1948 — 2023

GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH



75[™]
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION



MAY 21, 2023

A Message from our Pastor...



It's safe to say that a few things have changed since 1948. In 1948, there were no such things as domestic microwaves. Bart Starr was probably just learning how to perfect a spiral, being only 14. President Truman was still in office, and it would be another 9 years before Paul McCartney would even pick up a guitar.

Yet, you know the saying, the more things change, the more they stay the same. America still has a certain fear of Russians. People are still concerned about the economy and about the morality and wisdom of the upcoming generations. And people still listen to Bing Crosby at Christmas.

Most importantly, though, our Savior hasn't changed. He still died for the world's sins. He still rose from the dead. He still has ascended and is seated on his eternal throne. All of that was true in 1948 and it is still true in 2023. Just like it will be true another 75 years from now.

It's easy to forget all this, especially as the world zips by. And the hard part is, the older you get, the faster it all goes. How can we keep up? We might not always be able to, but our God can. This is the one who, again, is still seated on his throne on high, just as he always has been. This is the one who is unbound by time, the Great I AM. For whom a day is like 1000 years, and 1000 years are like a day.

As we look to the past at times like this, it can feel daunting, believing the lie that our forefathers knew so much more than we do. They didn't. They were flawed too, with only a partial view of the future just like us. They made the best decisions they could, and they trusted that God would bless their efforts. Thankfully for us, God has given us their example and their efforts to build upon. So, that is what we do. We stand on their shoulders, and we follow their example of trusting in the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Amen.

Blessings,

Pastor Buchner

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Ephesians 2:19-22

This booklet is dedicated to the glory of God. We humbly thank Him for the blessings and guidance He has given us to bring us to this day. We also dedicate this booklet to the members of the congregation of Grace, past and present, who have worked tirelessly and selflessly to ensure its continued ministry for the last seventy-five years and for the next seventy-five years yet to come.



75 YEARS OF GRACE, A HISTORY IN PICTURES

Humble Beginnings 1947 – 1948

Even as war loomed and eventually broke out in Europe and in the Pacific, the work of the Lord saw rapid growth in the Fox Valley area in the late 1930s and early 1940s, especially at Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Neenah. By 1941, another congregation was opened in Neenah with the founding of Martin Luther Lutheran Church on the west side of town. Rapid growth in both congregations continued and by 1947, it was decided to open a mission church on the south side of Neenah. The following resolution was approved by the congregation of Trinity, "That we foster another new mission, this time to the south of Neenah, and ask the District Mission Board to canvass the field and begin services as soon as a nucleus for a new congregation has been found, and that a school be opened by the mission as soon as possible."

Organizational meetings were held on December 11, 1947, and again on January 6, 1948 at Trinity Lutheran School. A committee was elected and a canvass of the area in question was conducted. Early in March, the General Missions board gave permission to organize the mission. Pastor Ernst Lehninger became temporary pastor, and the first worship service was held on April 4 in its temporary home, the Neenah Recreation Building

on Park Avenue. The congregation's temporary name of South Side Evangelical Lutheran Mission was selected. Releases were given to founding members which included 60 souls, 43 communicants and 19 voting members. Seventy-three persons, including guests were in attendance on that "ideal April morning with bright sunshine and a moderate temperature. The service was conducted by Pastor Ernst Lehninger of Riverview Lutheran Church in Appleton. Pastor Lehninger delivered a very inspiring sermon from the text John 21: 15-19. For those in



attendance, this first gathering was more successful than anticipated and with the Grace of God, we hope to carry on successfully." (Quoted text taken from handwritten minutes by Philip Gaertner.)

The first service with Holy Communion was held on Sunday May 23, 1948. An organizational meeting followed that afternoon, when the permanent name Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Neenah was chosen, and



officers were elected. An application was made for membership into the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Other business discussed was the envelope system for offerings and the purchase of land at Cecil and Birch Streets on which to build a church. Grace also placed a call to Pastor Willmar Wichmann of St. Paul Lutheran in Fond du Lac to serve as its first pastor. This call was accepted, and Pastor Wichmann was installed on July 25, 1948, as Grace's first permanent pastor. The first council meeting was held on June 4, 1948, Gerald Lee Pratt was the first member to be baptized August 8, 1948 and the first weekly bulletin was issued on October 3, 1948.

