

**The Vocation of First Call Congregations**  
**Case Study Report**  
**Grace Lutheran Church, Bandera, Texas**  
**Site visit: May, 2007**  
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The Holy Spirit Descends

*On a quiet spring morning, a family gathered along the shores of the Medina River just outside of Bandera, Texas. A young couple and their two children, siblings of the adults, parents/grandparents and friends came to participate in the baptism of Alicia and her two-year-old son, Jackson. Also present were the pastor and members of Grace Lutheran Church.*

*Alicia had been raised in a faith that endorsed adult baptism by immersion, but her husband was Lutheran and she began attending Grace with him. Their older son was baptized earlier, but Jackson had not yet been baptized, and after meeting with Pastor Karl, Alicia requested that she and Jackson be baptized by immersion at the river's edge.*

*The day began rather cloudy, with a slight breeze. As the group gathered there were others around, canoeing, kayaking, fishing and swimming in the water. Fishing gear including a loaf of bread for bait and fishing nets, symbolic to the faith were lying nearby. The guitarist/singers from Grace began singing "Down to the River to Pray" welcoming the participants and guests to this special service of baptism. Others stopped to observe this unusual group gathering at the waters edge and were welcomed by Pastor Karl and asked to join the baptism. The children began throwing stones into the waters edge and there was a gentleness and serenity as canoes floated by, the sound of those swimming across the river and a dog barking in the distance.*

*As the service began, the sun broke through and the gentle breeze continued to blow. Pastor Karl asked Alicia if she wished to be baptized, and they then proceeded into the water where Alicia knelt in the cold water and had water poured over her head. The music continued to play softly in the background, and those on the shore and floating by observed the peaceful and serene scene.*

*After Alicia was baptized, Jackson joined her in the water and after his parents affirmed their desire to have him baptized, Jackson also was immersed and had water poured over his head. The Spirit of God descending on the two of them through their commitment, the words of those around them, and the love of the congregation members singing softly in the background mesmerized those watching.*

*What a glorious way to receive the Holy Spirit, to be given new life and to be brought forth as inheritors of God's kingdom.*

## History of Grace Lutheran

In 1966, many of the residents of Bandera were driving to Kerrville for worship at the Lutheran Church there. One of the historians stated that she just “couldn’t see driving to Kerrville every week – there should be a church in Bandera for us.” A mission was beginning in Bandera and land for a church was purchased. Services began in the funeral home with about 13 charter families. In retrospect, the early parishioners “don’t know how we did it financially”, but they were able to build a church that was dedicated in 1967. A lot of the work constructing the church was done by the members. Rocks were hauled from the countryside and the wrought ironwork for the lectern, pulpit and communion railings were created by an artist member. The church is a beautiful structure of rock walls and beautiful floor tiles. Linda, who was one of the founding members of Grace and is now 99 shared, “People said we couldn’t do it, they said no one would come from this small town of Bandera. But I said then let them come from all over, and we done it, we created a church in Bandera.”

Ministry at this church has involved many short term and interim pastors. Because of difficult situations and the many transitions, Grace has had severe swings in membership over the years. Most parishioners interviewed identified two major difficult events in the pastoral care of the congregation. The first was an incident of pastoral infidelity that resulted in the removal of the pastor by the bishop (after congregational members spent time and energy trying to keep the two parties apart). Many felt that in addition to breaking up two families – the pastor and the church secretary – the issue also created marital conflict with other couples. Some people list as at least twelve couples who also then divorced. Before this incident, the church had built to almost three hundred members and they were worshipping in two Sunday services. Grace was known as the “in church,” the “place to go” in Bandera. The event greatly affected the congregation. Some members left over trust issues with the office of pastor; however, church members interviewed described themselves as having “lived through a lot” at Grace, but said they would never leave their church.

The pastor who followed this pastor (1994-2001) had to rebuild the trust of the congregation. The parishioners stated that he had a “master plan for growth” and was able to attract new members. This was a positive time in the life of Grace.

The second challenging situation for Grace was the pastor called immediately before Pastor Karl (although there was an interim in between). This pastor exhibited some serious differences with church members and membership began to dwindle quickly. In addition to his inability to give eye contact or exhibit warmth to the members, there was great discrepancy in what the congregation expected of a pastor, and what this pastor was willing to accept as his responsibility. According to those interviewed, “All he wanted to do was preach, and he felt everything else was the congregations responsibility.” After numerous attempts to make it work, the bishop removed him from the congregation. Many in the congregation are still angry about this – the time it took for the bishop to remove him and that Grace was required to pay six months severance pay to the pastor. Although it was acknowledged that some left for other reasons, the Sunday after this

pastor left, the “only people attending service was the new interim pastor and the organist.” The interim pastor rebuilt the congregation to about 80 members.

