Five chapters of a larger project: A tradition of grace

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Five chapters of a larger project: *A Tradition of Grace*

by

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of
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Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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1. INTRODUCTION

Grace United Methodist Church towers above Cottage Grove between 37th and 38th Streets near the center of Des Moines. It's an old neighbor, a dear friend, a comforting landmark. But what else is Grace? And what brought you to Grace? Questions about Grace lead to stories. And it's the stories of Grace that make this collegiate gothic structure dear and sacred to so many people. To write a history of a church, a living church, is to risk making it dull and dreary with too many dates, names, and lists. How to define Grace?

A history of Grace was needed because none had ever been published, though the beginnings of one had been lovingly handwritten by long-time member William Tutt in the 1950's. After looking at many other church histories, I decided that Grace's history should tell the story of what Grace is like today and how it came to be that way. It should be an interesting look at Grace from 1884 when Reverend Wiseman put up a tent on the corner of 19th and Crocker to the year 1999 when Reverend William Steward brought his love of baseball and good books to the well-worn pulpit. And it should communicate the richness of Grace through individuals who represent the hundreds of people who love Grace and find strength to serve in the world through Grace. The clergy, staff, and lay people who have served through the years should be highlighted as well.

Chapters with dialogue, scenes, and occasional humor attempt to capture some of the wonderful people who have been a part of Grace. This book is more of a folk history in its reliance on members' memories and stories. Interviews have provided most of the information, and in some instances I have created scenes based on members' memories and on historical documents. Whenever possible I have identified my sources in the text, but in some instances scenes are a result of my immersion in the stories and life of Grace Church and my creation of a scene to communicate the essence of that aspect of Grace. I have chosen to bring to life certain aspects of Grace Church to be preserved in print. This book is a combination of history and creative non-fiction. The history of Grace is the thread that ties everything together. Each chapter traces the history of an era (the first half of the book) or a tradition (the second half of the book). The living tradition and the people who have played roles in that tradition are the means I have chosen to communicate the life of Grace Church.

This thesis is five chapters of a larger work, A Tradition of Grace. My writing was
strongly influenced by two professors at Iowa State University: Mary Swander, who believes that all good stories have drama, and Brenda Daly, who introduced me to genre blending in her course The Use of the Personal in Scholarship in the spring of 1999. The church is an ideal sanctuary where personal stories intersect with the story of God’s love for his people in the Word. That’s the goal of this work: to communicate the stories of Grace Church through the stories of some of her people.

The first part of the book covers 115 years of Grace’s history with biographies and photographs of the ministers if available. Each pastor’s strengths as well as the major accomplishments and challenges of those years allow readers to see how the church has changed through the years. Other staff members who served more than ten years will be highlighted.

The second part of the book looks at various aspects of Grace (such as art, drama, music, etc.) in 2000 and explores the tradition through the stories of individuals. THE ART OF GRACE is a good example. Grace has a large collection of original art which is described in its own chapter. Alf Thomas is highlighted in this chapter because he has helped bring art to Grace over the past 50 years and he knows about the art. The persons who are highlighted in the second half of the book are guides or representatives for particular aspects of Grace. Every member has played a part in Grace’s history, but every member’s name will not be in the history. I tried to select excellent representatives to exemplify the best of Grace. These were very difficult decisions, and much research and discussion preceded each choice. The Grace staff and the history committee helped me make these decisions. You, or your parents, or your children may know exactly where you and others fit into the big picture of Grace. I hope you will write those names in and treasure your participation in the Grace community as well.

This book is written for Grace members and anyone who has ever connected with Grace in any way. It is my hope that it may be of interest to others who have experienced the loving community of a church, but if it records Grace’s history for Grace members alone, that is enough. It was written in love, by one who wanted to know more about this powerful old place that drew me and my family in and gave us a center after a year of searching for a church home, struggling with questions about faith and Christian community. I have found hope and renewal at Grace, and learning about the tradition of Grace has been a big part of my return to faith.

Throughout the long research and writing process, I have used as my guide Philippians
4:8: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” I have looked for the good and I have found much to share. Along the way I have discovered, to no one’s surprise, that the persons who worshipped and served at Grace through the years were not perfect. Nor is the present generation. Grace church is a human institution striving to know and serve God. Our name reveals that we live and thrive only in God’s grace. In that spirit I have found great hope as I researched the past and got to know more about Grace. If you, dear reader, are moved or inspired or humbled by the persons and stories presented here, even half as much as I have been, I know you will be greatly blessed.
2. THE ART OF GRACE

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

Art must be parochial in the beginning to become cosmopolitan in the end.

George Moore

I don’t really care whether anyone remembers me or not.

Alfred Thomas
A jangling phone interrupted Alf Thomas’ concentration on his current pen and ink drawing in his home studio in Urbandale on a cold Saturday afternoon in February. A Grace member called to report that two of the paintings in the Activity Center were missing. The artist, Wendell Mohr, was scheduled to be at Grace on Sunday for a discussion with the high school Sunday school class and a reception in his honor. Alf quickly put away his materials, and frantically drove to the church to find the missing paintings. In his five years of organizing artist of the month shows, no paintings had ever been taken, in spite of the church being open during the day. No one was at the church and none of his phone calls to pastors, secretary, or janitor yielded any light on the matter. From the wall phone in the church hallway, the usually cheerful Alf bent his six foot two slender frame as he made his next phone call to president of the Fine Arts Committee, Jim Hayes. “What do you think I should do?” the worried 77-year-old asked.

“Well, I think we should treat it like any theft and go ahead and call the police,” Jim replied. Alf did, and spent the rest of the afternoon with police officers in the church basement filling out reports. He called Wendell Mohr’s home in Van Buren county and left a message, but Wendell was on his way to Des Moines to spend the night with his son. It was close to ten o’clock when Wendell finally got the message to phone Alf.

“Oh, the two paintings? A friend asked if she could hang them in her living room on Saturday to try them out before purchasing one. I asked her to let someone in the church know. She’s going to bring them back before Sundays’s reception.”

“That’s good to know,” replied Alf. “Thanks.” Alf slept easy after the mystery of the missing watercolors was solved. It’s behind-the-scenes days like this, well maybe not exactly like this, that make Alf Thomas an ideal guide to the art of Grace United Methodist Church.

As a child, Alf loved to draw. An older friend encouraged him to pursue his talent, but Alf insisted, “only sissies take art.” His parents were officers of the Salvation Army, a church founded by William Booth in 1880’s because of disenchantment with the Methodist social organization. Alf’s parents moved every two years with their rotating positions in the Army. Their goal was to reach the people in the slums with the gospel and practical assistance. Alf remembers playing in Salvation Army bands, marching from the church to downtown for open air services every Sunday from the time he was nine until he graduated from high school. As a
freshman at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois in 1942, Alf took one design course and knew what he would do for the rest of his life. But in 1943 he was called to active duty, like many of his contemporaries, and spent the next four years in the Navy. He never left the Americas, but kept busy sketching pictures of his buddies’ girlfriends, a design for a company flag, cartoons of mechanics school, and various East Coast navy bases in addition to his military responsibilities.

His parents moved to Des Moines while he was in the service, and Alf decided to enroll in Drake’s art program on the G.I Bill. In 1950 Alf married Grace member Mary Joyce Lind in the original Grace sanctuary with its raised choir loft and center pulpit. At that time Grace's classroom walls were adorned with reproductions of well known religious paintings, many of them purchased in the 30s. Fifty years later, in 2000, original art dominates at Grace. This change has been witnessed and shepherded by The Fine Arts Committee and many individuals like Alf who have worked faithfully to nurture an appreciation for art in Grace.

One evening in 1968 Alf answered a knock at his front door, surprised to see Reverend Charles Rinkel, associate pastor from Grace. After a little chit chat, Reverend Rinkel got right down to business, “Alf, it’s been noted that you’re not a member. Your wife and daughters belong. Why haven’t you ever joined?”

“Well, no one ever asked me,” chuckled Alf. After 18 years of singing in the choir, helping with drama and art programs, and faithfully paying his annual pledge, Alf finally put his name on the membership rolls.

Never one to call attention to himself, Alf has been busy quietly making changes in the church over the past 50 years. When a leader of the Odyssey Sunday school class asked Alf to give a walking tour of the permanent art collection at Grace, he was there without delay. The group of about 15 met in the foyer near the main office where an aluminum globe with a wooden cross inside hangs near the ceiling. Its geodesic appearance reminds viewers of something by Buckmeister Fuller. In truth it was made by a Catholic brother at Christ the King Retreat Center in Buffalo, Minnesota. Reverend Bill Cotton attended an Iowa Annual Conference retreat with the cabinet in 1986 when he served as district superintendent of the Creston District. Cotton (also a wood carver) inquired about the piece, and later the brothers made a gift of it to the Iowa Annual Conference. It sat in a closet at Conference headquarters until Reverend Cotton was appointed to Grace in 1989, when he brought it with him and had it hung in the main entrance way. One of
Grace’s mottoes, “Gracing the Globe” is made real in this piece of art which welcomes many who enter from the back parking lot.

The group walked into the main office, behind the receptionist’s desk, to see a limited edition print of a watercolor, Tableau of Lilies by Linda Walker. It was given to the church in memory of painter Robert Warren by the Associated Artists of Central Iowa. Robert’s wife Jean Warren is a member who regularly volunteers at the receptionist’s desk. All proceeds from the sale of this print benefit Bidwell-Riverside Center in Des Moines. The sight of a group of tall lilies in an uncle’s backyard inspired Walker’s painting. Lilies symbolize hope, rebirth, and growth, important elements of faith, life, and the Bidwell-Riverside Center which strives to help women and children find whole, safe lives.

In the accounting office in the back of the main office, a painting called The Deluge by Ann Brunk depicts Genesis 7:11: “On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.” Whites, grays, blacks, and yellows slice the canvas to create an overpowering stormy wetness. This piece was purchased in 1968 through the annual Fine Arts Week competition for the purchase of a work which exhibited a religious theme.

By taking the elevator to the sanctuary level and pausing on the landing, the group sees a bronze effect plaster bust of Dr. Newton Moats, pastor at Grace between 1949 and 1963. The Torreys, a Des Moines couple who became nationally famous for their many sculptures, were members of Grace. Lincoln and Tad, one of their most famous works, rests on the Iowa State Capitol grounds. Fred Torrey made the Moats portrait relief as a gift for his pastor. It came to Grace after Reverend Moats died in Washington State. The Torreys were an inspiration to many young artists throughout the state. Their philosophy: “Whatever you do, do it well. Whatever you think, think it through. Whatever you make, make it beautiful” (Hamlin vii) lives on in their works.

On the north wall of the fellowship hall hangs a 1954 oil by Karl Mattern, The Crucifixion. The deep magenta background blends into the red foreground. Dressed in vibrant green, blue, red, and purple, three figures surround the bleeding Christ whose skin glows white and whose head bears a golden crown. On either side of Christ are the two criminals, also on crosses. A soldier on a white horse holding a spear looks on. This piece was given to the church by Karl’s widow, Mary Mattern.
The Mattern painting and the entire room are bathed in color which streams through the brilliant cosmic design of planets and stars swirling in stained glass. The fellowship hall serves as a smaller sanctuary for Saturday evening and eight o’clock services as well the perfect spot for meetings and celebrations throughout the week. “Tell us about these windows!” someone said. “They’re great, but they don’t look like the rest of the church!” Alf explained that after fire destroyed the fellowship hall’s old amber windows in 1991, a group was meeting to decide what to do. “I was just sketching, doodling really, when Reverend Jim Nelson said, ‘Why don’t you take that over to the stained-glass window makers!’” Once again, Alf responded to a minister’s question, and his New Creation became the beautiful, controversial, new light in the once old-fashioned fellowship hall. Alf brushes it off as just a pencil sketch, nothing special, but the modern design speaks of making beauty out of nothing, out of the emptiness of destruction through fire. From the back parking lot at night these illuminated windows shine blue, red, rose, and yellow; something new is happening in an old church in the center of the city.

