

# *Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church*

*100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

*May 28, 2023*



In honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Charter of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church this document was compiled to tell the history and stories that make our congregation so special. This work builds heavily on the histories compiled for the 75th and 90th Anniversaries. We give thanks for all who took time to contribute their research and stories to this history.



# **A History of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church Boone, North Carolina 1923-2023**

## **Early Lutheran Churches in Watauga**

The first Lutheran ministers in North Carolina were traveling missionaries. The first traveling missionary appointed by the Synod was the Rev. R. J. Miller, whose home was in Burke County. On June 18, 1811, he started his first commissioned tour which included the mountains of western North Carolina. A missionary practice was established by the Synod and resulted in the organization of many new churches. According to this custom, pastors were asked to use the extra Sunday in a month, having five Sundays to hold a service in a community in which there were no services being held. This dedicated effort produced the organization of new congregations in rural areas adjacent to well established congregations.

Sometime prior to 1840, the first Lutheran Church in Watauga County was established in Valle Crucis. This log building was located near the Mast Store and the Mission School. This property was eventually sold and land was purchased higher up the mountain. A second building of frame construction was built in 1884 while Rev. J. L. Deaton was pastor. A third building, located on Clark's Creek Mountain, was built of field stone by members of the congregation. This church became known as Holy Communion Lutheran Church and is located on Clarks Creek Road in Banner Elk.

Around 1845, in the northeastern part of Watauga County, the Rev. Jonathan R. Moser organized a Lutheran Church in the Jackson School House called Jackson Church. Rev. Henry Goodman was their first called pastor. In the late 1850s, a lot was donated for the church and plans were made to build, but the Civil War began and the building plans were put on hold.

In 1868, a frame church was built and the name of the church was changed to Mt. Pleasant. A second building was dedicated in 1910 but was destroyed by fire in 1920. Following the fire, the Rev. N. D. Yount and members of the congregation obtained a new lot which was two miles east of the original site. In 1923, a new frame church was built. The rebuilding of the church on a new lot brought about a division of membership. The members who did not want to move to the new site reorganized themselves into a congregation called Old Mt. Pleasant and rebuilt on the burned site.

On upper Meat Camp Creek in Watauga County, Mt. Zion Church was organized in 1896 by Rev. J. L. Deaton while he was the pastor of the Watauga Mission. A second building was erected in 1940 while Rev. J.A. Yount was pastor. This second church was dedicated in 1950.

Mt. Pleasant, Old Mt. Pleasant and Mt. Zion were strong congregations in the Watauga Parish, and in 1954 these churches merged and formed Bethany Lutheran Church, which is now located on Big Hill Road near Green Valley Elementary School.

In the Deep Gap area of Watauga County, there was a group of faithful and loyal Lutherans who met in a schoolhouse with the Rev. J. L. Deaton preaching. In the year 1918, a frame church was built and a congregation was organized under Rev. N. D. Yount. This church was dedicated in 1919. Several years later, a lot was purchased at the intersection of Highways 421 and 221 and the church was dedicated. The President of the Synod, along with Pastor J. A. Yount, Rev. W. A. Deaton and the Rev. Edwin F. Troutman, presided. This church was called Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

### **The Beginning of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**

Home mission work was being done by the North Carolina Women's Missionary Society and interest in the mountain missions grew. In 1921, a new children's program was begun under the name of the Light Brigade. The Light Brigade programs were based on mission study and mite boxes, later known as "Thank Offering Boxes," which were used to collect funds to support the missionaries.

Among the missionaries supported was Miss Cora Pearl Jeffcoat. In 1923, Miss Cora Pearl Jeffcoat, daughter of the Rev. Herbert Warren Jeffcoat, was commissioned as a parish worker in Watauga County, and later Miss Amy Fisher, a registered nurse, was sent to Boone as a parish nurse.

In late 1923, a small number of Lutherans began meeting at the Boone Courthouse for Sunday School. The Boone preaching point was supplied one Sunday per month by the Rev. Noah D. Yount. On November 23, 1923, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized by the Rev. Herbert W. Jeffcoat, Watauga Mission Pastor, and Miss Cora Pearl Jeffcoat, Watauga parish worker. The congregation was organized with 24 confirmed members and 8 baptized members. The confirmed members were J. M. Moretz, T. M. Moretz, Mrs. T. M.

