

## **Grace Episcopal Church -- A history**

On the corner of Virginia Park and Rosa Parks Boulevard (then called 12th Street), Grace Episcopal Church, the second Detroit church so-named, began as a mission in a portable steel structure elevated upon cement blocks. The first service on August 5, 1917 was led by Archdeacon Robinson, who was temporarily in charge.

Reverend Bertram W. Pullinger, an Englishman who served as a chaplain in the Canadian army during World War 1, was called as the first rector of the young mission. His first service was on December 2, 1917. He came to Detroit from the diocese of Saskatchewan where he served for 12 years. Rev. Pullinger served for 32 years as rector of Grace Church.

Incorporated as a parish in 1918, plans began for a permanent building to accommodate the growing church. With the assistance of an enthusiastic Sunday School that canvassed the neighborhood for contributions, the building campaign drew nationwide attention and funds. The cornerstone of the rising church house, the first unit of the Grace parish, was laid in February 1920. The treasure box placed in the stone contained copies of the daily papers, a Bible, prayer book, photos of Bishop Charles D. Williams, Rev. Pullinger, Charles G. Eddy, a member of the Masons, coins and copies of the program.

The new Grace Church Parish House was built of grayish buff rough textured pressed brick with Indiana limestone trimmings. The architects were Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. It was dedicated on Sunday, October 31, 1920 by Bishop Williams.

The second unit of Grace Church, built in 1921, became a memorial to Marjorie Guest who died at age 14. She was the adopted daughter of noted Detroit poet, Edgar Guest. Its principal room, the 'memorial room' was set aside as use for Sunday school work and conferences.

In the fall of 1942 the church became debt-free, a prerequisite of consecration. The following year on Sunday, January 31, 1943, the church was consecrated by Bishop Frank W. Creighton.

In the 1960s another addition went up. Designed by architect Nathan Johnson, it contained classrooms, offices and a chapel with stained glass depicting biblical scenes and the contemporary life surrounding the church. The chapel was built in memory of Katherine Fox Graham, George Fox and William H. Graham.

The second rector of Grace Church, Reverend Elden W. Mowers, arrived (September 1949) at the time of a racially changing neighborhood. Attendance and support dwindled as older members moved away with the influx of newcomers. Serious discussions were held concerning the church's future. It decided to stay put and minister to the people around it.

Grace joined the diocese's call to establish parochial missions in the growing outlying areas and suburbs. Grace Chapel, now the Church of the Redeemer in Southfield, Mi., was set up in 1951. Additional leadership was needed to help Rev. Mowers serve two congregations. Reverend Henri A. Stines, a native of Haiti, was appointed in 1953 as curate of the parent church. In January 1955, Fr. Stines became the first Black rector of Grace Church leading and growing the church throughout his nine years as rector into one of the best known of its denomination in the Detroit area.

The year Grace Episcopal Church marked its 50th anniversary, its surrounding neighborhood experienced the nation's worst riot which began on July 23, 1967 and lasted for five days. The destruction impacted the church, its neighborhood and the city of Detroit for years to come.

Under the leadership of Reverend Robert L. Potts (1964 - 1967), and his assistant, Reverend Marshall W. Hunt, Grace Church, which remained virtually untouched by the rioting, was used as a distribution center for food and clothing for those affected by the chaos, looting and burning of houses and businesses. Eventually, 12th St. was cleared and widened into a boulevard. It was renamed in honor of Rosa Parks, Mother of the Civil Rights Movement. Most businesses did not return to the area. Some new residences were built.

In July 1968, Black artists began work on an outdoor mural, the Wall of Pride, on the side of the church. Designed by Chicago artists William Walker and Eugene Edaw, the project was sponsored by the Episcopal Church. The wall was "to inform people about some of the contributions of Black people, whether they be controversial or well-liked", said Walker. It featured Black leaders, authors, playwrights, entertainers and others. At the September 9 unveiling, Rev. Hunt (1967 - 69), spoke of the hope to reach "out to the people of the area with a new hand of hope and understanding". The Wall of Pride remained on view for a number of years.

Other rectors who have served at Grace: Reverend Ellsworth B. Jackson (1971-1973), Reverend Blair A. Dixon (1973-1977), Reverend Arthur J. Hildebrandt (1977-1983), Reverend Samuel T. Knight (1985-1991), and Reverend Glendon Heath (2000-2001).

Grace has had the service of many fine clergy as associates, interims and supply priests: The Reverends James R. Levesque Jr., Malcolm D. Boyd, William J. Walker, Howard McClintock, Gene Montague, Thomas Masson, William Venable, Arthur B. Williams, Schulyer Clapp, Robert J. Bickley, Rodney Reinhardt, Franklin P. Bennett Jr., Harold Bronk, and Ned Schneider. For the past seven and a half plus years, Reverend Margaret Haas has served as supply priest and Bible study leader.

Grace Church has inspired a number of its members to go into the ministry. Ordained at Grace were: Percy Watton, Jack Goodson, William Elliott, Joseph Weathersby, Robert Reaves, Don E. West, and Kwasi A. Thornell. Others with roots at Grace include Judy Davis Boli, Susan Shannon-Keller, Karen Coleman and Martha A. Sanders the first Black female deacon in the Diocese of Michigan.

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2017 marks the 100th year of our existence on this corner and 50 years since the rebellion of 1967. "It has not been easy maintaining our ministry. We considered merging with another church family, forming a mutual ministry (whereby we would 'do it all ourselves'), or even sharing a pastor with a nearby congregation. Grace Church has had full-time clergy, priest-in-charge, interim rector and supply clergy to maintain our parish. The landscape of the community has changed..... following the events of 1967". As Detroit begins (again) to experience revitalization.....

We go forward too ----- to carry on our ministry of spreading The Good News. "The circle of life is still evolving today".

"We've Come This Far By Faith"                      Albert A. Goodson

With God, all things are possible.                      Matthew 19:26

This history is dedicated to those who entered our doors and became a part of the Grace Church family.

With acknowledgement to many previous historians of Grace Episcopal Church.

Linda Culpepper, Grace Episcopal Church parishioner  
2017