In the Suzanna Room or “Ladies’ Lounge” as it has been called for years, located just west of the Fellowship Hall, hangs an oil on canvas, a multi-colored expression of different faiths. Church steeples, sacraments, worship leaders, all jam together in this rich depiction of a great diversity of Worship. This piece is on loan from the artist Hedo Zacherle who lives near the church.

In the same room on the south wall hangs a long rectangular oil entitled Palm Sunday by Elizabeth Miller. In this painting a mystical figure riding a donkey seems to be passing from a light background into a very dark foreground. This was given to Grace to honor Alf for his many years of service in bringing art to the congregation. Elizabeth and Alf were members of Artists Equity of Iowa, a group of artists who regularly critiqued one another’s works. Miller taught for many years at the Des Moines Art Center, Drake University, and Iowa State University, where she was awarded the prestigious Christian Peterson Award in 1999 by the College of Design.

“I’ve never really spent much time in this room,” Alf admits, almost embarrassed, as the group crowded the small, feminine room to get a closer look at the two paintings.

“Why not? It contains your friend’s beautiful painting given in your honor,” asked a short-haired young woman.

“Well...,” Alf replied, “This is called the ‘Ladies Lounge’ because all the choir women
primp in here before we process into the sanctuary on Sundays. And this is where the bride gets ready for her wedding.” Alf has a way of deflecting any attention that is given to him. The quiet, distinguished looking man with gray curling hair led the group into the spacious narthex with deep emerald green carpet and a few wooden benches. He seemed more comfortable in the large hallway where everyone spread out and enjoyed the wooden furniture, benches, chairs, and even the original center pulpit from the sanctuary, which now serves as the ushering center. As the group talked about the furniture and the collection of art, a middle-aged woman asked Alf, “What was Fine Arts Week all about, and how did it start? I’ve read about it in old Chimes articles, but I don’t understand what it entailed.”

“Well, if I remember right, five central Des Moines churches sponsored a traveling art exhibit in the 1950’s. When that stopped, Larry Parsons decided Grace would have its own. Larry was our first full-time music director. He planned everything and had volunteers build sets and do the leg work.” Alf smiled as he continued. “A juried show was held and one painting of a religious nature was purchased to remain in Grace’s permanent collection, the purchase prize. That’s how many of our pieces were acquired.” The group gathered around, some people resting on the benches as they listened.

“Special musical and dramatic events accompanied the week-long exhibit. At first the art show was held in the fellowship hall, but it was called the parlor then, and of course it was very formal with the old amber stained glass windows; in recent years it has been held in the activity center in the basement. The choir director made Fine Arts Week happen. The tradition continued for several years, skipped a few, and then would be revived by the choir directors who believed in it and had the time and energy to make it happen.”

The group walked down to the basement to look at two blue African batiks hanging on the far north wall. The batik on the west side shows two women stirring something in a pot. Village huts rise up behind them and a child is tied to one of the women’s backs. This piece was given to the church by Jim Nelson and Louise Augustine. The batik on the east side reveals someone climbing a coconut tree while another figure on the right carries three gourds on his head. This piece belongs to Jim and Carolyn Nelson and is on loan to the church. Both batiks were purchased in Nigeria in 1991 when Reverend Jim Nelson and Louise Augustine went on a teaching/learning mission to the city of Jos in the highlands of central Nigeria. Alf didn’t tell the group, but he
stretched the batiks and framed them so that they could be displayed in the church.

The group was joined by a rambunctious Sunday school class who were soon climbing wooden jungle gyms, racing bicycles, and chasing balls around this large multi-purpose room. There were several beautiful paintings around the room and the children acted like this room was a gymnasium. “How do you get artists to show their work in a church basement?” someone asked.

“We just ask—artists love to have the chance to show their work,” Alf explained.

The “Artist of the Month” tradition began in 1995 when the Fine Arts Committee decided to use Grace to showcase artists by bringing a different artist’s work each month September through April to the Grace Gallery. “The idea,” according to Alf, “was the child of Jim Hayes, a long time committee member and the present chairman. His idea did not click immediately with the committee. Many objections were raised. In spite of the reluctance of the committee, Jim installed two carpeted panels on the east wall and provided the first exhibit—a set of his wonderful black and white photographs.” This large basement room, the activity center, also serves as a gathering place for youth, larger meetings, the annual dinner drama, and various dinners. Many other organizations use this building throughout the week as well. At last someone asked the question that was on everyone’s minds: “Have any of the paintings been damaged by the kids?”

“The children have never hurt anything; my only scare was the missing Mohr paintings.” Alf answered. “And preschool and day care children play here almost every afternoon. I get requests for information about the artists from the children’s parents who see the art when they pick up their children in the afternoons.”

By taking the elevator to the second floor, the group saw two more paintings on the landing near the Asbury office, the Christian Education Director’s office. On the right, there is another large Karl Mattern painting called Lazarus. The story of Lazarus can be found in John: 11:1-44. This large oil painting contains a figure in red (John the Baptist) with his hands stretched to heaven and a large crowd behind him. Christ is dressed in white as is a reclining man (Lazarus) who is reaching out to Christ, and being raised. There are two women to the left of Christ, Mary and Martha, rejoicing that their brother has been brought back to life. This painting was also a gift to the church from Mary Mattern.

To the left of Lazarus hangs a smaller, black and white linocut print by Chaney Rosenbaum entitled The Burning Bush. It depicts Moses’ encounter with God in the the form of a
bush that burned but was not consumed, as told in Exodus 3. Linocut is like woodcut but heavy
duty battleship linoleum is used rather than wood. One cuts the design into the linoleum, inks the
surface, and makes prints.

By taking the hallway on the left toward the nursery, the group got a good look at the final
Mattern painting entitled Rest on the Flight to Egypt, which was acquired by special purchase
agreement. An older couple sat down in the two easy chairs which face it to better enjoy the jewel-
like colors of this painting of the holy family along with a donkey and dove. A circle of safety is
created by the red, pink, and the rich blue of Mary’s dress.

At the entrance to the nursery hangs a small painting by Stan Hess entitled Mother and
Child. In pinks, browns, and black a mother and child are shown in a playful embrace. This piece
was acquired in 1972 when it received the purchase prize during the Fine Arts Week exhibition.

In the library next to the nursery hangs an oil on canvas entitled Suffer the Children. It was
given by Don and Patsy Gerdom in memory of their daughter Molly who was killed in a car
accident in 1973. This quiet room is the perfect setting for this painting which shows Christ’s love
for children. A wooden display case contains many historical documents and a nativity scene.

Only one more flight of stairs to the Wesley Room, the large, high-ceilinged room that once
was a gymnasium with a wooden stage on the west side. On the walls of the current large choir
room hang four Christmas designs. A dark blue one includes Joseph, Mary and Baby Jesus with
the three kings circling around in front. Another pen and ink depicts three shepherds under a
staff, all looking upward (towards the star). A third piece in brilliant blue shows three wise men
and the star shining from afar on the shepherds. A fourth one focuses on the holy family. These
designs were used as Christmas bulletin covers over the years and were requested to be used to
enliven the Wesley room. The church office has a file of all of Alf’s works, and the staff uses
them year after year as needed. A fourth Christmas design hangs in the music director’s office. It
is more detailed than most of Alf’s nativity scenes; it includes all of the actors in the Christmas
drama in the shelter of the stable. Alf made this pen and ink in the style of his favorite artist,
Albrecht Durer, a German painter and printmaker who lived in the 1400’s.

The choir director’s office also contains a portrait of Charles Wesley, Methodism’s great
hymn writer, on a dark green background. A larger painting of a minister preaching from a boat
entitled Offer Them Christ was given by Carolyn Jordan in memory of Judge Russell Jordan.
Someone asked Alf about other paintings that used to hang in the church. "We’ll have to climb some more stairs," he joked. The obviously fatigued group climbed two more flights of stairs to the sound room located behind the balcony. Here many of the older reproductions and a large oil copy of Christ in the Garden by Ash Davis, which hung in the front of the sanctuary during the 50's and 60's, are stored. More than twenty paintings lean against large iron beams, protected by sheets of plastic. As class members examine the somber Biblical images, Alf explained that the Fine Arts Committee debates which paintings are displayed and where. Times have changed, and according to Alf, these paintings are "art of a bygone era and will probably never be displayed again." Without a formal belief statement to guide decisions through the years, the Fine Arts Committee has steadily moved from reproductions to original art for the walls of Grace.

The group could have stayed in that dusty Sound Room for hours, talking about the changes at Grace, but a few members had to pick up their children from their Sunday school classes. And everyone was getting a little punchy. From out of nowhere a young man approached Alf, "What's the first thing you're going to ask God when you get to heaven?"

"How'd I get here?" was his immediate reply. Everyone was laughing; so the young man tried again. "What do you want to be remembered for when you're gone?"

"I don't really care whether anyone remembers me or not. I'll just go wherever I'm going," replied Alf, in his ever modest way. He locked up the sound room and the group thanked him and quickly said good by to one another as the organ prelude began. Everyone had to rush to get ready for the 10:15 service. An hour is really not long enough for a tour of the art in Grace, but it can be done. It's better to come back again to take plenty of time to soak in the art and the various settings. It can be done without a guide, but Alf's presence helps.

Alf seems to have a master key to the art of Grace. Like a cheerful church mouse, he knows all of the nooks and crannies of Grace. His quiet humor fills cold corners as the works of art have filled the church. Wherever one goes in the church one can see something he has created or nurtured into life. The fellowship hall will always shine bright with Alf's cosmic vision. And his sketches of the exterior of the church and of the gospel symbols high above the altar have been reproduced for church stationery. Bulletin covers with Alf's signature in the corner are common at Grace. The batiks in the basement stretched and framed by Alf, speak of the bigger world out
there and Grace's connection to it. And the moldings in the activity center, which now allow 30 paintings to be hung, were put up by Alf in 1998, allowing artists to show even more of their work.

But on the tour, Alf didn't tell about his efforts, he just told about the artists who passed through these walls, the artists he has had the pleasure of knowing, and the others he worked with through the years. The artist in Alf feels at home at Grace. For over 50 years he has quietly gone about expressing his love for God through this work. It seems so natural for Alf to do what he does at Grace. Most Sundays he can be spotted in the left-hand corner of the choir, singing bass. Never loud, never a solo, he's just singing his part, just doing his thing to make Grace a place that's warm and beautiful, a sanctuary for art and individual expression.
3. GRACE ON STAGE

For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time:

Ecclesiastes 3:1

All the world’s a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

Shakespeare As You Like It

Picture of performance of Wiley & the Hairy Man

You can never be so big of a star that you don’t need someone else.

T Valada-Viars
Every February the basement of Grace church changes dramatically. In the year 2000, a set appeared, a 50-gallon drum and miles of air duct hoses cluttered the hallway, props piled up, and teenagers appeared every evening to practice their parts. The first weekend of March, props were hidden, tables were decorated, parents in aprons worked in the kitchen, and delicious wafts of cheesy bread and baked chicken welcomed theater goers. Guests were served Southern baked buttermilk chicken, Wiley’s potatoes, and swamp slaw by the young actors in costume. When the last plate was cleared, the actors disappeared and guests were directed to folding chairs set up in front of the stage. The lights dimmed and Wiley and the Hairy Man opened to the music of a six-piece orchestra. Mama dominated the stage, conjuring whatever she needed to survive in the superstitious swamps of southern Louisiana, a foggy land where fears are as real as Wiley’s imagination and as conquerable as her courage.

Wonder and mystery were in the air opening night of Wiley. At intermission the actors served molasses-heavy shoofly pie and joked with loyal Grace supporters, grandparents, parents, neighbors, and children. When the lights blinked, everyone went back to their seats, the lights dimmed again, and the magic continued. Time was forgotten as Dog chased the Hairy Man and forest creatures swayed like cypresses and moaned like the spirits of the dead. When the house lights came on, a 3-year-old audience member was overheard asking his mother, “Can we see it again?”

