

Grace Church of Columbiana
“The Grace Given to Grace”
Rechartering and Historical Service
Sunday, September 14, 2014
10:45 a.m.

ROB: The sources for this historically based service come from the book *A History of Grace United Church of Christ, 1814-1993* and the Heritage Committee at that time: Everett Warrick and James A. Sitler. Also much historical information and advice came from our church historian, Beverly Richardson. Without these resources this service could not have been put together. I am truly grateful. I hope that, as my title implies, you can get a sense of the tremendous grace God has showered upon Grace Church through 200 years, helping us to survive a shaky start as a nation, community, and church, make it through economic depressions, times when giving was not good, a devastating church fire, theological battles and controversies, endure disgruntled pastors and grumpy church members, and massive societal transformations, such as the 1960s, and wars: a bunch of them from the War of 1812 to our present war on terror. Any one of these difficulties has been known to do in churches and close their doors permanently. But not Grace. Grace Church is still here, striving to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ as best we can, in ways God shows us to proceed. May it be always so, until He comes again.

–Rev. Dr. Rob Joy

Scene 1

Prelude to a Founding

BECKY: The latest census shows the largest single specific ethnic group in Columbiana is German at almost 29%. 2 centuries ago, the percentage was much higher. I would guess 80 or 90 % German in this area. They were, by and large, hard-working farmers, and literally carved out productive fields from the dense forests, cutting down trees, ripping up stumps, turning over the sod. It was not only back-breaking work, it was dangerous too. As they moved into the area, the Native American populations in the region had been armed with rifles by the British (one of the reasons for the War of 1812), and encouraged to attack the new settlements, so violent confrontations between settler and Indian were not uncommon. To honor our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and those brave forebearers of our faith, especially the German immigrants who settled this area who were mainly Mennonite, Lutheran, German Reformed, German Evangelical, let us sing a song they brought over with them from the old country, written by a founder of the Reformation, a German monk by the name of Martin Luther: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”.

***Hymn: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”**

(Pic of a wagon, or horse and plow while singing)

(Pic of Washington burning)

Most of us know by now that Grace Church was founded just eleven days before Washington was burned by the British in the War of 1812. What a horrible time it was for our young nation. What a brave time to start a new community and found a church!

(Pic of Key onboard watching flag)

A lawyer, Francis Scott Key, wrote the Star Spangled Banner while trying to negotiate the exchange of American and British prisoners of war. He was on a British warship and was kept there during the shelling of Fort McHenry, which was more a settlement with families, than a military outpost filled with only soldiers. Key asked the British commander to stop the brutal shelling, which was scheduled to last all night if need be, until they surrendered or the fort was rubble. The commander assured Key that the occupants knew that they could simply lower the flag and surrender and the shelling would stop immediately. Throughout the night, the American prisoners on board the British vessel, kept locked up in cells below deck, kept calling out to Key “Was the flag still flying? Is it still there?” Even through the darkness of the night, Key could now and again see the flag through the glare of the rockets and the bombs’ bright flashes as they exploded over the fort. Periodically, Key would report to the prisoners that the flag indeed, was still waving. With the dawn, the first light showed the flag, shredded and filled with holes from shell and shot, still waving proudly, although the flagpole was damaged and canted at an angle, the flag still waved. The fort did not surrender.

Stand and sing both verses of

***National Anthem: “The Star Spangled Banner”**

Scene 2

The Founding: Pioneers of the Faith

(August 13, 1814)

(Pic of the Rev. J. P. Mahnenschmidt)

The Rev. John Peter Mahnenschmidt:

MARK: I appreciate all of you coming to this meeting at this log tavern on the town square, where we have been meeting for the past year and have had catechistic instruction in order to lead lives that bring glory to our Heavenly Father and honor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that what we do today will make Columbiana, our young town, a Christian community, ordered by Christian principles and morals, a place of peace and prosperity for all who will

come to live here in the decades and centuries to come, indeed until Christ returns in glory and his kingdom in heaven becomes in fullness, a kingdom on earth.

