

## **GRACE UNITED CHURCH HISTORY 1956 TO 2009 (Updated March 2011)**

In 1956, Lambton Presbytery took a survey of north Sarnia residents. The results indicated a strong interest for the formation of a United Church in the area. Following the survey, Presbytery took an option on three lots on the north-east corner of Indian Road and Cathcart Boulevard. A meeting was called in the fall of 1956 at Errol Road School with the Rev. Charles Scott of St. Paul's United, the Presbytery appointee, in charge.

Suggestions were submitted for a name, and the majority voted in favour of the name, Grace. We immediately applied for our character, which was granted and presented at a service in January 1957, by the Rev. Harold Bailey, Chairman of Lambton Presbytery. We were on our way!

Our next logical step was to seek a minister to lead and inspire us. We made an agreement with Bright's Grove United congregation, who were also in need of a minister, to share the cost in a joint-charge arrangement. Our choice was the Reverend Glen Eagle, who, with his wife Joyce and family, came to us from Clinton, Ontario. We rented a house on Marcin Road which was to be the manse for several months.

In the meantime, the Property Committee was acquiring more lots on the corner of Indian and Cathcart. Between March 1957 and July 1965, when the final lot was purchased, we had procured 20 lots at an average cost of \$1,610 per lot – a total of just over \$32,000.

We decided to build a manse for a minister, with a Lori Ave. access, as our first major project. Meanwhile, we had outgrown the facilities at Errol Road School and had moved to the larger King George School auditorium.

In the late winter of 1957-58 the manse foundation was in place and on October 15, 1958 we held the official opening followed by an open house. Marion Cole, who was the first president of the Women's Association, poured tea.

We organized our first stewardship campaign in March 1958 and the canvassers enjoyed a meal in the Coles' basement prior to the canvas. The campaign proved to be most encouraging with \$100,000 pledged over a three-year period. Our planning committee recommended a Phase 1 building program that included a chapel and meeting rooms.

Jack Harris, the Building Committee chairman, handled the spade at the sod-turning ceremony, early in 1959. By the end of the summer, we held the corner stone ceremony. The Rev. Guest, chairman of London Conference, did the honours, and a time capsule was placed behind the stone. Glen and Joyce Eagle were called on a full time basis in late 1959 and the official opening of the chapel took place on November 22 of the same year. Many furnishings were donated by members, including the communion set. The first communion service in the new building was held early in 1960. A Sunday School picnic was held at Canatara Park in the early '60's. Our records reflect that our congregation was made up of young families; for in the Annual report of 1960, we note that there were 405 children on our Sunday School roll. There were 72 girls in Explorers that same year. Over the next couple of years our membership grew, activities were well established and the need for Phase 2, the Christian Education wing, was most evident. So, we decided to proceed.

We held the sod-turning ceremony for the C.E. wing in the fall of 1963 and by February 1964 construction was well under way. The cornerstone was laid in April. Construction proceeded rapidly and by July 1964 we held our official opening. Phase 1 and 2 were complete and Cathcart Boulevard was still undeveloped through to Murphy Road. Landscaping was accomplished by several of our male members and trees and shrubs were paid for by various members of the congregation.

In recent years our flower gardens and shrubs have flourished through the untiring efforts of people like Ev Hammond and Peter Litt. The Eagles, having seen Phase 2 completed, decided to leave Grace for new achievements in the Toronto area. Elders and their spouses held a surprise dinner in their honour.

The congregation was again seeking a minister to carry the banner and our choice was Dr. Jim Mackenzie who, with his wife Ena, came to us from Weston, Ontario. A church Fall Fair was first introduced to Sarnia at Grace in the fall of 1965 and has continued as a popular project each year since. Through the generosity of Ena Mackenzie's mother, Mrs. H. A. Hunter, an outdoor chime system was installed.

One of the flourishing groups in those early days was the Couples' Club, now the Adult Fellowship Group, which has operated the Country Cupboard at the fair since its inception. By 1966, the Couples' Club had inaugurated the Strawberry Social. Many new groups were formed and flourished including the Young Peoples' Group who kept busy – one fund-raising activity was their car washes. Grace has always had a strong Guiding and Scouting program and the first Venturer Group in Sarnia was established at Grace and enjoyed many outings at Camp Attawandaron.