Class members Lyle Dorow, Suzanne Gaertner, and David Gerhardt were the first to be confirmed on April 10, 1949. By the end of its first year, Grace was blessed with 99 members, 59 communicants and 23 voting members.

Grace Chapel 1948-1949

Soon after its founding, it became apparent that Grace needed a permanent home. In October of 1948, a planning committee consisting of Armin Gerhardt, Carl Williams, Pastor Wichmann and G. K. Kalfahs was appointed. At the April 1949 Congregational Meeting, it was voted to move ahead with the construction of a new chapel on the corner of Cecil and Birch Streets on the city lots purchased earlier in 1948. Groundbreaking for the new chapel was held on June 26, 1949, and excavation of the site began on July 6, 1949.

Design of the chapel was by Peter Giovanni of Neenah, and was provided at no cost. After construction was completed, the painting, some finishing work and the interior work on the kitchen was provided by members of Grace. All electrical work was done by member George Hopkins. Grace Congregation received many gifts from both friends and members, some of which included: communion ware, altar and pulpit hangings, baptismal font, organ, candelabra, crucifix, and pulpit light. The altar,



pulpit, lectern, hymn board and communion rail, all decorated in white and gold, were built by members and friends. The completed chapel was dedicated on December 11, 1949 at a total cost of \$20,269.

Christian Education 1949-1962

Christian education for its children has always been one of the goals of Wisconsin Synod churches. From the beginning, the children of Grace were given the opportunity to attend classes at Trinity School. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was a growing interest in the Fox Valley to provide continuing education beyond the 8th grade. In the autumn of 1950, it was proposed to local Wisconsin Synod churches, to begin a Lutheran High School in Appleton. The idea grew rapidly, and Fox Valley Lutheran High School opened its doors for the first time on September 3, 1953. Grace was among the founding members of the Fox Valley Lutheran Federation of Churches.



By July of 1957 and due to increasing enrollment, Trinity Christian Day School was at capacity and could only accept students from Grace and Martin Luther when space was available. In answer to the crowded conditions at Trinity School and to provide a Christian education for its youth, Grace joined with Martin Luther Church and opened a school together. Students began attending in September of 1959. Miss Verlaine Krueger accepted the call as the first teacher in the joint venture.

One of the founding goals of Grace was to provide a Christian education for its children. A planning committee was formed in 1961 to meet with an architect and to seek bids for a three-room school with an all-purpose room at an estimated cost of \$100,000. Plans were approved by the congregation and contracts were awarded in February of 1962. Ground-breaking followed soon after and was held on March 18, 1962.



Construction was carried out during the spring and summer of 1962 and the building was dedicated on September 2 that same year and students began the 1962-1963 school year in their new home. A Kindergarten class was added in 1975. The school consisted of three classrooms, an all-purpose room, restrooms, and a school office. The addition of the school also provided the space needed to carry out various congregational events and permitted

the chapel to be used only as a house of worship. The Christian Day School operated from 1962 to its closing in 1984. "May this new school serve as a workshop of the Holy Spirit for generations to come. We urge all to take advantage of this opportunity and privilege of training in the word of God, which is the beginning of all wisdom." Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Excerpts from Dedication Booklet).

The Interim Years 1950-1980

The wedding of Kathleen Kellner and Daniel Kueho on April 1, 1950 was the first to be held at Grace. The altar was also dedicated on Palm Sunday Confirmation Service on April 2, 1950. Bible Class, open to all adult and children, began its study on April 12, 1950. The congregation enjoyed continued growth and two services

began on Sundays at 8:00 am and 10:30 am. A new Baldwin organ was purchased in 1957 for \$3280.00 and the congregation became self-supporting in January 1960, when the original mortgage was paid in full. The school's mortgage was paid off and the mortgage was burned in March of 1976. During these years, many congregational programs, and events such as Advent and Lenten soup suppers, Easter breakfast, additions to the church library, church picnic, Bible Study, Newcomer's Potluck Dinner, Mother/Daughter banquet, and Father/Son banquet.