The founder of Columbiana, our good friend Joshua Dixon, as you know, in his wisdom, has set aside land at the Northeast corner of South Main Street and Pittsburgh as a place to construct a School and Meeting House for the benefit of the community, for the education of children, and for the advancement of the gospel. This being a splendid opportunity, our joyous task today is to found a School and Meeting House Society, to administrate, maintain, and enlarge in mission and effectiveness this new endeavor, into perpetuity.

Here, as written, are the Articles of Association of the School and Meeting House Society of Columbiana, Ohio, this day, August 13, 1814. After I read them, any who agree to these articles are invited to come and sign your name and become a charter member of this association. I pray, all here, would do so, for this association will need strong support from our young community.

On this day, August 13, in the year of our Lord, 1814, we hereby do ordain and establish this School and Meeting House Society of Columbiana, Ohio.

To promote adequate oversight and governance, there shall be elected annually, three trustees, a secretary, and a treasurer.

In our gatherings, to promote peace, these conditions of fellowship are required:

- 1.) A practical conformity to the principles of impartial equity.**
- 2.) Every member shall be considered as possessing in himself an original and inalienable right to believe and worship God as his own conscience may dictate without being called into question by any other member.**
- 3.) It is allowed that any licensed preacher who preaches the gospel in purity, to preach in the above said meeting house if he made application to the trustees, and should it happen that application should be made by two preachers in one day, let one preach in the forenoon and the other in the afternoon so that none may meet with disappointment.**

Would those willing to commit to this School and Meeting House Society, as charter members, please come forward now and sign your name?

(Judy plays something moving or patriotic, or old hymns while folks sign.)

(After all have signed who want to sign, Rev. Mahnenschmidt is seated.)

Scene 3

The Anxious Bench Controversy: New Measures or Old Standards?

DINAH: This was a very controversial and conflicted time in our church's history. It was so controversial the church was closed for a year, reopened and then closed again for a time. All because of a new revival and the methods they used and the theology they espoused.

The German Reformed Church had planted churches all over the new frontier stretching from New York to Ohio and Indiana and east to North Carolina. The hard working farmers, many of whom were ethnically German, seemed to gravitate to this denomination. Many of the services were in German and very traditional: hymn singing, scripture readings, prayers, preaching, communion, baptism, confirmation for those new to the faith, steeped in studying the Bible and reciting the Heidelberg Catechism. That was the way most people experienced God, was in the middle of doing those things, those regular spiritual practices.

(pic of Finney)

Into this stable arena, Charles Finney came. He was a lawyer, but quit that to preach. He quickly came up with a number of techniques to assist with the results of the revival meetings he ran. If these techniques were followed, many more folks came forward and were converted on the spot, usually with great emotion. The New Measures were: fervent, protracted, emotional singing, led a by a singing group down front. A pungent, fiery sermon was delivered, then the revivalist preacher would call down front any who wanted to be saved, to come forward and sit in the “anxious bench.” The preacher would then lead the congregation in a public prayer for the conversion of those sitting on the anxious bench. To say there was a little pressure on those who came down front to be converted, was putting it mildly. Then, for those who did not openly commit to conversion during the service, there was a protracted service after the regular service. There the unconverted were urged (one might say harassed and harangued) to not delay because of the “awful consequences of procrastination!”

Choir: “Clap Your Hands and Sing Alleluia”

It was a battle between the revivalists who spoke in English, advocated having an emotional faith, appealed to the young, and emphasized that one can choose to be saved of one’s own accord, and the established Reformed preachers, who often still did the service in German, emphasized traditional faith practices and appealed to the older generation, and advocated the belief that God saves you by grace alone. Because of the controversy, Rev. Sonnedecker resigned, the church was closed for a year, started again and closed again for a few years.