Why were audience members thrilled with this performance? Did it have anything to do with the fact that a brother or sister or child or grandchild was a member of the cast and crew? Or was it the knowledge of the hours the parents and youth put into finding or making the costumes and props, producing the special effects, and preparing the food? The Grace Youth Dinner Drama is a tradition of ensemble theater, a community process in which each person is vital and no one person is more important than another, according to current director, T Valada-Viars. Because everyone had given their best, it was a wonderful evening, another part of what makes Grace a safe and exciting place for young people. It was another experience in the tradition of Grace giving young people a reason to come to church.

Drama and religion go way back. Almost every ancient civilization had some sort of drama. In Europe in the 900’s, liturgical drama enhanced Christian worship. By the 1200’s mystery plays were taking the drama of Christianity outside of the church. Miracle and morality
plays continued this tradition. Certainly the Bible is filled with dramatic stories which help readers interpret and understand the world—and secular drama is an attempt to understand human experience.

Grace Church has been doing drama for years. In 1927 the first drama put on by the Epworth League in the new church’s community room (present day Wesley Room) was The Hoodoo. In 1929 the Ruth Boaz class presented the play, Good Evening, Clarita. And in 1933 a girls’ orchestra played for a minstrel show put on by the Ruth Boaz class. Thesa Shady performed in a play presented on that same stage and remembers charging a quarter for admission. According to Thesa, “The stage was designed for kids to put on shows—so we did!” They used the small Sunday school rooms behind the stage as changing rooms. According to Thesa, Helen Wharton directed the “non-professional” group of young adults, but they all had so much fun they kept doing it. Helen married and became Helen Felter and eventually moved to California.

Through the years, dramatic performances were also presented in the sanctuary as a part of worship. In the 50’s a drama committee regularly prepared plays for special services. An example of this was the performance of A Sleep of Christians written and directed by Larry McKeever on November 13, 1956, as a part of the Festival of the Christian Year. Mr. McKeever was employed by KRNT and was the first of several Grace members who worked there and shared their abilities with their congregation.

Although theatrical performances had been a part of Grace long before 1975, that was the year the youth group needed some help raising funds for a work trip to Fort Smith, Arkansas. At a weekly youth group meeting, a teenager complained, “We’re tired of bake sales and car washes.”

“How about doing a Vaudeville show?” one of the leaders suggested.

“Yeah! Yeah! That sounds fun!” replied a chorus of youth. Little did Jim Nelson know what work he had just gotten himself into. The first performance included two melodramas: Way, Way Down East, and Dark Doings at the Crossroads. The debut was reportedly a smash hit. “The audience really got into the act. The heroines were pure as the driven snow and the villains despicably evil,” according to a critique published in later programs. John Roberts and Ben Campney played the hero in one play and the villain in the other. In one night, the youth made enough money for their work trip.

The following year, a decision had to be made whether to tamper with a proven box office
success or to add variety. *The Still Alarm*, a chilling melodrama and *The Man in the Bowler Hat* pleased the audience immensely and led to making the dinner drama an annual event.

The first musical, *The Apple Tree*, coupled with another melodrama *Cast up by the Sea* brought in an even larger audience. Hanging plants and live shrubbery added to the "in-the-garden" experience as Adam, Eve, and the Snake recreated history. An early multi-media experience was created by showing slides of wild animals in conjunction with the play.

It seemed that everyone brought their children to see *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* in 1978. They laughed at the antics as Linus, Charlie Brown, Lucy, Snoopy, Patty, and Schroeder brought the famous comic strip to life. At the final Sunday performance, according to Betsy Johnson Hines, the seniors sang the final song with tears in their eyes.

After several successful productions, directors Jim Nelson and Ken Reams decided they were ready for the big time--big musical, big cast, and a big, new stage. It took three nights to accommodate all of the people who wanted to see *Oliver* in 1979. It showcased all of the talented youth in the Grace Church youth program. This production amazed everyone. The enthusiasm and excitement of this type of youth activity brought many youth and their parents to Grace.

In 1981, Betsy Johnson learned the meaning of the stage expression, "The show must go on." Betsy was in college at the time, serving as assistant director with Jim Nelson for the *Lamentations of Lucy*. It was late on Saturday when the phone rang at the Johnson home. "Hello. Johnson's, Betsy speaking."

"Hi, Betsy. This is Jim. I've got a little problem with the play, and I think you can help," Jim said.

“What’s wrong?”

“Angie is sick and won’t be able to play her part tonight. I think you could fill in--you know most of the script and blocking--it'll be easy for you.”

"Easy! Are you sure it’s not just because I’ll fit Angie’s costume?”

"Come on, Betsy, I know you can do it--and we’re desperate!"

"Ok, I’ll do it." Betsy said, as she ran to tell her parents that she was going to act again. That evening, Betsy spent every free minute backstage going over her lines. She made it through the performance unnoticed. As she breathed a sigh of relief behind stage, she heard her name being called to come up front. Jim beamed at her and boomed in his deep voice, “Betsy
saved the show tonight by performing a part she hadn’t practiced before five o’clock this afternoon. Let’s give her a special round of applause.” The audience did, and Betsy smiled, glad she could help—and glad it was over. Betsy’s experience reflects hundreds of young persons’ private success stories on the stage at Grace.

The following years brought new and different performances, but the story of youth finding a place to grow in self-confidence, a place to feel at home, remained the same. The story of the volunteer effort required to put on each production remained the same. The directors are essential, and they have made the shows shine, but the ensemble effort of young people, directors, and parents makes the tradition of drama at Grace truly remarkable.

In the Wiley and the Hairy Man program, the production team was acknowledged, as they have been each year. The director is the artistic specialist who brings dramatic expertise and makes all final performance decisions. Assistant directors are adults or young persons who help the director with notes and whatever is needed. Jim Nelson and Ken Reams worked together for many years. For Wiley, the two assistant directors learned the fine art of running a fog machine, perfectly timing this eerie element’s entrance and exit on stage. The accompanist plays a major role in all productions, putting in many hours of rehearsal time. According to T Valada-Viars, Becky Orfield has added many creative musical touches to numerous recent productions.

The volunteer coordinator is really the producer. If a parent were asked to be the “producer,” it would sound like too much work, and no one would agree to do it. But the term “volunteer coordinator” sounds so innocuous. It’s all semantics. The parent coordinator is key to the production’s success. This adult coordinates all of the other responsibilities and keeps everything running smoothly. The director tells the parent coordinator what is needed, and the parent coordinator makes sure it gets done. Whoever takes on this role is agreeing to see the whole thing through. It means holding a meeting to get other parents signed up for the other important jobs such as dinner, decorations, promotions, ticket sales, program, advertisements, stage/set, props, costumes, lights, make-up, t-shirts, and video. Parent coordinators live at the church on cold February evenings, make posters, build sets, sew costumes, counsel kids, advise parents, make phone calls, write thank you notes, and enlist their family members to come live with them at the church as well. Binnie Lehew became an expert on dry ice as she found the best price and picked up a batch every day over her lunch hour and carried it around in a cooler until she got it to
the church. She also made all of the tie dye shirts and cut and frayed the blue jeans for the chorus members. Her daughter Madison sat on the floor through almost every rehearsal and helped decorate the set with her friend Anna Meister. Binnie’s husband Ben provided many of the materials used on the set. No parent coordinator does this alone; it invariably becomes a family affair.

Every production requires creativity on the part of actors, crew, and parents. It is in the process of finding what will work, and what will work perfectly, that creativity blooms. According to T, being a part of that exciting community process is what makes her work fun. “Seeing young people grow in confidence makes it important. Phoebe Sexton was an excellent assistant manager for three years. This year she had the confidence to try out for an acting part and she got a lead as Mama. I hated to lose my assistant, but others stepped in and learned; that’s what it’s all about,” said T.

The ensemble nature of the Grace production makes it communal. There is a sort of spirituality in working together to produce a play. Each member of the team is important and must be treated with respect. According to T, respect is a form of love. The director respects the actors as individuals who are exposing themselves as they try to do what is asked of them; the actors must respect the director as the expert who can help them improve; and all of the actors must respect one another. All of this is essential to a successful dramatic process and performance. T has only one rule: respect.

Trust and camaraderie among crew members are essential. In theater they say, “There are no small parts, only small actors,” and T believes it translates into love. God loves everyone; therefore, everyone is important. For her it is a human rights issue that can be taught through drama. She teaches the kids, “You can never be so big a star that you don’t need someone else.” She has seen talented kids lose that star quality when they think that they are more important than others. According to T, “Talent is always in relationship to others. The lead cannot look good if the servant who is supposed to hand her a glass of water does not do her part.”

Through the years, amazing contributions to the Grace drama program have been made by countless volunteers. Although only a few names will be listed in this history, hours of work and support have gone into the production of these plays. Two 1999 contributions include the improved lighting network completed by Lisle Shires and a new stage built as a part of Michael
Freise's Eagle Scout Award. It is hoped that all volunteers received joy in proportion to their giving. (Did any parent ever grumble about Dinner Drama?) Although volunteers historically have been shy about counting the hours or even saving receipts for the materials contributed, the value of this tradition is enormous.

It would cost a fortune to put on any of the plays that have been presented at Grace. A fortune is not budgeted to the drama program—and probably never will be—but many families know its value and contribute generously. Denny Easter died in 1999. His three sons were active in the drama program at Grace. Memorials from his funeral all came to the drama program, long after his children had graduated.

Not every church has a tradition of youth dinner drama. At Grace the congregation wholeheartedly supports the dramatic efforts of their youth. Through the years, many adult Sunday school classes have attended these plays together. Extended families reunite to watch their star or stars. The drama program at Grace is important in ways that may never be quite understood, but can be felt in the pride of parents, the sense of accomplishment of young people, and the magical feeling that only drama can create in an otherwise ordinary church basement.
4. WOMEN OF GRACE

There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

May not women as well as men bear a part in this honorable service? Undoubtedly they may; nay, they ought--it is their meet, right, and bounden duty. Herein there is no difference: ‘there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.’

John Wesley’s sermon “On Visiting the Sick” (395-396)

Photo of Gladys Burkhead

I associate with the down and out. Most people associate with the elite. I have associated with the down and out all of my life.

Gladys Burkhead
One bright June afternoon in 1989, Reverend Bill Cotton was working in his new office tucked behind the northeast corner of the sanctuary, putting books onto shelves. A brisk rap on the door preceded the entry of a tiny woman on a mission.

"Are you the new minister?" she asked curtly.

"Well, yes, I am. My name’s Bill Cotton. And you?" said Bill, as he wiped the dust off his hands.

"I’m Gladys Burkhead, and I’m here to sign you up as a member of the Drake Neighborhood Association."

"Nice to meet you, Gladys, but how can I be a member if I don’t live in the neighborhood?" Bill replied, as he wondered about the usual formalities that were being cut right through by this little lady with piercing brown eyes.

"If you’re going to serve Grace Church, you should live in the neighborhood; but give me five dollars and we’ll forgive you for that."

Bill handed his solicitor a five-dollar bill and finally shook hands with Gladys Burkhead, one of Des Moines’ most innovative and effective community organizers. Gladys has made a lasting impression on the city of Des Moines, Grace Church, and every individual she has met. She was a member of Grace United Methodist Women and exemplified what one woman, working with others, can do to live out the gospel.

When Gladys spoke, people listened—and she did not mince words. When Bill Cotton first met Gladys, he lived in a parsonage located four miles north of the church; a year later he moved into the parsonage next door to the church. Gladys encouraged Preston Daniels to run for mayor in 1997. He was elected and counted Gladys as his strongest supporter. Gladys had a way of making people change, making people act. She exhorted, like the spirit-filled Methodist women in the 1800’s who stood up in church and told others what they ought to be doing. The power to convict others resided in Gladys. But throughout her life, Gladys did much more than exhort others, she acted on her beliefs.

Gladys was the spark needed to ignite the Drake Neighborhood Association in 1979. It has since become a powerful organization, a model for many others that have sprung up around the city. For years Gladys fasted every Saturday and gave the money she saved as a contribution to
world hunger. She had no car and spent little on clothing. On Sundays Gladys would walk to Grace with a garbage bag in hand to clean up the street after Saturday night. Gladys began a clothing drive for children when she and her sister lived near Grant School. The teachers sent the children to Gladys and her sister Chloris, who ran a day care out of their home, for help finding adequate clothing. Gladys started organizing to collect clothing for children all over the city. She also asked elderly persons to knit mittens and hats so that no child would go cold in the winter. This program is still in effect, administered by Church Women United. An endowment for the School Children’s Clothing Fund was created by the Grace Foundation on Gladys’ 90th birthday in 1997.