Membership reached its height in 1969 with 504 souls and 328 communicants. A number of anniversary celebrations were held to commemorate the following milestones: 5th on May 24, 1953; 10th on May 25, 1958; 15th on May 26, 1963; and 25th on May 20, 1973. Each anniversary was celebrated with a special service and a fellowship event following the service.

From the beginning, Grace membership has been devoted to promoting fellowship between its members, through events such as anniversary dinners, church picnics, Christmas parties, etc. A "Family Night" gathering was begun in 1950 and the Young People's Society was begun in 1951. Various mission and charity causes were willingly supported by members of Grace, such as the Lutheran Refugee Mission in Germany, Bethesda Lutheran Home, and the Lutheran Children's Home. The church library was established in 1951 with an initial offering of 27 books. A library fund was also established for the purchase of additional books. A children's choir and Men's Club were begun in 1961. In the late 1970s, Individual communion cups began to be used, and plans, as well as collection funds, were begun to allow for church expansion at current site.



At school, sports teams were offered to students, consisting of boys' and girls' basketball, boys' baseball and cheerleading for girls. Several championship tournaments were hosted by Grace and held in the Fox Valley Lutheran High School gymnasium. An adult Dartball league



was begun in the 1980s and included 15 teams from Oshkosh, Pickett, Neenah, and Winneconne.

Several pastoral changes took place during this time. Pastor Wichmann accepted a call to Grand Island, Nebraska in December of 1957. On July 13, 1958, Pastor James Berger was installed as the second pastor of Grace. Pastor Berger left Grace in March of 1963 when he accepted a call to Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Mason City, Iowa. Grace's third pastor, Alvin Kienitz, was installed on May 19 of that same year. Pastor Kienitz served Grace for the next 14 years before accepting a call to Ascension Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minnesota in June of 1977. Two months later, Richard Shimek, Grace's fourth pastor was installed. Pastor Shimek resigned from the ministry to pursue other career options in 1982, and Grace's fifth permanent pastor, Richard Frost, was installed on July 25, 1982. He served faithfully until his retirement in 2022.

A Congregation in Transition 1980-1989

By 1980, it became apparent that expansion of the current chapel was not a favorable plan. The south side of Neenah was by now an established community, with fewer opportunities for church growth. In 1983, the idea of relocating and building a new church on the west side of Neenah was proposed. After the day school closed in 1984, the church and parsonage were offered for sale. During 1986, the chapel and school as well as the vacant lot were sold, and all church property was moved. The school desks went to a WELS church in Houston, Texas, and the pews, altar, lectern, pulpit, and baptismal font were donated to Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Strongsville, Ohio, a new WELS mission church. Worship services were held in Conant Auditorium at Neenah Junior High School.

In the late 1980s, a new communion service was developed, and a new bulletin was designed. The Lutheran Women Missionary Society began meetings at Grace in 1987. This group supports both domestic and foreign missions through collected funds distributed at a national rally. The Scholarship Fund was established in 1986 to help parents pay for Christian education for their children. Grace successfully hosted its first Vacation Bible School in the summer of 1988 on the lawn at the new location on Breezewood Lane.

A New Church Home 1984-1989



Plans began to move forward once the congregation approved a plan to relocate Grace to the west side of Hwy. 41. Property was purchased on Breezewood Lane. The 8.8 acres of cleared land included an existing home, which would now become the parsonage, and the church would be built on the land behind the parsonage. The price of the land and existing buildings was \$95,000, and the sale of the parsonage on Cecil Street enabled Grace to pay off the purchase of the Breezewood property. The sale of the remaining church property was finalized in 1986.

A Building Committee was established to work with the architect on design and cost options for the new building. Capital, Debt Reduction and Unified Budgets were drafted by the Fundraising Committee. These

committees, as well as the Board of Trustees were responsible for overseeing the construction project. Groundbreaking was on July 31, 1988 after a communion service held at the site. A potluck dinner followed the proceedings. Construction began in October and continued through the winter months into the spring of 1989. The church was ready for the congregation and dedication services were held on June 11, 1989. The congregation's 40th anniversary was also celebrated that day. The



cornerstone was laid several weeks later on June 25, 1989. On dedication day, the congregation consisted of 287 souls, 230 communicants and 90 voters.



