements for the school building.” While other congregations in the city moved to the suburbs, Grace was determined to stay in downtown Milwaukee and serve the area.

There were several proposals for the school building including an offer from the synod’s mission board to pay either for the renovation of the school and lease space to Grace with Grace surrendering the title to

the building, or to demolish the building with Grace paying for a new building and leasing space to the synod for a student center. The synod also offered to put Grace on a mission status, but the church council unanimously declined the offer.

It was also discovered that attention needed to be given to the church building because it had experienced significant settling. An engineer offered the opinion that the repair of the church could be delayed. In 1969 the congregation decided to demolish the school and build a new two-story parish center which would house the boiler, meeting rooms, office, work rooms, cry room and lounge, with a passage through to the existing church, and to study shoring up the current church building. The parish center was dedicated on October 18, 1970.

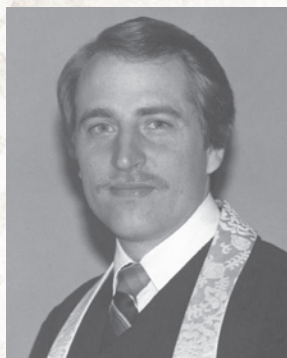
Other Developments

In September 1967, Mr. Alfred Bloedel became the part-time minister of music and served faithfully in that capacity until August 2004. In October 1967, Grace became a charter member of Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, a new organization replacing the Institutional Missions. In September of 1968, Mr. Henry Just asked to be replaced after 58 years of faithful service as Sunday school teacher and superintendent.



Mr. Alfred Bloedel was the part-time minister of music from 1967-2004.

In 1972, Grace began broadcasting services over WEZW. That summer 96 children attended Vacation Bible School. Requests for a full-time vicar were denied so Grace continued using part-time student assistants from the seminary because of the increasing pastoral workload. Professor Joel Gerlach became a pulpit assistant. Grace began meeting with representatives of other WELS inner city congregations for mutual support and to discuss and coordinate work in the inner city.



**Pastor Peter Kruschel
(1976-1982)**

Pastor Mahnke resigned as pastor of Grace because of family problems. He preached his farewell sermon on April 20, 1975. After several calls were declined, the congregation went to the synod's assignment committee for a seminary graduate. Pastor Peter Kruschel was assigned as the seventh pastor in the history of the congregation. He was ordained and installed in June of 1976. At the end of 1976, there were 365 communicants and a total membership of 414.



**In 1966, after a unanimous vote, the church agreed to stay in their current location,
instead of moving to a suburban location.**

1977-1990

Outreach efforts continued. In April of 1977, Grace members hosted 16 Lutheran collegians who canvassed 1,000 homes in the area, turning up 40 prospects. In February of 1979, the church council was informed that a seminary senior was going to serve as evangelism vicar. In December of that same year Pastor Kruschel reported four adult confirmands. Among the new members was the first black family to join Grace. Kruschel expressed the hope that they might be pioneers in integrating the church. A new women's group was also formed – LOGOS (Ladies of Grace Organized to Study, Serve, Socialize).

The congregation gave much attention to the possibility of purchasing the parking lot belonging to Pabst Brewing Company. MSOE was also interested in the property. The decision was made to sell the parsonage on Newberry and buy a parsonage at 7318 W. Bluemound. The council also studied an arrangement whereby the pastor could own the home.

In April of 1982, Pastor Kruschel announced that he had accepted the call he received to start a new mission in Orlando, Florida. He preached his farewell sermon on May 16. Kruschel later became the assistant administrator for the WELS Board for Home Missions and then administrator for the WELS Board for Ministerial Education.

The congregation requested a seminary graduate from the synod's assignment committee. James R. Huebner, a 1980 graduate of the seminary who had served for one year as an undergraduate tutor (dean's assistant) at Northwestern Preparatory School and two years as a graduate tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, received the call and was installed on July 18, 1982. Since that time Pastor Huebner has become the longest serving pastor in the history of Grace congregation. During his years at Grace, he has also served the synod as a member of a number of committees, as a vice-president of the WELS Southeastern Wisconsin District, and as first vice-president of the synod.



Pastor James Huebner was assigned to Grace Church in 1982 and has become Grace's longest serving pastor.



Three bells have been ringing from Grace's steeples since 1906: an E bell (2100 lbs.), an F-Sharp bell (1580 lbs.), and a G-Sharp bell (1120 lbs.).