(pic of Nevin)

Finally the Rev. John Nevin, a graduate of Princeton Seminary and professor at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, published in 1843 a theological circular entitled: *The Anxious Bench: A Tract for Our Times*. Because of the influence of that circular the practice of the New Measures slowly dissipated and the Reformed Church retreated from highly emotional revivals to experiencing revival with God in the standard practices of the faith: worship, prayer, singing, Bible reading, communion, baptism, confirmation. And people did experience

emotional revival, even when doing the common practices of the faith, such was the spirit of the times.

After a final time of internal strife and problems that caused the church to be closed intermittently in the late 1940s and early 1850s, the Reformed Church in Columbiana was finally firmly reestablished in 1855 by the Rev. Carl Lienakemper, (pic of Lienakemper) with a more cohesive theological unity than it had experienced in 30 years.

Hymn: (The Church's One Foundation, 1864)

Scene 4

The Reinhart Renaissance

SAM: In 1860, Jerusalem Church (which was what we were called then) started a time of renewal under a dynamic and energetic minister by the name of James Reinhart.

(pic of Reinhart)

It was the first time, in many years, that Columbiana had a minister living within the city limits. Previously, many pastors had a multipoint charge and lived away from Columbiana. The church grew steadily in membership and giving throughout Reinhart's nine year term as pastor.

Of course during this time the bloodbath of the Civil War raged and tore our country apart, literally it was brother versus brother on the battlefield, and former friends and classmates from West Point faced off and charged their brigades at each other. Finally, after four brutal years, the war ended.

***Hymn: #416 Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, all verses**

(pic of Lincoln's assassination)

President Lincoln was assassinated, our first president to meet his end this way and the nation was plunged into turmoil and grief, not only from the loss of the President, but over the unspeakable horror of the Civil War. After several years of deep grief, the country was able to start moving forward again. The mood brightened and the stage was set for new adventures.

In 1867, the church made an important positive decision. The Lutheran Church, which had been sharing the facility at Pittsburgh and Main decided to construct their own church building farther south on Main. They sold their interest in the original building, shared with the Reformed Congregation since 1822, to the Reformed people and took the name "Jerusalem" with them. It was a time when both congregations were growing and it does not take much conjecture to conclude they rubbed elbows for the limited space in the church building often. Rev. Reinhart succeeded in convincing the now named "Grace Reformed Church" to build a new brick building on the original site. It also still served as a school house for the community.

(pic of structure at that time)

Hymn: #702 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

Scene 5

A Time of Rapid Growth: The Bomberger Explosion

BRENDA: The 1870s were a difficult time in the area for churches and they often joined ranks for survival, sharing resources, including pastors.

(pic of Rev. Hilbish)

In 1870 Rev. Henry Hilbish came to take the three point charge of Mount Olivet in North Lima, Paradise Church in New Buffalo, and Grace Reformed Church.

(pic of Rev. John Kendig)

He resigned in 1872, and Rev. John Kendig became pastor of Grace. For six years, it was a time of stability and modest growth. When he resigned in 1878 the congregation had grown from 147 to 168.

(pic of Rev. Spangler)

Rev. Henry Spangler came and served two years and the by the time he resigned in 1880 the congregation had again grown, this time to 192 members, beginning to approach the number of our present membership.

Our country and town were growing. Ideas and inventions flourished.

Alexander Graham Bell had just invented the telephone in 1876. Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877 and light bulb in 1879. It was time of innovation and growth. Everything was popping and Grace Church was getting set to pop as well.

(pic of Dr. Bomberger)

The stage was set for the ministry of the Rev. Dr. J. H. Bomberger who pastored from 1880-1897, a run of 17 years, one of the longest terms of service for pastors Grace has ever had. Columbiana's population grew, and as people came, they also joined the Grace Reformed Church, taking advantage of the inspiring worship, Sunday School, and many social groups starting to form in the 60 year old church. Forming groups was one way of growing a church back then, and Dr. Bomberger knew this and encouraged their formation. These groups included: the Women's Missionary Society, the Ladies Aid Society, and the Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip for the men. To cope with the exploding congregation the sanctuary was enlarged in 1895 and at the same time the first electrical service was installed.

