

FAITH

# This Sheboygan church is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Three of its six pastors were born in the city.

*The anniversary celebration includes events on April 28 and 30.*

Submitted by Grace Presbyterian Church

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SHEBOYGAN - Grace Presbyterian Church, 4930 Green Valley Lane in Sheboygan, will celebrate its 50th anniversary April 28.

The congregation started as an outreach of the First Christian Reformed Church in Sheboygan under the name "Beacon Light Chapel." The Orthodox

Presbyterian denomination took over the work and held the first worship service for “Grace OPC” on Jan. 28, 1973.

During the past five decades, the church has had six pastors, three of whom were born in Sheboygan. The first pastor was the Rev. John Hilbelink, who served from 1973 to 1979. He was followed by the Rev. Jonathan Falk. Falk’s tenure ran from 1980 to 1986. The Rev. William Laun then served from 1987 to 1988, and he was followed by the late Rev. Lawrence Eyres from 1989 to 1993. The Rev. Ivan DeMaster, a Sheboygan County native, returned home to serve the church from 1993 until his retirement in 2005. At that time, the current pastor, the Rev. Brian De Jong, was called to the church.



The congregation first met at the Sheboygan home of Fred and Toni Barthels on Superior Avenue, but quickly moved to Cooper Elementary School. They later relocated to Mapledale School, and then to Sheboygan County Christian High School. Their first building was on 17th Street. In 1985, the congregation sold that property and bought a Nazarene Church building at 4930 Green

Valley Lane on the north side of Sheboygan. In 2008, the congregation conducted a significant renovation of the building.

The history of the congregation includes many ups and downs. During the early years, the assistance of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Oostburg and Calvary Presbyterian Church in Cedar Grove was essential to their survival. Both "mother congregations" sent manpower, resources and financial help to firmly establish the new group. "Without the help of Bethel and Calvary, we would not have survived," said charter member Harlan Harmelink.



During the late 1980s, significant conflict arose and many members left the church. When the Rev. Lawrence Eyres arrived in 1989, the congregation was on life support. Rev. Eyres, then in his late 70s, faithfully ministered to resuscitate the church. When he and his wife retired, the Rev. Ivan DeMaster took over the rebuilding effort. DeMaster's faithful and steady presence helped

the church stabilize and grow. Upon his retirement, the congregation was again solid and poised for the next chapter of her life.



For the theme of their celebration, they have chosen Psalm 117. Rev. Brian De Jong explains the significance of that choice as follows: “Psalm 117 is a celebration of God’s great faithfulness and His lovingkindness to His people. It calls all nations to praise the Lord for His everlasting truth. As we look back on the past 50 years, we see God’s hand upholding our church. His lovingkindness to our congregation has been great, and we are worshipping Him for that grace and favor.”

The congregation will hold a banquet the night of April 28 featuring the Rev. John Hilbelink as the keynote speaker. He will speak on “Growing Up in Christ” from Ephesians 4:11-16. A special video presentation on the history of the church will be debuted, along with special music by the ladies’ choir.



The celebration continues on April 30 with the Rev. Jonathan Falk preaching in the morning service at 9 a.m. and the Rev. John Shaw preaching during the evening service at 5 p.m. A fellowship lunch will be held at 11:30 a.m. after the Sunday School hour.

Videos from the weekend will be posted on the church website at <https://www.graceopcsheboygan.com/50th-anniversary-celebration> following the celebration.