

History of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

From There to Here (1964 - 2010)

What follows is a recounting of events which have served to shape and mold our congregation into what it is today; a caring/sharing family of God, growing in both faith and numbers, guided by the Holy Spirit, and oneness in its belief that what we are doing is right and what God would have us do.

It all began in late 1964. The Board of American Missions of the LCA established the “East Hampton Mission” with the vision to MINISTER in an EMERGING, HIGHLY MOBILE, MILITARY COMMUNITY. By October 3, 1965, a group of people met for the first time together in worship at the Century Bowling Lanes. This group, “The East Hampton Mission,” gave birth to Gloria Dei Lutheran Church. Two months later, in December 1965, they put their trust in God and held their Service of Organization at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church.

In 1966, The Reverend Edward Luther Counts was called to be our first Pastor. A year later, in 1967, the architectural firm of McLane, Chewning & Hoggard was commissioned to design Unit I, our first nave. In May, 1968, 2 1/2 years after our service of dedication, ground was broken for construction of Gloria Dei’s Unit I (currently the Fellowship Hall and music office, kitchen and front day-care rooms). Eight long, arduous, and sometimes panicky months later, on January 12, 1969, the first unit was dedicated. By year-end 1969, Pastor Stowe was called to lead this fledgling congregation forward

in its mission to GROW in WORSHIP, WITNESS and COMMITMENT...and to do those things that God has called us as individual priests to do.

The next three years were highlighted by the purchase of our first Processional Cross, the design and rendering of the Gloria Dei banner and the first annual Gloria Dei-sponsored Red Cross Bloodmobile. In September 1973...after nearly two years of planning and from \$800 of seed money that Pastor Stowe and Sally personally borrowed from the Virginia National Bank, Gloria Dei Lutheran School opened its doors to the community...this pilgrimage began with a staff of four, an enrollment of 19, three classrooms, and 1900 square feet. In less than 10 years, it would grow to become one of the five largest parochial schools within the LCA.

The years from 1974-1979 were punctuated by one financial crisis after another (partly because our LCA Program Support ended in 1975)...and yet we persevered. In the midst of these struggles, the CHALLENGE TO GROWTH (1974) and MANDATE FOR MISSION (1977) building funds kept us focused toward our vision. Ground-breaking services were conducted for the construction of Unit II in January, 1975, and by October 5, 1975, we dedicated our expansion of six additional classrooms and church offices. By 1977, we reached a milestone which later became an integral part of our ultimate commitment to build a new nave; our congregational baptized membership peaked and plateaued at 450 (six years later we were to have grown in size to only 459). As we entered 1978, we initiated construction of Unit IIIA and six more classrooms. We closed 1978 strengthened by the following inspired words of our leadership:

From the Director of Christian Education - "CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS A COMPLETE LIFESTYLE, AS OPPOSED TO A TEMPORARY UNDERTAKING LIKE A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE...ONE NEVER GRADUATES FROM CHRISTIAN EDUCATION."

From the Director of Evangelism - "WE KNOW THAT JUST INVITING PEOPLE TO WORSHIP IS NOT ENOUGH...PEOPLE MUST EXPERIENCE FULLY HOW WE AS CHRIST'S HANDS AND HEARTS EVANGELIZE THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, FELLOWSHIP AND PERSONAL WITNESS AS WELL."

From our Pastor - "AS I BEGIN MY 10th YEAR AS YOUR PASTOR, I AM FILLED WITH A SENSE OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT, PEACE, AND RENEWED COMMITMENT TO THE MISSION GOD HAS CALLED US TO, IN THIS TIME AND IN THIS PLACE. BY THE GRACE OF GOD, WE ARE BECOMING."

And one final interesting note from this period of our history, the Site Development Committee planted six hardwood willow oak trees "taking into considering the construction of our new church some time in the near future."

The years which closed out one decade and led us into another were characterized by reorganization and focused direction. In June 1979, 45 members of Gloria Dei met for two days to hear The Rev. Don Abdon (Parish Leadership Seminars, Inc.) outline the foundation and basis for our current management structure...THE RED BOOK - 'TRAINING AND EQUIPPING SAINTS.' The objective was to

broaden the leadership of the church from a small group of council members to an elected group of approximately 60 persons...assigned well-defined tasks, and organized around the work of the Gospel.

In early 1980, we embarked on a Pastor (Headmaster)/Wife (Principal) ministry team to lead our day school. Pastor and Sally struggled with the sensitivity of this decision more than anyone; however, the "rightness" and "wisdom" of their decision is evidenced by the fact that the school continues to grow and prosper fifteen years later. By mid year, we had celebrated the "burning" of our "Mandate for Mission" mortgage on Unit I and began construction of Unit IIIB, including the final six classrooms. With this landmark achievement, we were now able to focus our thoughts on 1985, our 20th anniversary, and our new nave. In December 1981, we held our inaugural "Hanging of the Greens" event; a unique Gloria Dei tradition of potluck, fellowship, singing, and decorating which has, to this day, withstood the test of time. In April 1982, a special congregational meeting resulted in (1) a unanimous commitment to construct a new nave (with ground breaking to occur in December 1985), (2) unanimous approval for securing fund raising counseling and support from Lutheran Lay Ministry (LLM), and (3) the unveiling of our first Gloria Dei needlepoint altar kneeler.