Tesch & Associates of Fond du Lac was the architectural firm on the project. Fox Cities Construction Corp. was General Contractor and oversaw local sub-contractors in all aspects of the project. The present church building has a total of 10,855 square feet, 7,735 sq ft. on the upper level and 3,120 sq. ft in the basement rooms. The north rise of the building is 40 ft. and features a stone and brick exterior. Outside, the parking lot can accommodate up to 64 vehicles. The nave has

a seating capacity of 210 with twenty-one 15 ft. pews and the Fellowship Hall has a dining capacity of 130. It was built at a cost of approximately \$415,000, financed in part with proceeds from the sale of the previous church/school properties and in part by a bank loan.

The Breezewood Years 1989 - 2019

Vacation Bible School was again a success in 1989 with 43 children in attendance. The Evangelism Committee was established in 1989 with the mission of outreach to visitors and the surrounding community. In the next decade, evangelism was carried on through activities such as canvassing twice per year, door hangers at Easter and for VBS, greeters at worship services, and working at the WELS booth at the county fair. During 1990, repairs were made to the new parsonage and interior work continued at the new church building (bathrooms and kitchen finished, as well as other interior finishing details). A new outdoor sign was erected, and trees were also planted in 1990. The basement rooms were completed in 1994. 1995 was a busy year at Grace:

The Mission Statement was developed by the Stewardship Committee; a new TV, computer and additional books and videos for the library were purchased; Wednesday night Soup Suppers were introduced during the Lenten and Advent seasons; the basement Mechanical Room was fireproofed to conform to city code; and the church garage was built. Summer Monday night services were begun in 1996. Grace joined the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries program

MISSION STATEMENT

United in faith and worship by the Word of God, we exist to make disciples throughout the world for time and eternity, using the gospel to win the unbelievers for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

in 1998. Worship tapes became available in 1999 for home-bound members. A new group was formed and became known as the Festival Praise family, consisting of talented singers and instrumentalists from Grace and surrounding churches. Since its founding in 1995, the group has delighted congregations in the surrounding area with wonderful praise and worship services.

The first twenty years of the new millennium (2000-2020) were marked with continued fellowship and improvements to the parsonage and the church building. The Ladies Guild held a Mother/Daughter banquet,



issued a cookbook, and in 2002, purchased the deacon's bench in the Narthex. Grace also began to support Camp Phillip in 2002. The youth group was quite active in these years with activities ranging from bowling, kickball, cross-country skiing, Timber Rattlers baseball games to floor hockey. The Grace floor hockey team won the championship in 2003. Adult Dartball was still active and quite successful during these years also. The Ladies Guild was reorganized into the Women of Grace in 2017. This group now serves Grace by assisting families for funeral luncheons, and by caring for the altar and organizing the Christmas Dinner and other

fellowship events. Grace Oasis was begun in 2001 as an outreach program for those in recovery from dependence on alcohol, drugs, gambling, or other addictions. This program met on Fridays at Grace and replaced the generic "higher power" found in most 12 step programs. The group continued to meet at Grace until 2008, when it was relocated to a more central location in the area.

Grace celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1998 with a special day of worship and fellowship on June 7, 1998.



Three services were held that day at 8:00 am, 10:30 am and 3:00 pm. A celebratory dinner followed the 3:00 service. A pictorial directory was produced, and new bulletin covers were made to commemorate this anniversary. Ten years later, the 60th anniversary of Grace was celebrated on May 18, 2008 with a new

photo directory and a potluck dinner. A special dinner to honor Beth Flunker was held on March 30, 2014. Beth served Grace as an organist for forty years.

