



## **Driven By Grace: A Short History of Springs of Grace Lutheran Church, ELCA**

### **1999 -2000**

Six months of pavement pounding, door knocking, and ice cream socials culminated on Sunday, September 12, 1999, when Pastor Craig Abee swung wide the doors at 169B Giles Drive in Boiling Springs, SC to welcome 142 family, friends, and other guests to the first service of Springs of Grace Lutheran Church. Later Pastor Craig admitted he was more concerned about the second service on September 19th, after family and friends had returned home. He was pleasantly surprised when 118 people made the return visit. So began the community of Springs of Grace, and we have not looked back since.

Long before we began our pilgrimage, God was busy laying the groundwork. Several of the initial attendees at Springs of Grace had been members of Nativity Evangelical Lutheran Church in north Spartanburg when it closed its doors in December of 1998. They brought blessings in the form of service, property, and finances. When Nativity voted to close, they pledged the proceeds from the sale of the church to a new mission church which was planned in the Boiling Springs area. A portion of the funds was used to purchase eleven wooded acres on Highway 9 just north of Boiling Springs. The remainder of the proceeds went into our Building Fund.

In 2000, Duke Power Company became interested in the location of our property and eventually approached us with a trade for twelve acres a half-mile north of the original property. As there were several buildings on the property, the trade included several thousand dollars to clear the land. However, a third party (Inman Paving) offered to clear the buildings and fences in exchange for the main house, which was moved to another site. The result was a doubling of the value of our holdings and the addition of several thousand dollars to our Building Fund. Our God is an awesome God!

Other financial support came from [Servants of Christ Lutheran Church in Indiana](#) who pledged \$120,000 over three years and [South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission](#) (LMM) who gave a three year pledge of \$50,000. Additional contributions from LMM followed and we also received funds from a multitude of mission partners who all have our deepest appreciation.

## **2001 - 2002**

On January 23, 2001, Springs of Grace Lutheran Church took its next major step when twenty-three stalwart believers braved the snow and ice to attend a worship service which included the opening and signing of our church charter. The charter remained open until March 18, 2001. When it was closed 78 adults and 35 children had signed it. In March 2001, Springs of Grace members gathered for fun, food, and fellowship to celebrate the official organization of the church. At that time the [South Carolina Synod](#) and [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#) (ELCA) recognized us as an official church body. Later that year, Pastor Craig and several members attended the opening ceremony of the annual South Carolina Synod Assembly where we were received into the Synod community.

After our organization and formation of our first Congregational Council the next step was to call a pastor. Pastor Craig who had been assigned to us as our mission developer by the Synod and the American Missions Board of the ELCA was a natural choice and a call was extended after our first congregational meeting. Having accepted the call, Pastor Craig, supported by his wife Ginny, led the congregation over the next two years. During this time we quickly maximized the use of our temporary worship facilities on Giles Drive and began to look at building a home of our own. In response, a capital funds campaign was kicked off in 2002.

## **2003-2005**

By mid-2003, our building plans were put on hold as it became apparent that the Capital Funds campaign was not bringing in the funds we needed. Soon after, in October 2003, Pastor Craig resigned. Having suffered the loss of our pastor, a significant turnover of our Congregational Council members, plus the heartache of the building plans being put on hold, the congregation began to suffer as members slowly began to find other church homes. An interim pastor, Rev. Newell S. Nelsen, was assigned to us by the South Carolina Synod. During his term the church left Giles Drive and began worshipping with our friends at Unity Presbyterian Church on Rainbow Lake Road. We enjoyed their facilities for almost two years before moving to another congregation, this time the Episcopal Church of Saint Margaret on Highway 9 in Boiling Springs.

## 2006

Lutherans (ELCA) are in Full Communion with [Presbyterians](#) (PC-USA), and [Episcopalians](#) and the exposure to these sister denominations was a blessing to Springs of Grace. We learned more about the similarities that unite us than the differences that divide us. But all the while we yearned for a home of our own again, and realizing building on our property was still out of the question, we looked at a building 2 miles up the road on Highway 9. The building was once the home of the Old Country Store and Bargain Host, names by which many area residents still use to refer to our location.

Improvements to the facilities continued into the next year and included an office, classrooms, nursery, improved bathrooms, doors, and windows. By mid-year, the congregation decided to move from our “caretaker status” back into our mission of **“Inviting All to Gather and Grow in Service to Christ”**. The power of the Holy Spirit was at work among us! A Mission Vision Committee was formed and we sought the advice of the Synod and the American Missions Board. On October 21st we accepted 8 new members, the first since leaving Giles Drive.

## 2007

Members of our Mission Vision committee had attended the “Growing God’s Mission” event in December of the previous year and on January 14, 2007 we hosted our own event with well over 50% of our members in attendance. At this working session, we resolved to adopt our [Core Values](#) and to apply them as we moved forward in our ministry. Building on this progress, and after a highly successful Stewardship Campaign, we began to think about steps to find our First Called Pastor.

At our Spring Congregational Meeting we took the bold step of agreeing to put all their assets (including time, talents, and offerings) on the line to ensure we could bear the clergy expense for at least the next two years. A call committee was formed shortly afterwards and began to consider candidates, but it only took one! On May 20th at a Special Congregational Meeting, the congregation voted to call Judson Frick Merrill. Pastor Judson quickly accepted the call and he and his wife Carrie moved to the area from Columbia, SC to prepare leading us.

## **2008 – Present**

Much has happened since Pastor Judson joined us over 5 years ago, on July 1, 2007. Our congregation is certainly acting like a “Church” now. Our membership continues to grow, in fact, we have almost tripled in size. Of course, part of that growth was due to the addition of two “Merrells”, Pastor and Carrie’s daughters Addison and Camryn!

We have established an active Sunday School for adults and children. We have a very successful Vacation Bible School program that grows in numbers and enthusiasm each summer. We have an active confirmation program, having confirmed several of our youth with more joining the program each year. Our Lutheran Men program was started and has enjoyed many programs and projects for the local community, while our Women’s Fellowship group continues their mission work and is probably one of our most strong small group ministries.

In addition to our growing numbers and growing ministries and programs, we have been blessed with amazing stewardship among our members. Statistically, we are on par or well above most other Lutheran congregations in our generous giving. But we are most proud of the way we are employing these gifts. Our outreach to the community was nearly non-existent only a few years ago. Yet now we continue to build on one successful event after another.

This brief history closes on yet another exciting time of our short life as a congregation. We have faced many difficult crossroads in our past and persevered through them all. With Pastor Judson’s continued leadership, our congregation had a bold outlook on our mission and we anxiously awaited our new opportunity to Grow God’s Mission out there in the Boiling Springs community!