In the fall of 1982, "Koinonia" was introduced to Gloria Dei to enrich our lives together in Christ through a "community" or "fellowship" of true believers; to hear the Gospel; receive the Holy Sacraments; and grow in the spirit and love of our faith.

1983 and 1984 were years of "Positioning" and "Growth"—positioning from the standpoint of our preparing for what we know we must do...growth from the standpoint of our personal commitment to do what God would have us do to meet our objectives. The Simeon Group was established and made responsible for "enabling us to hold up the Christ in the worship space we build,

similar to how Simeon himself took the infant Jesus and held him up in the temple and declared “My eyes have seen thy salvation.” We also established our three basic precepts of “art” and “architecture” for our new nave:

CHURCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE SIMPLE...ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE MADE OF ELEGANT MATERIAL; ITS MESSAGE SHOULD BE CLEAR AND DIRECT.

CHURCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE PROPER...IT SHOULD CONFORM TO ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS AND AVOID TASTELESSNESS AND MEDIOCRITY.

CHURCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE TRUTHFUL AS IT PROJECTS THE TRUE WORD OF GOD.

1985, our 20th anniversary year, was marked by several notable events. It was the year in which the nucleus for our “Acts in Action” program was conceived to more aggressively train people in evangelism skills and more actively respond to the ever-changing needs within our community. Secondly, we were introduced to the “Bethel Bible Series” and what it really means to be involved in Bible study. Lastly and **most importantly**, there was the cold wintry afternoon of December 15th when we broke ground for our new nave. The day was much more than a “ceremonial” one for those of us who had been a part of the Gloria Dei mission for any length of time. Officially the day began some six years before (1979); unofficially it began in the thoughts of Pastor Stowe the day he accepted his calling (1969).

One month and a day after the ground breaking, another special congregational meeting was held to present the plan to sell \$1.25 million General Mortgage Bonds. These bonds would provide the necessary funds for the construction of our church as well as pay off the existing mortgages on Units II and III. Security Church Finance was selected to orchestrate the bond issue. Meanwhile, the firm of L. Cook & Associates was well on their way with the design phase of our church.

As we prepared for our new nave, other aspects of our congregational life were also changing. The addition of a third service (with all of its associated anxieties) did, however, push our average worship attendance from the 150-170 range to over 200. Our Youth Ministry program was beginning to build momentum--“a sense of unique bonding was enriching the lives of our teenage youth.” Our Social Ministry outreach, together with our resources of time and talents, and prayer and love, helped establish Hampton’s Mallory House for underprivileged boys. The Christian Education program was buoyed by an initial enrollment of 90 “students” in the first semester of Bethel classes, and Evangelism’s theme, “Quality of Worship Life,” manifested itself into the phrase, “Come Grow With Us.”

In 1987, we were introduced to Pastor Stowe’s 12 Key Elements of Growth:

1. The need for additional Pastoral leadership;
2. Bible study through the Bethel Series;
3. An enhanced music program through the professional leadership of a cantor;
4. A Parish Management System with high levels of involvement;
5. A Shepherding Program;
6. An “Acts in Action” outreach to prospective members;
7. Day School/Child Care ministries through our school and Sally Stowe;

8. An intensified Parish Fellowship Program;
9. Worship space with seating capacity for 450;
10. Excellent Sunday nursery care facilities;
11. Good parking facilities;
12. An attractive and informative timely newsletter.

The first Key Element was given unanimous approval in another of our series of special congregational meetings in May 1987. The “call” process was initiated immediately and, by August, Pastor Briehl, his wife Pam and their two sons, had arrived. The third Key Element was completed by November when Cantor Brian Larson, his wife Barb, and their two children joined our ministry. The fall of 1987 saw a record enrollment of 415 students in our Gloria Dei School. The selection of Ritchie-Curbow Construction moved us one step closer to resolving items nine and eleven (ending nine months of struggles and frustrations trying to deal effectively with how to maximize the use of our construction funds)...and our new nave was beginning to grow out of the ground!! It was getting to be an exciting time.

1988 was the year we “finally made it!!” Emotions roller-coasted in the months which preceded our September 18 Dedication Day. We struggled financially (what else is new), but we responded well when confronted with reality. The Capital Fund Drive (“Lift High the Christ - Phase II”) in June resulted in nearly \$220,000 in pledges for a 3-year period. We struggled with our construction; nothing major, mostly a result of those typical nagging little things that disrupt a desire for perfection...and as the pieces began to come together (e.g., paved parking lot, a “real” directory, and expansion to two nursery rooms), Pastor Briehl reflected as to how our congregation was “poised” on the edge of growth and development...and eager to fulfill our role as a “faithful body” of our Loving Father.

