



11005 Foster Rd.
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Lead Pastor
Jeff Patton

www.gracelive.com

History of the Grace Brethren Church of Norwalk, California

The Brethren Church began with a very small group of people who wanted to be Bible believing Christians following the Scriptures in simple faith and obedience. They wanted a church that was relevant to ordinary life and simple obedience to the moral precepts of the Bible, the word of God.

In 1708, 5 men and 3 women, under the leadership of Alexander Mack, began a new fellowship of believers in Schwarzenau, Germany. Their attitude of obedience to the Bible was demonstrated in a triune baptismal service in the Elder River in 1708. From that humble beginning the Brethren Church grew...not perfectly...not fantastically.. but steadily and solidly. In 7 years several congregations were established in Germany.

But by 1719, because of opposition, the majority of the Brethren moved westward to America under the leadership of Peter Becker, many living in the area of Germantown, PA.

The Brethren Church in America followed the Western movement of the frontiers until the Pacific Coast was reached. In 1900 the First Brethren Church of La Verne opened its doors as the first church in California.

In 1905, four laymen met in a downtown hotel to lay plans for the founding of the First Brethren Church of Los Angeles. These four, with others, organized the Church a little later and in the year 1907 their first worship services were held at 142 East Miles Street, Los Angeles.

In 1909, living in the community of Compton were the following Brethren families—T. C. Robinson, Fred Runyon, J. Shively, T.H. Broad, C. Shively, Ray Runyon, and C.E. Trapp who were members of the First Brethren Church of Los Angeles. These members met in different homes in the general area of 60th and Compton Avenue for weekly Bible study. In October they arranged for the holding of a tent meeting which continued through most of November. During these meetings a number of members were baptized and received into the Brethren Church and it was decided that an organization would be effected and a building erected. The lot on the corner of 60th and Compton was gifted from Brother C. E.Trapp.

The tent in which the evangelistic meetings were held was moved to the lot adjoining the donated lot and Sunday School and church services were held every Sunday afternoon until the church was ready to occupy. Elder A. V. Kimmell did the preaching and served as pastor until a regular morning and evening service was begun in June 1910. The old Florence School House was purchased for \$200, moved to this corner for

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\$400 and remodeled into a comfortable little church for \$1,177.15. The first sermon preached in the “new” church was on November 26, 1909.

On February 27, 1910, the Compton Brethren Church was dedicated. The offering that day relieved their debt for the new church entirely.

On June 12, 1910, Elder Martin Shively came to pastor the young flock at a salary of \$800 per year. At that time there were 22 charter members. The weekly budget was \$20.85 and of that amount \$15.48 was for the pastor’s salary and the balance of \$5.37 was for the running expenses of the church.

As of August 7, 1910, the Church was incorporated under the laws of the State of California by the first Board of Trustees.

By the end of 1910, sixteen new members were added and Sunday School reported an average attendance of 57.

On March 31, 1912, a call was extended to M.D. Early who came to pastor at a salary of \$800 per year to include janitorial work. Total membership was 43. Elder Early was a Bible School pastor. Under his leadership the Bible School was reorganized and another unused public school building was purchased and moved to the rear section of the church property. This became the Christian Education department building. From the history we find this quote “A good “live” Bible School assures any Church of steady and consistent growth in the membership of the congregation”.

In November 1914, Elder Thomas Broad was called to pastor. During his ministry records show that offering envelopes were instituted.

In December 1915, Elder E. M. Cobb was called as the fourth pastor. Sunday School average attendance was 188 and Sunday services averaged 175.

In March 1917, Elder J. C. Beal became pastor at a salary of \$1,000 but the church made arrangements for someone else to do the janitorial work! Statistics show the receiving of special gifts toward a building program. And for the first time the church adopted an annual budget of \$2,600.

In 1923, Elder E. M. Cobb began his second term as pastor. Compton Ave was no more than a small dirt road but by now it was black-topped and had become a prominent street. The area had become somewhat of a shopping area and the community was experiencing growth and prosperity following World War I. The church needed larger facilities. The first building fund-raising began. The original two buildings were sold for \$1,600 and plans were drawn for a new structure.

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In May, 1924 the two original buildings were removed and a tent was purchased for \$300. On October 5, 1924 the new two story building, seating 400, was dedicated. The final cost to build--\$30,000 with outstanding debt of \$15,000. It contained 26 class rooms with 5 assembly rooms besides the sanctuary.

In 1927, Elder A. V. Kimmell, (who had been active in 1909 through 1910 in getting this church launched) accepted the call to pastor and was requested to act as chorister until one could be secured. In 1928, Henry Rempel was hired as chorister at a salary of \$7.50 per week.

In 1930, Elder Arthur Cashman came to the church and weathered the economic depression that began in 1929. During this time a trustee mortgaged his home and helped with the payments to keep the church from bankruptcy.

In 1934, Elder Paul Bauman became the pastor. There was a general revival during this time and the starting of a Worker's Bank. Teams of two would go calling. A total of 56 workers took part in making 1,662 calls and contacting 5,076 people in their community. The first Easter Sunrise Service took place in 1936 and since then a breakfast usually followed. FOOD AND BROTHERS!

In 1942, Elder William Taylor started his ministry and he carried on a splendid radio ministry right from his study in the Second Brethren Church.