Another historical event for the congregation was the addition of the fellowship hall. Initially it was built for the expanding Sunday school, youth and family gatherings due to the growth experienced, but was soon “taken over” by Noah’s Ark Day Care Center. Although there is acknowledgement that the Center may be bringing in new families, there is still some resentment that they have lost their space to the day care center and some feel the declining Sunday school attendance is due to this. There was agreement, however, that Pastor Karl is working on a compromise that will allow the space to be utilized by both the church and Noah’s Ark Day Care Center.

In addition, just about the time Pastor Karl began, the IRS contacted Grace (who were in partnership with the Center) about certain taxes that had not been paid. Noah’s Ark was in arrears approximately \$44,000 and a lien was put on the property. The church took a bold step and supported the Center by taking out a loan for them. This was a complicated step due to the financial situation at Grace. The Center has since paid back the loan in monthly payments. The exposure of this oversight was difficult for all, but a solution was found.

Pastor Karl came to Grace Lutheran in 2004. He arrived as the interim pastor was leaving. He has accepted many challenges including the day care audit, continuing the rebuilding of the congregation and making small changes to continue to help Grace grow in Spirit and in numbers.

### Congregational Context and Profile

Grace Lutheran Church is located in Bandera, Texas, a small community about 45 miles northwest of San Antonio. Bandera is located in the “hills” of Texas where rolling, lush green hills are separated by flowing creeks and rivers. The rivers and creeks are an ongoing flood threat, and floods have destroyed property in the recent past. In 2002 a flood wiped out half of Bandera. Many parishioners have lived under flood threats their whole lives, while newcomers are getting used to the possibility of floods at any time.

Bandera is known as the “Cowboy Capital of the World” and the small town plays to this well. The downtown has hitching posts for horses, and most of the downtown shops exhibit the “cowboy” theme, either by what they sell or by how they look. The local diner uses a large chuckwagon inside the diner for its buffet. John Wayne pictures cover the walls. In addition, some of the local churches have hitching posts for horses during worship.

Some described Bandera as a “bedroom community” to San Antonio. Many commute, some husbands holding jobs in the Bandera area and wives driving to San Antonio for jobs that give the family health care benefits. Schools are the biggest employer in the area. Bandera is also a newly discovered location for retirees, evidenced by the RV

trailer parks along the road from San Antonio to Bandera. There are many winter Texans who are active in the community and church but San Antonio retirees are not welcomed easily. Military retirees are welcomed, however, and an increasing number of retirees are coming from Texas armed forces bases. In addition to the winter Texans, there are other newcomers, primarily those from out of state who have heard about the hills of Texas. Many of the newcomers have found land in the Bandera area on the Internet and purchased it with the hope of increasing value over time. About 90% of parishioners at Grace live more than 10 miles away.

Bandera and the surrounding hills have a diversity of living situations – large ranches, gated communities and small pockets of city urban poverty. The land values have increased greatly in the last few years as the area is gentrifying. A new subdivision lists houses beginning at \$300,000 and many feel Bandera is becoming too expensive for locals to buy land and houses. Bandera is very segregated, and although Hispanics are the majority, they are not visible in the community.

Bandera is home to many churches of different faiths. The largest church is the Catholic church located on Main Street of town. There are Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist and non-denominational churches. When driving through town, it is evident that churches play an active role in the life of the people of Bandera. A large banner over Main Street announces the Catholic church's spring celebration and other signs throughout town are evidence of other church functions. Wednesday night continues to be designated as "church night" in the community (at least "until the ACLU catches up to us") and no school or community activities are scheduled for that evening.

The number of faiths and churches makes it easy for those who are dissatisfied with the resolution of an issue in their congregation to switch membership to another church and faith. This is known in the area as "church jumping" and happens frequently enough that all clergy are aware of it. It makes it interesting to lead a particular faith community when many of your parishioners have very "eclectic faith" backgrounds.

The people of Bandera and the surrounding area are primarily German in heritage. German immigrants initially started Lutheran churches in Kerrville, a short distance from Bandera. Polish immigrants and Mormons are considered to be the founders of Bandera and these two groups continue to be strong in this area.

#### A New Pastor – Interview with Pastor Karl

##### *Call Process and Welcome*

Pastor Karl is a First Call pastor to Grace Lutheran. He is considered by many to be a "local boy" having been raised in Comfort, Texas, just an hour from Bandera. He is aware that this helped him in the call process. Pastor Karl is a second career pastor, which means he is a bit older than most First Call pastors. He brought with him a wife and child (they have since had a second child). Initially looking for an associate position, he has found he likes this call as sole pastor. His first career was in public service and he

feels the skills he learned there benefit him in his pastoral call. He feels he is learning in this new call and that the congregation has been very supportive.