And then came September 18, the Dedication, over 500 people in worship, our new church, new organ, and Pastor Stowe saying “The pieces of our growth plan were carefully prayed through, worked out, and put into place...we have seen the Holy Spirit work in our life together. We have seen Him put into place component after component of the essentials for growth.”

1989...Well, it was hard to find a repeat for 1988, but it was still a special year. Parish Fellowship sponsored our second annual “Pig-Pickin’”--a new tradition was beginning to take a foothold in our lives. Evangelism sponsored our first-ever “Evangelism Visitation Day.” The newsletter received a “facelift” and remains today a publication of which we are very proud. Response Stewardship Campaign in November and some “Divine Intervention” in December went a long way to ease our concerns...and, then there was December 3rd, when we honored Pastor Stowe for his 20 years of priestly service to our congregation and community. What a day!! Emotions, surprises, and a sense of “something very powerful” in our midst as nearly 200 people attended a banquet in his honor.

The 90s were ushered in with a Parish Planning Council Retreat which stressed our “Oneness in Mission” and established 15 objectives to carry us forward through the initial two years of the new decade. Highlights included: (1) a desire for more direction from the Executive Committee; (2) improved congregational awareness; (3) enhanced communication; (4) revitalized membership recruiting; (5) optimized facility utilization; (6) and an increase in the general “caring” attitudinal posture toward our congregation and the auxiliaries we serve and support.

1990 was a year of challenge and emotional peaks and valleys. We initiated the strenuous process (thanks to Pete Slusar) of updating the Gloria Dei Constitution to conform with the ELCA guidelines. We were privileged, in July, to host a regional conference of the

Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. We also hired our congregation's first full-time Sexton. By late summer, we said farewell to Pastor Briehl as he moved on to serve in a parish of his own...and in December, we celebrated our 25th year in our life as a congregation. Additionally, throughout the year we greeted over 30 new families to our congregation and introduced the series of bulletin boards which continue to grace our Fellowship Hall. Yet financial struggles reared its ugly head once again; at one time, falling over \$15,000 behind in our Operating Budget payments to the school...and most devastating of all, the news in July that Sally Stowe had cancer.

Like 1990, 1991 was an emotional roller coaster. We recovered from our Operating Budget shortfall and successfully completed the "Lift High the Christ - Phase III" Building Fund with \$306,000 of commitments. The Youth Board expanded their ministry by forming a Junior Luther League and donating a Baptismal Banner to the congregation. Again, as in 1990, over 30 families were received as members into our family and, on May 4th, we held a Family Life Fair. Public Relations coordinated the publication of our first Congregational Picture Directory and our school won regional honors in the Battle of the Books contest in Williamsburg. In December, one of our favorite fellowship events, Hanging of the Greens, was attended by more than 200 people--a new milestone. But it will be Sally Stowe's strength and spirit that we shall remember most about 1991. On July 20th, she entered the Church Triumphant, leaving behind the memories of all she had taught us. She was truly a teacher, a guide, and a builder of lives. As we look back upon this period of time, we reflect fondly upon how we truly pulled together as a congregation and became stronger as a result of Sally's spirit and witness. With Sally's passing, we welcomed Linda Robinson as our school Principal – she would prove to be a blessing to our school program and all of the children who walked the hallways for years to come.

1992 was a year of resurgence. In the spring, the PPC established a goal plan for the next 10 years. Presented at the June Annual Congregation Meeting, these goals dealt with the following objectives:

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

1. Provide WITNESS 'ONE TO ONE' Evangelism Training to all members of the congregation.
2. Participation by 50 percent of the confirmed membership in a Christian Education/Bible Study learning experience.
3. Strengthen the Bethel Bible Study Program.
4. Strengthen Acts in Action visitation program for our new members.

COMMISSIONING THE PRIESTHOOD

5. Make Evangelism a part of every congregational event/activity.
6. Institute a congregational visitation program to hospital patients and shut-ins.
7. Integrate all confirmed members into meaningful service.

SUPPORTING THE PRIESTHOOD

8. Satisfy needs for current and timely information.
9. Initiate Spiritual Enrichment Retreats for congregational groups.
10. Provide required staff leadership to the parish.
11. Provide Christian-based services in our parish setting.
12. Enhance the worship and service life of our community of faith.
13. Equalize Evangelism and financial publicity.

These goals were intended to not only enrich our existing family of God, but also open the doors to our growth, enabling us to double our congregational size to 1200 members by 2002. Our statistical benchmarks for future comparison were set at 570 baptized members (410 confirmed), average worship attendance of 285, average Sunday School participation of 125-130, and a total annual fiscal responsibility (church and school) of \$1.4 million. In the same June Annual Meeting we approved a Church Operations Budget which exceeded \$200,000 for the first time in our history.