Hymn: Bringing In the Sheaves (see insert)

In 1880, a new bell was procured for the bell tower. The bell rang on Sundays, calling people to worship and it rang calling children to school on Sundays as well, where they learned reading, writing, and arithmetic, before the advent of regular Christian education and the public schools we know today. For a hundred and

twenty seven years the Grace Church bell has rung calling the faithful to worship and tolling at the funeral of a loved one. By the time Dr. Bomberger had resigned in 1897, Grace Reformed Church membership had exploded in seventeen years from 158 to 402, a rate of growth not seen before or since of over 250%. One thing for us modern Christians of Grace Church to consider: would we be willing to do what was necessary to try to have a 250% growth rate? Would we fight against it if we saw that many new people we did not know coming into the church and the pew we usually sat in used by different folks every week? How familiar do we like things in our church? These are things to think about. Yet we remember that Jesus said, “Whosoever will may come,” and that it is our sacred responsibility to welcome all with the love of Christ.

(CHRIS rings bell)

Hymn: Come to the Church in the Wildwood (see insert)

Scene 6

When Everything Changes: Chaos at the Turn of the Century

BETH: Dr. Bomberger had taken Grace Reformed Church to a pinnacle of success as a church fellowship in a fast growing town. The sky was the limit, or so it seemed. But, as in all things, there is often a cycle to life, and a church’s life is no different. Grace entered a time of chaos around the time of the turning of the century. So in a span of 11 years, from 1897 to 1908, counting the end of Dr. Bomberger’s pastorate to the start of Rev. Yenser’s pastorate, Grace Church had a rapid succession of six pastors.

(pic of Dr. Bomberger) Dr. Bomberger finished his work here in 1897.

(pic of Rev. Casselman) The Rev. Arthur V. Casselman served from 1898-1902.

(pic of Rev. Cromer) The Rev. Frederick Cromer pastored from 1902-1904.

(pic of Rev. Wettach) The Rev. E. D. Wettach was the Grace Church minister from 1904-1905.

(pic of Rev. Welsh) The Rev. George W. Welsh served from 1905-1907.

(pic of Rev. Yenser) The Rev. William Yenser, who finally gave some stability to the role of pastor of Grace by serving for eleven years from 1908-1917. In between these pastors, there were also interim pastors, sometimes several between called pastors, as some only served a few months, then were gone.

Despite all this pastoral instability, the congregation and the pastors kept trying to march onward and make progress in promoting the gospel, as best they knew how.

Showing courage, when no other would, Grace Church was the first church of the Reformed denomination to sponsor a mission to China and did so, proposing the new mission to the Ohio Synod, and when they seemed hesitant to support it, Grace Church volunteered to fund the entire venture itself starting in 1900. Which,

of course, met with great approval by the Synod. Rev. Cromer was first sent, but there were problems from the start and he was replaced by the Rev. Reimert the next year. Unfortunately for him, it was the exact time of the Boxer Rebellion. The ruler of China, the Empress Dowager, on June 18th 1900, ordered that all foreigners be killed. The Boxers took this charge very seriously and a slaughter of hundreds of foreign missionaries and their entire families ensued, men, women, children. Rev. Reimert has the distinction of being the first martyr of the new Reformed mission and of Grace Church, as he was trying to protect an orphanage in Huping from a bandit and was shot in the process. Despite that considerable setback and tragedy, the mission continued until 1934 when all missionaries were summarily ejected from the country by the Communists. About 50 years later, Grace Church supported for a time, a new missionary to China, Mr. Keylor.

