

Grace Church, Randolph

What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?

In our more than 160-year history, our church has been shaped by the people that came before us as well as our congregation's support at critical moments in our history.

In more recent years, two events fundamentally impacted Grace Church as we know it today. The first is the sudden and tragic death of the Very Rev. Earnest MacEachern in 1970. Father "Mac" accomplished a great deal in his fourteen-year ministry at Grace Church and left an indelible mark on the community as well as the parish. Under his leadership the parish hall was built, membership was dramatically increased, and he had the two largest confirmation classes in our church history. He was well loved in the community and was active in the Masons, served as a trustee of the Western NY Children's Home, and was an active volunteer fireman. The second event was a devastating fire



following the Bishop's Visit and a meeting of the Cattaraugus-Chautauqua Deanery at Grace Church on October 20, 2013. Fire erupted in the kitchen of the unoccupied building that totally destroyed the parish hall, kitchen, classrooms and offices, and restrooms, and severely smoke damaged the sanctuary. The rebuilding effort was a three-year effort, with the new church campus being dedicated by Bishop R. William Franklin on October 16, 2016

What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?

Our church is unique in its architecture and age of the church building. Our church building is largely unchanged since its consecration in 1879. We have retained the original stained glass windows, walnut pews and wainscoting. We are the oldest church building still being used as a church in Randolph. We are also privileged to have the only pipe organ in town.

What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?

Grace Church is an extremely welcoming church with a strong commitment to our congregation, community, and the support of missions. Following our 2013 fire, we received an outpouring of support from our community, Diocesan church family, and churches from throughout the United States. This support fundamentally reshaped our understanding of the true impact of outreach and resulted in a renewed commitment to mission and outreach. We are committed to supporting our local community organizations as well as other communities throughout the United States impacted by natural disasters. Following major disasters, we reach out to parishes "on the ground" offering support. Most recently we sent contributions in support of

victims of the Maui wildfires, Pacific Palisades wildfires, Western North Carolina area devastated by Hurricane Irene, and the Texas hill country flooding.

Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?

In recent years, we experienced two powerful examples of the Holy Spirit moving among us.

The first was in our response to an act of vandalism on our church building. A troubled teen had spray painted our church building with "Can I still get to Heaven if I kill myself?" Our church leadership was moved to respond by spray painting "God loves you with no exceptions!". The story of our response went viral and was the subject of at least one sermon in Virginia. Our church also reached out to this teen with love and compassion. This graffiti remained on our church building for a couple of months as a powerful example of the Holy Spirit working through us.



The second example happened during the 2013 fire that destroyed our Parish Hall. Like most churches, our Parish Hall was attached to our church building. The fire threatened our historic sanctuary and huge original stained glass rose window. The wind was blowing the fire towards the church building. A group of church and community members formed a prayer circle to pray while the fire was raging. They prayed that the wind would change direction and the sanctuary be spared. In the midst of their prayers, the wind suddenly shifted in the opposite direction and our historic sanctuary was spared, smoke damaged but otherwise unharmed.

How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?

StOur church is very engaged with our local community. We are one of four churches that conduct a community wide Vacation Bible School, hosting VBS every fourth year at Grace. Our facility hosts a local Cub Scout pack and community quilting group. We host community BBQs. We had two pickle ball courts installed (there were no courts in town) and provide equipment for our community to use along with Pickle Ball lessons. We are active during a community Trick or Treat, handing out candy and opening our church for the kids to come in and ring the sanctuary bell, serving typically 300-500 kids annually. We support our local community cupboard, community Thanksgiving dinner, and community Angel Tree.

What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?

Our dream is that we can grow and reinvigorate our congregation, attract young families, and provide a new sense of purpose and direction for Grace to continue to serve the Lord. We also hope that we can support a full-time rector again in the future.