

GRACE REFORMED EPISCOPAL CHURCH

COLLINGDALE, PENNSYLVANIA

Location and History

Grace Church is located in Collingdale, Pennsylvania, an inner-ring suburb southwest of Philadelphia. Grace Church was formed in 1895; four years after the Borough of Collingdale received its charter. Many of the early members were Ulster Protestants who had come from the (Anglican) Church of Ireland. The oldest part of our building was constructed in 1897.

The parish grew rapidly along with the borough during the 20th century, especially under the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Edwin A. Bustard, pastor from 1933 to 1972. During Dr. Bustard's tenure, the parish became a strong supporter of the Reformed Episcopal Church's foreign missions. The parish also was able to expand its building several times to include classrooms and a kitchen.

The area underwent significant demographic transition over the succeeding decades and the parish's membership declined. Early in the 21st century, the parish was reduced to mission parish status. However, during the tenure of our most recent rector, the Rev. Michael D. Fitzpatrick, from 2002 to 2018, a large number of new members from African immigrant communities joined the parish.

Early in Mr. Fitzpatrick's tenure, another Reformed Episcopal parish about six miles away, Christ Memorial Church (located at 43rd and Chestnut Streets in West Philadelphia), suffered major damage when a lightning strike collapsed its tower. Christ Memorial Church began to meet with Grace Church, and Christ Memorial's parish classical school, Christ Academy, opened its doors in what were hoped to be temporary quarters at Grace Church in September 2004. In 2010, when it became clear that Christ Memorial's building could not be repaired, Christ Memorial Church merged with Grace Church and Christ Academy became Grace Church's parish classical school.

The parish resumed full parish status several years ago. Our current membership is approximately 150 and average Sunday attendance is approximately 65. Approximately two thirds of the members are Africans or African-Americans; most of the remaining members are white Americans.

Facilities

Grace Church's building is located at the corner of Clifton and Blackstone Avenues in Collingdale, across the street from Collingdale Fire Company Number One. The sanctuary, first constructed in 1897, seats approximately 150 people. The parish has a pipe organ that is under repair; music during worship currently is accompanied by a piano.

The mid-20th century additions to the building include a pastoral study, approximately six classrooms (two of which are used during Sunday worship as a nursery for infants and as a classroom for pre-kindergarten children), a kitchen, and a parish hall that is used as classroom space during the school week. The church also owns a parking lot and a detached garage, used primarily for equipment storage. The Vestry successfully raised funds to resurface the parking lot in 2019. Other significant recent repair projects have included a partial roof replacement, replacement of two gas furnaces, window replacement, restroom renovations and repairs to the century-old sanctuary floor.

Worship and Ministry

Grace Church worships using the Reformed Episcopal Church's 2003 Book of Common Prayer. Our normal Sunday service schedule includes spoken Morning Prayer (9:30 a.m.), Holy Communion with sermon and hymns (10:30 a.m.) and Sunday school (12:00 noon). Morning Prayer is also celebrated daily during the school year for Christ Academy. During most weeks, Holy Communion is also celebrated on Thursday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. The parish primarily sings hymns from the 1961 Trinity Hymnal.

The parish's classical school, Christ Academy, has a current enrollment of 26 students with four teachers in grades K-8. The school board, which is separate from the parish vestry, has authorized recent shifts in grade levels (formerly 5-12) due to shifts in demographics of student population. The school is overseen by the parish's youth director, Mr. Steven Hoopes.

Sunday school is divided into an adult class (taught by the interim rector) and three age-separated classes for children through high school age, plus continuing care for pre-kindergarten children and infants. An adult Bible study meets on

Wednesday evenings twice monthly at the home of one of our members, led by an Anglican clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Monnat.

A women's ministry group, Women of Grace, is in the process of reorganizing. A youth group for middle and high school aged youth meets irregularly. However, the parish usually sends substantial contingents to diocesan youth winter camp (held over a weekend in January or February) and summer camp (held over a week in July or August).

The parish has in recent years operated a food pantry and continues to distribute meals to the needy at Thanksgiving. The parish also retrieves and distributes bread to the community.

Finances

In recent years, the annual parish budget has been approximately \$200,000. Approximately 50% of this total currently goes to staff expenses, about 25% to maintenance, insurance and utilities for the physical plant and 10% to diocesan support. Christ Academy's finances are kept separate from the parishes, and overseen by a separate board of directors (of which the rector is a member *ex officio*). However, the school operates in the church building and shares many of the facilities and resources.

Support Staff

The parish is located relatively near the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Our former bishop, the Rt. Rev. David L. Hicks, assisted us by directing several seminarians and recent graduates to serve at our parish over the years. We have several licensed lay readers in our parish. During the interim, we have had two assisting presbyters, the Rev. Michael Carr and the Rev. Ebenezer Olubajo, conducting services.

Our paid lay staff members, all employed on a part-time basis, include a parish secretary, bookkeeper, sexton and organist / pianist. We rely on volunteers to staff the nursery and pre-kindergarten rooms during Sunday worship and to teach Sunday school to children.

Priorities for a New Rector

- The new rector must be a godly man of strong faith, devoted to the Word of God and to prayer, able to teach, to counsel and to exhort.
- If married, he must rule his own family well.
- He should have the ability and the desire to lead a cross-cultural and multi-ethnic parish in an economically marginal inner-suburban area.
- He should have a commitment to and support for parish classical education.
- He should have strong administrative skills, including especially ability to delegate responsibility, lead the vestry, set ministry priorities for the budget, and lead meetings.

Parish Goals and Issues

- We strive to follow and serve the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to grow in faith and virtue, to promote the increase of the Gospel, and to leave a godly legacy for our descendants.
- Although the parish's membership rolls have expanded in recent years, there is a continuing need to bind members together in community and to promote participation in the sacramental life and parish life.
- Like much of the church in our country, we struggle to instill the Faith in our children and to teach them to continue to grow in the Faith as they reach adulthood. We need to revitalize and solidify our Sunday school and youth ministries and to make Christ Academy self-sustaining. We also need to assist our young people in entering careers or trades, and in forming marriages and families.
- Our parish is in a non-affluent area and problems of substance abuse and mental disorder affect many of our members' families. We need pastoral care and guidance in overcoming many of the problems of the present world.
- Our physical plant (other than the heating system and windows) is relatively old and has a number of issues.

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