

# Letters from the Dome

## First Year Reflections

PASTOR PETER DEBERNY

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is hard to believe that a year has already passed since I was installed as the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church. How quickly time flies by! I suppose it would be appropriate to write some reflections of my first year of ministry with you all.

Before arriving on Long Island, I heard the typical horror stories from other pastors across the country regarding the first year of ministry. "Make sure you walk on eggshells!" "Don't change things or the congregation will be upset!" "Watch out that the church doesn't chew you up and spit you out!" In hindsight, I find these comments laughable. I have never been part of a warmer congregation than Grace Lutheran Church. The people in this congregation are friendly and care about each other. You have not "spit me out." Rather, I have seen the immense trust you have put in your pastor.

I have seen so much good at Grace over the last year. People coming early in the morning to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, little children putting their palms on our wooden cross, a large crowd on the beach on Easter Sunday, spaghetti dinners, thousands(!) watching our services online, Sunday School classes, more members joining the congregation, and eight confirmands

affirming their faith in the presence of their families and the whole church! And I believe we can still do more! The work of the church is so good, but it is never ending. As our Lord says, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

As with all things in life, there are also challenges in the ministry. There are ups and downs. But I must say the "ups" have *far* surpassed the difficult days. It is a joy to serve here and I thank God that He has placed me in Mastic Beach.

I was humbled when I was first installed as the pastor at Grace Lutheran Church and I am still humbled today. It is truly a blessing for me to serve you all. To be honest, some days I do not feel worthy of all the trust you have put in me. However, despite my own feelings, I know my duty to God and to you.

I promise to continue to work to preach the hope of the Gospel and strengthen you all in the love of Christ! What an awesome time it is to be part of Grace Lutheran Church!

Pastor Peter Deberny



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# Words of Gratitude!

WILLIAM FARRELL

I hope this note finds you all well, as I continue to pray for you and the wonderful church the Lord has provided for us. I wanted to share a few thoughts with all of you.

Pastor Deberny will be celebrating his first Anniversary at Grace on July 9, 2023. I cannot believe it has been a year already. I am so very thankful to God for the blessing of a called and ordained servant to lead us. He has an amazing heart for God and an immeasurable commitment to serve Him as our Pastor. I am so very proud to work alongside him, in any way I can. We have seen some changes over this past year. I certainly look forward to embracing any future changes that may come as we at Grace support Pastor Deberny.

Grace will soon certify Gary Miranda and Patrick Doyle as Lay Deacons here at Grace. These two men have invested in us in so many ways and I am so thankful for their passion. To have them serving here with us is a true blessing!

I have noticed an increase of participation in events and programs which is very exciting. I have seen fellowship after Sunday service grow, both in the number of members staying after worship and the length that we stay. That is the family of Grace getting to know and love each other. OUTSTANDING! You will see some updates to the Narthex in the coming months to make our space even more welcoming and warm for that fellowship time together, so be on the lookout. Also, I would like to challenge all of you to try your very best to talk to at least three people after each church service (It's OK if you forget someone's name, we all do it! – Just ask again, again and again).



Fellowship in the Narthex on Easter Sunday

Your leadership team is working very well together, and we are always available to you, for any questions or concerns. Our congregational and council minutes are posted each month and please feel free to provide feedback as you feel led to.

We have had some interesting times in the past five years, prior to Pastor Deberny arriving. We had some time that we were in vacancy. I cannot name all that helped during that time but I would like to

name a few. Deacons Tony Vasell and Ed Ritzmann were instrumental in keeping us on track by handling the everyday pastoral duties with help and guidance from the district. We then were blessed to have Pastor Bell who God sent here to help us prepare and transition to our next called Pastor. Pastor Bell has been a HUGE Blessing to all at Grace and was faithful for over three consecutive years. Ed Colwell who served as our Congregational President for four years during vacancy of a called Pastor. He shared a positive outlook while making some hard decisions that were needed. Our Elders Will Kelleher, Vincent DiStefano, and Bill Brandt continued to be in contact with our congregation and visited those who could not be with us in person. Liz Vasell and Melinda Miller handled much of the day-to-day operations in the church office. They have always served our church with the utmost integrity. The church council and the board members also stepped up, big time, to connect all the dots as needed.

Thank you all for helping Grace Lutheran Church become a beacon of light in a crazy and, at times, dark world.

I would encourage all the members of Grace to get involved in some way. Volunteer at any/all events. Help create the next event! Work with one of the boards to learn how your talents would grow God's Kingdom and help your fellow members grow as well. It is so awesome to see us at Grace working together to do great things.