Gladys also worked through the Des Moines chapter of Church Women United (which she founded in 1950) to promote the recognition of Mrs. Rosa Park’s birthday as a national holiday. (Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, stirring the American Civil Rights Movement.) Gladys planted daffodils at Witmer Park and organized the planting of the beautiful flower beds on Kingman Boulevard as well. These flower beds reveal Gladys in the center of Des Moines, even when she was confined to a nursing home’s four walls during the last years of her life.

Everyone who ever met Gladys has a unique Gladys story to tell. Long-time member Thesa Shady recalls that Gladys made it a point to stand on her head every day for as long as she could—just for the fun of it. Coreen Witke, a member of the Church and Society Committee, remembers tying pink ribbons around tree trunks along Kingman Boulevard in early February to commemorate Rosa Parks’ birthday. And in 1999, when the new minister, Reverend Bill Steward, first visited Gladys in her nursing home, she reminded him to “Always remember the poor kids.”

An interview in July of 1999 allowed Gladys to reflect on her active faith and Grace Church. After she was propped up better on her pillow and helped to drink some water through a straw, she told a little about the origin of her drive to help others: “When I was a kid my mother dressed us warmly and adequately, but I never had clothes I liked. That might have had something to do with my desire to dress kids well for school. My grandfather fusses over my brother because he would carry on the family name. I felt left out—terribly alone in the world. I think that had something to do with it.” She looked at the ceiling as she told her stories. Gladys joined Grace
partly because it was in her neighborhood and partly because Grace had a no smoking policy. Although she was not a 50-year member, Gladys knew a lot about Grace:

“They are a very sensitive group and concerned about their neighborhood. Most of the people at Grace have two cars...I wish they were more committed. When there is a need, they don’t dig down in their pockets—they have a bake sale! I’ve never seen a church have so many bake sales. I like them all--they are all wonderful people. They’re terribly concerned about their own kids--and not enough about the kids who don’t have the basics. I suppose they could never do enough to suit me...Grace Church was always good to me.”

It was getting uncomfortably hot in the dark room and Gladys seemed to need to rest. “Could you turn the air conditioner on to low cool?” she asked. A window unit provided some relief. The nursing home room’s walls were covered with photos of the Preston Daniels campaign, yellowed Register articles about Gladys, appreciation plaques, and cards. “Ok, I’m ready. Could you lift me up a little higher?”

The wren-like creature’s strength was in her spirit, not her build, and the small room was filled with the presence of a prophet. She always encouraged the people of Grace to be even better Christians.

“So many Grace members are too busy climbing mountains, going to Australia, going to...I don’t know how they can love the Lord when they’re so segregated.” Her voice dropped off, and it was time to rest.

Although Gladys was confined to a bed, her work went on. In the Grace Fellowship Hall on February 3, 2000, over 40 women sat at various tables chatting, snacking, and making valentines for the prisoners at the Iowa Correctional Institute for Women at Mitchellville. Gladys always loved to make valentines, so she started sending handmade ones to nursing home residents and other shut-ins in 1970. In 1985 she started sending a valentine to every woman prisoner at Mitchellville. Some years, Gladys made over 500 valentines. She did not want these women to be forgotten on Valentine’s Day. But as the years went on, Gladys could not do it alone, so she asked her friends in the Grace United Methodist Women’s group to help. They did and eventually took over Gladys’ loving project. Individuals, small circles and the large group all work at various times over the year to create these handmade, recycled offerings of love and cheer.

For many years, Gladys didn’t hear a word back from the women at Mitchellville because
they did not know who had sent them. But after word got out, letters poured in. One young woman wrote: “You made my day much brighter. Your card was all I got on Valentine’s Day and it sure made me smile. If I remember right, last year I received one from you also. People like you are truly God’s angels. Acts of love like yours do not go unnoticed. The world is a better place with love like yours for strangers.” Gladys does make the world a better place. According to Reverend Cotton in a sermon preached in 1995, “When I think of the church as a sign of wonder for a new day, I think of Gladys. She makes the new wine. She is an epiphany, a manifestation of light, sign and wonder.”

Gladys was a member of the Grace United Methodist Women, and was just one of many Grace women who fulfill the purpose of the United Methodist Women as stated in the UMW 2000 Program: “The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission by participation in the global ministries of the church.”

The United Methodist Women of Grace United Methodist Church is open to all women. A general meeting for all members is held the first Thursday of each month at 9:30 in the Fellowship Hall, October through June. Smaller groups called circles meet once a month in homes or at the church. In 2000 the circles are Anna, Elizabeth, Promise, Rebecca, Ruth, and Suzannah. Special conference events are held each year such as an annual school of Christian mission and spiritual growth retreats.

In 2000, 176 Grace women are on the UMW roll. There are more than 35,000 women in the Iowa conference and over 800,000 in the United States who are members of the United Methodist Women. Organizing can get a lot done; women have known this for a long time. The program theme for 2000, “Mission Alive in the New Millennium” reminds members that this group was organized as a mission society and continues to support missions to help others in the United States and in the world. At the same time, it provides fellowship and support for members. Older women who are unable to participate, like Gladys, continued to be cared for, almost like family, by their circle members. When circle members visit their sisters in nursing homes, the nursing home staff know that they are cared for, not forgotten. This creative, supportive fellowship meets the needs of its members and reaches out to the world as well.
Women were important spiritual leaders and organizers in the early Methodist movement in England. Suzannah Wesley held prayer meetings in her home on Sunday nights that drew more people than the Sunday morning service. In America, Barbara Heck is considered the mother of America Methodism. She interrupted a card game to tell her cousin Philip Embury that he needed to preach, and helped organize the first congregation in New York City in 1766. Women have always been a vital part of the Methodist movement, but the more institutionalized the Methodist Church became, the less official leadership women were allowed, according to Methodist scholar Dee Andrews. It was only after the Civil War that women acted on what they knew to be their abilities to serve in the world, beyond the confines of the home (Miller Schmidt, 293).

The Women’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) was founded in Boston in 1869 as a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This organization was the forerunner of the current organization (UMW) and was the first to organize nationally (Miller Schmidt, 161). Several women missionaries were sent to India and China and other countries to establish schools and hospitals. Grace Church sent one of her own members, Miss Enola Eno as a missionary to Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, India in 1918 as noted in many Messenger articles. The Grace W.F.M.S. had 212 members that year and supported Miss Eno with prayers and offerings. In 1880 the Women’s Home Missionary Society (WHMS) was formed in an attempt to serve the needs of women and children in America.

In 1888 the General Conference of the Methodist Church denied women the right to be lay delegates, unseating five women who had been elected to serve in that capacity. In 1904 they were admitted to the General Conference. Women had already taken responsibility for organizing and doing good within their separate women’s organizations. At this time, women were repeatedly denied ordination in the various conferences and at the General Conference. In 1920 the 19th Amendment to the U.S Constitution was ratified, granting women the right to vote. In 1921 the Wesleyan Service Guild was founded for working women who wanted to participate with the other two women’s organizations the WFMS and the WHMS (Miller Schmidt, 270).

In 1939 the Methodist Church was formed by the union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1940 the Women’s Society of Christian Service was formed to replace the local Ladies’ Aid Societies and other missionary groups. In 1968 the United Methodist Church was formed by the uniting of the
Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church. It was at that time that all of the women’s group were brought together as United Methodist Women. Not everyone liked the change. Names changed and ways changed. There was some grumbling as the ladies reorganized, but most kept coming.

The following list provides the names of the different women’s missionary groups at Grace through the years: the Ladies Aid Society, the Foreign Missionary Society, the Home Missionary Society, Woman’s Society of Christian Service, the Wesleyan Service Guild, the Women’s Society of Christian Service, and finally, the United Methodist Women.

Through the years, in addition to missionary groups, Grace women have been predominately responsible for teaching Sunday school, serving meals, preparing communion, and decorating the altar. According to Reverend Marilyn Henrichs, current minister of education, women have been expected to do much of the work in the church because of long-established traditions. As more and more women began working away from home, many persons thought the church would decline without the volunteer work provided by the women. But according to Reverend Henrichs, it does not have to be the downfall of the church. “Church leaders must be more creative in continuing to get the work of the church done. The church has and continues to provide women an arena to explore their talents and how they can serve.” Henrichs works with many women through her administration of the educational programs at Grace. She has seen many women grow in faith and confidence as they are given more responsibilities within the church.

A recent tradition at Grace is the Women’s Conference held each spring. It was after Grace member Bonnie Campbell lost in her bid for Governor in 1994 that Reverend Bill Cotton decided that something was needed that would allow young women and all women to see that they could become spiritual and political leaders. With his encouragement and support, the Committee on Church and Society started organizing a weekend conference, Celebrate Women: Celebrate Life. This recent tradition addresses the need for women to continue to struggle to be whole persons in Christ, free to lead. This conference is designed for women of all ages and attracts women from all over Iowa.

Women in the Methodist tradition have always had access to the spirit and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The radical transforming power of the Holy Spirit has worked in the lives of women as well as men through the years. But there has been a struggle for women to express
themselves fully. The Christian tradition has kept women in certain roles; American society has been slow to grant equal rights to women; and women have struggled to lead within the Methodist Church. It was only in 1956 that women were allowed ordination rights equal to men’s. But it was back in 1869, with the founding of the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society, that women decided that they would organize and control their own business within the Methodist Church. At an early WFMS camp meeting, two ministers were asked to leave by the women, but they declined. The police were called to remove them from this women’s gathering—and business went on as planned (Miller Schmidt, 161). According to Church and Society Committee member Dianne Fagner, “Women in 2000 still struggle to express their faith, lead, organize, and live as whole persons in Christ.”

The United Methodist Women of Grace United Methodist Church has a vital purpose in the community and in the world. It is an organization that serves the world and allows for sweet fellowship in the process. Many women through the years have enjoyed this group and contributed to the world through its missions and activities. And many woman today continue to make significant contributions to the world through this organization. Each member serves in her own unique way, as Gladys did.

Gladys was not a typical church-going Christian lady. Sometimes she would miss Sunday worship. Each week she walked to church with her garbage bag in hand, picking up the trash thrown out on Saturday night. If it had been a big littering Saturday night, Gladys cleaned up the mess and missed Sunday worship. Once Gladys and her sister got let off on the Des Moines freeway by a cabby who would not stop smoking when they asked him to. That story made the news: two elderly ladies walking along the edge of the freeway. Gladys had a way of making a difference and making news.

For many years on World Communion Sunday, Gladys would get up in front of the church, all four foot 10 inches of her, and talk to the congregation about the Children’s Clothing Fund. Without an introduction, she’d begin: “I’d like you all to look at your shoes.” The congregation did as she asked, every year. “Now, I want you to think about how many pairs of shoes you have at home in your closet.” The congregation kept their eyes on their shoes. “Now I want you to think about children who don’t have even one decent pair to wear to school. And I want you to give to the School Children’s Clothing Fund, because it’s the right thing to do.”
Gladys Burkhead died in November of 2000. On November 14 in the Grace sanctuary, friends and relatives gathered to celebrate her life and share their unique Gladys stories. And the stories just kept on coming. So many lives touched, so many memories, so many lessons. Gladys was one of the many beloved women of Grace who have made a difference in the world.
5. MUSIC OF GRACE

Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150

O' for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his Grace.

Charles Wesley, 1739

When the church choir becomes God's choir the people are led into his presence. The meaning of life and love as He intended it to be for his children is made plain. The choir members are participants in a cosmic drama. Men and women dedicated to a holy task. There is singing in the Lord's tent of meeting and His temple is completed. The workmen go their way rejoicing. The morning stars sing together and the sons of God shout his praise. "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will among men." This was the song of the angels and it is his hallelujah in the hearts of those who are his ministers of music.

