

# GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church,

## COUNCIL UPDATE

**Michael Bruinooge** has agreed to serve as a volunteer member of the Grace Church staff to help us improve our ministries. Mike will be working with Church staff and committee leaders to help improve our decision making process, our decision implementing process and our communication process about the decisions that are made and the results of those decisions on our ministries. Mike will volunteer in this capacity for 20 hours a month. If you have suggestions or ideas for Mike as he assumes this role, please send him an email or note.



**Al Moss** has accepted the ten-hour position as Minister of Outreach at Grace Church. Al also serves as Campus Minister for Grand Rapids Community College students. Al will lead our efforts to do evangelism in our community in collaboration with the Grace Community House as well as our other many outreach ministries. Please welcome Al and family to Grace Church. If you are involved in an outreach activity, please invite Al to learn more about the many current outreach activities going on around Grace Church. If you are interested in working in an Outreach ministry, please contact Al.



**Grace Community House Task Force** recommendations are being implemented. We hope to begin the new program and add new residents to the house during the summer of 2016.

- Steering Committee being formed.
- Zoning modification being pursued.
- Recruiting for six college students attending a downtown college and interested in urban ministry.
- Recruiting a mentor to work ten hours a week with Grace Community House residents and our neighborhood community.

**Faith Formation** remains an important area for our church. We are excited about all of the groups being formed for adults. As we see all those children gather for the Children's prayer during our worship service, we know that we need to make new plans for faith formation for all of our children.

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH AT GRACE



### **Wanita Meloncen (1925 – 1986)**

Wanita was born in 1925 in Chicago and was the tenth of thirteen children born to their family. She was nurtured in the Christian faith at home and in a Methodist church. She moved to Grand Rapids in 1942 and lived with her sister and brother-in-law, Louise and Henry Washington. With

the Washingtons and her brother, Jesse Rush, she began attending Buckley Chapel. She joined them as a member of Grace Church by professing her faith in 1964.

Wanita is remembered as a community activist. She served as president of the Southeast Community Association for many years, as board member of the United Methodist Community House, as a member of the Housing Rehabilitation Board, the Model Cities program, the Job Corp, and was a charter member of the Council of Neighborhood Associations.

Her health failed in her latest years. She has a leg amputated in 1976 and adjusted to life with a prosthesis. She told her pastor time as again, "I do not let my pride stand in the way of my needs." She wrote poetry, dreamed of writing children's stories, enjoyed charcoal sketching, and loved a variety of popular and religious music. She remained a faithful and loving member of Grace until her death in 1986.

*Rev. Roger Van Harn*

### **Mack Brandon (1927 -- 2000)**

It is not possible to review the history of Grace Church without remembering Mack Brandon and his family on every other page. Mack became the janitor of Buckley Chapel in 1952 and retired as janitor of Grace Church in 1998. In those 46 years, many changes took place and with Matilda and their sons, Joseph and Matthew, they kept up with the changes.



Mack's role as "janitor" went far beyond what any job description could say. He worked with and for everyone who entered the church doors. He always watched for people who needed help. He extended hospitality to the neighbors who visited for whatever purpose. He cooperated with staff members Ellen Rottman and Lillian Grissen. When someone came to see the pastor "right away" and the pastor was not there, Mack sometimes was the "assistant pastor" and spent time caring for and with them. And yes, he also vacuumed the carpet and cleaned the rest rooms.

But the story that that tells the most and best about Mack took place in 1968. Those were riot days in the city, gangs walked the streets, and houses burned in the church neighborhood. One day, two police cruisers crashed on the corner of Sheldon and Logan while patrolling the area. Two officers were hospitalized. At an emergency Council meeting, Mack asked for permission to represent the church in visiting the officers to thank them for helping the church and community, Mack and Ted Rottman visited the next day. Mack thanked the white officers, prayed with and for them, and helped Grace Church live up to its name.

*Rev. Roger Van Harn*

### **Helen Brent (1946-2103)**

Helen died far too early. She was just 67 years old when she died of a lung infection. She was married to Bob Brent. Before she was married, she was Helen Burress. The Burress family has been part of Grace Church from the beginning. Her parents were William and Anita Burress. Edith McCreary is her sister. She was a nurse and lived a full life of service to God and our church. She loved Grace Church and Grace Church loved her.

She was so important to this church. She loved Grace and was a strong promoter for our celebration of black history month, saying to pastor Jack, "Tell them that we celebrate black history, because it is the history of this church." She served here in so many ways over the years. She served



as a deacon and as an elder. She was always ready to serve food. She served our Classis as a prayer coordinator. She was truly a tireless servant. In preaching her funeral, pastor Jack spoke of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. Mary is seen as sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha is seen as like Martha Stewart, busy preparing meals and cleaning up. One of sisters, Martha

is so active in doing the work of the Lord and the other sister Mary is more deeply spiritual. Helen was both Mary and Martha in the life of Grace Church. We lost a tireless servant, involved in all kinds of ministry at Grace. We lost our Martha. We also lost our Mary. Helen was a deeply spiritual woman. She loved the Lord. She was a devoted prayer warrior. She was a woman of prayer. She loved to pray. She knew a reality of God that is

rarely seen in life. She witnessed to us of the grace and reality of God.

*Rev. Jack Kooreman*

### **Andrew Cross (1910-2015)**

Andrew Cross was 40 years old when he became a member of Buckley Chapel. He and his wife, Viola, set records of faithfulness which are not likely to ever be broken. Viola was a member of the Priscilla Circle for study, fellowship and service for 45 years. Andrew served as a founding deacon and for uncounted terms as deacon and elder for 45 years until his health failed. Andrew and Viola moved to Grand Rapids in 1943 with their first five children, Andrew Jr., Annette, Irma Jean, Milton and Bernice. The other five children were born when they lived within four blocks of Grace Church: Velma, Carolyn, Florence, Joyce and Francine. Their family was precious to them and their values were rooted in Christ. Weekly worship and daily prayer sustained their faith, hope and love.



Andrew was known as a worker. Beginning at age 9 he remembered learning how to pick cotton on the farm. He worked as a laborer at the C&O Railroad yard in Grand Rapids. When he "retired" from that job in 1975 he continued to work at many other jobs and was honored with a visit to the White House for his model employment in 1996.

Those who knew Andrew even casually knew him for his praising the Lord no matter what the circumstances of his life. His favorite hymn was: "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bid'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come." He will always be remembered at Grace for his humility, love and acceptance of everyone that the Lord brought into this church. It was Andrew who at an elders meeting during a discussion of welcoming new white families into the community of Grace said, "If there is not room for them, there is not room for me." His influence will be felt here for as long as this church exists. *Rev. Roger Van Harn & Rev. Jack Kooreman*

*Jack Kooreman*



*The First Grace Church Council: Henry Washington, Andrew Cross, Luther Ward, Rev Toonstra, and William Burress.*