In closing, as I stated in my last letter, I wanted to thank you again for the trust you have instilled in me to lead in this capacity. Please know that I am always available for you. One of my goals is to ensure that we are as transparent as possible. Please feel free to contact me at any time. If you are curious about something, if you feel that there was a change or decision made that you do not agree with, or you simply have an opinion, please don't ever hesitate to reach out!

Thank you all again for allowing me to serve as your President (if you would like to contact me at any time, please feel free to email me at [wfarrellx2@icloud.com](mailto:wfarrellx2@icloud.com)).

In His Love,

William Farrell



# “He Loves Me Best”

DONNA SMITH

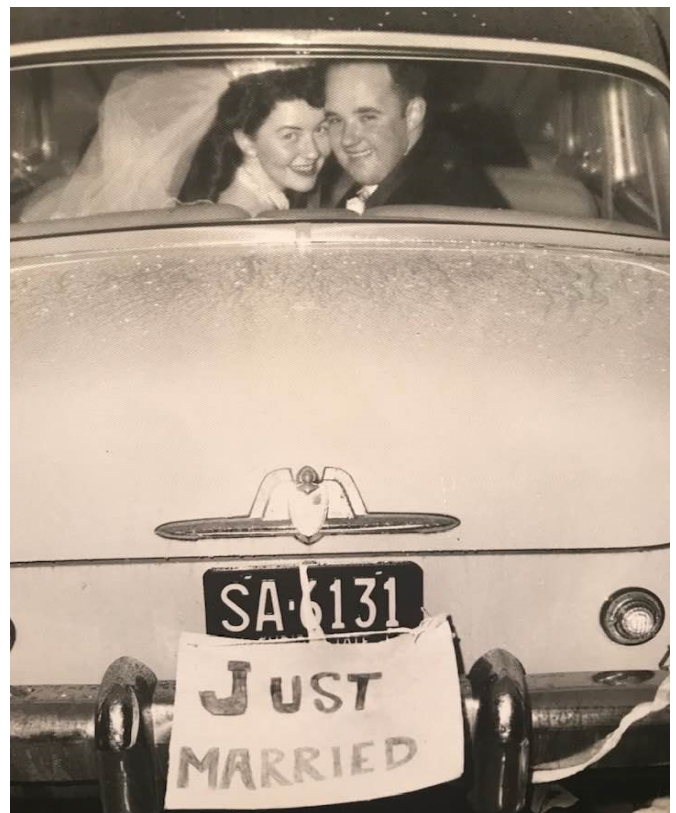
*I recently had the honor of interviewing the oldest living charter member of Grace Lutheran Church, Mastic Beach, Mrs. Barbara Davis whose 85<sup>th</sup> birthday is this October. My only hope is that my words truly convey to you what an amazing, spiritual woman she is. My four hours with Barbara were so very special and there is no doubt the Holy Spirit was with us throughout our time together.*

Barbara was born in St. Catherine’s in Brooklyn on October 24, 1938. Barbara was baptized at two weeks old and was raised Catholic. Her dad was in the Navy so Barbara spent her early years mostly with her Mom and maternal Grandmother. Unfortunately, her parent’s marriage didn’t last. When Barbara was seven years old, she and her dad moved out to Mastic to live with her aunt. Both of her parents eventually remarried and Barbara remained in Mastic with her Dad. When Barbara was nine years old, she became good friends with Beatrice Anderson and she was invited to attend her very first Sunday School with Beatrice, which was held at the Mastic Beach Property Owners Assoc (MBPOA). After this wonderful experience there was no doubt in Barbara’s mind, heart, and soul that Jesus Christ was her Savior and would change her life.

Grace Lutheran Church was established as a seed church from Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Patchogue in the 1940’s. Services were first held at the MBPOA. On May 15, 1953, when Barbara was a sophomore in High School, she went on her first date with a junior named Arnie Davis. They had been dating over a year when Grace Lutheran was applying for their charter. Barbara informed her boyfriend Arnie that if he wanted to continue to date, he must take Confirmation/Discipleship Classes with her so that they could sign the Charter together. He didn’t really give her an answer but Barbara says that she was so very happy to see his car coming down the street as she waited to attend the Confirmation/Discipleship Classes. In 1955, Barbara and Arnie were two of the original signers of the official Charter of Grace Lutheran Church.



Barbara celebrating with her five children.



The Davis' were the first couple to marry in the church's parsonage.

The property that Grace Lutheran Church and the parsonage now stand on was gifted by Benjamin Herrley, a Real Estate Developer at the time. The parsonage basement with a façade in front was the original Sanctuary before the actual parsonage was finished. Barbara and Arnie were married in that basement on February 3, 1957 with 13 people in attendance. In the coming years as Barbara and Arnie started their family, Grace Lutheran Church was built where it now stands. After years of trying to bring her Dad to Christ he started to come around and he and Barbara’s step-mother were very involved in helping build the church.