Reverend Newton Moats' sermon, May 27, 1956
Something calls folks to Grace. Is it the Chimes on top of the high slate roof sprinkling the neighborhood with old-time hymns? Or a piano or organ’s notes traveling through an open window in May? A soloist, practicing for Sunday’s service? Or the hand bells ringing on a Thursday evening, the laughter and talk as much a call as the melody? The musical magnet that draws so many to Grace may very well be the musical tradition of Grace. The walls and brick and plaster have it. The sanctuary reverberates with today’s songs and echoes all of the music of the past. Grace is big enough to hold it all, from second grader Neil Stoffregen’s original composition, “Christmas Fanfare” in 1998 to a 290-voice mass choir performing a program of carols and Christmas anthems in 1957. Grace delighted in the Mullen Family’s folk rendition of “If the Lord” in 1999 as it did in Bach’s “St. Matthew’s Passion” in the 50’s. Grace’s musical tradition calls folks to its sanctuary to praise God and listen to the spirit within these most acoustic walls.

Little is known about the music at the first church, but in 1902 a pipe organ was given to Grace by Mrs. E.A. Ross and installed in the second building. Unfortunately it was destroyed in the 1917 fire which damaged much of that building. A new three manual Barckhoff organ replaced the original one. According to church records, the first choir director, referred to as “chorister and organist” was J.C. Norman Richards in 1906. The first mention of a paid director of music was during Reverend Fifer’s pastorate, 1904-1920. The organist and a vocal quartet were also paid at that time.

The current church was dedicated in 1927, and the Grace congregation lost no time in procuring an organ for their expansive sanctuary— even in the midst of the Depression. The original Reuter pipe organ was dedicated on March 11, 1932 with a grand concert featuring Harold Brown, an associate from the Royal College of Organists, London.

The new organ allowed for high church music in the larger, auditorium-like sanctuary. In the March 13, 1932 Grace Church Messenger Reverend W.L. Ewing wrote: “It is indeed a source of most delightful anticipation as we think of what the organ will mean to the singing of the old hymns and to the anthems throughout the entire life of the present Grace Church sanctuary. Who can compute the number who shall sit amidst the melodies and praise to our Heavenly Father produced by this instrument, and who shall, because of the hosannas of beautiful harmony, become in tune with the great Master Musician, who would play upon the harp chords of our
souls.” But Methodists love all sorts of music. Tickets for musicales were sold for fifteen cents in 1933. These more casual concerts were performed in the Grace Church Parlor (current Fellowship Hall) at 7:30 P.M. and refreshments were provided.

After the second world war, Grace church snagged a nationally known baritone opera singer and new voice professor at Drake, Andrew B. White, through the well-prepared attack of Dr. Moats and Robert Throckmorton. They had written to him about the job, but he replied that he was too busy and not interested. Nonetheless, they met the Rock Island Train in Des Moines on a cold autumn night “Excuse me, Sir, are you Andrew White?” asked the well-dressed Dr. Moats as soon as Mr. White stepped onto the platform.

“Well, yes, I am,” said Mr. White. “Are you from Drake?”

“No, I’m Dr. Newton Moats of Grace Church and this is Bob Throckmorton, chairman of our music committee and former leader of a fine dance orchestra. We wanted to meet you, welcome you to Des Moines, and make sure you had a ride in this weather.”

“Well, thank you, nice to meet you both. I’m supposed to be met by a music professor, but apparently he’s not here yet,” said Mr. White, looking around for his official greeters.

“We’re glad to have you in Des Moines—what an asset to our musical and cultural community. Let me give you my card. If you need any help, please give me a call,” said Mr. Throckmorton. “We can talk more about the music job at Grace once you get settled in.”

“Thank you.” I’m really going to be very busy traveling, you know. But thanks for your interest.” Before the month was over, they managed to meet with him again. They responded to all of his reasons for not taking the job, even providing a replacement director for any times he would need to be away performing. Finally Mr. White agreed to take it, “until you can find someone else.” That was 16 years later.

During those 16 years, Grace’s music ministry grew. Throughout this time, Mrs. LaRue White worked tirelessly and made an invaluable impact on the music program, molding and directing the youth and children’s choirs. Their eldest daughter Ramona also worked with the younger children. The overall effect of the Whites’ influence on Grace’s musical ministry was to instill a quality of discipline, loyalty, and reverence in the lives of each choir generation.

Mr. White brought many of his excellent Drake music students with him to Grace. Two stand out. Jon Spong grew up in Union Park Methodist Church in East Des Moines, where his
musical ability was recognized at an early age. While Jon was studying music at Drake, he accompanied Mrs. White’s student choirs, directed the Chancel Choir, and was the paid tenor soloist. Sherrill Milnes was the paid baritone soloist. Grace enjoyed many special musical performances during their college years and afterwards. The two of them became friends and Spong accompanied Milnes in concerts for over 35 years. They made three sacred music recordings together for voice and organ. Milnes' opera career is recorded in a memoir published in 1998, *American Aria: From Farm Boy to Opera Star*. In 2000, he began teaching at Northwestern University. Spong served as director of music at a number of churches and had a long college teaching career. He is widely published in church organ music. Mr. Spong resides in Iowa City after retiring from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. These two former students maintained a close friendship with the Whites. The musical tradition at Grace was enriched by their gifts and those of many other student musicians through the years.

On July 11, 1965, Grace Church hosted an appreciation night for the White family as they prepared to move to Waco, Texas, where Mr. White had accepted a teaching position at Baylor University. Don Gerdom served as master of ceremonies at the heartfelt affair. Gerdom was one of the many folks called to Grace because of its music. In 1957 the Gerdoms moved to Des Moines from Davenport. They had heard about Grace’s tremendous music program—300 singers in over five different choirs—robed every Sunday. That’s what brought them to Grace. Don and three of his four children joined a choir. At that time at Grace, both services were packed. Families were encouraged to attend the early service, when the youth and children’s choirs sang.

The adult choir sang at the later adult service. *The Hour of Grace* radio program sent the entire second service over the radio waves to central Iowa, at a time when radio was a constant companion in the home. Grace services were on KRNT television for two or three years in the late 50’s and early 60’s. Grace was the first Des Moines church to be on television, and the service was professionally managed by Reverend Clifford Lott. Reverend Moats had a constant cough, and was used to taking a swig of cough medicine before beginning his sermon. His pocket flask contained cough syrup, but the television audience may have wondered why a Methodist minister was drinking anything that resembled alcohol. Many Grace members remember worrying about giving the wrong impression about their minister to the television audience. Because everything had to be timed to the minute, Reverend Lott was often observed making cutting motions under his
neck as he tried to stop Reverend Moats from exceeding his time limit on the sermon. The television broadcasts went all over central Iowa.

A mentally retarded young man and his mother faithfully enjoyed The Hour of Grace each Sunday in their home in Creston. Once a year, the mother drove her son to Des Moines to participate in a Grace service, live. The visitors were warmly welcomed and all parties celebrated the positive impact Grace was having on so many lives. Grace reached out to thousands during its radio and television days. Russell Van Dyke, Grace member and long time KRNT news director, helped set up the control station located in the southwest corner of the sanctuary. Andrew White directed a superb adult choir with professional soloists. Music was an important part of what made Grace popular with radio and television audiences as well as the more than 3000 Grace members.

According to Don Gerdom: “The music program was a real system. Andy and LaRue were strict. Choir members dressed well and respected the directors. Choir mothers helped keep the younger children well behaved.” Two sisters, Jon Dee Beers and Kathryne Long, fitted all of the children for their robes; A long-time choir member Mrs. Leona Taylor helped file and repair music. Other volunteers sewed robes and filed music as well. An offering was collected every Wednesday night at adult choir practice. Special choir programs, complete with comedy routines, light musicals, and dessert, raised even more money for the choir program. Alf Thomas playing his bass and Don Gerdom playing the drums on “Dry Bones” provided great fun for everyone. A strong musical tradition was established by the choir system that the Whites put in place at Grace. The following biography of Mr. White appeared in the program for his farewell tour in 1989.

Andrew White (19__-1998) was born in Fort Deposit, Alabama, the son of a Baptist minister. His mother was a teacher of voice and piano. In high school he received many honors in music and appeared as soloist on many occasions. He studied at the University of Arizona and graduated in 1936 with a Master’s degree. In 1942 he went into Military Intelligence work and was Assistant G-2 of a Corps Headquarters until June, 1945 when he returned to States, separating from the service as a Lieutenant Colonel. He held teaching positions at the University of Michigan, Ohio State University and Shrivenham American University in Shrivenham, England. He was well known for his oratorio work in “The Messiah,” “St. Matthew Passion,” and many operatic roles. The White family came to Des Moines in 1949 when and became head of the Voice Department at Drake University. He then moved to Baylor University where he was chairman of the Voice Department and ended his career teaching at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. In 1979 he was was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus by the University of Cincinnati and continued to hold the Dieterle Chair of Music for many years. “He is first of all a caring family man with the highest personal standards. He has been blessed with a lovely and most helpful wife, the former LaRue Mann. They have
three devoted daughters (Ramona Clark, Marie Hise, and Michelle Goolsbee), two charming granddaughters and three lively grandsons (one of whom is named for his distinguished grandfather.) ... He had his first job at the age of four years (delivering milk in his little red wagon) and has never been without some sort of a "job" since that time. Faith, consistency and dependability have been - and are - at the center of his existence. He feels that the longevity of his singing career has been made possible because of a strictly-adhered-to code of the right kind of daily practice (military service excepted). If there is a legacy he would like to leave to his students, it is self-discipline, reliability and love for one's fellow man." Andrew white died on July 7, 1998. In 2000, Mrs. LaRue White resides in Cincinnati. Her daughter Ramona lives in Clive and is Director of Music at Westkirk Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

In preparation for writing this history, many former staff members were asked to reflect on their years at Grace. Andrew White sent a long letter to David Kvernstoien in 1998, recalling many good memories. The letter was a rough draft in Andrew’s hand; he died before it could be revised or typed, but his family found it and kindly sent it to Grace. An excerpt follows:

I remember the sixteen years that I served at Grace Methodist Church as being among the most gratifying experiences in my life. ... We had a wonderful adult choir, and I wanted to do the "St. Matthew Passion" by Bach. We would do it over a period of almost three months, using excerpts of about eight minutes each Sunday. When I approached Dr. Moats on the plan, he said, "Do you think this congregation can take three months of Bach?" I said, "If you will let me pick the hymns, I will select very familiar ones that everyone knows, and I think they can!" We had a special bulletin with the text of each Sunday in it, and requested the congregation to leave it in the pews from week to week. It went so well that we decided to do the same about three years later.

We left Grace Church with six choirs (including the Taylor Bell Choir).

We have never found another church home like Grace.

Many great leaders emerged during the White era and afterward, but none were as long serving as the ever-faithful organist Alice Brown. Alice practiced at odd hours of the night in the huge, lonely sanctuary. Several folks cautioned her against practicing late at night saying, "Alice, it's eerie in there. Someone could come in and knock you over the head!"

"They can go ahead if they want to," Alice replied. She just needed to practice. Her full-time job was as secretary for Fred Weitz contractors, but she was able to take time off to play for youth choir tours, funerals, and other special events. One Sunday morning the ever-faithful Alice did not arrive at church in time to practice before the first service. Andy White sent choir president
Don Gerdom to find her. Don walked outside and headed in the direction of Alice's home. A beautiful spring day, Alice was leisurely strolling down the sidewalk, enjoying the magnolia blossoms and lilac buds. "Alice! You forgot to set your clock ahead! Church is ready to begin!" shouted Don. Alice ran to the church, grabbed her robe, and didn't miss a beat as she calmly walked to the organ, sat down, and began playing the opening hymn. Whenever Alice's name is mentioned, the response is almost always, "Dear Alice." Alice served as organist for Grace Church for 40 years. She had a phenomenal natural talent. Many of her recitals were played from memory. Her faithful devotion to the music program at Grace endeared her to many, and her death in 1984 saddened them in proportion to their love for her. A special day in Alice Brown's honor was held on Sunday, November 21, 1977 and was publicized in a Chimes article prior to that Sunday:

For over 32 years she has accompanied choirs, played preludes, postludes, and offertories for Grace Church, along with occasional recitals. This will be our special time to say "Thank You" to a very dedicated, steady talent whose ability has always been an exceptional asset to the music program of our church.