Moretz (Florence), Stuart Moretz, David Moretz, Margaret Moretz, Grace Moretz, Virginia Moretz, Mrs. Mary Hodges, P. W. Moretz, Mrs. P. W. Moretz (Alice), Vilas Moretz, Ralph Moretz, Lessie Moretz, Clayton Moretz, Lona Moretz, Mrs. Mattie Toppings, Mrs. W. C. Lyons, Mr. W. C. Lyons, L. L. Norris and Mrs. L. L. Norris (Rosa). The baptized members were Katie Lyons, Margaret Norris, Hazel Norris, Bessie Moretz, Tommie Moretz, Alonzo Moretz, Johnny Moretz and Luther Moretz.

Several years prior to the organization of the congregation, a lot was purchased by interested congregants from Kings Mountain and Cherryville, which was to be held until needed for a church. However, this lot was taken over by the city for public school use. A second lot was purchased with the proceeds. This land was also sold, but in 1927 the North Carolina Synod advanced the congregation the money for a new lot, which is the present location of the church.

The cornerstone for Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was laid on Thanksgiving Day, 1928. Generous help from the Women of the United Lutheran Church resulted in the sum of \$13,000 which was used to help the congregation build its brick church and parsonage. The labor, material and money were donated by the members and interested friends, including the members of Holy Communion Lutheran Church on Clarks Creek and St. Mark's Lutheran Church at Bailey's Camp, Blowing Rock. The completed building was dedicated and opened for service on May 26, 1929.

### **Grace's Early Years and the Relationship to Appalachian State Teachers College (ASU)**

The Rev. Joshua Alonzo Yount was called as the first pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. Rev. Yount worked under various mission boards and, under his direction, six churches and two parsonages were built and ten congregations were organized. Rev. Yount was the father of mission developer, Rev. Noah D. Yount. Rev. Joshua Yount served Grace from 1926 until 1937. Miss Cora Pearl Jeffcoat reported in her September 1929 mission report that there were over thirty Lutheran students from Appalachian State Teachers College attending Sunday School and church services. On a 1938 ministerial roll of the United Lutheran Church in America, Rev. Joshua Yount listed his congregations as Mt. Pleasant, Old Mt. Pleasant, Holy Trinity, Mt. Zion and

Station Brownwood (which was located 14 miles east of Boone). He also listed himself as chaplain of Appalachian State Teachers College.

### **Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church Reaches Out to the Community**

In May of 1938, the Rev. Edwin Flavius Troutman accepted the call to Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. Rev. Troutman served not only Grace Church and the Lutheran students of Appalachian State Teachers College for twenty-seven years, but he also served as a community pastor. He was well known for his visits in the community, regardless of the individual's religious affiliation or lack of affiliation. He valued non-Lutherans in the community as well as Lutherans.

During Rev. Troutman's call, Holy Trinity in Deep Gap merged with Grace. In 1965, the debt to the Synod was paid off, the parsonage was renovated, and the educational wing was added. The congregation became self-supporting and Grace became well recognized within the community. Under Rev. Troutman's leadership, the church membership grew from 48 to 211. Rev. Troutman retired from his call in 1965. In lieu of a retirement gift, Rev. Troutman and Mrs. Estelle Troutman asked that a spire fund be established to place a steeple on the sanctuary.

Following the retirement of Rev. Troutman, the Rev. Richard B. Graf, Jr. accepted the call to Grace Lutheran Church as the third pastor. During Rev. Graf's ministry, the groundwork was laid for continuing the church building plan. He resigned his call in 1967 to accept a call in the Florida Synod.

In November of 1967, the Rev. David Rhodes Keck became Grace's fourth called pastor. Under Rev. Keck's guidance, the Hardin and Leak properties were purchased, a new parsonage was built and the master site plan for a new sanctuary and parking lot was approved. The original parsonage next to the church was demolished to make room for a parking lot.

On May 19, 1974, the 50th Anniversary of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was celebrated. Church membership had grown from 215 to 317 baptized members. At the 50th Anniversary celebration, Rev. Graf, Jr. was welcomed back as a guest preacher, Rev. Troutman offered prayers, and Mr. Charles Helig, the Treasurer of the NC Synod, brought special greetings.

In 1975 the church responded to the requests of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service of the Lutheran Council in the USA and

sponsored a Vietnamese family. The family was brought to Boone and Grace supplied the family's food, shelter, education and funds until the family became self-supporting. In 1976, Pastor Keck resigned his call to Grace in order to accept a call to Kimball Memorial Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kannapolis, North Carolina.

