



## **A Profile of Grace Presbyterian Church**

The following profile describes several aspects of the ministry of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois, and its outreach to the community and world.

### **History**

The core message of Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) is that God's amazing grace provides faith to trust in God, freedom from guilt and sin, and fuel to live a life that pleases God.

Grace is a historic, 154-year-old church that has a rich history and is deeply respected throughout central Illinois. The mission school (which would ultimately become Grace Presbyterian Church) began on March 1, 1862, as a Sunday school to reach children of railway workers and Civil War veterans. The first Sunday school classes for children were held in a passenger railroad car, and within a few Sundays the class grew so much that a second passenger coach had to be added.

Within two months, the school moved into its first building—a small structure built with the help of the YMCA in downtown Peoria. Evening services were added, and on May 1, 1868, the little mission school was organized and incorporated as a church. In 1874 the church outgrew this building and relocated to the corner of Wayne and Madison streets and changed its name to Grace Mission Church, eventually becoming Grace Presbyterian Church in 1877.

Since those early years, the church has persevered through several wars, a Great Depression, increases and decreases in the economy of the city, and the often-common struggles of congregations who must determine who they will be. Several pastors have led the church over the years.

In 1957, under the leadership of Dr. Bruce Dunn, who served as Senior Pastor from 1951 until 1991, the church moved to Forrest Hill and Knoxville and a radio-television ministry was established that expanded the church's outreach (the television ministry continues to this day). The church purchased 60 acres of land on Route 91 for a new home in 2004, under the pastoral leadership of Dr. Ben Johnston, who served as Pastor from 2000 to 2012. Ground was broken in 2008, and the church moved into its new home on September 26, 2010.

Dr. Bryan Chapell became the Senior Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in 2013, after serving 30 years at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He and the Session led the church through strategic planning for the current vision of the church. In

2020, Dr. Chapell left to serve as the Stated Clerk for the PCA. Dr. Sandy Willson is currently serving as the Interim Senior Pastor during the search for the new pastor.

## **Congregational Information**

The Welcome Ministry and Assimilation Ministry are quite active in reaching guests and new people through our Taste of Grace, Discover Grace, and personal calling and shepherding. Grace's local ministry reaches men, women, and students with midwestern values, particularly values about how life and family work. Those who "stick" at Grace are individuals for whom relatively stable institutions continue to dominate their personal worlds (i.e., family, friendships, economy, career stability, neighborhoods, and schools). They are people whose identities are still rooted to a great degree in family, local communities and friendships, and their work or vocation. Yet they increasingly struggle with these changing realms of life. They explicitly understand—or at least, they intuitively sense—their deep need for grace to realign and motivate their daily living. They are hungry for grace, even before they can refer to the word, grace, itself. They stay at Grace because they instinctively pick up the subtle distinctions of unlimited grace, as well as meeting new people.

2,200 individuals call Grace their church home (attending at least six times per year.) Approximately 1300 adults and children attend typical Sunday worship services at Grace Presbyterian Church. The Sunday experience is diverse, comfortable, friendly, and casual. Both worship services—one at 8:30 a.m. and the other at 11:00 a.m.—aim to provide a unified worship blend of historic hymns and contemporary songs—including songs that have been written by the Worship Director. Sunday school classes for all ages meet between the two services.

Although Grace has a long history, the church has a young heart and an exciting vision to reach its community and world, especially younger families and singles.

## **Vision and Leadership at Grace**

The vision of Grace Presbyterian Church is that God's unlimited grace inspires all generations and peoples to follow Christ in glorifying worship, gospel dependence, gracious humility, and global discipleship so that we may join in the song of Revelation 5, impacting Peoria and the world.

Although one might surmise that all churches would welcome such a vision, we believe our vision is unique in our region. The vision encompasses everything that we do. It may easily be remembered as:

- *The core message of God's unlimited grace in all teaching and preaching.* We have identified the gospel of grace as the core, essential DNA of a biblical vision.
- *The scope of all generations and all peoples,* humbly counting one another as more significant than ourselves.

