

GRACE NOTES

News from and about Grace Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan # 13 January/February, 2008

Church History

WILLIAM H. AND ANITA BURRESS

April 14, 1924 – August, 14, 1999 (Anita)

March 28, 1924 – April 27, 2003 (William)

William Burress and Anita Broyles Burress were married for most of their adult lives (over 50 years) before Anita died in August of 1999. They were both from Mississippi. Bill was in the high school's marching band, where he developed his initial love of music. Anita, who was always involved in some kind of education, was teaching in a one room school house on the "Prairie" in Mississippi. Bill served in Germany and France while in the Army and distinguished himself as a band leader and trumpet player.

They both came from strong Christian backgrounds and brought those same values and work ethics with them when they came "up north". Bill and Anita were married on February 10, 1946 shortly after WWII ended. Bill's parents left their hometown in Tupelo, Mississippi to come to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and were able to buy a home shortly afterwards. Bill and Anita followed soon after and lived with Bill's parents for a short time while Bill was away at Business School at Howard University in Washington DC. Bill decided to come home to Grand Rapids to his wife and first born baby girl, Helen, and to pursue Real Estate Certification at the University of Michigan's Extension program in Grand Rapids. Bill received his certification after taking several business courses in preparation for starting his own business.

Bill and Anita soon found a home of their own not far from where his parents lived and about two blocks from a little church then known as Buckley Chapel. Their home became known as the place to go if you were a "Negro" and needed to take care of personal business matters; or couldn't read or explain your needs well enough to have your business taken care of by someone who didn't understand your culture or struggles. He did taxes in his home, made personal loans, even provided personal representation for those who didn't know how to represent themselves at various agencies, such as Social Services, Social Security, or the Court System. In 1953, while working the night shift at General Motors, Diesel

Division, Bill started one of the first black owned real estate businesses in Grand Rapids, and eventually became the first Black Real Estate Broker in the city. The business, on the corner of Cass and Franklin, became the headquarters for his real estate and tax business, and today remains under the direction of his son, Bill. Just recently the property, for years a city landmark, was sold and the business moved to a new location.



Anita took care of the house and her children and she and Bill opened their home to family and friends coming "up north" to better themselves. Without a place to live, many stayed at Bill and Anita's until they could get on their feet and out on their own. When her children were younger, Anita worked part-time assisting parents and their school aged children in a special program sponsored by the YWCA and the United Methodist Community House. She was also on the Board of a local community service organization, and attended local, state and national meetings. Anita was

a tireless volunteer. Her volunteer activities included the National March of Dimes Walk-A-Thon; the United Methodist Community House, and during the time the children were in school, PTA activities with Grand Rapids Public Schools.

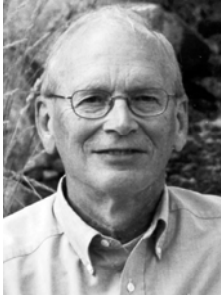
Because it was so close to their home, Bill, Anita, and the children, began going to Buckley Chapel in 1955. It was within walking distance and easy for their five children to attend Bible school, Sunday school, and Vacation Bible School. Buckley Chapel became Grace Church in 1962 and Bill became an Elder and Vice President of the very first Grace Church Council. Anita was active in coordinating and teaching in the Church Bible School, Sunday School, the Neighborhood Clothing Center, and Priscilla Circle. Bill taught Adult Sunday School classes and was Superintendent of the Sunday School till 1973.

Both William and Anita continued serving and volunteering well into retirement. Bill retired from General Motors after 40 years and from his Real Estate and Tax business after 30+ years. After 40 years of service, Anita retired from coordinating the Bible Club and teaching Sunday school at Grace Church. The impact Bill and Anita had on their community and church continues to this day. Not only did they leave their children a legacy of Christian love and service, but they also left a legacy of Community Service

and Volunteerism that hopefully will be handed down from generation to generation. Theirs was a life together devoted to building God's kingdom and is captured in one of Bill's favorite scripture verses: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say – rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." Philippians 4:4-5

Helen Brent

Gord Van Harn Retires



After seven years of leadership at the helm of Van Andel Education Institute (VAEI), Gordon Van Harn has announced his retirement, effective January 1, 2009. Van Harn will continue to serve on the VAEI board of Trustees and the Van Andel Institute (VAI) Graduate School Board of Directors.