### **Seminary Interns and a New Sanctuary**

Visiting pastors served Grace until the Rev. Robert Glenn Young was called as Grace's fifth pastor. Under Rev. Young's leadership, Grace began its participation in the seminary internship program in 1977, calling the seminary intern "vicar." Many seminary students completed their internship under Pastor Young, including: Thomas Nelson, G. William Nabers, Robert Sain, Steve Ridenhour, David Westphal, David Ridenhour, Steve Winemiller, Carol Hertler, Dan May, Mark Neville, Rich Rhoades, and Rebecca Wegner. Grace Church was listed as a covenant congregation to support the Lutheran students at Appalachian State University.

As the congregation continued to grow, final planning for a new sanctuary continued. On April 26, 1987, the groundbreaking for a new sanctuary was held. At the time of the groundbreaking, there were eight living charter members and three were able to attend the ceremony: Virginia Moretz Bolick, Katie Lyons Moretz and Margaret Moretz Tugman.

The new sanctuary was designed to match the exterior appearance of the old Grace sanctuary. The hand-milled chestnut paneling removed from the original building of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church was incorporated into the interior of the new sanctuary. Upon completion, the Schantz pipe organ was moved from the original Grace sanctuary to the choir loft in the new building. The Spire Fund was incorporated into the Building Fund, allowing a steeple to be placed on the new sanctuary. The steeple stands as a memorial to Rev. and Mrs. Troutman's service to the congregation and community. On May 22, 1988, the new sanctuary was dedicated. Following completion of the sanctuary, many major improvements were made to the older church building. The original sanctuary was remodeled into a Fellowship Hall including the addition of a new kitchen. A new space for the Lutheran Students of Appalachian was created. In 1992, after a ministry of 15 years, Rev. Young resigned his call to Grace in order

to accept a call to Resurrection Lutheran Church and St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Cameron, South Carolina.

### **Mission Statement and the Troutman Foundation**

Once again, visiting pastors served Grace until the Rev. Dr. Timothy Marcus Smith was called in 1993 as Grace's sixth pastor. In 1994, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church adopted a mission statement: "This congregation is called and empowered by God to live and proclaim the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ; to affirm our call and gifts; and to use them to serve the needs of all people." In response to a special stewardship campaign, the mortgage of the new sanctuary was paid off ahead of schedule in 1995.

Under Rev. Smith's leadership, ministry continued to expand, including the additions of the children's choir, children's chime choir, and the handbell choir. In response to the needs of the learning ministries, youth and campus ministry, the congregation voted in 1996 to add the position of Lay Assistant to the church staff. Kelley Dull Himes began her duties in the fall of 1998.

Under Rev. Smith's guidance, the seminary internship program continued to provide congregational learning experiences for Karen Nelson Young, Jefferson Cox, Lauren Eigenfeld Wrightsman, Todd Zielinski, Carey Gardiner Mack, Liddy J. Howard Bileck, Tony Bradshaw, Ward Misenheimer, Paula J. Schmitt, Andrew Miller, Matt Simpkins, Nathan Hilkert, David Wegner and Jonathan Schnibben.

In January of 1997, in response to a memorial gift from the estate of Mrs. Thelma Deal, the Edwin F. Troutman and Family Foundation was established to assist Grace Lutheran Church in carrying out the mission of the church. One-half of the funds to start the foundation came from the sale of the property of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, due to the widening of Hwy. 421. The foundation's funds were designated to be used primarily for outreach in the community in support of Grace's mission.

The congregational membership had increased to 648 members in 1997. Worship service attendance had increased to an average of 325 per week and three differently styled worship services were available to the community: a contemporary, a traditional and an informal service.

In response to the continued growth of the congregation, an Associate Pastor position was added. In 2000, Rev. Elizabeth C. Polanzke was called to



serve Grace. Rev. Polanzke served two years before resigning the call to Grace and accepting a call to serve a congregation in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania. In 2003, Rev. Becca Gummere was called to serve as the second Associate Pastor in the history of Grace. Rev. Gummere served four years before resigning the call to Grace and accepting a position at Oasis, Inc., a local nonprofit that seeks to end abuse with service, information, and shelter. In 2008, Rev. Sarah Lang was called to serve as the third Associate Pastor in the history of Grace. While each associate pastor had varying responsibilities, all provided support and leadership for the Lutheran Students of Appalachian.

In 2006, a home was purchased on the lot adjoining the back of the church property for \$350,000. Initially, Lutheran Students of Appalachian used the home as a meeting space, and the house was used by weekend retreat groups from congregations off the mountain. The house would be named Grace Place. Eventually, the Grace Place was used to house seminary interns.