A popular event in the early years was the "Arts and Flowers" sponsored by the U.C.W. and featured local artists. In 1969 the mortgage on Phase 1 was burned and the main stained glass window at the front of the chapel was installed and dedicated in memory of deceased members. The final fifth memorial window was completed in 1995. Our newsletter, "Grace Notes" was introduced to our congregation in March 1975 and continues today as a welcome source of information and communication. Our Grace Notes editor, since its inception, has been Maxine Ellis. She was also one of the main driving forces for our paper drives which continued for many years. The funds raised were used to help sponsor refugee families and other outreach projects.

By 1978, Dr. Mackenzie had reached retirement age but arrangements were made for a year's extension and then another. However, in 1980, retirement was inevitable and we were again faced with choosing a minister. It was our good fortune to find the Rev. Doug Greenough, who with his wife Marj came to us from Thunder Bay, Ontario. In 1980 our congregation agreed to become involved in refugee relocation and the Lam family became our charges. This process required a year long commitment of funding and settlement assistance, and for some in our congregation it continues today.

Some rearranging was undertaken in late 1980. The minister's office was transferred from the manse to the main building. A church office was created and at the same time our library was transferred to a small room beside the gym stage. In 1982, Lorna Schmidt joined us as Christian Education Coordinator. Strong youth programs in the Sunday School, CGIT/Explorers, Guiding/Scouting, Young Peoples' and Hi-C have been augmented over the years by involvement with music within the church. The Junior Choir has had excellent leadership and has been a good training ground for our young people. This group has brought honour to Grace church through its music festival involvement on many occasions. The musical leadership of the Senior Choir, which has stood the test of time, is always much appreciated.

Winter craft groups and activities have been popular for several years and the church hall has seen many dinners and other social events as the years have passed. Our AOTS Men's Club holds a beef barbecue in early fall of each year. In 1984, a special committee defined Grace United's "Statement of Purpose" as follows: "IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALL, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PLAN, THE PURPOSE OF GRACE UNITED CHURCH IS TO BE A COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND LOVE, CELEBRATING HIS PRESENCE AND FORGIVENESS, UNITED IN USING HIS SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO DRAW ALL PEOPLE TO HIM, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD." In 1986 we once again agreed to sponsor more refugees – this time the Martinez family from El Salvador. In 1989 we sponsored another family – the

Valenzuelas from Nicaragua.

For several years we enjoyed a very compatible arrangement with St. Giles Presbyterian Church congregation regarding joint summer services. In 1994 both churches obtained adequate staffing which allowed them to begin full independent services for the entire summer season. Subtle changes have been made as the years have passed. In 1984 a new Friendship Room was carpeted and furnished, by the U.C.W., as an excellent meeting room for anniversaries, funerals, weddings and other friendly gatherings. In 1986 the final mortgage on the church buildings was paid off and the congregation embarked on a major stewardship campaign called "Reach for the Star" – a five-point major financial program which produced an extra \$403,000 in pledges. The five areas of challenge to be addressed were:

- 1) Adequate maintenance of existing buildings with some modifications;
- 2) Community outreach;
- 3) Additional paid staff including ministry and C.E.;
- 4) Stepped-up funding for M. & S.
- 5) Achievement of Phase 3 – A New Sanctuary

With the additional pledged funding, a new P.A. system and ceiling fans were installed in the chapel. In 1988, the new sanctuary wing alternative concept was approved and submitted to the congregation but the project was put on hold.

In 1989, a call was issued for a second minister and the Rev. Scott Agur and family joined us from B.C. Scott Agur and Doug Greenough carried on a team ministry for a year until Doug's retirement in 1990. A new fellowship group, the Friendship Club, was started in 1985, by some of the younger members of the congregation. It joined the ranks of groups like the Adult Fellowship, AOTS, Gracious Quilters and UCW units to offer strong financial support through donations to our many and varied projects. A part-time minister, Mike Ellenor, was hired in 1989 to support the young peoples' Christian Development programs. Major office renovations and reconstruction were completed in the C.E. wing and a new library location was established next to the new secretaries' office.

When Doug Greenough retired, a call was issued to the Rev. Bill Steadman, who, with his wife Ann and family, joined the Rev. Scott Agur on the full-time ministry team. A strong Caregivers Group was established during these years, adding significant support to our Pastoral Care needs. As part of our outreach to shut-ins, videotaping of worship services was added to augment our audio taping program and at the same time provide closed circuit TV to the nursery helpers on Sunday mornings. Periodic soup luncheons in support of outreach programs became a regular part of our after-service events. Bible study programs increased and small group ministry was introduced as a vital part of a congregation willing to change. The next few years would prove to be a particularly challenging time for the congregation of Grace. Economic downturn in the community saw church income level off following the completion of the Five Star program, and plans for a new sanctuary were again put on hold.