Disaster Averted

On October 20, 1982, the south steeple of the church caught fire. Two MSOE students driving down the hill saw flickering at base of the cross on top of the steeple. When they arrived at class, they called the parsonage. Mrs. Huebner called the church during a Sunday school teachers' meeting. Pastor Huebner and Bob Baumann ran out to look, saw flames, and called the fire department. In minutes a hook and ladder truck was on the scene, but the fire fighters could not reach the burning steeple from the outside because of the height of the steeple and the strong wind. They pulled hoses up the south narthex stairwell and extinguished the fire from the inside of the steeple.

Fifteen feet burned, and the fire chief said, "Another 10 minutes and you would have lost the building." The congregation recognized the two young men for their alertness which saved our church from a serious fire by giving them a gift of framed sketches of Grace from the congregation's 100th anniversary.

It soon was time to address the church's serious structural issues caused by the settling of the building. In 1983, the congregation hired an engineer to study the problems caused by the west end of the church sinking. After the necessary repairs were made, in 1986 it was decided to repair the altar area and restore the historic look of the chancel. The chancel restoration project was completed in 1989. It included the repositioning of the pulpit on a pedestal, installing a new pulpit canopy, and restoring the lectern and baptismal font to their original positions in the chancel.



In 1986, Professor James Tiefel (pictured front right) became the pulpit assistant and part-time minister of music.

New Developments

Efforts to enhance worship included an attempt to provide liturgical variety with the use of the Order of Matins on the second Sunday of each month. About the same time, phase 3 of the organ improvement was completed. In 1986, Professor James Tiefel became the pulpit assistant, preaching every five to six weeks. Eventually he became the part-time minister of music.

For many years the congregation had been interested in the adjacent parking lot property owned by Pabst (later the Heilman Brewing Company) with the hope of being able to purchase it. In 1985, Heilman sold the parking lot around the church to the City of Milwaukee for \$500,000. In 1986, Grace received a memorandum

from the city granting the congregation permission to park in the lot on Sundays and Wednesday evenings during Advent and Lent. Grace also informed the city that the congregation would like to be notified should the property be offered for sale. In 1987, the Commission of City Development sent a letter to the congregation stating that the city was unable to consider offers to purchase parking lots due to lease commitments. In December, Pastor Huebner reported on discussions with developer John Silseth concerning land use around the church. Mr. Silseth recommended working with MSOE and the city developer concerning joint land use with MSOE. On the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 1989, the Milwaukee Sentinel printed an article citing a "leak" from the mayor's office that the city wanted to build the new Brewers stadium on the parking lot next to Grace. Pastor Huebner was called by a Milwaukee Journal reporter asking for comments and was interviewed on videotape by Jerry Grayson from Channel 12. The interview aired on TV. The television spot led to an individual taking Bible Information Class and joining Grace. Pastor Huebner met with Mayor John Norquist on April 11, 1989, concerning property acquisition. City Engineer, John Erickson, visited Grace and viewed the parking lot. He recommended that the congregation work with MSOE to reserve a number of spaces and in the future to share in a lease with MSOE. The mayor's plans for the Brewers stadium were not resolved until the spring of 1996. His plans did not come to fruition, and the new stadium was built on the County Stadium property.

1987 saw a number of evangelism efforts as members were trained in “God’s Great Exchange.” Grace also participated in the synod-wide evangelism effort “Go ’87.” Some 3,000 homes on Milwaukee’s east side were canvassed. There were 35 visitors on “Bring a Friend Sunday.” Plans were made for the congregation to canvass a small portion of the east side in August preceded by door hangers, and to do a direct mailing every January to a number of apartment buildings in the area.

In 1988, as part of the synod’s spiritual renewal program, the WELS Board for Parish Services of the WELS extended Pastor Huebner a limited two-year call to serve 33% of his time as a parish consultant as part of a pilot project as a consultant for two years, July 1989-June 1991. The congregation approved the arrangement. The synod compensated Grace \$11,000/year for the help necessary to cover the approximately 25 hours/week that Huebner would be devoting to his work as a parish consultant.



“Sola Gratia” — the center of the rose window at Grace Lutheran Church depicts Martin Luther who led the Lutheran Reformation and who coined the phrase “by grace alone.”

Growth and Renewal

1990-Present

For many decades the congregation experienced numerical decline as the area around the church changed and members moved away from downtown Milwaukee. Total membership declined from 1250 in 1931 to a low of 370 in 1989. Beginning in the mid 1980s the congregation's leaders and members recommitted themselves to a focus on worship, Bible study, outreach, fellowship, and service. These efforts, together with the revitalization of downtown Milwaukee, helped the congregation nearly triple in size by the early 2000s.