Volunteers and others continued to beautify and improve both the parsonage and the church building and

grounds. The Advent candle wreath was constructed in 2005 and the current street sign was installed along Breezewood Lane in 2007 and was recently refurbished in 2022. A new roof was installed in 2013. The canopy at the east entrance was constructed in 2011 and a steeple was added in 2013. New landscaping was also installed that year. The Mother's Room, Narthex, both entryways, bathrooms, both stairwells and the Fellowship Hall all enjoyed a new coat of paint in 2012. Thanks to an anonymous donor, funds were received to refurbish the communion ware in 2013. The parsonage received a new roof in 2018 and a beautiful tree sculpture, a gift from the Festival Praise family, was received in 2016. It currently is on display in the Narthex.



Trying Times 2020-2022

The new decade dawned with an ominous cloud on the horizon that would come to be known as COVID-19. Just a few months later, it became a world-wide pandemic that would last for two years, with effects reaching beyond that. The world literally shut down and Wisconsin was no exception. All gathering places such as schools, churches, stores, sporting arenas, etc. closed in March of 2020. Services resumed at the end of May that year, with



certain precautions in place: facemasks were mandatory, there was no singing, social distancing was practiced in the church proper, and Grace Choir and the Festival Praise family skipped the entire 2020-2021 season. Precautions began to lift late in 2021 and finally all precautions were ended by June of 2022.

Not all was bleak during this time, however. A new Rodgers organ was purchased and installed in 2020 and



was paid off in 2022. A new Ariens lawnmower was also purchased, and the Constitution and By-Laws were updated and ratified. The church mortgage was paid off and the mortgage burning took place on September 12, 2021. The south entrance canopy was constructed, and automatic door openers were installed on both the east and south entrances in early 2022. A new office position of Office Secretary was established in September of 2021. After a one-year hiatus, Grace Choir and Festival Praise resumed in September of 2021.

2022 began with the daunting task of calling a new pastor to replace the beloved Pastor Frost, who retired on May 15 after 40 years of continuous and loyal service to Grace. A well-attended farewell dinner was held for the Frosts on May 1. Beginning in February, five calls were issued, which included a request to the Seminary. The Lord's blessings were upon Grace and prayers were answered when the fifth call was announced as accepted at the end of worship service on November 6.





Pastor Tyler Shinnick, of Martin Luther, Neenah, served Grace as the Vacancy Pastor beginning in June. In the interim until a new pastor was found, Monday night services and Sunday Bible Study were not held. In hope and anticipation of a new pastor, the parsonage was refurbished, church storage spaces were reorganized, and other updates were made to both buildings and to operating procedures. Many, many volunteers worked tirelessly to achieve these goals. As the year ended 2022, Grace counted 176 souls, 153 communicants, 81 voters and 16 shut-ins.

A New Era 2023 and Beyond

As the new year began at Grace, there was a feeling of joyful anticipation at the arrival of our new pastor. Pastor Nathaniel Buchner was installed on January 15, 2023. An afternoon reception was held in the Fellowship Hall after the 2:00 ceremony. Monday night services as well as Bible Study and Confirmation class were resumed in February, and Easter week provided an opportunity for new and different rites and traditions to be seen and experienced. After four years, a well-attended hot Easter Breakfast was once again offered.

Conclusion

On the third Sunday of May in 1948, a congregation of believers met to sign the charter and to choose the name Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. Now, on this, the third Sunday in May 2023, we gather to look back and to thank the Lord for blessing our congregation with seventy-five years of longevity and to humbly pray for His continued blessing as we begin the next era of our ministry.

CHARTER MEMBERS:

Mae Boegh Family	George Hopkins Family	Ernst Munsche Family
Inez Case Family	Arline and Gretchen Kalfahs	Leon Quimby Family
Herbert Dorow Family	Gustav Kalfahs Family	Warren Romberg Family
Theodore Drucks Family	Dora and Ida Kuehl	Edwin Timm Family
John Falck Family	Robert Kuehl Family	Carl Williams Family
Philip Gaertner Family	Herbert Metzig	W. F. Wichmann Family
Armin Gerhardt Family	William Metzig Family	Willard Wogsland Family

Louis Helmke Family

The final roster in October 1948 consisted of 84 members, 50 communicants and 23 voting members.

1948 – 2023 HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

2023 75th Anniversary is celebrated on May 21, 2023.

