

Grace Church

Florence

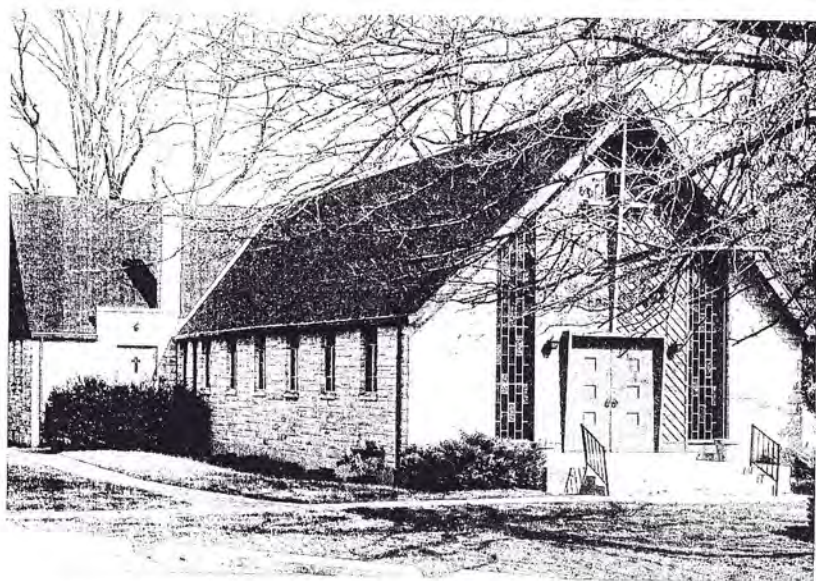


THE EARLY HISTORY OF GRACE CHURCH, Florence, reflects the growth of the suburbs in America. By the early 1950s, many of the younger members of Trinity Church, Covington, had moved to the outlying areas of Kenton and Boone counties. After a door-to-door survey was conducted in the area of Erlanger, Elsmere and Florence, the Rev. Francis W. Kephart, Jr., curate of Trinity and vicar of St. Stephen's, Latonia, was charged with organizing a mission in the area. On August 1, 1954, approximately twenty people met in the basement of the Florence firehouse for the first service of Grace Church.

In 1954 a tract of land in Florence was purchased by Trinity Church, and on October 23, 1955, Bishop William R. Moody laid the cornerstone for a new church. The first service was held on Easter Sunday 1956. The Rev. Arthur Willis, a graduate of the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Kentucky, became the first vicar of Grace Church and served for twelve years.

In May 1956 Grace Church became independent of Trinity Church, Covington, and was named a mission of the Diocese of Lexington. A year later it became a parish.

The pristine, T-shaped building is treated with gabled roof sections and square wall openings. The exterior is sheathed with rusticated stone. Vertical window bands flank the main entrance, from whose center a contemporary cross of Lorraine rises to the gable peak directly above.



During the early 1960s the completion of Interstate 75, which passed through Grace's immediate vicinity, brought a spurt of growth to the area and a need for more space at the church. Four years later ground was broken for an addition to the original rectangular building. The nave was lengthened and a new chancel, chapel and sacristy were added, transforming the building into a cross-shaped structure. Seating in the church was doubled, Sunday school classrooms were partitioned and Grace was prepared for its second decade.

The Rev. Charles Dudley Barksdale came to serve Grace Church in August 1967 and remained for ten years. He oversaw a period of steady growth and important changes. New organizations replaced old ones and the parish took on new life.

When the Rev. Michael P. Milliken became rector in April 1977, he found a church in transition. Northern Kentucky had become a more transient area where many people moved when their jobs necessitated, and then left when transferred elsewhere. As a result,

Grace Church was inundated with new members, who often stayed for only one or two years.

During the nearly two decades of Fr. Milliken's ministry Grace Church has grown steadily, becoming more and more involved in diocese and community. It stands today as the fulfillment of the hopes of its founding members, many of whom are still active in the church. Over forty years ago they set out to create a center of Christian faith for themselves, their children and the community. Today members, old and new, work and pray together, sustaining Grace Church as a spiritual center for future generations.

CLERGY

The Rev. Arthur Willis	1955-1966
The Rev. C. Dudley Barksdale	1967-1977
The Rev. Michael P. Milliken	1977-