A large turnover in staff occurred while the governing body of the church began plans for transfer to the Council System. In 1992, Mike Ellenor, who had been a keen driving force for our youth, left us due to permanent job commitments. In 1993, we said goodbye to Bill Steadman who had provided strong leadership in Pastoral Care and Sunday worship. Bill left to fill a position of Regional Stewardship Consultant for Huron-Perth Presbytery.

Shortly thereafter, Lorna Schmidt decided to give up her position of Staff Associate for Christian Development after more than ten years of dedicated service. Interim help for youth work was carried on by our part-time youth minister, Al Shaw. Temporary staff associate, Roberta Marshall, filled the position for

Christian Development. In 1993, Presbytery appointed the Rev. Christine Jerrett as a half-time minister for one year. Shortly after Christine's arrival, the church Official Board System of Management was replaced by the Council System and a new constitution was adopted in January 1994. In the fall of 1994, a call was issued to the Rev. Christine Jerrett to fill the full time team ministry vacancy with the Rev. Scott Agur.

As the Council System began its struggles to adapt to the many changes, we were faced with another challenge when Scott Agur accepted a call to St. Albert United in Alberta. We reassessed our staffing requirements and decided to hire two persons, one to concentrate on Christian Development and one for Pastoral Care. Sue Browning accepted a call in the summer of 1994 as a full-time Diaconal, primarily for C.D., and in the fall, the Rev. Janet DeWolfe was appointed by presbytery to fill the half-time Pastoral Care position.

In 1996, in our third successful year of operating under the Council System, we prepared to celebrate our 40th anniversary as a congregation. We reluctantly said farewell to Sue Browning whose family commitments took her to Orillia and welcomed Marilyn Townsend-Smith, from Forest, to fill that vacancy. As we approached the next decade, we, as a congregation, were thankful for the leadership of Christine, Janet and Marilyn as they helped us promote and develop our theme "OPENING NEW DOORS". We prepared to build on a new VISION STATEMENT presented to us by our Council: GOD'S GRACE SHINES IN OUR CELEBRATING PEOPLE. WE GROW IN FAITH TOGETHER AND SHARE OUR LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST. WE WELCOME CHALLENGES, CONFIDENT THAT GOD WILL GUIDE US.

In 1996, under Council Chair Eric Bristow, we developed key goals that would take us into the year 2000. Worship objectives were identified that would create an environment that enables celebrative worship in peoples' lives, to be achieved by the year 1999. A Facilities Committee was formed with the following accomplished:

- Listened to the reasons for a new sanctuary and upgrade needs ·
- Understood the situation and options with the Manse and Properties
- Researched the process within the United Church to build a new sanctuary ·
- Initial architectural rendering drawings and a scale model developed ·

In November the congregation supported a major financial campaign A Stewardship Committee was formed to kick off a pre Christmas financial campaign, Vision in Action, specifically in support of the new sanctuary, followed by a full campaign in the March/April '97 time frame. Under Janet DeWolfe, A Small Group Ministry project was developed with the objective of involving 50% of the congregation by 1999. 75% of the small groups would have either non Grace members involved, or the small group would have a positive impact on people outside of Grace. 10% of the congregation would be trained as small group leaders. Unfortunately we received the resignation of Marilyn Townsend-Smith to be effective June 30, 1997 and formed a Pastoral Relations Committee to consider her replacement. At the Annual Meeting in 1997, the congregation reversed a prior decision to sell the manse and retain the property. An alternate proposal from our Outreach Committee saw us entering into an agreement with the Sarnia Association for Community Living who leased the manse for five years at one dollar per year. The building was refurbished by the Association for use by the mentally challenged. The Stewardship Campaign proceeded under George Werezak, Marv Bildfell, John Cooke and a volunteer group which was estimated as ¼ of our envelope givers. The pledge results indicated that the sanctuary project would proceed with a slightly scaled down version of the original design. The Pastoral Search Committee under Dave Charles conducted a search for a new CD Minister and Patrick Morrison joined us from London, On, in mid 1997. The success of the capital campaign was slightly offset by a drop in regular givings which carried over into 1998. However, reduced budgets for 1998 saw us ending up with a surplus at the end of the year. We turned the sod for the new sanctuary on September 13, 1998 and using drawings provided by architect David McAuley and Associates, we began construction. Don Hawkey Construction

provided the main supervision for the project which also involved many man hours of volunteer labour from members of the congregation. John Cooke coordinated the project for the congregation and George Vero acted as building contact. Pledge coordinator was Madeline McCaw, project treasurer -David Motherwell and project treasurer John Himmelman. Construction proceeded on schedule and the building was closed in before Christmas. Progress was reported regularly with photos provided by Duncan Bristow and Ted West on our new website, and with weekly updates in the church bulletin by Communications Coordinator, Peggy McKeown, Janet DeWolfe and Council Chair Gerry Toulouse dedicated the cornerstone on January 31, 1999. Our first service in the new facility was conducted on Easter Sunday morning, April 4, 1999 and the dedication ceremony for the sanctuary was on May 16, 1999. With the opening of the new 450 seat facility, we changed from two Sunday morning services to one as the result of a Worship Committee study.

