



Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

50th Anniversary Celebration
April 28, 2023

Program

Welcome	Rev. Brian De Jong
Opening Prayer	Rev. Ivan De Master
PH Hymn 245 Great Is Thy Faithfulness PH Psalm 117B Praise the Lord God, All You Nations	
Prayer of Thanksgiving	Rev. Jon Falk
“Lord God, Our Thanks to Thee We Raise”	Ladies’ Choir
Ephesians 4:11-16	
Growing Up in Christ	Rev. John Hilbelink
50 th Anniversary Video Presentation	
Closing Prayer	Rev. John Shaw

Pastors

John Hilbelink 1973-79
Jonathan Falk 1980-86
William Laun 1987-88
Lawrence Eyres 1989-93
Ivan DeMaster 1994-2005
Brian De Jong 2005-present

Elders

Roger Arndt
Fred Barthels
Mark Berenschot
Bob Boss
Paul Damkot
Ron DeMaster
John Henderson
Dick Johnson
Joel Moody
Rich Nagle
Steve Nyenhuis
Jim Onnink
Phil Roerdink
Don Schlernitzauer
Tim Voskuil

Deacons

Jonny Arndt
Roger Arndt
Steve Boss
Tim Boss
Tony Braatz
Jay Buyze
Don DeTroye
Jeff Froh
Eugene Heller

Harold Hopeman
Randy Jensema
Chris Kaeiser
Ken Koehler
Dave Kuiper
Joel Moody
Tom VerVelde

Interns

Ronald Scheuers
Uri Tamminga
Eric Ederma
Ken Golden
John Shaw

Meeting Locations

Fred & Toni Barthel's basement
Cooper Elementary
Mapledale School
Sheboygan County Christian High School
17th St. Building
Present Location

A Brief History of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church

By Rev. Ivan DeMaster & Rev. Brian De Jong

Grace Church - Beginnings

The history of Grace Church goes back to the Beacon Light Chapel established by the First Christian Reformed Church of Sheboygan. The goal for starting the chapel was to reach out with the gospel to those who might not come to First Church. Some of the members committed themselves to this mission effort. Fred and Toni Barthels were among those who made this commitment and who shared this vision.

A building was found on Superior Avenue located between 39th and 31st Streets. The building is still there. An evangelist was called to serve the chapel and the Lord blessed this work. Attendance grew to 75 people.

One of the evangelists who served the chapel was John Fikkert. He served for a couple of years. His zeal and ministry were greatly appreciated. When he left he came in contact with the Rev. Don Stanton and the Rev. Henry Fikkert. These men were part of presbytery's Church Extension Committee (CHEX). They encouraged John Fikkert to become part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and seek ordination. John responded positively to this and took up the mission work in Green Bay where the presbytery wanted to see a church planted.

The Beacon Light Chapel faced some difficulties in the early 1970's and the decision was made to close the chapel. The people were encouraged to worship at First Church. Some did so but being a part of a large church was very different from the smaller mission chapel. There was a desire to continue what had been done. Some people brought up the idea of coming to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The decision was made to go up to Green Bay on a particular Sunday and worship with the people pastored by John Fikkert. This visit and the discussion with Pastor Fikkert encouraged the people to investigate the OPC further.

Meetings were held with Pastors Stanton and H. Fikkert as to how to proceed in starting a church here in Sheboygan. Prayers and plans were made. People from the chapel and others were notified of the decision. A date was set to begin worship services.

The first worship service was held on Sunday, January 28, 1973. The service was held in the basement of Fred and Toni Barthels home on Superior Avenue. The Rev. Henry Fikkert conducted the worship service and his son Brian sang a solo. The basement was largely filled. Current members who were part of that service were Harlan and Nancy Harmelink and their daughters Gail Moody and Sandy Kaieser.

We are thankful to God for these pioneers who had a vision for the church. They would be joined by others who loved the Lord and desired to reach out with the gospel.