1948	District Mission Board authorizes the organization of South Side Mission Church of Neenah. Ernst
	Lehninger becomes temporary pastor.
1948	An official organizational meeting is held on May 23. The name "Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
	of Neenah" is chosen, the Constitution is adopted, and the official charter is signed.
1948	Grace Choir is organized.
1949	Pastor Wilmar Wichmann is installed as Grace's first permanent pastor.
1949	First class is confirmed on Palm Sunday.
1949	On its first anniversary, Grace is blessed with 99 members, 59 communicants.
1949	New Chapel at Birch & Cecil Streets is dedicated.
1953	Fifth Anniversary is celebrated.
1953	Fox Valley Lutheran High School opens. Grace is a founding member of the Federation.
1958	Tenth Anniversary is celebrated.
1958	Pastor James Berger is installed as Grace's second pastor.
1962	Grace Lutheran Day School opens.
1963	Pastor Alvin Kienitz is installed as Grace's third pastor.
1969	Membership reaches a high point of 504 members, 328 communicants.
1973	25 th Anniversary is celebrated.
1977	Pastor Richard Shimek is installed as Grace's fourth pastor.
1982	Richard Frost is installed as Grace's fifth pastor.
1984	Day school is closed.
1986	All church property is sold. New property is purchased on Breezewood Lane.
1988	First Vacation Bible School is held on Breezewood grounds.
1989	New church on Breezewood Lane is dedicated.
1995	Festival Praise worship group is founded.
1998	50 th Anniversary is celebrated.
2008	60 th Anniversary is celebrated.
2011	Canopy over east doors is constructed and the steeple is added in 2013.
2020	New Rodgers organ is purchased and installed.
2021	Church mortgage is paid in full.
2023	Pastor Nathaniel Buchner is installed as Grace's sixth pastor.

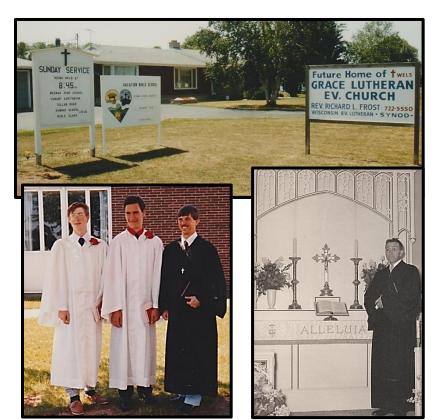
Photo Gallery

























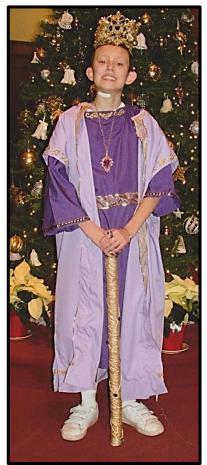






















PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED GRACE



Ernst Lehninger Mar. – July 1948



Wilmar Wichmann 1948 – 1958



James Berger 1958 - 1963



Alvin Kienitz 1963 - 1977



Richard Shimek 1977 - 1982



Richard Frost 1982 – 2022



Nathaniel Buchner 2023 -

Acknowledgements

A heartfelt thank you to those who made this celebration day possible:

Liturgist Pastor Nathaniel Buchner

Guest Preacher Pastor Richard Frost

Organist Mary Rose

Grace Choir Mary Rose, Director

Brass Ensemble Jessy Betow, Kelly Betow, Adam Hoogervorst, Jim Hoogervorst

Video Presentation Dena Swanson

Caterer LaSure's of Oshkosh
Cake Manderfield's Bakery

Catering, Flowers Bonnie Olsen
Baked Goods Members of Grace

75th Anniversary Committee Jessy Betow, LaVerne Betow, Kathy Flenz, Judy Maurice, Susan Munsche Grace Church Council David Voight, Scott Rogers, Michael Hester, Denis Munsche, Harvey Harrison,

Jerry Vanderkinter, Kelly Betow, Nik Eggert

Keepsake Booklet Susan Munsche

Members of Grace, Family and Friends

Historical Sources Cited:

Gaertner, Philip. Handwritten minutes of organizational meetings, 1947-1948 Gorsalitz, Jeanine. *Fifty Years of Grace, 1948-1998*

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