- *The focus of discipleship so that all people are encouraged and equipped to follow Christ in all of life.* The result of God’s unlimited grace is equally as essential to our vision—following Christ. This places discipleship at the center of our pathway, of what we focus on, what we do. What we’re doing is to bring together grace and discipleship into the daily life of all generations and peoples. Grace-inspired, disciple-making disciples will, of course, ultimately result in the unified worship of all God’s people to His glory.
- As grace-inspired disciples follow Christ, they will demonstrate the four values that we have identified with grace in their daily life: *Glorifying Worship, Gracious Humility, Gospel Dependence, and Global Discipleship.*
- Our current strategic planning now focuses on three major initiatives: (1) hiring new senior pastoral leadership, (2) creating a *culture* of grace-transformed disciples who are reproducing themselves in the Body of Christ and are representing the heart of Jesus in transforming our community, and (3) shepherding all members of Grace.

The church is governed by the Session, composed of twelve spiritual men chosen by the congregation. The Diaconate, also composed of twelve men, oversees matters concerning finances, facilities, and care. A larger group, the “Joint Officers Group,” is composed of other elders and deacons who shepherd, provide counsel for church vision and major direction, and approve items for congregational votes.

Like other churches and non-profit service organizations, the only way Grace will impact the center of Peoria (and the world) is through its congregational members serving and leading throughout the county. Grace therefore focuses upon an equipped ministry staff who lead and serve through unpaid volunteers—thereby requiring a strong emphasis upon development of volunteer men and women who will sacrificially and joyfully focus on other people.

Grace Presbyterian Church has established a good relationship with several churches in Peoria through the regular meetings of senior pastors and the holding of united worship services of a multiracial association. Grace is also the hub of Campus Outreach of Central Illinois, with chapters at Bradley University in Peoria and five other campuses in the Midwest.

## **Community Information**

Situated only two and a half hours from both Chicago and St. Louis, the greater Peoria region boasts a population of around 350,000. The city of Peoria has been awarded the All-America City Award four times and was ranked on several occasions as one of the top ten mid-sized cities to launch a small business. AdvisorSmith, a business research group, recently ranked Peoria as the most affordable mid-sized city in the nation.

Grace’s local ministry is in northern Peoria—near the communities of Dunlap, Kickapoo, and Edwards—a largely middle-class community with a growing international population who have been drawn to work opportunities in the medical, Caterpillar, and educational

career fields. Sermon outlines are offered every Sunday in four languages. We have an active English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry that has served people from 40 countries.

Peoria has big-city amenities and a small-town feel. A stroll along the vibrant riverfront, an evening of baseball or hockey, a round of golf, biking or walking on miles of trails in 9,000 acres of parks, or a trip to the zoo or wildlife park, all provide opportunities for relaxation. Even more, the opportunities for missional and evangelistic efforts around Grace's location are beyond imagination.

Peoria has a growing population of young adults in the area and at Grace Presbyterian Church. This population of married and single people is eager to form friendships, be discipled and disciple, and reach the community for Christ.

## **Finances**

The Finance Committee, a sub-committee of the Diaconate, is delegated the responsibility for handling the funds of the church, formation of a recommended budget, administration of the approved budget, monitoring of cash balances to maximize the use of the church's resources, and generally all matters concerning the church's finances. The Session approves and adopts the annual budget. The church operates on a modified cash basis of accounting and uses a fiscal year that begins on the first day of October and runs through the last day of September. The annual operational budget for church ministries is \$3.5 million. We have a \$500,000 annual budget for missions which supports 70 missionary families globally, nationally, and locally. The total budget of all accounts - including operational ministries, holiday offerings, missions, Grace International Broadcast, Campus Outreach, and reserve accounts - is \$6.2 million. During the pandemic, income exceeded expenses. The church has zero debt.

## **Presbytery and Church Planting**

Grace Presbyterian Church is part of the Presbytery of Northern Illinois. It is the largest of the ten churches in the Presbytery, though every church in the Presbytery is very active in its community. Presbytery meetings are held three times per year, at differing locations so that pastors and elders can visit one another's church. Grace has held an influential role in the Presbytery's current church planting and missional outreach efforts. The Presbytery is currently planting a new church in the state capital of Springfield and a new Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) chapter at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

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