Grace Church - Development

The first worship service of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church was held on Sunday, January 28, 1973, in the basement of Fred and Tony Barthels' home on Superior Avenue in the Township of Sheboygan. The room was largely filled. Rev. Henry Fikkert urged the people to find another meeting place that would be more adequate. The next week the service was still held in the Barthels' home, but the third week the worship service was moved to Cooper Elementary School in Sheboygan.

The remainder of the first year the worship services were held at the Cooper School. The people developed a sense of unity and vision for the church. The group was under the oversight of Bethel OPC in Oostburg. With the help of the session of Bethel Church an effort was made to find a pastor for the new church. The Rev. John R. Hilbelink, who was a son of Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove and was serving as pastor in Hamil, South Dakota, was contacted. He expressed interest in becoming the organizing pastor. In September of 1973 Grace Church together with Bethel Church in Oostburg issued a call to John Hilbelink, which he accepted. He moved to Sheboygan and secured a home at 1915 N. 7th Street. He was officially re-

ceived by the Presbytery of the Midwest on January 23, 1974, and installed as organizing pastor shortly after.

The people also began to plan for a building of their own. It was agreed to look for property and land was purchased along Superior Avenue just west of what is now Taylor Drive. This was to be the future home of Grace Church.

Efforts were made to reach out into the community. On Sunday afternoon, some of the members along with members of Bethel Church would go calling in the neighborhoods. The purpose was to share the gospel and to invite them to visit Grace Church. Many contacts were made and a few people did respond.

In 1974 a decision was made to move to another public school. Mapledale Public School, which was located on Superior Avenue. This location was used only for a short time and then the services were moved to Sheboygan Christian High.

In 1975, a church building, located at 1704 N. 17th Street, became available. The Congregational Church had outgrown their building and built a new building. The typical old, white wooden church building was seen as the opportunity for Grace Church to have their own building. In June of 1975, this building was purchased and became the home of Grace Church. By the end of 1976, the congregation had grown to 33 communicant members and 26 baptized members for a total of 59 total membership.

Pastor Hilbelink served as pastor of Grace Church from the fall of 1973 until 1979. He and his wife Lois had three children when they arrived: Stephen, Christa, and Heidi. Their son Matthew was born after they left Sheboygan. In summer of 1979, Pastor Hilbelink accepted a call to become the mission pastor of Grace OP Chapel in Amarillo, Texas. He was released by this presbytery on September 3, 1979. (The Hilbelinks followed the Churchills in Amarillo and in fact, purchased the home of Bob and Dorothy Churchill.)

John Hilbelink served the church in Amarillo from 1979 until 1987. He then accepted a call to Second Parish OPC in Portland, ME, where he served for several decades. He also served on the denominational Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension as the chairman for many years.

(The following was taken from a Presbytery of Midwest on the Move, Spring, 1973)

SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN

A new chapel was begun on Jan. 28 when twenty-seven people gathered in the basement of a private house in Sheboygan, Wisconsin for a worship service conducted under the direction of the Church Extension Committee of the presbytery. Two weeks later, the group was meeting in the rented facility of a public school (Cooper Elementary School, 20th and Cooper Streets) and attendance had climbed to fifty-one.

Now under the oversight of Bethel Church in Oostburg, and with the cooperation of Calvary Church in Cedar Grove, a Sunday School is being organized.

Please pray for the Lord to strengthen and increase this new testimony.

Grace Church - Progress

Following Pastor John Hilbelink's move to become mission pastor of Grace OP Chapel in Amarillo, Texas, the church established a pastoral search committee. They found their pastor close by. Jonathan Falk was the intern at Bethel Church in Oostburg, the church that was overseeing Grace Church in Sheboygan. He had led the worship service at Grace Church on occasion.

The congregation voted to call Jonathan Falk as their pastor and he accepted the call. Jonathan and his wife Margaret with their two children, Christopher and Catherine, moved to Sheboygan to begin their ministry. Jonathan was a licentiate of the presbytery and needed to sustain his ordination exams. This he did at the Spring Stated meeting of the presbytery of the Midwest. On April 16, 1980, he was ordained and installed as pastor.