Alice came to Grace the Sunday after Easter, April 19, 1944. In her capacity as organist-pianist, she has worked with eleven directors, including Dr. Stromberg, our present Director of Music. Alice is a graduate of the Chicago School of Music, and is a charter member of the Des Moines Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. She has served as dean of the organization in the past. Among her concerts have been recitals before the six-state regional convention of the American Guild of Organists at Mason City; a dedication concert for the new Casavant Organ at the Episcopal Church in Ottumwa; Guild sponsored concerts at Central College in Pella, Grinnell Chapel in Grinnell; the United Methodist Church in Cedar Falls; St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Des Moines, and a recital for the ISEA at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids. The talents of Mrs. Brown have been widely acclaimed throughout the Midwest, most particularly among church musicians for her outstanding interpretation of sacred music. She has accompanied the Chapel Choir in its tours, including the recent mini-tours around the state, and neighboring states, as well as going with them to England on the Heritage Tour in 1973. She will be the organist for the approaching Chapel Tour to Central Europe in 1977.

Alice and her late husband, George, have three children scattered over the nation. Alice, the oldest, is now Mrs. Richard Guzman-Barron and lives in Chicago. Carl lives in Sunnyvale, California, and Kriste, Mrs. Robert Robert Grasso, lives in Arleta, California. Mr. Brown passed away in 1974. Alice has worked for the Weitz Construction company for over 22 years, and is now the personal secretary to Mr. Weitz.
The Don Gerdoms were there to appreciate the Whites and Alice Brown. Their family exemplifies the importance of music in a family and how music connects their lives to one another and to Grace. Don and Patsy met in a mixed choir in Burlington. At Grace, Don joined the choir in spite of his WW II disabilities -- and was able to continue to enjoy his love of singing. Their eldest son Tom graduated from Drake in music and worked with the Tulsa Symphony before settling in Michigan as a music consultant. Peter helped organize many musical programs at Iowa State. Ann was an assistant organist at Grace and accompanied the Chapel Choir on its first Methodist Heritage Tour of England in the summer of 1973. She received a master’s in church music from Northwestern and is currently church organist for a Lutheran church in Lake Forest, Illinois.

The Gerdoms’ youngest child Molly played the violin, the piano, and sang in the Chapel Choir. Molly was 15 when she went on the youth choir’s first tour of England. The group got back from England on Wednesday night. Friday night Molly was in an automobile accident. The youth group, the Grace family, and even the English families who had hosted Grace’s youth prayed for Molly, but she died on June 17, 1973, Father’s Day, the summer before her junior year of high school. She wrote poetry, and Remembrances of My World -- Hollow Whistles and Other Songs of Joy was published by her parents in 1975. Memorial gifts provided gold choir robes for the Chapel Choir which served for over 25 years. Molly, like most adolescents, was finding her way to adulthood. She had a home in the Grace music program. The first poem from her collections follows:

Who Am I?

Who am I?
Where do I belong?
My father, he is so smart
He knows so many people.
My mother never stops doing creative stuff
Like pillows and wall hangings
She never uses kits either.
My brothers—oh my brothers
One’s a father and a musician to boot
Pretty good, I might add.
The other, he’s a big man on campus.
My sister plays five instruments
Looks like a girl from the cover of a magazine
Then there’s me.
What can I do?
How can I compete?

Well, for a start,
I can smile.

Molly lives on in the lives of all who knew her, especially those who were a part of Grace’s music program with her. In the Grace Church Library another gift from the Gerdoms, a painting, Suffer the Children, reminds visitors of Molly’s life and of Christ’s love of children.

The tradition of a children’s music program has continued through the years. Today first graders may join the Caroller choir; fourth graders may participate in the Good News Choir, and seventh graders are invited to join the Chapel Choir. There are two youth bell choirs as well.

The Taylor Bells were given to the church by Leona Taylor in memory of her husband Clem. Mrs. Taylor saved her change and went without new dresses to be able to give this gift to the church. The adult bell choir currently goes by the name of the Grace Chimers. (In some of their early years they went by the name of the Ding-A-Lings, but in keeping with the dignity of this group, the name was later changed.) Edy Fudge was the first director of the group; Becky Orfield succeeded her, and in 1984, June Rutt adopted it and has been the director ever since. In 1995 two youth bell choirs were begun by June Rutt and David Kvernstoen. In 2000, David Kvernstoen directs these bell choirs.

In 1976, as a young widow, June Clinton Rutt moved from northeastern Iowa to Des Moines. She moved just two doors from the church to an apartment in her father’s red brick home before he decided to move to a retirement home. Her father was Dr. John Clinton, a retired Methodist minister, member of Grace, and community activist. He was instrumental in getting the replica of the first Methodist church at the Iowa State Fairgrounds and for getting the Lincoln and Tad statue on the Iowa State Capitol grounds.

After finding a job and getting started singing in the choir, June answered the call for help with the bells. Even though she had never played the bells before, she had taught music for several years at Turkey Valley. June has enjoyed her years as a volunteer director because, “I’m putting my talent to use helping other people enjoy making music.” Her scrapbooks record each performance and special workshops. Handbells for the Homeless and a special Christmas concert
for the handicapped children at the Convalescent Home for Children in Johnston reveal the good these bells can do. According to June, a lot of a director's work is encouraging folks to try. "It's the people who are willing to work at the bells who are appreciated. Faithfulness and enthusiasm are more important than superior musical talent." June's work is its own reward, as is true for many Grace musicians and singers. June can't help but brag a bit about her crew: "They're a good bunch to work with—we all have a good time."

A listing of choir directors and organists who have served at Grace through the years can be found in the appendix. All of their gifts and commitment have been valued by the congregation. Gifts and commitments from members enhance the musical program as well. In 1962 a bequest by Fred and Suzy Brown made a complete tonal revision of the Reuter organ possible. In 1983 Wayne Cooley provided for the complete releathering of the organ in memory of his first wife Gerry. Continued maintenance of the organ is also paid for by Mr. Cooley. In 1998, all eight musical groups were provided new choir robes thanks to a generous donation by Dr. Bernie and Virginia Hermann. Numerous gifts and bequests come to the music program, keeping the tradition of musical excellence strong.

The Chancel Choir is the name of the adult choir, open to any singer who has graduated from high school. The Amazing Grace Singers is an adult vocal double mixed quartet.

David Kvernstoen started as organist at Grace in 1984. He soon proved himself capable and willing of becoming minister of music, and combining the jobs of organist and choir director allowed David to work full-time for Grace. David has maintained a strong traditional adult choir in a time when much in church music is changing. In 1998 David presented an organ lecture and recital about the music used in worship services. David's personal attention to the needs of individual members and musicians endear him to many. David's ministry of music allows him to work closely with the pastors to plan meaningful and uplifting services. David has brought a devotion to the liturgical calendar to Grace by strongly encouraging the observation of the church calendar in music, prayer, and scripture. David brings tradition and order to our worship--perhaps his Lutheran upbringing is showing. The benefit of having David as full-time minister of music has been noted by many members. He, like Alice, is often heard practicing at odd hours of the day and night. He is more than an organist, though; he takes care of the entire music program.

David welcomed the J &J Gospel Choir's 10th anniversary and reunion at Grace on
Saturday August 19, 2000. Several Des Moines Gospel choirs filled the Grace sanctuary with clapping hands and heart and soul. David kicked off the evening with the Grace Chancel choir's rendition of *Jesus Loves Me*. David's traditional music excellence coupled with his acceptance of a diversity of musical styles make him a good caretaker of the Grace musical tradition. David is a silent shepherd of the music at Grace, the song leader at the organ, with his shining white hair, silently gliding from organ to piano and back again, during the 10:15 service.

One July weekday in 1999, long time member Polly Cochran fell on the narthex stairs after a UMW luncheon meeting. "I was taking a lazy man's load," she said moments later as she held an ice pack to her head.

"It's easy to fall on these steps, especially when you've got something in your arms," said David, kneeling to talk to the shaken woman.

"I don't know what I was thinking, and I hate to take up your time, David!"

"You just rest and I'll drive you home once you feel strong enough to walk a little." said David, as he stayed on the steps, along with a few other staff members who happened by. David drove Polly home and got her settled in. He also called to check on her until she recovered. It's in the Grace musical tradition for excellent musicians and caring individuals to serve God as they nurture beautiful music within Grace's walls.

David Otto Kvernstoë (1942- ) was born on May 8, 1942 in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. He graduated from Fergus Falls High School before attending St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, where he graduated with a degree in music education in 1964. He continued his education at the University of Colorado, the University of Iowa, and Drake University; he has taken organ study with David N. Johnson, Gerhard Krapf, Davis Folkerts, and Frank B. Jordan; conducting study has been taken with Olaf Christiansen, Kenneth Jennings, and Warner Imig. He served churches in Alta and Indianola, Iowa, before coming to Central Presbyterian of Des Moines. In 1984 he started as organist at Grace. He also taught public school vocal music in Alta and Indianola before being drafted for service in the United States Army in Viet Nam in 1968. He returned in 1970 and taught for 15 more years in the Indianola Community School. David has nurtured his connection to Viet Nam and its people through the years. He visits regularly and is good friends to many of the Vietnamese families in Des Moines. He teaches them English and they teach him Vietnamese. In 1990 David became Grace's Director of Music as well as organist.

The huge Grace sanctuary has absorbed innumerable songs, anthems, solos, preludes and postludes, concerts and assemblies, wedding marches and funeral dirges. Music has made everything better. One can feel the musical tradition of Grace even in the silence of the empty...
sanctuary. It is a holy place, made more so by all the music that has been raised to God by so many different voices. The walls will never be the same for having reverberated so much music, so much energy, so much life, so much love.

The people who lived in the neighborhood in 1933 were called by the new organ into Grace’s impressive new 950-seat sanctuary. Newcomers to Des Moines, like the Gerdon family, were called in the 50’s by the strong tradition of choral music established by the Whites. And families and individuals are still called to enjoy the variety of musical performances, from percussion ensembles, flute obligatos, trumpet and organ duos, bell soloists, the Red Sneaker Jazz Band, the Czech Republic Children’s Choir, and much more, in addition to the traditional choirs. The Chimes atop the church play hymns twice a day and three times on Sunday. The original system was restored in 1988 by the Neighbors Sunday School Class. Grace maintains its musical tradition through countless individual efforts and gifts. The strong musical magnet is still bringing people to Grace.
6. GRACE IN THE WORLD

As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it unto me.

Matthew 25:40

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

John Wesley from Letters (#1915) Rules of Conduct

Photo of Churches United Shelter
with
Grace Folks serving

Why are there people freezing to death in Des Moines in the 1990's?

Anne Maitre
Two men with beards stood in line waiting for a hot meal of potato and hamburger casserole, green beans, bread, and apple crisp. “What do you think of this big place?” said the first, motioning toward a large hallway leading behind the kitchen.

“Yeah, man, it’s huge—the biggest church we stay at, I think.”

“I bet we could find some cool places to hide—maybe smoke a little—if we tried.”

“Yeah, look at all the doors out of here, but we’d better not—we might get kicked out.”

The line approached the big kitchen where five smiling, middle-aged women piled their plates with steaming hot food. The two young men took the food with eyes lowered. It was good food and a glass of milk and a warm place to sleep for the night.

It was a Grace member who was born in England, Anne Maitre, who asked the question in a discussion in the activity center that got Grace involved in helping the homeless. “Why are there people freezing to death in Des Moines in the 1990’s?” Between 1990 and 1992 five homeless people died of exposure in Des Moines. A group of Des Moines churches united to help the homeless—each church hosting one night a week—until a permanent shelter could be found. Grace was a tenacious member of this group. It’s the countless dedicated individuals who help the poor that make Grace a vibrant servant community in mission to the world. But Grace members not only do acts of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, but many also make a public witness for social justice. John Wesley said that holiness is social, and Grace members concur.

