

# GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan Vol.7 num.7, SEPTEMBER, 2015

## INTRODUCING AN OLD FRIEND...

If you weren't at worship August 23—or if you've recently become part of the Grace Church family—you need to “meet” its patriarch, Andrew Cross, whose 105th birthday we celebrated last month.

Where to begin a “short” piece on Andrew and his influence over the years? For starters, I spoke with retired pastor, Roger Van Harn, whose ministry at Grace began in 1976, when Andrew was a young 66. Tell me about Andrew in a sentence or two, I asked. Roger begged for a book instead,

yet was able to summarize Andrew this way: Andrew Cross is a man in whom God's grace in Christ is transparent in his attitudes and actions. (Makes you want to get to know Andrew, doesn't it?)

Andrew's influence at Grace began over sixty years ago (1954) when he and his wife Viola made profession of faith and brought five of their (eventually) ten children to the baptismal font at what was then called Buckley Chapel. Eight years later, the chapel officially became an organized CRC congregation—and Andrew was installed as a member of its first council, along with William Burress, Henry Washington, and Luther Ward. And that was just the beginning—in subsequent decades, Andrew's quiet wisdom and steady faith would bless the Grace Church family in many ways. When asked by CRC Communications reporter Chris Meehan on the occasion of Andrew's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday why a cotton picker from Arkansas ended up joining a CRC congregation, Andrew replied, “It was the only church I knew about when we came to Grand Rapids. I learned in the church about my creator and to love God and to read the Bible.”

Here's another bit of history, as told by Pastor Van Harn, which highlights Andrew's wise and loving heart. When Buckley Chapel became Grace Church, its membership was largely (90%) black. During the sixties, as the ministry of ML King heightened racial consciousness, the membership at Grace shifted toward a white majority. The question before its pastor and council became a challenging one: Should the congregation continue to encourage an influx of white members? As Council agonized, Andrew Cross asked to speak. “Pastor,” he said, “if there is no room in this church for them, there is no room for me either.” According to Rev. Van Harn, the Council fell silent, and, since there was no further business, the meeting closed with prayer.



Luther Ward, Pastor Jack and Andrew Cross

Andrew and Viola were a team that gave and gave. In addition to parenting ten children, their hearts of hospitality also extended to others in the church and the surrounding community who needed them. Viola, who died in 2007, mentored many young mothers and maintained a lengthy prayer list, including many moms she encountered in her active ministry as part of the church's clothing bank. Their home was always a sanctuary for those who needed a temporary place of peace.

Andrew retired in 1965 from the C&O railroad—but “retirement” was not a word that's ever defined him. He simply didn't like it! After that he worked a number of part time jobs, and from 1975 until 1996 he was employed as a custodian for S. Abraham and Sons. During those years, according to Pastor Van Harn, Andrew was known as a model employee who was always praising the Lord.

Praising the Lord DID define Andrew. To this day, his daughter Carolyn, who cares for him, says her father awakens to each new day praising God for waking him up and giving him another day of life.

And that's not just on the good days! On May 31, 1986, after a tragic fire destroyed the Cross home at 433 Thomas SE. When Pastor Van Harn visited the smoking ruins he found Andrew sitting on the steps in front of the remains of their family home. “He welcomed me with the familiar ‘Praise the Lord, Pastor.’ He rehearsed how the members of the family were spared from injury and death. The fire was destructive, he said, but the Lord was good and worthy to be praised.”

The praise goes on. . . Dave Vander Hart, long time friend and regular visitor with Andrew told me that Carolyn, Andrew's daughter, says his favorite word these days is “Hallelujah!” And one of his favorite pastimes is reading (and rereading) the cards he's received in response to Pastor Jack's invitation to send birthday greetings. It was indeed a celebration for those who were at church for the party—watching Andrew make his way with his walker toward the front of the church, listening to him address the group that had gathered to honor him—amazing. Our hearts joined with Andrew's in a doxology of praise: “The Lord woke us up this morning, and so we praise him! Hallelujah!”

Pat Nederveld



## ΣGUM and SHRUBS

Twenty-five Calvin students did not know what would face them when they came to Grace Church on a recent very hot Thursday afternoon to do a service project. It did not take long to find out.

After being welcomed to our church and the neighborhood by Karl Westerhof, the work began.

Dave Vander Hart, David Turnbull and Ed Smith worked with many of the students outside of the building. Large and small shrubs were trimmed and loaded onto the back of trucks. Weeds were pulled and mum plants were planted. No one will forget how hard and sweaty the work was!

Those students working inside the building were helped by Kim Eggebeen and Mary Van Harn. Several students were given the job of scraping gum (Yuk!!) off from the bottoms of sanctuary chairs and washing the chairs. One freshman girl spent her time cleaning the refrigerators so they looked like new. Others cleaned the cupboards and scrubbed hallway walls. Melanie Karr found students willing to help her with gluing some old Psalter Hymnals.

An unbelievable amount of work was accomplished! Grace Church can be very thankful to these Calvin students (and to Dave, David, Ed, Kim and Melanie)!! *Mary Van Harn, Reporter*



## Dumpster Day in Southgate

Three big dumpsters were filled by neighbors who brought furniture, trash, carpets, and all manner of treasures on September 12, for the annual dumpster day. A half dozen volunteers from Grace helped check addresses, guide cars, unload trash, fill the dumpsters, and, of course, kept the coffee pot hot and full. Southgate Block Club, in cooperation with Seeds of Promise, sponsored the day, and it was satisfying to see lots of neighbors coming through to take part in the annual fall event. *Karl Westerhof*

**Seeds of Promise staff from left: Pat Jimmerson King, Jessica Solis, Amy Hasson, and Grace's own David Turnbull.**