Pastor Daron Lindemann
(1999-2012)



Pastor Daniel Bondow
(2013-2019)

Adding Ministerial Staff

In 1999, Pastor Daron J. Lindemann was called as an associate pastor. He served until 2012 when he accepted a call to Texas. In 2013, Pastor Daniel S. Bondow was installed as Lindemann's replacement. He served until 2019 when he accepted a call to Colorado.

Pastor Aaron M. Strong was called as a third pastor in 2015. Under Strong, Grace began mission work in the Third Ward as a second site ministry location. A good start was made, but the effort ended with the

Covid 19 pandemic. Tragedy struck Grace congregation once again on October 12, 2022. Pastor Strong lost his life as he was coming to the church office. His car was struck by a reckless driver traveling at a high rate of speed on Wells Street. Strong was 40 years old. His funeral was attended by an overflow crowd – an estimated 450 in church and 550 in the Grace Center.



Pastor Aaron Strong
(2015-2022)

Pastor Daniel Leyrer, the president of the WELS Southeastern Wisconsin District, preached on 2 Corinthians 5:21. Strong's death and funeral were covered by all the major news outlets. As a result, in his death he continued to proclaim the gospel and

his Savior whom he had served so faithfully during his life.



Pastor Brian Hackmann
(called in 2019)



Pastor Matthew Scharf
(called in 2023)

In 2019, Pastor Brian Hackmann, who was serving a congregation in Eagle River, Alaska, accepted the call as outreach pastor. Pastor Matthew Scharf, who was serving as an assistant to the Nebraska District president in Manhattan, Kansas, was installed as Strong's successor on July 2, 2023.

Congregational growth also resulted in the calling of staff ministers. This was not a new concept for Grace. Mr. Arthur A. Griebing served from 1935 to the beginning of January 1962 in music and administration. Mr. Alfred P. Bloedel served part-time from 1967 to 2004 as minister of music. In 1991 the church council recommended to the congregation a position description for a minister of discipleship. Mr. Frederick J. Horn was called and installed on August 25, 1991. He continued until his retirement in 2018.

Mr. Andrew R. Carter was assigned from MLC as family minister to replace him and served until August 2022. Mr. Kevin P. Becker was installed as minister of music on July 21, 2019. Mrs. Abbie R. Strong was installed as family minister on November 27, 2022 and served until April 2024.

Today the congregation also has a part-time church administrator/accountant, an office secretary, an events coordinator, a communications coordinator, an assistant for events, and a coffee shop manager, along with hundreds of volunteers carrying out the congregation's ministry.



Building Developments

In 1995, a major renovation project was completed featuring a redesigned interior color scheme, acoustical improvements, increased nave seating, a new roof, rewiring of the entire building, and balcony flooring. In 1999, the members approved a plan for a half million-dollar organ renovation. The 53 rank, 3 manual pipe organ was completed and installed in 2002.



The Grace Center was dedicated in 2007

Planning for the Grace Center began in 1990. The Grace Center was originally intended to be built along Broadway and either connect to the parish center or replace it. That changed after the threat of the city in 1996 to locate Miller Park next to the church and the subsequent sale of the block to MSOE in 1998. When MSOE planned for its Kern Center to fill the block and wrap around Grace's property, it took two years of intense negotiations to persuade them to revise their plan and leave 10,000 square feet down the hill behind the church for the Grace Center. The Kern Center was completed in 2004. Grace purchased land from the city in 2005.

The Grace Center, a \$5.3 million multi-purpose facility, was intended to enhance the congregation's ability to connect with the community and serve its members. The building includes a lower level for parking, a main level featuring the Grace Place coffee shop, offices, and a classroom, and a third level for the great hall. Construction began in February 2006. The Grace Center was dedicated on March 25, 2007. By the grace of God, the mortgage was retired in January 2021. The Grace Center has proven to be a great blessing for the congregation.

Planning for the next project, the "Broadway Building," began in mid-2021. A design committee was appointed and began meeting in November of that year. An architect was hired to explore designs and costs to replace the parish center and to link the church with the Grace Center. Plans for the Broadway Building were revealed to the congregation in November 2022. The cost was quite high, but Grace had already received commitments of nearly \$7 million by the fall of 2022.



Wisconsin Lutheran High School choir at Grace Lutheran Church worship service in 2024

In January of 2023, a team looked at the costs and considered what might be the best way to proceed. In February 2024, the council adopted a plan for a phased approach. Phase 1 (\$2 million to be paid in cash) is slated to begin as materials become available, likely in early 2025. This phase includes HVAC, electrical, and other infrastructure necessities to be built in the church basement; renovating the church basement for children's ministry and other uses; and addressing and changing the acoustics of the Grace Center's great hall. Phase 2 is scheduled to begin in 2026 or 2027. In this phase the north stairwell and ramp through the north tower of the church will be removed to create a better flow for people into and out of worship through a gorgeous, spacious gathering space (with bathrooms and other amenities) in the Broadway Building. This will provide the opportunity for people to connect with each other more easily and enhance outreach as guests see and experience person-to-person love and care. It is estimated that the Broadway Building will cost \$9 million to build.