Pastor Falk served Grace Church from 1980 to 1986. In 1982 the congregation petitioned the presbytery to be organized as an independent congregation. Previous to this they had been under the oversight of the elders of Bethel church in Oostburg. Now the congregation selected Fred Barthels and Steve Nyenhuis to serve as elders and Jonathan Falk to con-

tinue as pastor. The presbytery granted their request and the presbytery officially organized the congregation on March 19, 1982. At the end of that year there were 53 communicant members and 26 baptized members.

In 1985 the present church building became available. The Church of the Nazarene was not continuing and the opportunity came to purchase the building and the seven acres of land. This was a difficult decision because the building was located outside the city and was not easily visible. In addition, the finances were tight. However, the decision was made to proceed with the purchase at the cost of \$143,300. The building on 17th Street was sold and the congregation moved to the present location. This building has served the congregation well.

Pastor Falk received a call from Pilgrim Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Bangon, Maine, early in 1986 to become their pastor. He accepted the call and on April 28, 1986 the presbytery dissolved the pastoral relationship and dismissed him to the Presbytery of New England. Once again a pastoral search committee was established.

The Falks have three children. Emily was born when they were in Maine. While in Sheboygan, Jonathan taught Bible in the Christian High to supplement his income. He had been a Bible teacher for two years in a high school in Massachusetts before going to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

The Falks were in Bangor, Maine, from 1986 to 1999. After serving there for ten years, the session suggested that he take a sabbatical doing short-term foreign missions work. This would assist the missionaries and increase the congregation's awareness of missions. He did this, serving two short-term mission efforts in Mbale, Uganda.

In 1999 the Committee on Foreign Missions extended a call to Pastor Falk to serve as missionary evangelist in Uganda alongside of Brian and Dorothy Wingard. He accepted the call and he, his wife, and daughter Emily went to Uganda. He taught at the theological college there until 2002. At that time permission was given by the government of Eritrea to begin a theological college in the capital city of Asmara. The com-

mittee responded by sending the Falks and the Wingards to Eritrea to establish this school.

Grace Church - Struggles

The third pastor of Grace Church was Rev. William Laun. Pastor Jonathan Falk left for Maine at the end of April, 1986. The pastoral search committee first presented the Rev. Thomas Church, former intern of Bethel Church, Oostburg, and RHM in the Presbytery of the Northwest. The vote to issue him a call fell one vote short of the required 2/3 majority. The next candidate presented was William Laun. The congregation on August 31, 1986, voted unanimously to call him as their next pastor.

William Laun was born in Sheboygan and grew up in Kiel. He attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Sensing a call to the ministry he attended and graduated from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. After graduation the Launs had become part of the New Life Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

William and Kathy Laun arrived in Sheboygan the end of September and began to serve at Grace Church. Bill was not yet ordained and therefore had to prepare for his ordination exams. These he successfully completed and he was ordained by the Presbytery of the Midwest on March 7, 1987. On Sunday, March 8, Samuel Brian Laun was baptized. Their second child Caitlin Anne was baptized on April 24, 1988.

During this time the congregation was finding it difficult to meet the church's budget commitments. Some members had moved or left so that the pressure increased. A special congregational meeting was called for June 26, 1988 to consider the question: "Should Grace Church continue?" The moderator, elder Steve Nyenhuis, pointed out 3 difficulties facing the church: 1. Membership decline 2. Financial problems 3. Differences in philosophy of ministry. Discussion followed on the calling of Grace Church, financial consideration, and philosophy of ministry. No conclusion was reached at this meeting.

Following this meeting Pastor Laun came to the conclu-

sion that he should present his resignation. A special meeting was held on July 10, 1988. The congregation agreed to accept his resignation and to request presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. At a subsequent special meeting of the congregation, held August 7, 1988, a motion was passed to continue Grace Church and also continue with interim plans. (The vote was 16 yes, 2 no and 4 abstain.) A further motion was passed to request presbytery to return Grace Church to chapel status under the oversight of the Session of Bethel Church in Oostburg.