Barbara and Arnie welcomed their first son, James, in 1958, then Timothy in 1960, then Gary in 1961, and then Keith was born in 1963. Five years later in 1968 the Lord blessed them with their only daughter, Laura. The Davis Family was your typical hard-working family living through the constant changes in the troubled 60’s and 70’s with one exception. Their life was Christ Centered. They loved camping as a family. In fact, their camping trips at the beach were instrumental in the addition of the Easter Sunday Sunrise Service at the beach which now continues to be held at Shirley Beach. Barbara is so happy that camping is still a tradition being carried on by their family. These days James and Keith are both Elders in their churches and Laura is involved in ministry through Bible Studies. Barbara and Arnie were not only blessed with these five wonderful children but as of today there are 14 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. Truly A Blessing Indeed!

Barbara and Arnie frequently held Bible Studies in their home in the 70’s. In fact, at a critical time in Grace Church’s history when there were major issues with the Pastor, they had 50 people in

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## “He Loves Me Best” (cont.)

their home praying to restore love, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit to Grace. Around this same time Barbara was convicted to forgive her mother for abandoning her as a child which ended up being a blessing for both.

Barbara and Arnie served Jesus and this congregation in so many capacities over the years. The team taught Sunday School and Barbara started VBS at Grace, serving as Director for 15 years. She served on the Board of Education for over 15 years as well as on the Board of Fellowship which meant she served on Council for over 20 years. Bob Veglucci took over the Sunday School / Junior Church program when Barbara retired from the Board of Education. Arnie served several times as President of Council as well as a very cherished Elder. But one of their most cherished commitments to this congregation happened by accident. Barbara and Arnie celebrated their 25th Anniversary at MBPOA with over 200 family, friends, and members of Grace Lutheran Church in attendance. Soon after this celebration of love, Pastor Ernst approached Barbara and Arnie about starting a program for the married couples of the church. Hence Marriage Enrichment was born. Barbara and Arnie brought Jesus’ lessons of love to 65 couples over 20 years. The couple group of five would meet at the Davis home for several weeks and learn to let Jesus be the center of their marriage. Each couple would write their love story through projects and love letters to each other. “Graduation” from the program culminated with a weekend at Pinecrest in Setauket with the group and all other couples who had participated in the program previously. Randy and I had the distinct privilege of being in the final group. It was a life changing experience for us as we learned to share our married life with Christ. Soon after this final gathering at Pinecrest the building was demolished by the new owners. And not too long after that Barbara, her family, and the family of Grace lost Arnie to cancer. Barbara has become very self-sufficient with the Lord’s guidance since losing Arnie.

Barbara attributes EVERYTHING to Jesus. She shared that she is nothing without him. He has loved her, saved her, forgiven her, and has made her His own for her entire life. Barbara lovingly tells her children that Jesus loves them but Jesus loves *her* best ~ like she’s his only child. They always laugh, but she really does believe it. It is her belief that we are only in this world to praise and give God the glory. God’s Loving Spirit welcomes us, loves us, forgives us, heals us, and invites us to worship and praise Him as His Family. He is our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Our interview allowed Barbara to remember the last 74 years at Grace and how God had truly blessed her through so many ministries. Barbara especially gives praise and thanks to God that she has lived long enough to welcome Pastor Peter Deberny, our new Shepherd to Grace Church. She says, “he is a ‘Gift’ from God’s Heart. He brings joy and radiates Jesus’ reflection in all he does. We are blessed to have him.”

I am beyond blessed to have been the first and only person to ever to hear the story of the last 74 years of her life as Christ’s Child. Her love for Him seeps out of her and makes you want to be just like her. Those four hours together changed me. I now know Christ better than I have ever known Him and love Him tremendously for gifting me His precious child as my mentor and friend. I love you with all my heart Barbara Davis.

When you see Barbara, say hello and thank her for sharing her love and devotion to our church and most importantly to Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Barbara and Arnie Davis



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## “Will You Eat”

LINDA GUTERES

**Luke 22:7-8** *Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.”*

A crisp linen cloth covered a table set with sparkling fine China. Polished silver utensils were properly placed on each side of the gleaming dinner plate. Crystal glasses holding ice cold water stood at the top of the triangular fold of the linen napkin. The aroma of freshly baked bread filled the room as the waiter placed a warm roll on the bread plate next to a plate of creamy butter.

A waitress entered carrying a large tray, and laying it on the table,

she removed a silver domed lid revealing steaming meats and vegetables cooked to perfection seasoned with delicious herbs and spices.

The lighting in the room was dim, perfect for dining comfortably. Soft music filled the air. The magnificent meal was ready.