1992 was also marked by the introduction of the David C. Cook Bible-in-Life series to our Sunday School, and new Ventures to our Confirmation class.; we said good-bye to Linda Stanzione as Pastor's Secretary and welcomed Andrea Cerone. Our hallways and classrooms were spruced up with new carpeting and we tried (albeit without much success) to introduce an "adopt-a-bed" program for our landscaping maintenance. Meanwhile, nine of us continued the process started in 1991 to call a new Assistant Pastor. In November 1992, this process was successfully completed when Pastor Timothy Spring accepted our invitation to come "serve" and "grow" with us at Gloria Dei. We ended 1992 filled with high expectations and gratefulness of God's Grace.

Pastor's message in the 1992-93 Annual Report says that "the foundation that we have built over the past 28 years around Word and Sacrament through the synergism of the priesthood we share, our staff, and our facilities, gives us what we need to move into a future with optimism. We have the potential to be a dramatic witness to the Christ as we move into that future." In January 1993, we welcomed Pastor Spring, his wife Pam and their two daughters (Hilary and Bethany) into our ministry; our staff was once again complete. The growth that we anticipated started to happen. Congregation membership reached 625, Sunday School enrollment exceeded 200 (with average participation approaching 140) and our multi-faceted choirs (vocal and ringers) involved 135 talented people.

On July 25, 1993, a special congregational meeting was held to approve a plan to purchase 3 1/2 acres of land across the street. The land was to be used to expand our school and provide recreational space (in the near term) while providing options for the long term to construct either an elderly care facility or retreat center. In November, we were blessed with a wonderful gift from the Monroe family--three octaves of Malmark handbells. 1993 was also the year we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our school which included a fabulous banquet and recognition for many of the staff, past and present, who provided an "educational ministry" and "holistic philosophy" for thousands of students throughout the years. In return, the school (parents and community of friends) honored Pastor Stowe with a \$10,000 gift to be put toward the "Rose Window."

1994 was characterized by Pastor Stowe as "A Time to Envision." His Annual Report message quotes from a passage that we have heard many times before--"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). There could be no better example of the congregation's willingness to grab a piece of this "visionary" ownership than their enthusiasm and response to our "Lift High the Christ - Phase IV" campaign renewal program. Nearly \$335,000 was pledged, but more importantly, our program of workshops and fellowship allowed many of us to get to know more about each other and the congregation that we refer to as our "Family of God." As our membership soared past 660, aspects of our 10-year plan began to fall into place. The format of the Witness "One to One" program was drafted (and the initial retreat was scheduled for early 1995). A Diaconate group of visitors and caregivers was established. Furthermore, Sunday morning adult education opportunities were expanded to five classes and on several occasions we were enlightened with a social or health-related seminar. Wednesday night

Adult Bible Study (originally set aside for the Bethel Bible Series) was enhanced with a new course entitled Cross Signs...and, finally, we welcomed Bob Steele as our new Sexton. His professionalism and positive attitude added significantly to the attractiveness of our church and grounds.

1995 brought us our 30th Year celebration. It was a year punctuated by a series of retreats and workshops to more clearly articulate our mission and vision as well as put more “flesh” on the 10-year goals established in 1992. In February 1995, Pastor’s New Member Class included 27 new families (a new record!!). This year saw the introduction of “A Mighty Fortress,” a Sunday morning radio ministry fostered by Gloria Dei’s own Dick Manley—and financially sponsored by the area’s Lutheran churches. In late Spring, preparations were begun for the expansion of our school on the property purchased across the street in 1993. By the Annual Congregation Meeting in June, our congregation membership had crossed the 700-member threshold. Pastor Spring’s message to us in the Annual Report included a quote from Eberhard Arnold, “when a person makes a circle with a compass, the larger the circle, the more firmly the compass needs to be placed in the center. The more we reach out in ministry, the deeper our relationship with Christ and one another needs to be.” The programs we have in place at Gloria Dei have enabled us to expand the area of our “circle;” the commitments of our youth and adults have become a witness to others in such a way that can be interpreted only as Christ-centered. Before 1995 ended we had moved 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders into our new facilities on Harris Creek Road, rewarded Pastor Spring with a renewed “call” as an Associate Pastor (promotion from Assistant), and converted our Parish Council leadership from a “Board/Committee” management structure to a Ministry/Small Group management structure.

As 1996 unfolded, our journey brought us to the realization that “our success” renewed the challenge we have as Christians to respond to our needs for ministry and service. The music program, under Brian Larson’s leadership, had grown to a level (>150 participants) that had become increasingly more difficult for him to manage/administer. But as has happened in the past, our congregation responded with numerous individuals stepping forward and taking leadership roles to assist Brian in the management of the music program.