Presbytery approved the request from Grace Church and a steering committee consisting of Harlan Harmelink, Tom VerVelde, and Mark Berenschot worked with the Bethel Session to carry on the ministry of Grace Church. In this way and with the financial help from Calvary and Bethel Churches, Grace Church moved ahead.

The Rev. Bill Laun accepted a call from New Life OPC, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, to serve as associate pastor where he served from 1988 to 1994. (This congregation transferred to the PCA in 1990.) In 1994 he accepted a call to be organizing pastor of Valley Spring PCA mission in Appleton. He served there until 1996.

Grace Church - Rebuilding

The first meeting of the steering committee was held on October 1, 1988. The congregation was once again a mission work under the oversight of Bethel Church, Oostburg where the Rev. Jim Bosgraf was pastor. The committee began to arrange for pulpit supply and to seek someone as an interim pastor. They found a retired pastor, Rev. Charles Ellis, who was willing to come for three months.

The congregation at a special meeting (January 29, 1989) approved the recommendation to ask Rev. Charles Ellis and his wife Norma to come for three months. Housing was arranged with Mrs. Antoinette De Master in Oostburg. The congregation agreed to provide Pastor Ellis \$250 per week.

The Ellises came in April. He had served pastorates in West Collingswood, NJ (1943-46), Cincinnati, OH (1946-48),

East Orange, NJ (1948-1955), Silver Springs, MD (1955-79), and Rockport, ME (1977-83) when he retired. He then served as interim pastor in more than one place.

Pastor Ellis was a great encourager and helped to assess the ministry of Grace Church. After three months in Sheboygan, he recommended to the Session of Bethel that they close the work in Sheboygan. The Bethel Session seriously considered this recommendation, but ultimately determined to continue the work in hopes of a recovery of the vitality of the congregation.

A special meeting of the congregation was held on June 4, 1989, to act on the next step. The congregation agreed to ask the Rev. Lawrence Eyres to come as pastor for a year or more. He would be provided \$500 per month which would supplement his retirement income.

Lawrence and Geraldine Eyres were coming to this area because they wanted Dr. Don Schlernitzauer to do Mrs. Eyre's eye surgery. They stayed with Mrs. Dorothy Churchill here in Sheboygan. Although Mr. Eyres was already 77 years old he was ready to serve the Lord where needed.

Rev. Eyres pastored Grace Church for four years. He began making calls and working with people that were in need. By the end of 1990 eight adults and ten children were added to the membership. Total membership was now 40 communicants and 21 non-communicants.

Since it appeared the Eyres would be at Grace Church longer than a year, they purchased a home near Oostburg. This provided room for ministry and a garden for Pastor Eyres. He continued as pastor through July of 1993 and retired at the age of 81. They remained living there until Mrs. Eyres died. He then moved to Janesville, WI where his only daughter and her husband, Priscilla and David King were ministering in Christ Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Pastor Eyres served congregations in Deerfield, NH (1938-43), Portland, OR (1943-50), Westchester, IL (1950-58), Long Beach, CA (1982-88), Wasilla, AK (1988-89), and Sheboygan, WI (1989-93). He completed 55 years in the active ministry and ten more years serving the Lord in many ways.

Grace Church - Growth

Pastor Lawrence Eyres served Grace Church for four years. As 1993 began, he urged the congregation to begin looking for another pastor. Pastor Eyres had reached the age of 81. Therefore, a pastoral search committee contacted the Rev. Ivan DeMaster and this led to the congregation calling him to be the fifth pastor of Grace Church.

Since Grace Church was still a mission church under the oversight of Bethel Church, Oostburg, he was called as an assistant pastor of Bethel Church. Ivan DeMaster was born in Sheboygan and grew up on a farm near Oostburg. His family was part of Bethel OPC, Oostburg, and he graduated from Oostburg Christian School and from Oostburg High School. His wife, Carla, lived on a farm between Gibbville and Sheboygan Falls. She attended Falls High School and Gibbville Reformed Church.