Pastor Karl identifies the day care center and its potential for new members as one of the reasons he took the call to Grace. He also states the proximity to his and his wife's family as another factor in accepting the call to Grace Lutheran.

The church made a house available to the Pr. Karl's family at no charge for the first one and a half years of his call. The Biermanns settled in to a parishioner's home in Pipe Creek, close to Bandera, until they were able to afford to buy their own house in Bandera. The church also increased the "housing allowance" so the Biermanns could buy their house. It was presented to the congregation that if some parishioners could increase their monthly pledge five to ten dollars, the Biermanns would be able to purchase their Bandera house. Grace's ability to do this was very helpful to the Biermann's and a sign of support for the new pastor and his family.

The Biermanns were welcomed on moving day by ten to fifteen members who helped them move into their home. Many people helped them get acclimated to the community by giving them written information on activities and resources and taking them around the community.

The church also addressed childcare issues with Pr. Karl and his wife and he feels blessed that they gave him a six-week paternity leave when his second child was born. There are currently three retired pastors in the congregation who were very supportive during that time, preaching and managing other pastoral responsibilities.

Pastor Karl felt that trust was established immediately with some parishioners at his ordination in Comfort. Because of the proximity, many from Grace came and Pastor felt it was a great bonding experience. In addition, he makes an effort to do home visitation especially with the core group of congregation members and feels this has been important to the members.

### *Challenges*

Pr. Karl feels that although he has a strong core group of "old timers" and winter retirees, the future growth of the congregation will be in the newcomers. He talks excitedly about the potential for Grace but feels it is dependent on the willingness of the congregation to look at making the changes needed to accommodate the changing population. This does not mean changing the doctrine of the church. His challenge is to help the congregation understand this.

Another challenge identified by Pr. Karl was "distance." Because so many of the current parishioners live more than ten miles from the church, it is difficult to plan activities at church during the week. In addition, because many are ranchers, there are other constraints to scheduling activities. Currently, most activities are held on Sunday (Bible study, confirmation, youth activities) which makes for a very full day.

Finances were identified as an issue even during the call process. Pastor Karl was aware that the congregation was not sure they could call a full time pastor, but made a “leap of faith” to do so. The congregation has had to come up with money for the loan to the daycare and for the increase in the housing allowance for the pastor and they have done so. Pastor Karl’s says they “pay to what’s needed” and seem to get by. He feels they are becoming more goal oriented and stewardship (faith giving, not tithing) is being addressed in a more formal manner.

### *Response to Change*

The called pastor prior to Pastor Karl introduced change very quickly and there was a lot of resistance to it. He introduced the WOV blue worship book without consulting the congregation on the change. One family continues to pride itself on “not ever touching the WOV worship book.” There were other changes that many felt did not have congregational input or approval. This was some of the basis of the conflict that arose between this pastor and the congregation. According to Pastor Karl, some have told him that there is a “culture clash” between the old timers and the newcomers in the congregation, but that most of the members don’t want to fight and are willing to try new things to keep peace.

The re-introduction of two services on Sunday morning (a traditional and contemporary service) became the first issue to come to the congregation. The Worship Team recommended the change and it is being evaluated at the end of the summer. Many felt that it would harm the “family feel” of the worship service and they would be “split.” There is a fear of change if members feel it will threaten “the family of Grace.” Even with a fellowship hour, Sunday school and Bible study between the two services, many felt that two services would divide the congregation. They have been willing, however, to try it, and it has been going quite well, with good attendance at both services.

Pastor Karl has been content with the congregation’s response to change. They seem more willing to try something new if they are unaware of the context in which it has been introduced. For example, a new liturgy has been introduced this summer in the bulletin, and most have been pleased with it. It was selected from the new hymnal, which many are opposed to. The Council and some in the congregation refer to it as the “stealth liturgy” since the majority of the congregation do not know where it comes from.

### *Collegial Support*

There are currently three retired pastors who worship at Grace Lutheran. There was a fourth who recently moved out of the area. Pastor Karl has felt very supported by the pastors at Grace. They have given him a place to check things out, supported him in his ministry and have not interfered. This has been a gift to him as he learns and grows.

### *Pastors Perspective on Why It Is Working*

Pastor Karl feels Grace is a very unique and resilient congregation. They have been through much, but continue to bounce back. He is clear about their hesitancy to call any pastor recommended by the bishop, based on past experiences with the Synod office. He

feels they took the risk with him because they see him as a “hometown boy,” having been raised close to Bandera. They felt he knew the culture of the community and would be a “good fit” for Grace. In addition, they wanted a pastor with family roots close by so he/she would stay with the congregation for a while. In many ways he feels the initial negotiations that had to take place regarding his salary, housing allowance and paternity leave were good for the relationship between the congregation and him. It required some good, honest discussion and compromise and set the stage for future issues to be discussed.

