

Grace Lutheran Church History

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded on February 24, 1917 at a meeting of eleven consecrated Christian men held at the home of Hans Clemann 1775 43rd Avenue in Vero Beach, Florida (also known as Clemann Avenue). Charter members present: elected officers Hans Clemann - President, William J. Orth - Secretary, Deacon/Trustees - Claus H. Lange, Edward Klingsick, Louis Klingsick and Charlie Kutz; also, attending William C. Brasch, Edward Clemann, Louis H. Clemann, George Mattmueller and F. W. Meyer. At this first meeting, an offer of two lots from Indian River Farms Company was accepted and the group traveled downtown and chose Lots 8 and 9, Block 34, Original Town of Vero, on 17th Avenue and 21st Street in Vero Beach.

On Sunday, June 8, 1919, Grace dedicated its first House of Worship, a modest wood frame chapel seating 65 costing \$1,588.94. Prior to this date, services had been held at the Harris School House on the corner of Glendale and Clemann Avenue (8th St. & 43rd Ave.); visiting pastors Louis Geiger & Theo Schulz of Delray Beach and Henry Niewald of Miami were conducting services on alternate Wednesday evenings.

The official record of the first baptism at Grace Lutheran was life-time member Gwen Orth Lysne. Gwen's certificate records her baptism on January 10, 1917 by Rev. Louis Geiger.

Rev. Herman H. Kellerman was a 'supply pastor' working in the citrus industry and serving Grace part-time from 1919 to 1929. The Voters' quarterly minutes of April 27, 1919 show a resolution to accepted the first church constitution as written and revised. In June, 1921, Grace became a member of the Missouri Synod and on July 21, 1922, received its Charter of Incorporation from the State of Florida. Corporate seal reads Grace Lutheran Church of Vero, Florida. The official church record shows one of the first weddings in Vero and the very first church wedding was Burl & Frieda Tippin married on June 17, 1923. Pastor Herman Kellerman conducted the wedding ceremony.

In 1929, Grace received its first full-time pastor (Rev. August Frederking) and a parsonage to house the Pastor costing \$4,194.66 was completed in December 1930 next to the original House of Worship. Easter, April 3, 1932 was the 15th Anniversary celebration with services at 11:00 am and 7:00 pm with "Dinner in the country" and reminiscing about 'pioneer days' from 1:00 – 6:00 pm. The meal was held at the home of Henry W. Prange and appears to be the first Voters' record of the annual 'Easter Picnic'. Pastor Frederking served until 1934 and was replaced by Rev. Clarence Mueller. On January 7, 1937, Grace survived the depression with half of its membership of 48 communicants and 62 souls. The congregation left mission status and became self-supporting. Rev. Mueller served Grace from 1935 to 1941.

January 1942 saw the nation depressed by World War II, but the church was excited with their new Pastor Lewis Gerbhardt. The new pastor met a lovely WAVE named Hazel Metz from the Vero Beach Naval Air Station. They would wed and she would join Pastor Gerbhardt in helping guide this congregation for 40 years.

Soon after Pastor Gerbhardt arrived, the church celebrated its 25th anniversary with an all-day meeting including a special morning service. A basket lunch was enjoyed at the home of Henry Prange. (*Press Journal, Feb. 27, 1942*) Pastor Gerbhardt's first confirmation class, November 1942 was Edwin Prange, James Tippin, Marion Mattmueller and Betty Christensen. Also in 1942, two adjoining lots were purchased and by 1948 three additional lots were procured making up the Church complex on 17th Avenue. A building program for a new House of Worship was launched in the summer of 1948. In the next 20 months, Grace congregation numbering 90 communicants, raised some \$16,000 for this project. On Mother's Day, May 1950, ground was broken after morning services and construction soon got underway. The sanctuary construction project included a kitchen and two classrooms to be attached to the 1919 worship building which was then used for other functions. Dedication of the modern concrete block facility was held November 19, 1950 at a completed cost of \$41,000.

In the fall of 1951, with some 18 members of Grace living in the Ft. Pierce area, Grace congregation sponsored a mission. In December 1951, Trinity Lutheran Church was born and Grace's Pastor L. C. Gerbhardt served the mission for 20 months until a full-time pastor could be called. During 1946-47, Grace had sponsored evening services in the Melbourne area, but at that time the area was not deemed ready for full-time services. Mission services were again begun in 1954 and after two months were conducted by a local Rockledge minister.

Grace membership continued to increase, so September 1958 plans were drawn for an Educational Wing to expand Sunday School space and provide a church office. The sale of the original 1919 wooden church and parsonage structures in October 1959, cleared the way to begin this new project which was dedicated on February 24, 1960 at a cost of \$56,000.

Many anniversaries for Grace were celebrated during 1967. January 29, Rev. Lewis Gerbhardt celebrated his 25th anniversary in Holy Ministry and the conclusion of the 25th year of his service as pastor of Grace. February 26, the church celebrated its "Half A Century of Blessing" (50th Anniversary 1917-1967). Special service officiants included Rev. W. Schoech of West Palm, Rev. Edmund Weber of Vero, Rev. C. Thalacker of Ft. Pierce and Rev. L. C. Gerbhardt. Lutheran Women's Missionary League also celebrated its 25th Anniversary during 1967. Frances Berggren, Clara Grumbach, Ida Graul, Clara Hensick, Jenny Johnson and Adel Webster were charter members from Grace.