Pastor Spring’s Annual Report message quoted a Martin Luther maxim, “One Christian, no Christian.” Pastor Spring went on to say “to be a Christian is by definition to not only have a relationship with the God of Jesus Christ but also to be a part of His body, the Church.” From this maxim and Pastor Spring’s recent training evolved the beginning of our small group “discipleship” ministries.

In 1997, Pastor Stowe, following our record breaking response to the 10th Building Fund Renewal (*Seeing Through Christ’s Vision*—160 commitments for nearly \$540,000), commented in his Annual Report message that we (Gloria Dei) have come to another “moment of destiny.” (It is interesting to note that the term “destiny” would reappear as an integral part of our 11th Building Fund renewal three years later.) We were challenged as a congregation to build upon the established Gloria Dei ministry foundation by “determining areas of ministry that Christ would have us enhance and develop.” The seeds were planted for (a) what ultimately would become an Adult/Elder Care Facility (Sunrise House) and (b) the initial thought process/identification of program and facility requirements leading us toward the next phase of facility enhancements. 1997 also saw formal introduction of small group discipleship ministries (12 such groups the first year) and the retirement of Alex and Margo Hooks following 17 faithful years of service as our Kindergarten Sunday School teachers.

1998 brought our 25th year celebration for the school. What began with 19 students and an \$800 loan from Pastor Stowe and his wife back in 1973 had grown to 585 students (over 700, including child day care). As part of the celebration, we completed the development of the Harris Creek “campus” thereby enabling 1st through 5th graders to be across the street, freeing up much-needed conference areas. Parish Council met with representatives from various city agencies (Planning, Chamber of Commerce, and Youth) to help better understand the needs of the community (as they pertained to our efforts to expand/enhance our ministries). As Pastor Spring stated in his Annual Report message, “if a person does not know to what port he or she is steering, no wind is favorable (Seneca).” 1998 also saw (a) the development of Sunrise House coming closer to reality, (b) our baptized membership exceeding 800, and (c) installing a new organ console (a gift from the Monroes).

As the century came to a close in 1999, Pastor Stowe introduced us to the word “Charismata.” Charismata (or grace gifts) is “the New Testament Greek word for the Holy Spirit equipping us for the work of ministry.” Pastor Stowe goes on to say, “I believe that we are at a point of beginning to expand our church home to a parish village.” For nearly 35 years, we have been developing and enhancing our programs and facilities in support of the church, school, child care, and Christian education. 1999 saw the introduction of our long-awaited adult/elder care facility—Sunrise House.

1999 was also a year of change. We said goodbye to Brian Larson, rejoicing for the 12 wonderful years he gave us as the Cantor and anguishing over how we were ever going to replace him. For Pastor Stowe and Joy Hough, it was a year of culminating their relationship into marriage. For John Liesman, it was “retirement” from what has seemed like 100 years of faithful leadership service. For our congregation, it was recognition of the fact that we desperately needed a third Pastor to help usher us into the next century—as such

a “call committee” was established under the leadership of Rita Foringer. 1999 saw participation in the small group discipleship ministries exceeding 100 members. 1999 was also a year of “record highs” from the school—over 1800 hours of community service, over \$16,000 collected for the American Heart Association (Jump Rope for Heart program), and an enrollment of 625 students.

As year 2000 unfolded, we were again introducing new territories and new faces. For the first time, our youth participated in the ELCA’s National Convention in St. Louis. In August, Dr. Martin Sunderland was installed as our Director of Parish Music.

Year 2000 also saw our 11th Building Fund renewal campaign take on as its theme “*Destiny is a Choice*” (remember that word *destiny* from 1997)—we are reminded that although we are chosen by God, it is up to us to decide (a) to what level we elevate our commitments and (b) where we go from here. Several groups are activated (and reactivated) with the expressed purpose of assimilating all of the information gathered these last three years into a definitized proposal for our next stages of facility expansion—the atrium and the multi-purpose facility.

In a precursor for what was to be, Pastor Spring experienced the life of campus ministry at Wittenberg University in Germany. The 2-week English Language Ministry gave rebirth to a latent dream that was to be fulfilled in the next two years.

2001 was filled with numerous highlights but perhaps the most significant was the May 5th burning of the mortgage (i.e., the ‘Bond’ Fire). In just 15 short years, through the Grace of God and the stewardship commitment of many faithful, we had paid for the magnificent structure that sits at the corner of Bromley and Fox Hill. Pastor Spring, in his annual report message, said “ashes of that fire provided the starting point for continuing the journey of faith God

began with the people of Gloria Dei over 35 years ago.” The night was filled with recollections, appreciations (e.g., for Grob’s Sir Speedy and our Charter Members), singing, “folksie/country social” festivities and wonderful fellowship. Never satisfied to be debt-free, the congregation authorized \$200,000 on June 11th, for the refurbishment, upgrading, and installation of the roof, gutters and lighting system for the nave.

