

Grace Church



Supplement for June 2017 Grace Notes

150 Years of Grace

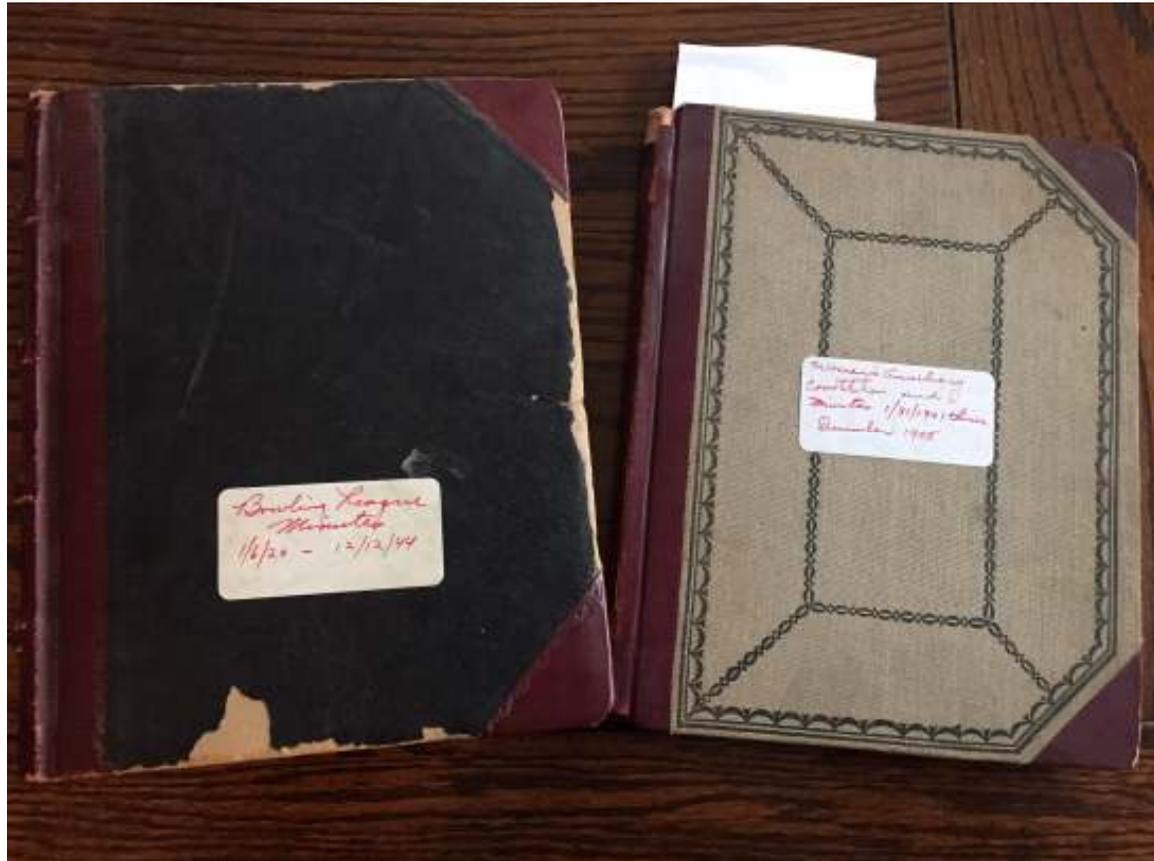
one of a series of talks celebrating the history of Grace Church
Millbrook

How about we open with a “Collect for the Church” from *The Book of Common Prayer*, the Episcopal Church version of the Church of England treasure-chest of prayer, scripture, liturgy and theology, first written in 1539.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were being cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Having prayed for the capital C Church, let’s talk about a particular church, a parish, this one. Grace Millbrook. It is far from the oldest church in this diocese, or even this county. That honor goes to Christ Church Poughkeepsie. We aren’t even the oldest Episcopal church in town. St Peter’s Lithgow just celebrated their 200th anniversary. Still 150 years is something to note. And I guess marking the anniversary of Grace Church from June 13, 1867—when the first Grace Church was consecrated, makes at least as much sense as marking the anniversary from the consecration of our current church building in 1901—and here is the program for that celebration back in 2001. And I think much more sense that marking it from the date of incorporation as a parish, which happened in 1879—and here’s the program for that Centennial Anniversary. But the true founding of Grace Church began in the decade or so before the first sanctuary was built, when members met in homes and community halls in Hart’s Village with the visiting priest from St Peter’s. We don’t have a date to celebrate. But it tells us something about Grace.

I am all in favor of laying cornerstones and receiving bishops’ blessings. We will do some of that on June 11. But the deep history of a parish is written elsewhere than in anniversaries and speeches. It is written in the actions and patterns of common life of the regular members.



Take these two pieces here. Two modest notebooks, both filled with handwritten minutes from meeting of organizations once vibrant and rooted here—both now long gone.

