



History of Grace Church

The beautiful stained glass window that continues to draw first time visitors to Grace UMC was donated in memory of Josiah Leonard. Grace church began as a vision of Josiah Leonard. It began in 1887 as a 2-story building on the corner of West State and Avon Street, owned by Mr. Judd. In this building was a hall that was used for religious purposes such as Sunday school and prayer meetings by the West End Union Evangelical Association...an idea influenced by Mr. Leonard.

In 1891 a special meeting was held for the purpose of organizing a new church. An informal ballot was taken to find out what denomination was preferred. The Methodist carried by a majority. A couple of days later the pastor at Court Street presided at a meeting held in Judd's hall, for the purpose of organizing a Methodist Episcopal Church. Josiah Leonard was elected secretary. A ballot was taken for a name and *Grace* received the most votes. In February of 1891, the trustees of the Evangelical association deeded a lot in the 1000 block on West State Street (and corner of N. Avon St.) to the trustees of the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church of Rockford. The church started with 40 charter members.

As the city grew westward it seemed wise to change the location and to provide a building that would adequately care for the rapidly growing congregation. In the next two years the first Grace M.E. church was built (on the corner of Hinkley Ave. and West State St.) and a parsonage was bought on Mulberry Street. From 1891 until 1908 there were 7 pastors and positive spiritual growth happened in the church and in lives with each one. Under Rev. Whipple the building of the parsonage on North Hinkley Avenue happened. In 1909 the Josiah Leonard family relocated to another church, but their time spent with Grace remained in loving remembrance.

During the time period from 1909 until 1917 the groundwork and building of the next Grace church began and was finished. In the stretch between 1909 until 1923 there were 5 more pastors who worked faithfully for the church in the name of Christ. (I am using the notes written for the 35th anniversary of the church. It was important for the people to write of the significance of each pastor's ministry within the congregation.)

The church had its ups and downs. It had many blessed revivals in which souls were added to the church. It had its time of depression when the cause seemed at low ebb, and it was a struggle to raise its finances, but it has always made a steady advance. From a small beginning of 40 members, Grace grew to an enrollment of nearly 800 in both church and Sunday school.