2001 also saw the hiring of Dee Lowther as a part-time Director of Christian Education (a key ingredient to our goal plan that was to further manifest itself in 2003), an adjustment of our early worship time from 8:30 to 8:15 (to allow for more Sunday School opportunities), and Gloria Dei’s first “mission trip” where eight youths and adults traveled to Trinity Lutheran Church (Brooklyn, NY) to experience life in partnership with another congregation, in a different place.

The year ended in yet another Gloria Dei (and for that matter ELCA) historical event - the “call” for our third Pastor, Ed Freeborn. On December 2, 2001, Pastor Freeborn, a Presbyterian Pastor in Gloversville, NY, was extended an invitation to join our Lutheran congregation in an ecumenical relationship that would enable us all to continue to broaden our depth of understanding that we are all one in God’s Spirit and Grace.

In February 2002, Pastor Freeborn (with wife Debbie) fulfilled his “call” to Hampton Virginia and brought with him a wealth of experience, knowledge and pastoral energy. Two months later, April 21, we took another major step forward in our continuing plan to maximize our facilities/program capabilities by extending a contract to the firm of Hayes, Seay, Mattern and Mattern (HSMM) to provide the architectural services for the design of our Atrium/Connector Space. As we ended the congregation meeting that day, standing in the nave and singing “On Our Way Rejoicing”, there was genuine relief for having finally reached these two major milestones and renewed excitement for all that was to become.

But as is true with all of our lives, each new day has a tendency to open doors for the unexpected and sure enough, before summer we were greeted by the announcement that Pastor Spring and his family would be leaving Gloria Dei. That life long dream that he talked about during the call process which brought him to Gloria Dei (nearly ten years ago); that life long dream which most likely lay latent until given rebirth on his trip to Wittenberg, Germany (two years ago), now, through the Grace of God, opened to him on the campus of Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. Although we were deeply saddened to see Pastor Spring and his family leave, we sincerely believe the world becomes a better place as the result of these transitions. We rejoiced in the knowledge that God has called him into this new time and new place for a special reason . . . and he will bring to that community the same level of energy and enthusiasm that he brought to us for the past ten years. Good-byes are tough, and we have certainly had our share . . . but with each good-bye there always seems to be a “hello” on the horizon.

Laura Ann Madott soon joined us as the Associate Director of Music. Her vitality and wide range of musical skills provide Dr. Martin Sunderland much needed support for making an even larger/louder “joyful noise” in our school and congregational music ministries. Other 2002 highlights included our Sunday School sponsored “Record Breaker Sunday” with a goal of 151 attendance; 195 attended.

. . . And let’s not forget that 2002 represented the start of the 30th year for our school ministry. As we look back to our beginning and how the 19 students has grown to over 600, how the tens of thousands of special moments have brightened so many days and so many lives, and how these kids have been given a foundation to make our world a better place, we give thanks to the teachers and leaders of that school ministry for their dedicated effort and stewardship of their talents. The 2002-2003 school year was highlighted by two new

school buses, over \$26,000 of funds raised for special causes, a new “face lift” for the Harris Creek Library, the addition of Spanish to the fifth-grade curriculum and Science Lab to the 1st/2nd grade curriculums, the participation of the school choir in the Virginia Music Educators’ Association meeting, and an all around continued growth to the school’s academic achievements.

2002 ended with the December groundbreaking for our Atrium/Connector Space and another successful response from our **Every Member Response (EMR)** stewardship program.

The story for 2003 was like many years before; sprinkled with highs and lows . . . but fortunately, as always, an upward movement in the trend and a continued ability to build spiritual growth when confronted with adversity. For the first time in our school history, we experienced the death of a student, Taylor Atkins. Her 16-month battle with a brain tumor was paralleled with experiences of pain and grief – but the 500 people (family, students and staff) who attended her funeral, fully experienced the spiritual under-girding of God’s promises and assurances of everlasting life.

Hurricane Isabel, in September 2003, brought devastation to our community and many of our lives; yet the congregation once again rose to the occasion by providing prayer, funds, clothing, food, labor and friendly support to those in need.

We saw more new faces with the staff additions of Erica Verdone (Director of Christian Education) and Vicar Cheryl Griffin (Seminary Intern). Our Building Fund “Lift High the Christ” campaign brought record commitments of nearly \$600,000 - but the groundbreaking “hole” dug in December 2002 has sat frustratingly empty for over nine months while we trudged through the process of City Council approvals and receipt/acceptance of contractors’ bids.

In December, a presentation of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* came off with stunning success - - - but our tradition of having a “real” Christmas tree in our nave was met with opposition from the local fire marshal . . . necessitating extensive volunteer “fire watching” from our congregational faithful.

2004 led us into our 40th year of existence and many new (or revitalized) initiatives. Vicar Griffin brought our Diaconate service (crisis management/support) back to life, helped to bring resurgence to our Vacation Bible School, and blessed our youth with her tremendous gifts of learning, leadership, and love. We said good-bye to Vicar Griffin in August with hope that once she finishes her final year of education at Gettysburg Seminary, our paths will cross once again.