In early spring of 1972 after several years of prayer and deliberation, Grace Lutheran Church left the Missouri Synod and joined the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL). In April 1975, the FAL Synod disbanded and later that year Grace met with representatives from Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At the annual convention, June 1976, Grace was officially accepted into the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) which is in fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

Pastor Gerbhardt served Grace for 40 years but retired in 1982. Upon his retirement, the Voters' issued a call letter. Rev. Jim Olsen answered the call, having served as a missionary in Peru. May 1983, Grace sponsored a new mission congregation in Sebastian, Florida – Trinity Lutheran Church under retired Rev. Gerbhardt and in April 1985 sponsored another mission in Port St. Lucie – Christ Lutheran Church.

Pastor Olsen served the congregation until 1985 when Rev. John Moldstad, Sr. was installed. During 1985, it became apparent the 1950's church structure required extensive repairs and total renovation, along with a need for a larger sanctuary and more parking spaces. On January 10, 1986, 3.19 acres of land were purchased for \$70,000 at the corner of 12th Street and 41st Avenue. This location being only a few blocks from the site of the Clemann home where the church originated in 1917. On October 3, 1988 after exhaustive negotiations, the 17th Avenue church property now consisting of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a city block was sold to Indian River County for \$375,000 to construct a new County Library. The last service in the 1950's building was held September 11, 1988 with subsequent services for the next 10 months being held at the local Junior High School Auditorium. Church meetings were held at the school as well as in members' homes.

September 18, 1988 ground was broken with a special ceremony for the new church sanctuary and supporting structures. Finished at a cost of \$876,000, an initial dedication took place July 23, 1989 with a formal ceremony held Reformation Sunday, October 29, 1989. Special note: The sanctuary's stained-glass windows were designed by Rev. Moldstad and constructed by Conrad Pickel Studios in Vero Beach. Grace was blessed to have 8 pastors participating: Fred Stubenvoll, Don Moldstad, George Orvick, Ken Mellon, Lewis Gerbhardt, John Wilde and Charles Keeler. On June 10, 1990, the church purchased an additional 1½ acres adjacent to the existing 12th Street property for \$40,000 to allow an area for future expansion of the facilities.

In 1991, Pastor Moldstad accepted a call to Wisconsin. Retired Rev. Ray Branstad served as interim shepherd until later that year when Rev. Kurt Smith accepted the call as Grace's new pastor. Grace Lutheran's 75th Anniversary, observed February 22, 1992, was a memorable day for the membership with a special afternoon service (6 pastors attending: Jonathan Madson, David

Lillegard, Kurt Smith, Lewis Gerbhardt, Ray Branstad and Charles Keeler), buffet luncheon for 250 and a historical video presentation by Stanley Tippin. A commemorative banner was made by Sebring Pastor Joel Willitz and his wife Dawn.

Pastor Smith served until 1997, when he accepted a call to the Midwest. Grace then extended a call to Rev. John Petersen which he prayerfully accepted. Rev. Petersen was installed as pastor September 28, 1997 and served till 2005, while offering guidance to Vicars Michael Dale, Glen Smith, Erich Hoeft and Sam Schmeling. Under Pastor Petersen, January 2000 the Long-Range Planning Committee started a discussion to begin a Preschool at Grace.

Pastor Matthew Luttmann arrived as new pastor from Plzen, Czech Republic in December 2005. March 2006 with Pastor Luttmann's expertise, Voters approved opening a school in the fall and calling Ann Holmes as Preschool Director. A separate preschool building was planned and constructed over the next year. Gracie's Preschool building was dedicated October 28, 2007. Also in 2007, Grace installed Don Weston as the first Director of Christian Education in ELS. This was a tremendous boost to the church's youth outreach over the next 5 years. Pastor Luttmann continues to serve and guide Grace while developing an additional contemporary-blended Sunday worship service. He has also counseled Vicars David Locklair and presently Kurtis Freimuth.

Various improvement projects have been completed since the building was dedicated in 1989. The Wicks Pipe Organ which had been moved from the 1950's church, was renovated for \$30,000 in October 1994. In October 1996, the Memorial Garden was established with a total of 400 plots available to the church membership. Oak entry doors with leaded glass and hurricane shutters were installed in the late 1990's. These shutters proved very valuable in the storms of 2004-05 and 2016. The historic communications antenna from the Navy's USS Ozark was dedicated as a permanent flag pole September 2014 having been donated by Stanley Tippin.

February 25 – 26, 2017 has been set as the dates to celebrate Grace Lutheran's 100th Anniversary. The Lord's richest blessings have been with the congregation over the past century and we pray that He will guide and direct us as the church looks forward to the future.

Grace Lutheran Church's Pastors/Vicars

Rev. L. Geiger of Delray Beach	1916 – 1917
Rev. Theo Schulz of Delray Beach	1917 – 1918
Rev. H. W. Niewald of Miami	1918 – 1919
Rev. H. H. Kellerman	1919 – 1929
Rev. A. R. Frederking	1929 – 1934
Rev. C. Mueller	1935 – 1941
Rev. L. C. Gerbhardt	1942 – 1982
Rev. James Olsen	1982 – 1984
Vicar John Petersen	1984 – 1985
Rev. John A. Moldstad, Sr.	1985 – 1991
Vicar Jonathan N. Madson	1985 – 1986
Rev. Raymond M. Branstad	1991 – 1991
Rev. Kurt A. Smith	1991 – 1997
Rev. John J. Petersen	1997 – 2005
Vicar Michael Dale	2001 – 2002
Vicar Glenn Smith	2002 – 2003
Vicar Erich Hoeft	2003 – 2004
Vicar Samuel Schmeling	2004 – 2005
Rev. Matthew Luttman	2005 –
Vicar David Locklair	2010 – 2011
Vicar Kurtis Freimuth	2016 – 2017