A well-dressed man walked in, scanned the room, and took his place at the table. He saw the elegance. He recognized the effort and expense it must have taken to put such a beautiful meal together. As he was about to lift the napkin off the table to cover his lap, he paused, stood and then left the room.

The meal was for him and yet he chose not to eat.

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# Lent Through Pictures



We started with our Ash Wednesday service and enjoyed Wednesday services throughout Lent. Holy Week was filled with very spiritual services starting on Palm Sunday and continuing through Easter Sunday.



## “Will You Eat” (cont.)

Some of you reading this may think this man was crazy. To deny oneself such a delicious meal in such an exquisite setting sounds absurd, doesn't it? And yet, some of us do this all the time.

Jesus willingly hands each of us hope, forgiveness, salvation, and love-free of charge-on a silver platter. And yet, some of us choose not to "eat" of His generosity and grace. We push ourselves from His table empty and lost. Each time we are invited to His communion table, we are offered this meal — Jesus' precious body and blood — given to us purely out of God's love and grace, regardless our unworthiness to receive it.

Only through Jesus are we worthy to come to His table, eat His body, and drink from His cup, and in doing so we receive the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of life everlasting.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has set His table for you. He asks you to dine in His love and grace. My question for you is this, will you eat?

**Luke 22:17-20** *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

Linda Guteres



# My Journey to “Grace” and what keeps me here...

WILL KELLEHER

From an early age I had developed a relationship of trust with Jesus. This came from my parents who were devout Catholics and brought me and my seven siblings up with a love for God. After 12 years of Catholic education and a seemingly restricted life I withdrew from church life and religion as I perceived it.

Fast forward 18 years, marriage and two children, and a wife who believes in Christ, I learned that my two boys questioned why I wasn't going to church with them. It took some time, but I believe the Holy Spirit convicted me. When we baptized the boys, I took a vow to raise them to know our Lord. I take these vows seriously.

The following Sunday I appeared ready for church at the appointed time - jacket, tie and all. Upon entering the church, I was greeted by Don Elliott, a friend to this day. He introduced me to others and I felt welcomed. Bob Ernst was Pastor at the time and he was preaching in that small church of 90 people. Yet somehow I felt he

was talking directly to me.

As time went by I found out that a number of people were praying for me and my family. Through these prayers and the leading of the Holy Spirit we became members of Grace Lutheran.

There are many chapters to my family's journey at Grace Lutheran over the last 39 years. We became involved in many activities and eventually took on leadership positions.

We have always found this church to be friendly, loving, and supportive in our spiritual walk. We will always love our family at Grace Lutheran Church.

Will Kelleher



## Boards Behind The Scenes

DONNA SMITH

I am thoroughly enjoying interviewing the members of our church now serving on Boards. It was a pleasure interviewing the Board Chair of Social Ministry, Melinda Miller who also is one of our church secretaries.

Melinda was baptized and raised Lutheran. She and her husband, Keith were married in 1995. While living in Ridge they attended Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. They moved to Mastic Beach in 2003 and began to attend Grace Lutheran Church in 2006. They officially became members in 2007. They also welcomed a son in November 2006, named John Henry.

Mel's first experience serving at Grace Lutheran was assembling the newsletter and serving as a counter. She then became Church Secretary in 2007. Melinda has served on Social Ministry since 2008 as both a Board Member and twice as Board Chair. In January 2023, Social Ministry merged with the Board of Evangelism in an effort to keep Evangelism alive and strong. Many of the events and programs were overlapping so merging was a win-win proposition.

One of Mel's favorite programs is the Homeless Outreach through Maureen's Haven of Riverhead. When we host our guests throughout the year, we provide spiritual medicine and bring the hope of Jesus to them. They are always humbled and thankful for their time spent at Grace Lutheran Church. Many times, members of Grace have come to pray with and play music for our guests. Mel is

so grateful for the blessing of this program and how wonderful it feels to serve in this way.

Some of the other wonderful programs and events that Social Ministry participates in are: Operation Christmas Child, creating Thanksgiving Baskets for those in need, Our Community Garden, Angel Care, the “Souper Bowl,” as well as programs shared with the Board of Evangelism such as Long Island Youth Mentoring, the Christmas Tree Lighting, the Shirley and Mastics Christmas Parade, and Hope Day. Hope Day is a National based program that aids people with food, personal care, and provides spiritual encouragement.

Serving Jesus and our congregation energizes Melinda and allows her to feel purposeful. If you should feel led to serve in any capacity with the programs and events of Social Ministry/Evangelism, please see Mel to begin your journey.

Probably my favorite gift from Melinda is her weekly check-in to say hi and offer encouragement. Her words (and Scripture) have brightened many a tough day. Thank you Mel for your compassion for this congregation and more so, your compassion for ALL God's children.

Melinda Miller