One contains the Women's Auxiliary Constitution and Minutes January 31, 1901 through December 1905. The other is The Men's Bowling League Minutes 1/6/20 to 12/12/44. How well people wrote in longhand, cursively, back then.

What a great thing to have a pocket constitution and bylaws for a bowling league. With dues of \$2 per year and an entry fee of \$1. But you also had to be recommended for membership. As it seems everyone in town was—for the bowling alley in the basement of the Parish Hall was expressly built so

that people of the village would have a place to go for wholesome fun and building friendships.

The women were a bit more serious minded, at least insofar as the minutes reflect the constitution's "object": "The object of this branch of the Women's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions shall be to aid and supplement the Board of Missions by cultivating among its members the habits of 1. daily prayer for missions; 2. the reading and study of missions; 3. systematic and conscientious giving for missions."

The Bowling League is gone. There is a newly remodeled Grace Preschool in the basement of the Parish Hall where the bowling lanes were. The Women's Auxiliary long ago changed its name to Episcopal Church Women—still active in many parishes, though not in ours. At least not by that name. We have a wonderfully vibrant Women of Grace group that meets monthly for fellowship, prayer and mutual support.

Mutatis mutandis—an old Latin phrase meaning "with the necessary changes having been made." Things change, sometimes for good, sometimes as a loss. Some changes we can control, most we must adapt to, especially those in the larger culture. We have no lack of change and the challenges that come with change in our day. Church is no exception. But how do we discern the adaptations and new directions that should or should not be made?

It is common in discussions of church life to hear that a particular parish has a certain "DNA," an ingrained pattern of life together and worship style that is set in place on founding and persists even when pesky clergy try to change it. Rectors and other clergy come and go; the abiding members pass on their deep-rooted traditions.

This is not to say that the clergy who are called to lead a congregation don't make a difference. They do, for good or ill. Each puts his or her mark on the place as well as a name in the book and picture on the wall. Not to mention music directors (we have had 19) and parish secretaries (we are on number 2; Maria Galli is pretty much the whole history of that role here).

It is also true that as long time members pass the baton of presence and leadership, the new members, be they in the Vestry, altar guild, choir or simply active member, leave their distinctive marks.

Indeed, a church of this size may well turn out to be a place where a dedicated “lay” member can really make an impact. Churches, and other volunteer-driven organizations depend on some members diving in and making this organization—this church—“their” church. And that sense of ownership—partly fueled by pledging and other forms of financial support but ultimately grounded in giving of time and thought and passionate commitment—is what is in the DNA of this wonderful parish, Grace Episcopal Church, Millbrook New York. Grace Millbrook for short.

I know, because I was a lay member here twenty some years ago and I was guided and fed not only by the wonderful clergy team of Ken Swanson and Pam Mott but by such lay members as Chris Hunter, Jane Auchincloss, David and Laurie Latvis, Virginia Neville, Bill Hammond, Francis Montgomery. and of course Doug and Connie Kinsey. I was part of the men’s group and participated in a small group called Disciples of Christ in Community that Pam Mott facilitated.

I never had a chance to do much beside learn at their feet, for pretty soon, inspired by their witness and work, I went off to seminary—and God bless Mary who was willing to take the leap of faith into a new line of work and way of life with me. Eli, being 4 or 5 didn’t have much choice.

Coming back after all these years—and having served in two other churches and visited many more—I am struck again by the particular strength of the members here, their sense of ownership, commitment and love for this place and for the Lord.

And a new and deep sense of wanting to give to the local and regional community has grown.

The Women’s Auxiliary may now be the women’s group. The men’s bowling league is gone—a preschool is in its place. Grace Players in no longer—but a children’s theater is in the works. an AA meeting meets every Saturday—and a community is helped. A roundtable meeting led by Evelyn and GLO

meets upstairs. A group of high school students from area high schools, many of whom speak English as a second or even third language meets every Friday.

Meanwhile, through thick and thin, the altar guild and choir keep on setting and singing. And I am now the 25th Rector of Grace Millbrook. The divine liturgy and Holy Communion is said and served every week. Prayers continue to be made, and God will always be with us and for us. And that is our abiding faith.

This is not the time or occasion to lay out grandiose plans for the future. But the Vestry and I are certainly involved in strategic planning. We have hopes to plant new gardens, enhancing the Memorial Garden in front of the church and planting an educational garden in front of the Rectory. We have other property plans as well. But it is the people who will determine the future of Grace, the regular members who come, or not, and vote with their feet and commitments. We have nothing to sell, only to give away: the good news of God in Christ, the warmth of a welcoming diverse community of faithful people, the beauty of old stones and polished wood, the promise of life abundant and unending. These things have been offered here for 150 years—and many have accepted and given in their turn. It is our turn now, as we continue the tradition and try to pass it on to our children and others who walk through the old red door. Into Grace.

May God continue to bless this place and these people, in Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins, Rector
Grace Church, Millbrook, NY