Covid 19 Pandemic

A century after the Spanish Flu pandemic the United States was struck by another. The Covid 19 pandemic caused medical professionals and government officials to scramble for solutions to prevent the rapid spread of the disease. The medical response and governmental requirements varied from community to community. Milwaukee County was more stringent than many other counties in Wisconsin. As during the Spanish Influenza pandemic, in-person worship and other large gatherings were shut down from March 22, 2020 to June 7, 2020. When gathering for worship was again permitted there were requirements for social distancing and the wearing of medical masks. Hand sanitizer was made available in the church narthex. During this time Grace made improvements in the online streaming of services as did many other WELS congregations. This has proven to be a blessing for shut ins, members who are traveling in areas where there is no WELS presence, and even for outreach.

CONCLUSION

Why do we celebrate congregational anniversaries and write congregational histories? We do these things to remember God's mercy and faithfulness and to express our thanks to him for his many blessings. By its very nature a congregational history is a history of what God has moved his people to do together, corporately. It cannot tell the story of each individual Christian and what God has done in their lives and how he has used them as his children to accomplish his plans and purposes. Those stories will be seen and told in heaven.

Much has happened in 175 years. There have been challenges and changes, numerical growth and decline, good times and difficulties. Yet through all the vicissitudes of the past there has been one constant—God's grace. During all this time our God comforted sinners with the good news of full and free forgiveness. He reassured the dying and bereaved with the certain hope of the resurrection. In his name shut-ins have been visited and encouraged by the gospel. The Lord of the church brought children and adults into his kingdom through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. He gave them his very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of Holy Communion. He allowed the young and old to be instructed in his Word. He united couples in holy matrimony. He saw to it that the troubled were counseled. He caused the congregation to reach out to the unchurched and to seek the straying. The history of this congregation is the story of 175 years of God's grace toward sinful human beings. As we survey what the Lord of the church has done for and through this congregation we can only declare with the psalmist, *Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness* (Psalm 115:1).

What about the future? Seeing God's grace in the past gives hope and confidence no matter what challenges and opportunities the coming years might bring. The One who died to save us has assured us, *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). He has also promised, *My word . . . will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it* (Isaiah 55:11). God's grace and promises will continue to comfort, guide, and strengthen us until he returns in glory to take us to be with him forever. Though there will, no doubt, be more challenges and changes and perhaps even tragedy again in the future, his grace will never fail.



THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED AT GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

PASTORS

Johannes Muehlhaeuser
May 13, 1849 – September 15, 1867

Theodor Jaekel
March 1, 1868 – January 30, 1906

Carl Gausewitz
August 1906 – September 4, 1927

William F. Sauer
January 1928 – June 1951

Elton H. Huebner
December 2, 1951 – June 12, 1961

Elmer A. Mahnke
October 31, 1962 – April 7, 1975

Peter H. Kruschel
June 1976 – May 16, 1982

James R. Huebner
July 18, 1982 – present

Daron J. Lindemann
August 15, 2000 – August 2012

Daniel S. Bondow
April 28, 2013 – November 25, 2019

Aaron M. Strong
August 30, 2015 – October 12, 2022

Brian P. Hackmann
May 19, 2019 – present

Matthew W. Scharf
July 2, 2023 – present

STAFF MINISTERS

Mr. Arthur A. Griebing
Music and administration
August 18, 1935 – January 2, 1962

Mr. Elfred P. Bloedel
Music (part-time)
September 1967 – August 2004

Mr. Frederick J. Horn
Minister of Discipleship
August 25, 1991 – June 30, 2018

Mr. Andrew (Drew) R. Carter
Family Minister
July 15, 2018 – August 31, 2022

Mr. Kevin P. Becker
Music Minister
July 21, 2019 – present

Mrs. Abbie R. Strong
Family Minister
November 1, 2022 – April 2024

CHURCH COUNCIL

(IN 2024)

Matt Trotter (president)

Mike Davidson

Jason Goede

Joel Hassler

Jeff Hatzung

Kyler Johnson

Steve Stone

David Toepel

Levi Wolff



Grace Lutheran Church volunteers in the Grace Center



Grace Choir



2016 Easter service at Grace



GRACE

LUTHERAN CHURCH

1209 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Web site: gracedowntown.org
Phone: 414-271-3006