As the congregation continued to grow, the issue of parking continued to be a challenge. The congregational leadership hosted many rounds of conversations about how best to address this pressing need. In 2007, the congregation voted to purchase an almost two-acre parcel of land across the street, behind the church for \$1.2 million. With special approval from the Town Council, a large parking lot was added to the property, along with sidewalks and lighting at a cost of about \$600,000. In addition, the house on the property was named the Council House and received several updates, including new siding, new roof, plumbing upgrades, and a ramp for access into the house. The ramp into the house was named "Howards Bridge" after member Mr. Howard Young, who, though wheelchair bound, desired to visit the new house. The Council House became the home of Lutheran Students of Appalachian and, with the addition of a fire alarm system, began hosting weekend groups from other congregations.

In January 2008, the congregation adopted the following Affirmation of Welcome statement: "In the name of Jesus, who invites us with reconciling love and grace to join in the kingdom of God, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church welcomes all who profess, or seek to profess, Jesus Christ as their Savior. Believing that the Gospel is God's gift to all, we rejoice in the diversity of God's people and welcome all, regardless of age, cultural and economic background, ethnic and linguistic heritage, gender, marital status, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, or any other distinction. We are all one in God's eyes,

sharing in the free gifts of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we encourage all to take part in the life of this congregation as we worship, witness and openly share the love of God through Christ our Lord.” This Affirmation of Welcome statement continues to be displayed on the congregation’s website and publications.

In 2010, after 17 years of service, Rev. Smith resigned the call to Grace in order to accept a call to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia. Rev. Lang also resigned the call to Grace, though continued to serve on a contractual basis until accepting a call to St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2011. During the interim time, Rev. John Propst was contracted to serve the congregation. Under the guidance of Rev. Propst, the seminary internship program continued to provide congregational learning experiences for Lisa Beery and Jonathan Weant, who stayed two years to aid in the transition process.

### **Grace Builders**

The origin of Grace Builders dates back to 2004 when Harold Stophel informally began leading a small group of volunteers to help with projects around the church and community. In 2006, anyone interested in learning more about Grace Builders was invited to a breakfast at the church. Twenty-nine people showed up that day, and all joined the new Grace Builders team. In January 2007, Grace Builders was formally organized as a ministry of Grace. From the onset, Grace Builders decided that they never wanted this ministry to take anything away from the other ministries of the congregation. Therefore, Grace Builders has never taken a dime from the church budget. Their projects are too plentiful to name, but have included, adding a retaining wall and expanding the parking in the main church lot; building 48 wheelchair ramps; tearing out nine mobile homes and replacing them with donated and renovated mobile homes; small home projects like adding grab bars; and building the access road behind the church. The road behind the church was named “Stophel Strasse” in honor of Harold’s work in organizing and leading Grace Builders.

In 2009, WeCan asked if Grace Builders could help provide firewood for a few of their families in need. A member of the congregation allowed wood to be split on their property off of Highway 194, and the wood was kept at the church. Later in 2009, the Helping Hands Woodlot was moved to land closer to

the Hunger and Health Coalition, and a new partnership was formed. Community members with need receive vouchers through the Hunger and Health Coalition which allows them to take a load of wood to their home. In 2022, over 600 loads of wood were given out!

## **Modern Era**

In 2011, Rev. Derek Boggs was called to serve Grace as the seventh solo, or senior pastor. Under Rev. Boggs' leadership, the congregation paid down a significant portion of the Councill property mortgage. Rev. Boggs served as both congregational pastor and Campus Minister for Lutheran Students of Appalachian. In 2015, former Grace pastor, Rev. Dr. Timothy Smith, was called as Bishop of the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Under Rev. Boggs' guidance, the seminary internship program continued to provide congregational learning experiences for Karri Clark, Ben Erzkus, Zach Baer, and Sylvia Bull. In 2016, Rev. Boggs resigned the call to Grace in order to accept the call to Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Salem, Virginia. During the interim, Rev. Leonard Bolick, retired Bishop of the North Carolina Synod, was contracted to serve the congregation. Rev. Bolick supervised a seminary intern, Sue Lynn White, during the interim year.

In 2017, Rev. Stephen Troisi was called to serve Grace as the eighth senior pastor. Under Rev. Troisi's leadership, the congregation updated its mission statement: "Sharing God's love so that all are served and supported." In 2018, Lutheran Students of Appalachian became a Reconciling in Christ designated ministry through Reconciling Works and adopted their own Affirmation of Welcome statement. In 2019, Deacon Stacey Nyitrai Troisi was called, part-time, as Campus Minister to serve Lutheran Students of Appalachian.

On March 15, 2020, in-person activities at Grace were suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All ministries were immediately moved online, including worship, classes, and campus ministry. In the fall of 2020, the congregation began hosting some outdoor activities while continuing online ministry offerings. Early in 2021, the congregation completed a short capital funds drive that paid off the Councill property mortgage and created seed money for the next building project. Grace resumed in-person worship in the sanctuary on April 19, 2021.