2004 also saw us give rebirth to our **Time and Talent** program, establish a Youth Council (to let their voice be heard), give added attention to our Family Oriented Activities - all to best utilize our resources, and meet the changing needs of our congregation, and celebrate Pastor Stowe’s 35th Anniversary of Ordination.

The “hole” that we dug way back in December 2002 finally began to take shape in 2004 as our atrium/multi-purpose facility rose from the ground with concrete, blocks and wood structure. Our vision is that this soon becomes another important piece of the puzzle that began as part of God’s blessing to us back in 1964 and matured through the **Faith, Fortitude and Future**-looking vision of our Senior Pastor, our Parish Council leadership and our congregational support.

As we celebrated our 40th anniversary in 2005, the “final” pieces of the next part of our future fell into place. We closed the deal on the purchase of the Rice Property (18.5 acres behind the “North Campus”), moved into the Pastoral Leadership Center–PLC (old Bennett Building) and (finally–more than a year late) dedicated the

Koinonia Atrium. We immediately experienced the “community of fellowship” benefits the Koinonia Atrium offers us. During the Advent season, we began to understand the importance of the quality of space for administration and care that is gained by the opening of the PLC and we began to lay the groundwork for what will become the future use of the Rice property.

In 2005, we also renewed Pastor Freeborn’s contract to continue as our Executive Associate Pastor, we served the educational needs of 447 students and the after-school needs of 112 students, we began to see the fruits of Vicar Griffin’s contributions as the Diaconate group served the needs of 22 families. Finally, in 2005, we strengthened our Sunday nursery program by introducing CPR training requirements for our nursery attendants and purchased/established a paging system for contacting nursery parents.

As 2006 unfolded, we said thank-you to Rita Foringer for her six years of dedicated service as our Parish President. Rita’s message to us in our Annual Report, **“chill out, settle in, and find a third pastor,”** speaks to what we all feel with respect to our need to take a deep breath, reflect upon the accomplishments of the past, and prayerfully hope that the three-year search (and struggle) for a third pastor is soon behind us.

Alas!!! The struggle ended in May, as we welcomed Pastor Edwin Kopp and his wife Brenda and looked excitedly forward to his area of primary focus – the establishment of the Gloria Dei Academy and its associated Pastoral Internship Program. The objective here being the continuous flow of pastoral candidates through our community of faith and the hope that those who choose to stay, builds upon our vision, with fresh ideas of their own; for those who move on, we hope they take with them the treasured memories of having experienced Gloria Dei’s ministry.

With all that has happened in our past, there are still amazing things the Holy Spirit has in store for our future. In February 2006, we were introduced to the 2006-2009 Building Fund Campaign **“Dreams and Visions”** (our unprecedented 13th such three-year building fund campaign) and the strength and spiritual energy of the campaign leadership spearheaded a record response of more than \$780,000!! We are truly blessed.

The remainder of 2006 and up through the middle of 2007 began the process of revealing the fruits of our recently-established Gloria Dei Academy. We welcomed students Vicars Nathan Robinson and Garrett Bugg into the Clinical Pastor Education Program supporting Gloria Dei at-large and Pastor Wayne Harrison as Director of Gloria Dei Ministries, Inc., at our elder day care center – Sunrise House.

As Pastor Freeborn writes in his annual report message, “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on” (Philippians 3:13-14)—we congregationally continue to focus efforts on those things that will improve our ability to serve the Lord:

- Town Hall Meetings were held to get congregational inputs with regard to the future of our retirement/assisted living “Life Center;”
- Our Diaconate group, led by Leonard Mayo, provided increased care/comfort for countless numbers of our community of faith;
- Technological and business transformations will better enable us to understand and be responsive to our needs, and;
- 544 students were enriched with the experience provided by Linda Robinson and her staff—with one of the year’s highlights being the celebration of Linda’s 30th year at Gloria Dei Lutheran School.

Other highlights during this period included: (1) the co-sponsorship of 18 youth to the ELCA National Youth gathering in San Antonio; (2) the inclusion of 5th -7th graders into our formalized youth program; and (3) Fellowship celebrations that included our 20th annual Fish Fry and the inaugural SuperBowl Party.

...But like many times in the past, we also had our moments of care/concern. Senior Pastor Doug Stowe took an absence to help him refresh his physical body and spiritual energy. Thankfully, by the grace of God, Pastor Stowe returned to his mission of serving this community of faith with renewed commitment and a “willing spirit” to continue our growth journey of becoming a mission-oriented church.