Judy Anderson was on that early Churches United committee. She remembers driving a van downtown to find people sleeping in boxes in alleys. Some needed to be lifted into the van; others, too drunk to realize the danger of the cold night, were brought to the van by their friends. At Grace, volunteers prepared and served a hot meal. Tables were set up on the west side of the Activity Center and cots were set up on the east. At least two Grace members stayed overnight each Tuesday night. The homeless crowd was different from those who usually frequented Grace’s basement. Some Grace members did not like having dirty, alcoholic persons sleeping in the same room where preschool children played during the day. But overall, “The church’s support was great.” said Judy. Numerous volunteers were involved in this new type of mission.

After several years of struggling to serve the homeless of Des Moines from a variety of locations, Churches United was evicted from a building they were leasing. They wanted to put up tents on city land, but they could not get permission to do so. Finally, Churches United was
loaned a huge revival tent and got permission from Bethel Mission to put it up on their property. This story got picked up by the *Des Moines Register*. What seemed like a catastrophe turned out to be a catalyst for change. The *Churches United Annual Report, 1999* reads: "In 1994 a fund raising effort spearheaded by area businessman, Bill Knapp, raised $510,000 to purchase land and construct a permanent home for the shelter. The new facility officially opened its doors to the homeless on February 15, 1995." Architect Bob Brierly (a former Grace member) designed the building without charge. Churches United Shelter continues to be supported by Grace Church through individuals like Judy, financial gifts from the missions committee, and the individuals from twelve small groups who serve the evening meal the first day of every month.

One of the many Grace members who has served at Churches United Shelter is Gene Leonard, a cheerful, wiry man whose grin and unassuming manner give him away as a Iowa farm boy moved to the city. Gene says that he's been "well blessed." He was a long-time Sunday school teacher and member of the Mingo United Methodist Church before he and his wife Marilyn retired from the farm in 1991 to move to Des Moines to be closer to their grandchildren. His first job after retirement was house manager of the Door of Faith Mission. He spent over three years in this unlikely downtown position, where he learned about drugs, alcohol, and difficult family relationships. One of his first jobs there was to throw out a man who was too drunk to stay. That man later came back to the Mission and became one of those who "made it," according to Gene. Gene recently attended this man's wedding in Cedar Rapids. Gene keeps in contact with several of the men he met at the Mission and considers them life-long friends.

In January of 1997 Gene became chairman of the Missions Committee at Grace. He believes the mission field begins at the front door of the church and home. Gene has also been a regular volunteer at the Breakfast Club of Children & Family Urban Ministries for four years. He's there at 6:25 at least three mornings a week setting up the breakfast line and washing dishes. The grade school children help him clean up--and they talk his ear off. Gene attends their fun nights and field activities as an adopted grandpa.

Gene's example makes him an ideal mission chairperson. Gene says that there are good people on the committee because, "They're interested before they come." Although Gene says he's not much of a fund raiser, his committee is doing pretty well. In 1999 Grace Church gave $47,164 to missions through apportionments and $35,378 as a part of 3rd mile Rainbow.
Covenant giving, the highest level of giving that Methodist churches can attain. The Rainbow Covenant Program encourages local churches to give to a variety of local, national, and world wide missions. The missions committee budget comes from the special offerings collected at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter and special mission fund-raising events.

A few special missions fund-raising events should be mentioned. Grace church was the site of jugglers and jousters each June from 1990 to 1993, during the renaissance era at Grace, a time when the mission committee found a knightly way to raise money for others. In 1994 an art auction and English tea, organized by Anne Maitre and Helen Johnson, made fund raising even more British fun. In 1995 each member was sent a one dollar bill and was asked to multiply it and bring back the gain. 1,349 bills were sent out and 5,433 were returned to Grace. The dominant impression of missions work at Grace is one of joy. The people who get involved in missions all have something in common—the joy of giving and the freedom from self-absorption as they do something for others.

What Grace does for missions is not always as easy to see as costumed maidens and knights serving a Feast of Camelot. Nor is Grace’s mission outreach fully understood by most members. Mission is big word. It happens when people leave bills in a collection plate, when uncommon hospitality is offered, and when people get more personally involved. Impossible to define, mission requires many stories to begin to be understood.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:35)

Jesus said that his followers would be known by their care for others. These actions are required of all Christians, not just the leaders. In 1884 Reverend Wiseman, Grace’s first minister, was on a mission to organize a church in the northwest part of Des Moines. His friendly nature made strangers feel like friends. His love for God inspired others to come together to do the same. His work was a mission in the rapidly growing northwest part of Des Moines. The work of the pastors, staff, and lay persons made Des Moines a different type of place than it would have been without its presence. And Grace continues to influence the community.
From earliest Grace Church Sunday school records, offerings were sent to missions. Even when times were hard for members, they still supported others whose needs were greater. Early women’s groups supported women missionaries and learned about the world through mission studies. Sermons over years often informed lay persons of needs in the world and in our own country.

Many missionaries were supported by Grace Church through the years. Early Grace Church member and missionary Miss Enola Eno served at Isabelle Thoburn College, Lucknow, India in 1918. Missionaries often came to speak to Grace members, as did A. Kristian Jensen, a seminary friend of Reverend Moats, who spent 27 years in Korea. In 1952 a letter from Rev. Moats in the Chimes described Reverend Jensen’s imprisonment in Korea. His wife Maud continued her work in Korea after Kris’ death.

Kris Jensen Alive: Hallelujah!

We must not be too optimistic but there is cause for belief that our own Kris Jensen, missionary in Korea, has survived his long confinement as a prisoner-of-war. The North Korean radio has reported that 48 civilian prisoners, not previously listed, are held. This list included “Anders Kristian Jensen.”

Kris was on an errand of mercy near the 38th Parallel when the North Koreans first invaded. In the long interval since, there has been no word concerning him. His wife, Maud, was in Seoul. With only two hours notice, she escaped to Japan. Maud is now in the United States and will speak here at Grace Methodist Church, Sunday morning, April 27th.

Kris and I were ministers together at Grace Methodist Church, San Francisco, back in the Twenties. He and Maud left us there to begin their work in Korea.

It is our prayerful hope that the North Korean radio report is true. We rejoice with Maud in the possibility that Kris has survived the hardships of his captivity, and he will be returning to us.

Grace Church has been supporting the work of Kris and Maud Jensen in Korea through the Advance. They are responsible for the work in 189 missionary Churches in that devastated country. Our interest in them and our support for their work will continue, the Lord being our Helper.
The Schnecks were long-time missionaries in India. They spent their furlough to the United State as members of Grace church in 1961. Another missionary family that Grace supported through the years in Zimbabwe and a variety of locations was the Piburn family.

Missionaries still come to speak at Grace, and many different missionary efforts are supported. Naming all of the missionaries that Grace church has supported, their work, and their locations is impossible, but one cold Sunday morning early in the year 2000, Lawrence and Laura Hills, a Methodist missionary couple just about to retire from their work in Zaire, shared some of their stories in the Grace activity center. Living on a boat, the *Moya Winga*, the Hills traveled into an inaccessible wet area called Kafue flats. Missionaries had never gone into this area before. Their efforts enabled schools and clinics to be built, a health boat to make regular visits, and a Habitat for Humanity programs to be started. During their years in Africa, the Hills often had their jeep stuck in calf-high mud. Laura had to carry their drinking water from the community well, just like all of the native women. Military coups and intimidation at gunpoint sprinkled their lives with drama.

Their son David married an African woman and the couple had a daughter before the young parents died of Aids. The Hills shared how much sympathy and support they received after their loss from their church sponsors. Missionaries who tell about their lives in remote areas and their efforts to bring clean water, health care, education, and the gospel, inspire. Their lives are rugged, full of happiness and sorrow, like all lives, yet joyful in the knowledge that they are working full time for the Lord.

Alan and Mavis Streyffeler served at Nyadire Farms in Zimbabwe as Grace’s covenant missionaries in 1993 before Larry and Jane Kies filled that position and relationship with Grace in 1994. A covenant missionary relationship means that the church supports a particular mission with at least $1,000 a year. The missionaries correspond with the missions committee and come and speak about their work when they are on leave.

To better understand the big picture of mission outreach at Grace, just ask 82-year-old Chuck Heilman, a bear of a man with a full head of thick white hair, smiling almond-shaped eyes, and the air of a world traveler, to give a lesson. With a pencil in hand and a quickly drawn map of the world, he quickly transforms any classroom into an exciting lesson on Methodist connectionalism and world geography.
Chuck and his family moved to Des Moines in 1949 when Chuck got a job in the education department at Drake. Drake math professor Basil Gillam suggested they try Grace Church. In the late 50’s Chuck served as teacher for the Homebuilders class and his wife Marguerite was the organist for the early service. Although one page of print can never completely explain Grace’s mission outreach, looking at Grace’s local, national, and international outreach programs, through a brochure entitled “Missions Goals at Grace UMC” helps, especially with Chuck Heilman providing a global perspective. The international column identifies our current covenant missionaries, the Kies, and their work in Zimbabwe, Africa.

Mission Goals
At Grace UMC

To involve the Grace congregation in spreading the Gospel through witness and service in the Community, Iowa, the United States, and throughout the World.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

INTERNATIONAL

By joining with other persons of faith, Grace reaches out to countries around the world.

Missionary Support in Zimbabwe & Zaire
Farm, Colleges, Hospital & Churches

Iowa Nigeria Partnership
Seminary Tuition Scholarships
Motor Scooters & Bicycles
Dorm, Laboratory, Health, School & Seamstress Kits
Health Care Clinics
Literacy Programs
Youth & Women's Ministries
Educational Infrastructure

Volunteers in Mission (VIM)
Volunteers travel throughout the world to provide physical assistance & encouragement where needed.

Heifer Project International
Provides families with a source of food rather than short-term relief.

Disaster Response & UMCOR
United Methodist Committee on Relief strives to meet the challenge of hunger & poverty.

NOMADS
Volunteers with/without recreational vehicles share time and skills in churches and camps.

YOUTH MISSION OPPORTUNITIES
Annual work trips
Christmas Community Outreach
Grace Church Improvements

NATIONAL

By joining with other persons of faith, Grace reaches throughout the United States.

Red Bird Mission in Kentucky
McCurdy School in New Mexico
Alaska Children's Services

LOCAL

By joining with other persons of faith, Grace reaches throughout our community.

Bidwell-Riverside Center
Hawthorn Hill
School Children's Clothing Fund
Des Moines Urban Missions Council
Urban Children's & Family's Ministries
Churches United Homeless Shelter
Door of Faith
Bethel Mission
Congregational starts & development
Work Groups for the Elderly
Work Groups for Home & Flood Repair
Refugee Resettlement
The Iowa Nigeria Partnership is especially important to Chuck because he helped set it up. Bishop Job decided the Iowa Conference should have a mission presence in West Africa. Five persons were sent to consider the situation and what could be done in 1989. Former member Don Mendenhall and Chuck were part of that team. At that time, the United Methodist Church in Nigeria, was struggling to become a conference. In 1990 the Iowa Nigeria Partnership was approved by the Iowa Conference. The Iowa Conference has given from $300,00 - $400,000 in cash and materials to Nigeria each year from 1996 to 2000 through the Iowa Nigeria Partnership. After describing the political climate and the great need for resources of all kinds, Chuck pointed to western Africa. "In Nigeria, one year the district superintendents got bicycles to help them visit their clergy. You wouldn’t believe how much they helped! Of course it would be better to have motor scooters. It’s so hard to make improvements—but everything helps, like our old computers. We take a load of computers over every year. And they appreciate everything we can give them! You should see the faces of the kids when they get their school kits with pencils, crayons, paper and scissors. It’s exciting to see a church grow in a country that needs so much.” explained Chuck. At the 2000 Iowa Annual Conference in Ames, over $50,000 was raised by the Des Moines District to build a new secondary school, The Little Red Schoolhouse, in Jalingo, Nigeria.