Under Rev. Troisi's guidance, the seminary internship program continued to provide congregational learning experiences to Ethan Overcash, Christopher Shealy, Randolph Rothchild, and Spence Robertson.

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As the congregation of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church looks back and celebrates its 100th Anniversary, it also looks forward to enthusiasm around its mission to share God's love so that all are served and supported. While the ministry has taken a variety of forms, the facilities have expanded and been updated, and the town of Boone has grown around it. Grace has stood firm, remaining on the same corner and seeking ways to bring the message of God's unconditional love to the campus across the street, to those who call this place home, and for any and all who find their way to our beautiful mountain town. Whatever the shape ministry will take in the coming decades, it will assuredly look like the love of God being poured out in care and support for the Boone community and far beyond!

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (1923 – 2023)**

1811 – Traveling missionaries in western North Carolina

1840 – First Lutheran Church in Watauga County, located near Valle Crucis found, eventually became Holy Communion Lutheran Church in Banner Elk

1845 – Jackson Church organized

1868 – Jackson Church became Mt. Pleasant Lutheran Church

1896 – Mt. Zion Church organized on Upper Meat Camp Creek

1918 – Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Deep Gap was organized

1921 – Women's Missionary Society begins a children's program called the Light Brigade

1923 – Boone Courthouse is the Sunday night preaching point for Rev. Noah D. Yount (mission developer)

1923 – Women's Missionary Society (now the Women of the ELCA) was formed

Nov. 23, 1923 – Grace Church was organized by Rev. H. W. Jeffcoat, the Watauga Mission Pastor, and Miss Cora Pearl Jeffcoat, Watauga Parish worker

Nov. 25, 1923 – Sunday School was begun by Cora Pearl Jeffcoat; Grace Church constitution was adopted

Jan. 13, 1924 – Grace Constitution was adopted

1924 – Formation of the Luther League

1924-1926 First church lot was purchased and taken over by the city; second lot was purchased and sold; another lot purchased

1926 – Rev. J. A. Yount called as pastor

1927 – Building lot was purchased at current location

1928 – Groundbreaking for the first church building and parsonage  
May 26, 1929 – Completed church building dedicated  
1929 – Parsonage built next to church  
1938 – Rev. Edwin Troutman called as pastor  
1945 – Loan from the Synod paid off  
1948 – Parsonage renovated  
1953 – Congregation becomes self-supporting  
1954 – Combination of churches (Mt. Pleasant, Old Mt. Pleasant and Mt. Zion) merge and form Bethany Lutheran Church  
1956 – Education Building built at a cost of \$14,000  
1965 – Holy Trinity merged with Grace  
1965 – Rev. Graf called as Pastor  
1966 – Parsonage renovated  
1967 – Rev. David Keck called as pastor  
1968 – Hardin property was purchased for \$28,000  
1971 – New Parsonage built in University Village  
1973 – New parklot completed  
May 1974 – 50th Anniversary of Grace  
1974 – Leak property purchased for \$8,000  
1977 – Rev. Bob Young called as pastor  
1977 – Seminary internship program begun  
1982 – Mohler organ replace with 2 manual, pedal organ with eleven ranks of pipes built by Schantz Organ Company

April 26, 1987 – Groundbreaking for the new sanctuary

May 22, 1988 – New Sanctuary dedicated

1993 – Rev. Dr. Timothy Smith called as pastor

1995 – Mortgage for new sanctuary paid off

1997 – Edwin F. Troutman and Family Foundation established

November 1998 – 75th Anniversary of Grace

2000 – Rev. Elizabeth Polanzke called as associate pastor

2003 – Rev. Becca Gumere called as associate pastor

2005 – Major renovations and updates to the main building

2006 – Crawford House behind church purchased for \$350,000

2007 – Norris House and property purchased for \$1.2 million; \$600,000 spent to add parking lot, sidewalk, lighting and upgrades to the house

2008 – Rev. Sarah Lang called as associate pastor

2008 – Affirmation of Welcome Statement adopted by congregation

2011 – Rev. Derek Boggs called as pastor

2017 – Rev. Stephen Troisi called as pastor

2018 – Lutheran Students of Appalachian becomes Reconciling in Christ ministry

Mar. 15, 2020 – All in-person activities suspend because of COVID 19 Pandemic

2021 – Councill Property mortgage paid off

Apr. 18, 2021 – First in-person, indoor worship service since pandemic

May 28, 2023 – 100th Anniversary of Grace