In 1944, Elder Charles Ashman was called. The years after World War II and after might be called the declining years of the Second Brethren Church, not in spiritual fervor but in general scope of work due to reasons the church could not control.

In 1947, Elder Allen Fast began his eleven month pastor ship. He resigned due to illness.

In 1948, the church made a decision to relocate the congregation and plans were made to sell the property in Compton and find a new location.

In 1949, Elder Henry G. Rempel was called to the pastor ship. On Home Coming Day October 5, 1949 a nineteen foot long neon sign was dedicated. The sign simply said "JESUS SAVES".

In December 1953, the Compton property was sold to The Calvary Baptist Church for \$75,000. Our church located property in the community of Norwalk with a population of 8,000. 45 new homes were being built towards the east of the property and another 400 were planned across the street. Some members of the church had already moved to the Downey/Norwalk communities. The property was purchased at \$7,500 per acre and two acres were purchased. The vision was for a youth center and a Christian Day School besides the regular activities of the church.

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On December 6, 1953 the last public services in the old church were held and the ground-breaking for the new church was held that same day.

On December 13, 1953 the first public service of the Norwalk Brethren Church was held in the D.D. Johnston public school auditorium. 53 persons were present.

From January thru May 1954 plans were ready for construction of the first phase and these were months of waiting and praying for a building loan. In May 1954 the portable chapel was secured from the district mission board and all evening services were held there. Finally, the Church voted to start construction and pray for the money to come in. The Lord, in due time, sent all the necessary funds. This included loans from members who mortgaged their own homes to build the church. 1600 volunteer labor hours were offered and the building went up in record time at a cost of \$37,000. Six months after construction began the building was occupied. This included a chapel that seated 250 and 2 large rooms for Sunday School. One of these rooms included a kitchen and was the first fellowship room. By October 3, 1954 all services were held on our own premises. The first meeting in the auditorium was held on watch night service, December 31, 1954.

On April 3, 1955, the Norwalk Brethren Church was dedicated to the glory and service of the triune God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And plans were already under way for 4 new classrooms.

On September 8, 1955 the second wing of classrooms were completed and the first day of school was Sept 12, 1955. 148 children enrolled for K thru 5th grades. School began with 5 teachers, the pastor acting as the superintendent, 1 part-time secretary and 1 custodian. The following year the enrollment reached the maximum of 175.

By October 1958, the Assembly room and Sunday School classes know today as the KidMo Room were completed.

In May 1959, The Second Brethren Church of Compton officially changed their name to Norwalk Brethren Church.

In February 1961, the last classroom on the second wing was completed.

In September 1963, Pastor Henry Rempel resigned and Howard Mayes accepted the call to be our pastor.

In October 1966, the church built the two story building to include 5 classrooms, nursery, school office, Cafeteria and modern kitchen. By 1968 the school had 338 students with 13 teachers, principal, secretary, superintendent, 2 cafeteria workers, 4 bus drivers and 2 custodians.

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In 1968 Pastor Howard Mayes resigned and a call was accepted by Stanley Jensen.

And in 1972, Pastor Jensen resigned and Dr. Nicholas Kurtaneck became our part time pastor as he was also a professor at Biola University.

In May 1980, the church changed their name to Grace Brethren Church of Norwalk.

In November 1985 construction of the final wing on the north of the property was completed with much volunteer labor and included 4 additional classrooms.

By summer of 1990 Dr. Kurtaneck resigned and Robert Devine accepted the call. He resigned in 1992 and Don Bowlin then accepted the position of pastor for our church.

In April 1995, the original sanctuary was remodeled for \$155,000. And since then several stained glass windows have been added in memory of faithful members in our church.

By early 2000 the Trustees converted the garage to a Youth Center and installed modular trailers for maintenance and storage.

In the summer of 2001 the original kitchen and one adjoining classroom in the first wing were remodeled to a nursery for babies and toddlers. This included a kid-friendly bathroom.

In 2004, Pastor Don Bowlin retired and Wayne Ayer accepted the call to the pulpit.

In November 2007, Pastor Ayer accepted a call to Ohio and we called Jeff Patton as our pastor. He moved from Indiana in June 2008.

In 2009 the church voted to change our organizational structure and appointed 3 elders to join Pastor Patton for the spiritual leadership of our church. 5 deacons are also appointed and approved to serve the members. A review of the constitution as it relates to these changes began and was approved by mid- year 2011.

Our church has experienced a resurgence of young families during the last 6 years and our focus has been to make a difference in our community by expressing the love of Jesus to our neighbors. This effort has been reinforced by strong teaching from God's word edifying the members and calling each one to continual spiritual growth so that we become ambassadors for our Lord.

The following poem was written by a faithful child of God for this 100 year celebration:

Our God is Faithful!
He is the creator of all things.
It is He who holds the universe together.
He controls the winds and owns the rain.

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Our God is Faithful!
He never slumbers nor sleeps.
He raises the sun of the morning.
He places the moon and the stars in the night sky.

Our God is Faithful!
He is the Great I am.
He always was; He always is; He always will be.
He is always on time...never late...always here... Always!

Our God is Faithful!
Our God is ever true.
Let us have this moment to introduce our God to You!

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