Ivan attended Calvin College in Michigan and Carla, Central College in Iowa. They developed a serious relationship during college years and were married while Ivan was a student at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

The DeMasters arrived in Sheboygan the end of June 1993 and Ivan was installed as pastor of Grace Church. Since the church was not able to provide a full salary, Carla found a teaching position at Cornerstone Christian Academy. Their daughter, Ruth, entered the fifth grade there in the fall. Ivan also started to work two days a week at Ongna Wood Products. At the end of the year Bethel Church decided to provide some support and Ivan quit his part time job. Ivan DeMaster was pastor of Grace Church for 12 years. The first couple of years the Lord gave significant growth. As 1994 was nearing an end, the congregation met to elect elders and to petition the presbytery to organize Grace Church as a separate congregation. These men were elected as elders: Dick Johnson, Joel Moody and Don Schlernitzauer, and as deacon, Tony Braatz. The first meeting of the new elders was held on December 15, 1994. Pastor Eyres was still worshiping at Grace Church and he was

asked to serve as Director of Christian Education and to continue giving the children's sermon each week.

As the church grew the financial condition improved. A full salary was provided for the pastor and efforts were made to pay off the mortgage. Progress was made and early in 1998 the mortgage was fully paid off. A special celebration for the 25th anniversary of Grace Church was planned for the weekend of August 8-9, 1998. A dinner was held in the Oostburg Christian School with the Rev. Henry Fikkert as speaker. Former pastors Lawrence Eyres and William Laun were invited to preach on Sunday.

The last four years of Pastor DeMaster's ministry a seminary intern was obtained. The four interns were Uri Tamminga (wife, Melissa), Eric Ederma (wife, Sarah), Ken Golden (wife, Cressid), and John Shaw (wife, Ann). This proved to be a blessing both to the church and to the interns.

At the beginning of 2005, Pastor DeMaster communicated to the congregation that he planned to retire the coming summer. The congregation set up a pulpit committee to call another pastor. A special retirement party was held at the Christian High School in recognition of 12 years of ministry at Grace Church and 43 years of ministry in the OPC. A generous gift was given with the suggestion that it be used for the planned trip to Malawi. During the 43 years of ministry, the DeMasters were in Bluebell, PA (1962-66), Westchester, IL (1966-1985), Lauderhill, FL (1985-1993) and Sheboygan, WI (1993-2005). They continue to live in Sheboygan and are enjoying being of help to the churches of the presbytery when needed.

Grace Church - Stability & Unity

In the Spring of 2005, the church's pulpit search committee carried out a thorough search for Pastor Ivan's successor. The Rev. Brian De Jong was invited to candidate during the Memorial Day weekend. Rev. De Jong was born in Bozeman, Montana to Norman and Wilma De Jong. The De Jong family

moved around the country every two or three years, spending time in Allendale, Michigan, Sioux Center, Iowa, Bellflower, California, North Haledon, New Jersey, and Palos Heights, Illinois. They actively participated in Christian Reformed Churches throughout those years.

Brian graduated from Chicago Christian High School in 1981 and studied at Calvin College in Grand Rapids for his first year. He then spent a year at Trinity Christian College before transferring to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. After graduating from SIU in 1986, he married DeLou Ittner. During their time in Carbondale, Brian and DeLou were active in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapter at SIU-C and in the local PCA church.

After earning his BA in Cinema and Photography, Brian worked for 6 weeks at a photography studio. Sensing a call to the ministry, he became an intern with Reformed University Fellowship (PCA) working with international students at SIU-C. During those years, Brian and DeLou had their first two children.

In 1990 they moved to Jackson, Mississippi to attend Reformed Theological Seminary. Graduating in 1993, Brian was ordained to the gospel ministry in the Central Florida Presbytery of the PCA. After two years as a campus minister to international students at the University of Florida, the De Jongs moved back to Southern Illinois. There they planted Providence Presbytery Church (PCA) in Marion, Illinois.

In 2000, Pastor De Jong was called to Covenant OPC in Brighton, Michigan. Then, in 2005, he was called to Grace Church in Sheboygan. During the summer of 2005, John Shaw served a summer internship at Grace Church. The Shaws left for St. Paul, Minnesota the week that the De Jongs arrived. With the help of various members of the church, including Chet DeBlaey, they found a house in Sheboygan Falls where they could keep Samantha's two horses and where Pastor De Jong could begin building his chicken empire.