In May we were sorry to receive the resignation of Janet DeWolfe from our Pastoral Care and Small Group Ministry, effective June 30, 1999. Janet moved with her husband Laurence who received a call to Halifax. Grace Council and Lambton Presbytery proceeded to form a Joint Needs Assessment Committee with the task of recommending alternate permanent staff. Permanent replacement by the middle of the year 2000 was the plan. Council and the Congregational Care and Growth Committee proceeded to find alternate help to fill the gap. In May 2000, The Rev Dr Brad Morrison was called as our second full time minister. Brad came to us from Teeswater, Ontario where he served United Church congregations for six years. Brad is the brother of Pat Morrison, our Christian Development minister. Brad is serving in the pastoral care area and sharing preaching with the Rev Christine Jerrett. In the spring of 2002, Marianne Clift announced her retirement as Director of Music at Grace and a committee was formed to find a replacement. We were pleased to welcome Glenn Parsons, from London, Ontario, as a very qualified musician for this position. A significant musical event was presented at Grace in the fall of 2002 by talented musician and composer, Mark Hayes, ably assisted by Glenn Parsons.

In May 2003, Grace received the first of two Worship Renewal Grants from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. This allowed us to undertake a project called *GraceWorks*. *GraceWorks* is a process of bringing together artists and theologians in 'pods' for the purpose of creating scripture-formed art that enriches worship. This first Grant focused on the visual arts with four pods engaging scripture and creating works of art for the season of Advent. Seven pods then created works of art to offer in worship for the season of Lent 2004. A Festival of the Arts was held in October 2004 featuring Don Besig and Nancy Price, Marva Dawn and Steve Bell among the guest presenters.

The second Worship Renewal Grant was received in 2005 and had a focus on drama. This part of the project was called *GraceWorks Forward*. Four pods studied eight parables and created dramatic works of art to offer in worship. This part of the project culminated in a Drama Festival in May 2006 featuring a major dramatic production by the Grace Players called, "In the Lion's Den," a concert by "Hilariter" and workshops.

*GraceWorks* established a Concert Group that organized a series of four concerts in 2005

06. Artists featured were Celebration Singers & St. Luke's Choir, Gracefull Jazz, Glen Soderholm and New Beginnings & The Grace Choir.

Rev. Christine Jerrett (project director) and Rev. Susan Woodhouse (project administrator) were workshop presenters at Calvin's "Symposium of Worship and the Arts" in 2005 and facilitated other workshops about the *GraceWorks* process, including one in Iowa in 2006. They coauthored a chapter for a book on Arts and Spirituality published by United Church Press in 2006.

The congregation has experienced scripture in new and exciting ways because of their participation in, and

support of, *GraceWorks*. The process and project which had become a part of the life and work of Grace United Church came to completion in 2006.

In August 2006, the congregation said goodbye to The Rev. Christine Jerrett, who submitted her resignation earlier in May. We wished Christine well wherever her path will lead her in the future. Following Christine's departure, Presbytery imposed a 333 review on the Grace congregation in 2007 to study the situations surrounding Christine's resignation. Bev Robinson from London Conference directed this review over several months. To fill the staff vacancy, Presbytery appointed Sue Browning as a temporary half time team minister with Pat and Brad Morrison in October, 2006. The 333 review was completed early in 2009.

The Proclamation and Special Events Committee was re-established in 2007 at the completion of the *GraceWorks* project. Besides taking care of the annual Spring Flea Market and the Fall Fair, the committee has hosted several other events through the years.

Don Besig and Nancy Price have provided Choral workshops in 2006 and 2008. They will join us again in October of 2010. These workshops co-ordinated by Glenn Parsons and the P&SE committee have been a marvellous ministry expanding outside the Grace community. The Lambton Youth choir has traditionally been involved in these workshops and are part of a mass choir presentation to close out the weekend.