To honor and remember Rev. Reimert and all martyrs of the Christian Church, let us pray silently as we remember the sacrifices of those who gave their lives so that others might believe in the One who gives life, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us indeed remember all our ancestors and loved ones, who have witnessed by their lives and by their deaths, the grace and love of God. (short period of silence)

Hymn: Be Still, My Soul #530)

(after the hymn, pic of the burned church)

Almost as if to top off the turmoil of this time, the church had a devastating fire on March 12th, 1907, that was caused from an electrical surge from the city power supply, which in the early days was not regulated adequately, so brown outs and surges were common. The result of the fire was that the sanctuary needed rebuilt, with a new roof and stained glass, and the organ repaired from water damage. Despite the loss, the congregation pooled their resources and the sanctuary was renovated and the organ rededicated in June of 1908, just over a year later.

(pic of renovated church)

Nationally, it was a time of great change as well. President McKinley was elected in 1897 but assassinated on September 14, 1901, one hundred thirteen years ago today. Henry Ford founded Ford Motor Company in 1903 and the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk that same year. Beloved native son of Grace Church, Harvey Firestone, invented the “dismountable rim with a rubber wheel” and so made the first spare tire in 1907, something we take for granted now. Also in 1907 the Knickerbocker Trust failed and stocks crashed. So, it was a time of innovation, adventure, success and sometimes great failure and tragedy in our nation and church.

Perhaps symbolizing the chaos of that time, a letter to the congregation from one of the short-term pastors, the Rev. George Welsh, says a lot about the financial volatility of that time, and that either the church *had no money* to pay him after the church fire and the stock failure that effected the entire country, and possibly the

giving of some of the church members, either that, *or they didn't want to pay him*. Hear what he has to say as he makes a report. Do you hear sour grapes, or just a grinding noise?

JACK: “Grace Congregation: 414 members, children 120. June 6, 1906, Rev. Frederick Cromer married to Miss Mary Halverstadt. The groom was a former pastor of Grace. *The present pastor was not invited*. September 22, Street Fair, about 6000 people in town. (The report of 1907.) Mainly because of sickness of my mother and brother, Mother Welsh and I went to York, Pennsylvania. Where my father had a grocery store and that it was agreed that I resign and come east to York and take charge of the business. Mother and children left in July. I came back to Columbiana September 1 and presented my resignation. Arrangements had been made for supplying the pulpit. *These arrangements were canceled as soon as I left town. I had no regular vacation as granted by the consistory and was the regular pastor until classis dismissed me*. (Classis was the Reformed regional denominational association). September 8, preached farewell sermon in Columbiana, and went to York, Pennsylvania, where I lived until August 1908. March 3, received notice of the meeting of the Eastern Ohio Classis to dismiss me and dissolve relations with Columbiana. *One month's salary was not paid. The month of August 1907 has never been paid*. I wish the congregation well in all its efforts for the kingdom.”

Hymn: #708 Blest Be the Tie That Binds, 1782

Scene 7

Brother Can You Spare a Dime? & The Yanks Are Coming

ALEX: As we progressed into the 1900s, the challenges came too. The “War to End All Wars,” World War I, was on. In 1917, Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, 2nd in command of an army convoy passing through Columbiana, had the troops stay overnight at Grace in the Sunday School rooms. All were fed a chicken dinner by the ladies of Grace.

The Rev. Theodore Wright pastored Grace from 1917-1921. Because of the necessity of being mobil, the church bought him a Model T. He was not a very good driver. He wanted to drive the ladies to their aid society meetings, but no one would ride with him. He was known to go the same speed on turns as straight aways, and often tipped the car over. Then he had to round up a few men from the church. They would set it back up and he would be on his way. (Pastor Rob note: I bet that was one beat up Model T when he was done. AND it was the last time the church ever bought a vehicle for the pastor, thanks, Ted!)

In 1919 Prohibition started, but Columbiana was a “dry” town anyway.

The church built a parsonage in 1920, beside the church. It was NOT a good time to build as a massive depression hit the country from 1920-1921, caused by deflation after WWI. About 40% of banks failed and many companies went out of business. Unemployment skyrocketed, and in many ways, this depression was more severe than the Great Depression to come. Thankfully it only lasted a year. The Roaring Twenties came to Columbiana and from 1922-1932, the Rev. Dr. E. F. Wiest served as pastor. (A man who looked like he stepped out of the pages of the Great Gatsby.) The economy took off and things looked rosy for almost a decade.