Another important Iowa Annual conference annual event that greatly supports the Iowa Nigeria Partnership is the Bishop’s Ingathering. Goods, money, time and talent are brought to five collection sites around the state in November to support a variety of missions. Grace Church sends kits to the Iowa Nigeria Partnership at this time. This is Chuck’s busiest time as a member of the Iowa Nigeria Partnership Team. He oversees the filling of a sea container with clothes, kits, computers, and school supplies. This means, among other things, that he spends a fair number of hours in a cold and windy parking lot adding more boxes until it is full.

But back to the celebration day, the Saturday of the Ingathering. There’s food and fellowship and mission information booths and seminars and a worship service. And there’s the quilt auction. Grace Quilters traditionally bring in top dollars for their fine stitching. This is their glory day. The 2000 quilt, Virginia Rose, a delicately hand quilted white background with small pink roses with a blue border, sold at auction for $3,100. It’s a fun Saturday, a chance to celebrate giving and the Iowa Conference’s ability to work together for the good of others. Many Grace members like to spend the day loading boxes into trucks, selling food at the bake sale, or just
browsing the handicrafts. In another Grace tradition, confirmation age youth attend and help unload all of the boxes of goods that are brought to Greenfield’s United Methodist Church, one of five Ingathering sites.

**Volunteers in Mission** or VIM allows volunteers to travel throughout the world helping in a variety of ways. In 1986 Chuck was thinking about retiring. In a church bulletin he read about a group going to Panama to do some construction on a church property. He called to inquire and the receptionist asked, “What kind of work experience do you have?”

“Well, I know which end of a hammer to hold, and I’ve lived overseas for 12 years in seven different countries,” Chuck replied. That cinched it. United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) signed him up, and he traveled with them somewhere—Belize, Nicaragua, St. Croix, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Russia—every year until 2000, when his wife Marguerite’s health kept him at home. Other Grace members who have gone on several VIM missions include Keith and Marcia Hyde, Roy and Marilyn Reese, John and Jan Mechem, and the youth group. Many summer youth work trips are VIM trips.

**The Heifer Project International** is strongly supported by Grace, especially through the many years that Lynn and Marian Johnson volunteered with the Project. And it all began when Lynn and Marian were members of the Grace youth council. A trip was planned for 40 kids to work on a Heifer Project ranch near Perryville, Arkansas. The youth worked with the animals, built feed troughs, and painted outbuildings. When the youth went on to Dallas for a singing tour, the Johnsons stayed to work an extra week at the ranch—and that’s all it took to hook them. According to Marian, “The people involved in Heifer don’t have money signs in their eyes—there’s a nice spirit—and the Heifer folks are still our friends.”

Lynn took early retirement in 1984 and the next year the Johnsons moved to Perryville. In 1987 they worked at Overlook Farm, the regional center in Massachusetts, In 1987 they went to London to start the Heifer Project there. They worked in California and Kansas, and Lynn manned the Heifer Project booth at various conferences and at the Iowa State Fair. Lynn died in January of 1999. The following June, the Grace vacation Bible school honored him by creating the Lynn Johnson Memorial Truck, complete with cows, goats, and pigs. All VBS offerings were given to the Heifer Project that year as they had been for several years before when Lynn brought live animals for the children to enjoy.
Disaster Response & UMCOR are supported through Grace’s financial giving. United Methodist Committee on Relief strives to meet the challenge of hunger and poverty in the world.

National outreach programs which Grace supports include the Red Bird Mission in Kentucky, the McCurdy School in New Mexico, and Alaska Children’s Services.

NOMADS is a program that allows volunteers with recreational vehicles to share time and skills working on various projects throughout the United States. Keith and Marcia Hyde have participated in many NOMAD trips as have John and Jan Mechem. In the winter of 2000 the Mechems were busy painting classrooms at Rust College in Mississippi; in May the Hydes were building barns at Boys Ranch, Oklahoma. Keith Hyde has been a coordinator for the NOMADS for many years. This program has been extremely popular, allowing retired persons to travel and serve and enjoy great fellowship all at the same time.

Youth mission opportunities include annual work trips, Christmas community outreach, and Grace Church improvements, such as painting. In 1999 and 2000 the Grace Youth roofed during two summer work trips. They seem to have found their niche in the missions work world.

The local outreach serves our closest neighbors. The organizations listed under the local column receive funds and volunteers from Grace. Bidwell-Riverside Center’s roots are Methodist. A Deaconess home was established in 1893 with funds provided by A.K. Bidwell; the Riverside Mission began in the early 1900’s when women in the Women’s Home Missionary Society were concerned about the poor. Today Bidwell Riverside Center provides direct services and empowerment programs including emergency food, clothing, and meals.

A Grace member who has spent many hours at the current agency is Jan Mechem. Jan and her husband John joined Grace Church in 1952 when they found a supportive community in the Tu Sum Sunday school class. Jan has long been involved in organizing the kits to be gathered for the Bishop’s Ingathering and John has served many years as Grace’s treasurer. But in 1980 a friend asked Jan if she could help sort socks for the Christmas Sharing project at Bidwell Riverside Center. The next year Jan found herself director of Christmas Sharing, a program to aid persons in need of holiday items such as food, toys, hats, mittens, socks and underwear. She accepted this new role with fear and trembling. Jan, or the volunteers she snagged, interviewed 100 families,
bought food, sorted the donated goods, found enough freezers to keep more than 100 chickens and turkeys cold until distribution day, and delivered everything before Christmas.

In 2000, the position of Director of Christmas Sharing is held by a Bidwell Riverside staff member. Jan still helps with this project, and has been observed recruiting volunteers in May. Jan acknowledges that such projects “take a lot of work.” Leadership roles within the church and as in the community must be passed around. It is good to lead because it brings such a feeling of accomplishment, but it is also good to know that it is someone else’s turn the next year, according to Jan.

The local agencies listed are familiar destinations for many Grace volunteers. Hawthorn Hill Ministries provide emergency shelter for homeless women with children, English as a Second Language classes, and advocacy for Iowa women prisoners. The Urban Children’s & Family Ministries at Trinity United Methodist Church is where Gene Leonard serves breakfast. The Churches United Shelter is where so many Grace members serve meals the first day of each month.

Congregational starts & development allows Grace to help found other Methodist churches. Grace helped Gatchel Methodist get started in 1915. Grace helped Aldersgate United Methodist church in the early 1960’s, providing a pastor in Reverend Lott and much needed financial and secretarial support. Grace also helped New Hope in northwestern Des Moines and Greenfield Plaza in southeastern Des Moines get started later in that decade.

The last local listing is Refugee Resettlement. Through the years Grace has helped many individuals and families make a new start in Iowa. An attempt at a chronological listing is provided in the Appendix. Pat and Jim Hayes have helped settle many families in the past ten years. Jim Nelson was responsible for helping the refugees who came from southeast Asia in the 70’s. Other Grace members have sponsored individual families. The willing support of Grace members made these sponsorships work.

Grace Church reaches out to its community; individuals who belong to Grace reach out to others in their daily work. There are so many ways to help others in one’s daily life. Everyone can reach out to others in God’s love. Perhaps it all depends on one’s understanding of mission. One definition reads: “an inner calling to pursue an activity or perform a service; a vocation.” In volunteer efforts or in work for pay, Grace members can be in mission.
Many Grace members feed the homeless through a commitment to serve the evening meal at Churches United Shelter once a month. Restaurant and food service workers also minister to the hungry and thirsty. Medical workers serve God by caring for the sick. Persons who welcome strangers are doing God’s work. Retired persons, students, workers in any field have the opportunity to do this. Every Sunday, members can welcome visitors to Grace with a friendly greeting.

There are hundreds of Grace members who feel a mission in their work. Therapist Jan Hill will speak for the many Grace members who work in the helping professions and find strength at Grace. Jan lives in the big beige and brown stucco house on the northwest corner of Cottage Grove and 38th which was an Evangelical United Brethren parsonage when Reverend Al Wilkin served as district superintendent for the EUB Church. Jan’s grandfather was a United Methodist pastor and she grew up as a Methodist. But Jan and her husband Richard lived in their home several years before trying Grace.

In the year 2000 Jan seems like an old timer. She and her husband started the Positive Parenting class in 1988 and still coordinate it and bring in speakers to address a variety of topics. Jan teaches Sunday school and says it is good for her because, “Children are a hedge against cynicism.” The whole youth program at Grace inspires Jan. Just seeing young people having a good time together gives one hope for their futures, the future in general. Jan’s blond hair, broad smile and uplifted voice in the choir reveal that Grace is her place, but during the week, her work in the world is intertwined with her faith.

Jan is a private practice counselor who has worked in a number of capacities as a social worker. She sees a variety of clients and is able to use her years of experience in the system to help others. “Everything good that happens in therapy comes from God. If I’m calm enough I can hear what God is trying to tell me that will help,” explains Jan. Jan acknowledges that she can’t carry her clients’ problems home with her, but she does pray for them. If her clients are interested in faith, Jan is able to share how faith has helped her. “I’m a counselor and I’m a Christian,” says Jan, “Faith is a part of who I am and of my work.” According to Jan, “Mission and life are synonymous.”

Jan also believes that God acts in the people that are sent to her. If she has been struggling with an issue in her own life, invariably several calls from people who are struggling with that very
issue arrive. As she listens to those people, she finds herself learning and blessed as she tries to understand. Her work often become a collaboration between client and counselor. Jan used to have problems with the phrase, “There but for the Grace of God, go I.” Now she knows why. It assumes an arrogant attitude. When she listens to people with struggles, Jan thinks, “There go I.” She has learned that everyone struggles and needs help along the way. Jan is symbolic of hundreds of Grace members who have come to understand that mission and life are one. Jan looks at her clients as Judy looks at homeless persons and as Gene looks at those he serves. They look at others in love.

Grace members have a way of reaching out to others in love. In the early 1990’s it meant inviting homeless persons to Grace for a meal and a place to sleep. Later it meant serving on committees to get a permanent Churches United Shelter built. And in the year 2000 it means continued support of the shelter by preparation and service of a meal the first day of each month. It’s this kind of commitment to service that undergirds the Grace congregation. The people who worship on Sundays are busy living out their faith through the week.

A warm July evening in 2000, Gene Leonard’s Sunday school class, Generations, served the meal at Churches United Shelter, a large, one-story modern building with cream-colored siding. In an almost deserted part of western downtown, empty buildings to the north and a flood plain to the south, tomatoes and peppers and yellow marigolds bloomed in the late afternoon sun. A fenced in patio allowed folks who had entered for the night to still enjoy the summer air and a view of Gray’s Lake and the Raccoon River. Near the street entrance, beer bottles littered the sidewalks, noisy cars drove up, and more than thirty people entered the air conditioned building to relax in front of a T.V. or talk while waiting for the evening meal to be served. Gene Leonard gave the blessing, as people in line or at tables bowed. Then the line started moving.

A pretty woman in leggings and aerobic shirt entered the door, eyes red from crying. An older woman greeted her by name and they sat nearby. “What’s wrong?”

“My husband’s back on my track. I don’t know how long I can stay here now.”

“Talk to Jean, the director, she’ll be able to help.”

“Yeah, I should, I just want to be free of him. I can’t have him show up at my job with a gun ever again! I just can’t take it!” She cried quietly, quickly encircled by her friend’s arm.

“It’s ok, it’s ok, hon. Let’s just have a nice meal together. You’ll be safe here tonight.”
The two women waited till the line was only two or three people long. Most of the other people were enjoying the food, talking to a neighbor. The kitchen crew smiled as they offered up chicken and rice casserole, rolls, pea salad, banana pieces, and cupcakes served on Styrofoam plates.

"Would you like lemonade or milk?" Gene asked at the drink table.

"Lemonade, please," responded the older woman.

"And you, Miss?"

"Milk. Thanks."

"Let me take these to your table," said Gene, as they walked to a back table with a broken bench. "Be careful not to cut yourself on that," Gene warned. The two women sat down; Gene put their drinks down for them and said, "Enjoy your meal, ladies." He walked back to his post and continued to made it a point to speak to everyone he served.
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