The first major drama presentation at Grace was "In the Lion's Den" a Pecora /Rutter musical back in 2006. This was followed by, "Through the Darkness" another Pecora Rutter musical in June of 2007. In March 2008, we were pleased to present Glen Soderholm in concert. The year of 2008 was extremely busy for the newly formed GracePlayers. They presented, " In the Belly of the Whale "in May. The GracePlayers were excited and pleased that song writer and author, Jane Pecora was able to join us at Grace to see our presentation of her musical. . This production was quickly followed by Dennis and Nan Allen's musical, "State Road 47" and was presented as a fund raiser for the Lambton United Church Centre. In August 2009, the P&SE presented the Adullum Choir a new venture with the Adullum Summer Choral Group from Chatham, Ontario. It is hoped that this will become an annual event. In September of 2009, Grace United hosted a concert featuring minister and well recognized song writer, Paul Rumbolt. The committee is looking at hosting a few new events in 2010 including a Spring Art Fair under the direction of Bruce Ritchie.

Sue Browning was ordained in May of 2008 and, following a Joint Needs Assessment study, she was called to a permanent half time position at Grace in the fall of 2009. A covenanting service was held for The Reverend Sue Browning on November 1, 2009 at the church.

## **GRACE UNITED CHURCH** **MINISTERS**

### **Ministerial & Christian Development**

1957 to 1964 - The Rev Glen Eagle  
1964 to 1980 - The Rev James Mackenzie  
1980 to 1990 - The Rev Douglas Greenough  
1982 to 1992+ - Lorna Schmidt  
1989 to 1992 - Mike Ellenor

1989 to 1994 - The Rev Scott Agur  
1991 to 1993 - The Rev Bill Steadman  
1992 to 1994 - Allan Shaw  
1992 to 1994 - Roberta Marshall  
1993 to 2006 - The Rev Christine Jerrett  
1994 to 1996 - Sue Browning  
1994 to 1999 - The Rev Janet DeWolfe  
1996 to 1997 - Marilyn Townsend-Smith  
1997 to present - Patrick Morrison  
2000 to present - The Rev Dr Brad Morrison  
2006 to present – The Rev Sue Browning

## **SUPPORT STAFF**

### **Music Directors:**

Marg Anderson, Carlton Sole, Carl Sharen, Paul Anderson, Pauline Owen, Jetty Haakman, Marlane Butterfield, Marianne Clift, Glenn Parsons.

### **Office Support:**

Jean Porter, Donna & Lorne Longley, Betty & Fred Waddell, Vivian Scott, Debbie Fournier, Kathy Woods, Valerie Pitt, Holly Meining, Ali Brown, Marsha Vero, Lori Armstrong.

### **Custodians:**

Mr Sparks, Ed Boyce, Les Billington, Curtis Dixon

## **OFICERS**

**Clerks of Session:** Douglas Turner, Maitland Hammond, Kenneth Plumley

### **Recording Stewards and Recording Secretaries:**

Clint Sykes, Wilma Kern, Susan Mallard, Hugh Veach, Ian Ward, Peter Allman, Susan Woodhouse, Trevor Jordan, Wayne Caslick, Gwen Lewis, Maureen Grimwood, Marvin Bildfell, Christopher Cooke.

### **Chairs of Official Boards:**

Ministers up to 1989, Jim Rutledge, Bob Newman.

### **Chairs of Council:**

Peggy McKeown (1994)

David Bonk (1997)

Bob Newman (2000)

Wilma Kern (1995)

Gerry Toulouse (1998)

Earle Kilner (2001)

Eric Bristow (1996)

Mark Woodhouse (1999)

John Kafford (2002)

George Vero (2003)                      John Cooke (2004, 2005)                      Brent Freer (2006)  
Glenn Kilner (2007)                      Val Adamson (2008)                      Wayne Pease (2009)  
Leanne Kember (2010)                      Iris Murtha (2011)

**Roll Clerks:** Ken Plumley (1996 - 1999), Jim Wicks (1999 - present).

**Envelope Stewards:** Madeline McCaw, Ian Ward, Annette Marshall. (Office Volunteers - temporary)

**Treasurer:** Ian McGuinness, Anne Rankin, Bob Newman                      **Assistant Treasurer:** Peg Dawkins (2009)

**Accountant:** Ron Lawrence, Mary Ann Ritchie

**Finance Secretary:** Ann Edmunds (2006), Ron Lawrence (2009)

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*The text for this historical review was started by charter member Jim Marlów for a slide show which he presented for the kick-off of the "Reach for the Star" project in 1986. It has been updated periodically by Grace members including Bob Newman, Susan Woodhouse, Sue Browning, Bill Yates and Ted West.*