Song to be played: Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" Rudy Vallee

In 1929, of course, the Great Depression hit and stocks crashed and continued to go down for three years, losing 90% of their value. You would think this would devastate Grace Church, but positive things were still happening. The Board of Christian Education was formed in 1932, and the church called a fireball of a pastor to come and serve: the Rev. Stanley Fritz. He was a hard worker, a "go-getter." He helped form the Columbiana Public Library Board, and was active in the community. He seemed to always be busy with something. He made a lighted cross that still hangs in the sanctuary. He did so much, so quickly, that it seemed he burned himself out and retired early, because of failing health.

Walter Gobrect served as pastor from 1936-1943. Positive things were happening, but in 1939 there was a budget crisis in the church. Giving was down. It caused several projects to be canceled, including buying a new church organ. It was a tough time. Let us, even today, remember that without continued generous giving by the congregation, there will always be a budget crisis and the progress of the gospel will be impaired. Let us give to God our tithes and offerings this morning.

(Offertory, usual order)

Scene 8

The Nifty Fifties and the Psychedelic Sixties

CHRIS: The Great Depression didn't end until World War II started and we were on a war-time economy. In 1947 200 shares of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company stock were donated to the church by the Harvey Firestone estate. This was the basis for our endowment today which we have used to make many special projects happen. With better economic stability for the church, there began a string of longer pastorates:

The Rev. Waldo Bartels served from 1943-51.

The Rev. Donald J. Voelm was pastor from 1951-59.

The Rev. Harold W. Thiedt served from 1960-68.

The Rev. Ernest Noll served from 1968-78.

The Rev. Charles R. Terrill was the pastor from 1979-1989.

The Rev. Earl Crecelius served from 1990-2002.

The Rev. Michael Boehm, was the only shorter-term pastor, serving from 2003-06.

And the present pastor, the Rev. Dr. Rob Joy has served for seven years so far, from 2007 to the present.

That's a remarkable record. That speaks not only of economic stability, but stability within the dynamics of the congregation, despite the craziness of the 1950s and 60s, despite the changes in society, in family structures, in what people wanted and expected in worship, with music and style of service. The Korean Conflict occurred from 1950-53, and Vietnam was from 1959-75, and nearly tore our country apart, socially. Then there were the assassinations of John F. Kennedy in 1963, and Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy in 1968. One historian said of the 60s, "It was one darn thing after another." Despite all those factors, the stability of Grace Church before, through, and during this period, was remarkable. We were a safe refuge for people seeking God during a troublesome time, and it is hoped we still are!

Hymn: #710 We Are Called to Be God's People, 1973

The economic stability also contributed to the success of several big building projects. A Sunday School addition was completed in 1953 and another Sunday School addition was completed in 1967 with a gym, rec room and church offices and additional classrooms.

There was a lot for which to be thankful in the 50s and 60s. One of the great hymns so frequently used in Christian worship was written at the beginning of the period of expansion in 1949. Let's stand and sing.

***Hymn: "How Great Thou Art" #21.**

Scene 9

When Everything Changes: Chaos at the Millenium

LARRY: There are many changes and challenges to the life of Grace Church in this new millennium, yet there are some things we do, that I believe will be good for us always to do, and they remain strong.

Music is a large part of how we connect with God. The choir has always been a part of leading the singing and worship. Thanks to all former and current choir members. (Raise your hands!) Thanks to our choir directors. From the historical booklet of 1993 we know of these directors: Harvey Rapp, Mrs. William Clendennin, Willard Ferrall, Rev. Don Voelm, Beverly Richardson, Dale Wadman, Shirley Hamm, Brenda Bradley, Judy Bott, Polly Boston, Martha Koeler, Diane Santelli, Eric Keylor, Ben Ammon, Thomas Tully, Nate Joy, and Alaina Cornfield. Thank you for your service and hard work and patience!