A significant development for the church took place in 2007 and 2008, with a wide-ranging remodeling of the build-

ing. The entire fellowship hall was torn down and replaced with a bigger area. New bathrooms and an adult Sunday School classroom were added. Almost every aspect of the building was updated during the effort. The experience further cemented the unity of the congregation. The generosity of many members allowed the church to quickly retire the entire cost of the project.

During these years the annual Reformation Conference was introduced. The first speaker was the Dr. John Carrickoff Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Dr. Carrick spoke on Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards. Because his luggage was temporarily lost by the airline, he borrowed clothing from Roger Arndt and preached in Roger's suit. In later years, the Reformation Conference speakers included Tony Curto, Bob Godfrey, D.A. Carson, Bill Edgar, David Murray, Craig Troxel and others.

The Session at this time was made up of Pastor De Jong and elders Roger Arndt, Bob Boss, Mark Berenschot and Don Schlernitzauer. The unity and cooperation within the Session was a strength of the church. Early in Pastor De Jong's ministry the church began using the services of Sermonaudio. By putting the weekly sermons on this website, the ministry of Grace Church extended to all fifty states and to countries around the world and on every continent.

Eventually God brought in new families to help in the ministry of the church, including Howard and Audrey Voskuil, Tim and Tammy Voskuil, John and Sally Henderson, and Jim and Arenda Onnink. Tim, John and Jim have served on the Session. During the past eighteen years, Grace Church has enjoyed stability, strong unity, and fruitfulness in ministry. The regular preaching and teaching of God's word are blessed by the Lord, as are the various forms of outreach. Support for home and foreign missions continues to be a priority of the congregation

Beacon Light Chapel



John & June Fikkert



Grace Church's Early Days



Receiving the King's Men offering: Rev. Hilbelink, Harlan Harmelink, Darryl Harmelink, Fred Barthels, and Ike Van Ess



Fred & Toni Barthels

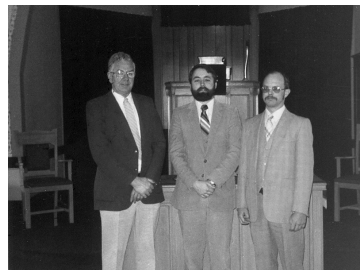


Sandy Harmelink, Rev. Hilbelink, Gail Harmelink, and the Gregor boys

Grace Church Grows Up



Harlan's Catechism Class



Grace Session in 1982
Fred Barthels, Jon Falk
& Steve Nyenhuis



Lloyd & Harriet Teune



The Building on 17th Street

Familiar Faces



Grace Pastors



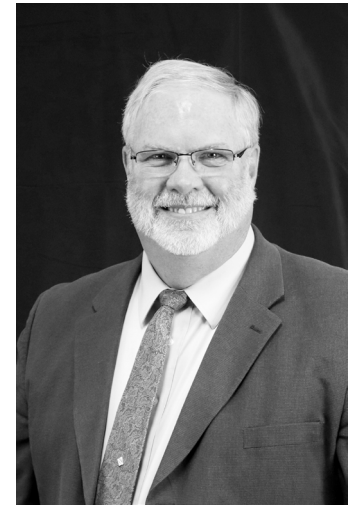
John & Lois Hilbelink



John & Margaret Falk



Ivan & Carla DeMaster



Brian De Jong



William Laun



Lawrence & Geraldine Eyres



50th Anniversary Committee

Pastor Brian De Jong, chairman
Mrs. Debbie Boss
Mrs. Susan Gross
Mrs. Gail Moody
Mr. Mark Berenschot
Mr. Jeff Froh
Mrs. Wendy Froh

Praise the Lord, all nations;
Laud Him, all peoples!
For His lovingkindness
is great toward us,
And the truth of the Lord
is everlasting.
Praise the Lord!
Psalm 117