

## A HISTORY OF GRACE CHURCH LANCASTER 2019

Early in 1960 some families from the Harrisburg Grace Brethren Church and the Lancaster area met for a Sunday afternoon Bible Study at the Lancaster Poultry Center with Pastor Alva Conner. By that November the group had called Bill Tweeddale to be their first full-time pastor. His passion was to win the world for Christ through sharing the good news that Jesus saves. He also believed and taught strongly in the authority of the Bible as God's Word and as the truth we need for all of life today. He led the church to accept that we have all been born to reproduce – both as individuals and as churches. The church launched their first public worship services in April 1961 and soon added its weekly radio ministry. By the end of that year they were already averaging over 100 in attendance.



Because of this rapid growth, the congregation purchased property on Rohrerstown Road just south of Route 30 and broke ground in the fall of 1963. The dedication service for their original construction along with the north wing was held on August 30, 1964. And then on January 1, 1965, they chose to go self-supporting from the North Atlantic District Missions and Brethren Home Missions. Because of continued growth with attendances reaching the 250's, they added the south wing in 1966 for additional Sunday School space, offices, and foyer.

Because of Pastor Tweeddale's commitment that churches as well as individuals were "born to reproduce," he led the congregation into an aggressive policy of church planting throughout the region. He believed that the New Testament concept of church growth was to divide to multiply. So interested groups from a specific area were encouraged to leave the mother church and form the nucleus of a new church.

These following Grace Brethren Churches were formed through sending families from Grace Lancaster:

1. The Manheim GBC began in 1962 with a group of about 23
2. The Elizabethtown GBC began in 1965 with a group of about 55
3. The New Holland GBC began in 1966 with a group of about 71
4. The Wrightsville (Susquehanna) GBC began in 1969 with a group of about 32
5. The Lititz GBC began in 1971 with a group of about 100
6. The Southern Lancaster (Willow Valley) GBC began in 1976 with a group of about 45
7. The Ephrata GBC began in 1980 with a group of about 34 from Lancaster, Lititz and New Holland

And these two churches were assisted through consultation with the Grace Lancaster leadership:

8. The Penn Valley/Telford GBC began in 1965
9. The Myerstown GBC began in 1967

As a reflection of the impact of this approach, the Grace Brethren in Lancaster County grew from the initial group of 17 at the Poultry Center in 1960 to between 600-700 on Easter 1967 (according to an article written in the Spring of 1967). In the year of 2017, there were an average of 1308 attending worship at Grace Lancaster and the seven churches it planted through sending families, with an additional 524 attending the two churches it helped plant through consultation – for a total of 1832. Grace Lancaster also had the privilege of being the catalyst that led to the development of the Camp Conquest ministry on the Sprecher farm.

During its almost sixty years of ministry, Grace Lancaster has been pastored by eight pastors: Bill and Carol Tweeddale in 1960-1969, Art and Gladys Malles in 1969-1973, Vernon and Gwen Harris in 1973-1976, Wes and Ginny Haller in 1976-1982, Bill and Karen Davis in 1983-1991, Jonathan and Joan Tompkins in 1992-2003, Galen and Elsie (Diffenderfer) Wiley in 2004-2015, and now Scott and Rebekah Becker from November 2015

until the present. Glen Weaver is currently serving as associate pastor of visitation (since 1978), Galen Wiley is serving as admin pastor, and Josh Brussell is serving as Family Ministry Intern.

Another interesting story of God's grace is how two of the churches Grace Lancaster helped start came to help them as they asked the Lord to help them "reignite" for reaching their 21<sup>st</sup> century world. In 2004 the Grace Church at Willow Valley came alongside Grace Lancaster for a five-year partnership. They helped them move to elder leadership, to blended/contemporary worship, to outreach ministries to younger families, to having a preschool, to a deeper love for the Lord and His work in our world today, and to a ministry of grace. And then in the Spring of 2014, the Grace Church Lititz came alongside Grace Lancaster to help them find a younger pastor who could help them be a vibrant congregation reaching a younger generation and impacting their world for decades to come. Grace Lititz led them to become a campus ministry and to call Scott Becker to come with his wife and four children to lead them as their pastor. Because of strong growth and restored stability, it was decided in the fall of 2018 that Grace Church Lancaster would become fully autonomous again in 2019 once all the legal paperwork would be approved. These two "daughter" churches have demonstrated great grace as they have both helped their "mother" church regain the spiritual health and vitality needed for continued impact for generations to come.

Another huge blessing the Lord has given to Grace Lancaster has been a core group of men and women who have remained faithful to the Lord and His church here at Grace Lancaster, some for forty or fifty years. Even though they have faced many challenges and changes over the years, they have remained strong and steady in their faith in the Lord and their willingness to sacrifice greatly to continue God's work here. It has been exciting to see the Lord bind together these godly, mature adults, with all the new people that the Lord brought here from Grace Church at Willow Valley, from Grace Church Lititz, and then from all the other places where the Lord has graciously brought people together here to be the present Grace Lancaster Family.

The greatest blessing of all has been God pouring out His amazing grace in the lives of His people here at Grace Lancaster. Over the years God has taken very imperfect people and used them to change many lives, families, and ministries here and around the world. This is the greatest miracle of all – the miracle of God's grace in saving people and giving them this unbelievable privilege of sharing Him with a lost and confused world around them. Jesus Christ is the center of all the people of Grace Lancaster are or ever will be.

And now just as the church has made such an impact throughout Lancaster County for these past almost sixty years, they are ready to continue to make a major impact in their community and their world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond – or until Jesus comes. They are committed afresh to the challenge of sharing the greatest news in all the world that Jesus saves and changes lives for this lifetime and an eternity, leading them to real love and real life by faith in Jesus. They are praying that God will truly do "immeasurably more than all they can ask or imagine according to His power of Jesus living and working within them" (Ephesians 3:20-21).