It has been some years since we have been able to have a Singspiration. Thanks to all who had a hand and voice in that ministry that made the Christmas season so special.

We've had a pipe organ since 1907 and it has been used in virtually every service since that time. A list of organists includes: Helen Greenamyer Otto, Stella Kuegle, Harvey Rapp, Oneta Orr, Janet Keller Miller, Anna Rapp Price (daughter of Harvey Rapp), Leona Ehrhart, Gladys Pepple Melnick, Lucille Funkhouser Mundy, Helen Cline, and our current organist since 1958, Judy Bott. Thank you for filling our sanctuary with the resonate majestic tones only found on an organ, and giving us a pre-taste (or sound) of heaven.

Remembering all those who have contributed, and celebrating our tradition of praising God with music in worship let us sing:

Hymn: In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified (1978)

(Sunday School and youth slideshow, or pics)

YOUTH: Sunday School from early on, begins the training the child needs to eventually become a mature Christian. The need for Christian education never stops, and many there are who take advantage of the adult classes who study the Bible and encourage Christian discipleship. Thanks to all who participate in that crucial ministry.

Youth involvement is important and encouraged. Recent youth activities at Grace include: roller skating, movies, lock-ins, Easter breakfasts, chili cook-offs, and one of the most life-changing events: the mission worktrip that tops off the Confirmation class experience. Thanks to all who participated, supported, and made these events happen. Let us sing a favorite of youth groups for over 40 years:

739 Pass It On, (1969)

(Pic of Grace Church)

ROB: As the church makes it through the change of the millennium period, there are many changes occurring in our world, and in the religious life of the American people. This is a time period when the institutional church is looked upon by many in society in negative terms, for being perceived of as judgmental, stodgy, irrelevant, impractical, useless, while undifferentiated "spirituality" is seen by many as helpful, inspirational, accepting. More and more people are turning away from the Christian church, or refusing to commit to any specific church fellowship. A new type of religious life is starting to reveal itself in Americans. It remains to be seen what it will be exactly, but what we see so far is that it is extremely accepting of all people and lifestyles and religions and seeks to integrate into practice the best of all those. It is interactive, missional, high tech, yet still seeking

“that still small voice” of God that speaks to us. This “sea-change” is not going away anytime soon. From what the experts say, likely in around another twenty years or so these changes will be mostly worked out and what it will mean for the religious life of Americans will be pretty much established for the next hundred years. As church historian Phyllis Tribble says, “Every 500 years or so the church has an attic sale. It cleans out everything it has. It keeps what is best and throws away the rest and starts over.” Many churches will not survive this transition. Some are mainline denominational churches. Some are “praise” churches. The question is, do we provide opportunities for people to meet and experience God? This time period is similar, I believe, to the New Measures controversy of the early 1800s, but with one important difference, it is on steroids! What we have now is much more fundamental, radical, and it will change everything, that is, nothing will remain exactly the way it was when this is all over. How Grace Church adapts in its presentation of the gospel, how it keeps the best of its tradition and integrates the best of new practices, so it reaches out with God’s love to new generations, here now and yet to come, will determine if it is here for another 200 years, and that, bottom line, is what we all want, because we believe it is what God wants, for we seek to glorify God in all we do.

#118 We Will Glorify, 1982, Twila Paris, verses 1, 3

In the end, our solution, I believe, will be similar to our solution during the New Measures Controversy. Being patient, working it out together, as pastor, and people, and leadership, all working together, as we seek to give all people the most effective opportunities to emotionally, intellectually, in every way, experience and meet God as we do the practices of the faith: worship, prayer, singing, Bible reading, communion, baptism, confirmation. May the light of God shine through in everything.

(slide show of happy events, multigenerational)

#721 Shine Jesus Shine, 1988