Highlights of our ministry together from the mid-2007 to mid-2008 time period included: (1) celebration of Vicar Robinson’s marriage, ordination and “call” process to Woodstock, Virginia; (2) celebration of Vicar Bugg’s “call” to become an Associate Pastor at Gloria Dei; (3) the creation of the “20-something” and “30-something” groups to provide those members with outlets for fellowship and shepherding care/concern amongst themselves; (4) the inception of our “Saturday Night Alive” worship opportunity; and (5) the completion of Gloria Dei Lutheran School’s 35th academic year..

Once again, we were challenged by the short-term absence of Pastor Stowe; this time the result of a “major heart event”—but as Joe Martin said in his annual report message, “[w]e praise God for bringing Pastor Stowe successfully through this trial and for keeping us united as a community of faith.”

The 2007-2008 Annual Report also provides us with a detailed insight to the proposed plan for our Family Life Center (or Continuous Care Retirement Community). This presentation lays out a general time-phased implementation plan (project controls, approvals, financials, etc.), as well as a site plan for “Cluster Homes,

“Villas” and an “Assisted Care Facility.” It was hoped—at that time—that a more precise expectation could be laid out by mid-2009. Unfortunately, the country’s economy did not cooperate. Individual commitments/priorities were severely tested by pressures impacting their employment, financial security, and general wellbeing. Together, these external influences help create one of those “valleys” that Pastor Stowe’s addressed in his “BETWEEN THE PEAKS” message to us in the 2009 Annual Report. As evidenced by our prior history, we have certainly had our share of peaks, but as Pastor Stowe so poignantly points out, it is the valleys between those peaks where “commitment, perseverance, and overcoming obstacles” will enable us to continue to carry out God’s vision. Paramount in overcoming these valleys is the need to “have a plan” and the need to “work the plan.”

Despite these struggles, Pastor Bugg applauded the fact that, as God’s people, we have continued to (1) maintain our congregation and facilities, (2) reach out to our community, and (3) prepare our students and youth for their future via (a) the Gloria Dei School; (b) the Sunday school, (c) the youth programs, and (d) youth adult programs. This is the way it has been throughout our history...

On July 31, 2009, the “valley” suddenly became a deep chasm when Pastor Stowe died following a series of setbacks that eroded his health. For over 40 years, Pastor Stowe had been our spiritual leader, our personal counselor, and our dear friend. His memorial service was not only a celebration of his life, but also, more importantly, a celebration of how his life spiritually enriched and personally educated the lives of thousands.

Our congregation was now faced with its biggest challenge to-date. Maybe the best assessment of our overall feelings and was expressed by our interim Pastoral Associate, Art Pederson’s (ret) comments in the 2010 Annual Report, “My sense of our congregation at this time

includes equal parts of concern, worry, hope, and expectation. We are ‘marking time’ during the period of uncertainty...and we realize it requires a lot of energy to be enthusiastic about parish ministries and events. Our worries and concerns for the future of our church are close to the surface and we crave for meaningful change and creativity in an effort to move forward. Marking time is really not a good place to be.”

Through God’s Grace, and the amazing dedication of our leadership, we slowly began an ascent from the “chasm” by both preserving (i.e., “marking time”) our strengths, while at the same time, living out Pastor Stowe’s legacy. Below, are some highlights and milestones from our 2010 Annual Report:

- “Graduates” from our 5th Grade approached 900 over the last 20 years
- Contributions to the American Heart Association from the School’s “Jump Rope for Heart” program approach \$280,000
- The Church’s Diaconate Group provided crisis intervention care to 21 Gloria Dei families.
- Introduction of the Financial Peace University’s course on personal financial management enabled nearly 40 families to reduce their debt by more than \$140,000.
- Our Sunrise House’s elder care facility, in its tenth year of operation, served 25-30 participants on a daily basis.

We also celebrated Pastor Bugg’s call to a senior pastoral position at a Presbyterian church in Ashland, Kentucky. While we hated to see him leave, we know that wherever he goes, his congregation will benefit from his presence. We will remember him for his spiritual warmth, his gentleness, and how he frequently used his homespun stories to enhance his sermons. Most importantly, we will be eternally grateful for his dedicated efforts in support of our youth. .

In closing out the year, both Joe Martin and Linda Robinson said it best in capturing the essence of Pastor Stowe’s ministry to Gloria Dei, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” You will be truly missed.

Our life together as a congregation will no doubt continue to change as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. However, one thing remains inordinately clear. Each step we take is empowered by and embodied with God’s Spirit—and our faithful journey continues to be characterized by the following excerpt from Pastor Stowe’s 2001 Annual Report message:

- **Momentum Spiritual and Growth** – God has chosen us for life together with Him and one another. Getting to know God and ourselves more fully propels us to make Christ first in our lives.
- **A Caring Atmosphere** – We love because God loved us first. A caring, compassionate community puts our faith in Christ into action. We not only talk about love for one another, we practice it.
- **Engaging and Empowering Systems** - God gives us the freedom to choose how we organize ourselves as a faith community. Effective leadership-organization structure enables each person to find meaningful ways to serve God and others in mission and ministry.