"We are grateful to Gord Van Harn for his seven years of exceptional leadership," said VAI Chairman and CEO David Van Andel. "Under his leadership Van Andel Education Institute has seen the founding of the Science Academy and the VAI Graduate School, has hosted important national and regional education forums, and has changed its focus from technology to science education."

Van Harn served for thirty years as a faculty member of the Calvin College Biology Department where he taught physiology, undertook muscle and cardiovascular research, and served as Provost and Academic Dean for the Natural Sciences.

Gord has served Grace Church as an elder, clerk, and Sunday School teacher and currently serves the church as the book keeper.

William Versluys II 1946-2009



Long time member of Grace Church, William (Bill) Versluys II passed away Thursday, January 22, 2009 at Altrud Hospital in Grand Forks, ND. The funeral took place on Tuesday January 27 at 1 p.m. at Grace Christian Reformed Church.

Bill was born March 10, 1946 to William and Lois Versluys in Grand Rapids, MI. He attended Mayfair Christian School and graduated from

Grand Rapids Christian High School. He attended Calvin College before entering the business world for the next ten years. He returned to Calvin and the Seminary to become a minister.

He graduated from the Calvin Theological Seminary and accepted a call from the Christian Reformed World Missions to work in the Philippines. To facilitate his work, Grace Church called him as an associate pastor, ordained him to the ministry on October 11, 1981. After his return he served the churches in Jackson and Saginaw MI, Princeton, Hancock, Crookston and East Grand Forks, MN. He also

worked for Red River Hospice in ND and Good Samaritan in MN.

He and his wife Connie joined Grace Church in 1966. They were gone for a few years in the mid 70's, when Bill was working in North Carolina. He served Grace Church as the Sunday School Superintendent taking over from William Burress around 1973 and as a deacon in the late 70's. Bill and Connie often sang, either alone, or as a duo, at Grace Church. Their children Lisa, Bill, Kristin, Erica, Michael and Peter were all baptized at Grace Church.



Grace Church Council in the late 1970's. Front row (l.to r.) Bill Versluys, Jim Stapert, Rev. Roger Van Harn, Ted Rottman, Karl Westerhof; back row: Tom Vanderlaan, Andrew Cross, Marlin Van Elderen, Greg Yoder.

"Aint' Nobody Done Nuthin for Me."

On Friday and Saturday March 6 and 7 at 7:00 PM at Grace Church there will be a Black History Month production of "Ain't Nobody Done Nuthin for Me." This drama is written and produced by Deborah Alexander, a member of the Lighthouse Full Life Center.

The drama is set in a courtroom and stars Mr. Davis who is on trial because he is ignorant of his past. He feels that nobody ever did anything for him, thus the title. "Aint' Nobody Done Nuthin for Me."

During the trial there are many witnesses from the past including King Alfonso I, Queen of Sheba, and Rev. Robert Walsh. Mr. Davis also witnesses scenes from slavery times and hears from Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, and others. He is educated about his past and finds out that there are many who have done something for him.

There are about 35 people in the cast. Emmanuel Phillips plays the part of the prosecutor, Melanie Karr is the judge, Kathy Bouwsma is the bailiff, Helen Brent is Harriet Tubman, Al Pinder is the attorney, and Nikki Pinder is Queen of Shebah. Leah Yoder is helping with set and props. There are dancers from Grace Church, GEMS participants, Grace Gospel Choir members, and members from the Lighthouse Full Life Center and the greater Grand Rapids community.

Attend this drama celebrating Black History at Grace Church. March 6 and 7, 2009