Pastor Karl knows there is an anxiety about him leaving Grace after a few years, and since they are approaching two years he has seen the anxiety increase. He has been trying to reassure the congregation that they are staying at Grace by engaging in long term visioning and by purchasing the house in town.

### Lay Leader Interviews

Interviews were held with historians, long term parishioners, council members, church leaders, staff and retired pastors. All were gracious in their hospitality and honest in the discussions.

### *Call Process*

The call committee members were concerned about calling a First Call pastor, about having the financial stability to afford a fulltime pastor, and mistrust with the Synod office regarding past “matches” for Grace.

Giving was beginning to increase as the interim pastor rebuilt the congregation from a few to about 80 parishioners. However, there was much discussion about the Grace’s ability to support a full time pastor, even if it was a First Call pastor.

Because of the difficulties that the congregation had gone through with two of the last called pastors, the call committee and some in the congregation were anxious about calling a young, inexperienced pastor. The vision, however, was to call a pastor that would be able to relate to the youth and young families as this was an area the committee felt was a potential for growth.

The Synod office gave the call committee three names for potential pastoral candidates. The call committee interviewed two of the pastors by phone as they were out of town candidates. In addition, the congregation bought a plane ticket for Pastor Karl to preach and meet them. By the time they scheduled the interview, he was the only candidate for the position. Some parishioners knew Pastor Karl from contacts in Comfort and he had a cousin attending Grace. One of the retired pastors knew Karl’s family and had married Karl and his wife. They knew he was an older First Call pastor and was bringing a family with him. Some in the congregation did their own check of references from their contacts in Comfort in addition to the references provided as part of the call process. Feeling that two of the three last pastors recommended by the Synod office had been disasters for the church, they felt after interviewing Pr. Karl that the only “negative was that the Synod office was so sure he was a good match.”

However, after discussion, the congregation decided by a vote of 42 to 1 that the call would be made to Pastor Karl. Some indicated that many in the congregation did not understand that “We’ve been through a lot – the new people don’t understand,” and they were ready for a “breath of fresh air after the disasters.” They were pleased that he was young, energetic and interested in working with young families and the youth.

Although calling a female pastor was not an option (no female names were given to Grace in the call process) there was a spirited discussion at the evening barbeque about whether the church was ready for a female pastor. This was a younger group and the women felt Grace was ready while the men felt it was not. In discussion with some of the older members, it was clear they felt Grace was not ready for a female pastor.

### *Welcoming*

Many in the congregation were involved in preparing for Pastor Karl’s family. Members spent weeks getting the house ready for the Pastor and his family. They were not charged rent for the time they lived there. Although it was a bit of a struggle, they were able to increase his housing allowance so he could purchase his own home in Bandera.

### *Congregational Challenges*

Membership is an ongoing challenge for Grace. The large swings in attendance, due to the challenges of the congregation, have made this a priority. There has been an increase in attendance since the interim pastor left and there are now approximately 120 people worshipping on Sunday morning.

Along with the increase in worship attendance has been a slow, but steady increase in membership. With increased attendance has come an increase in giving. Finances have been an issue at Grace since the early days when attendance dropped from three hundred to only a few. There is a feeling that “God was on our side because He always got us through.” There were mixed reactions to “tithing” and some of the older parishioners feel the younger ones don’t know about tithing because it was “never taught to them.”

There is a continuing challenge of increasing the attendance of youth and young families. Many feel the youth/young adult age have already been lost and that pastor should focus on those of Sunday school age. Some feel that the young are not coming to church because there has been little change in the worship service and few places for their involvement.

### *Dealing with Change*

Change comes slowly at Grace Lutheran church. There are many who want faster change, and some who feel change is happening too fast. There was a wide range of opinion about how decisions are made, with some feeling that the Church Council and committees should have more authority over change and some feeling that decisions need more congregational input. Although many were initially resistant to the different worship styles of the early and later services, they now feel the changes have been good

for the congregation. As one parishioner explained, “Pastor Karl is exploring new things and he needs the support of those who want change.” There appears to be a willingness to try something new on the part of most people.

### *Dealing with Conflict*

Although there does not appear to be overt conflict at Grace, there is a small undercurrent of distress. Some of those interviewed felt there is not a real commitment from the Winter Texans and said, “you can’t count on them.” Some felt that changes are thoroughly discussed by the committee and council before implementation while others felt that the congregation is left out of some important decision making.

It was expressed by some that people “don’t always speak their minds” because they do not want fighting in the congregation. It was generally felt that “people come together when the vote comes” and few grudges are held for differing positions.

It was difficult to get a feel for how this congregation handles conflict. It appears as though the difficulties with the previous pastors have united the congregation and in some ways, making the Synod office the target of their anger. It also appears that the issues of small changes, following a period of time when they felt they had little control over the change process, are acceptable and even welcomed by most. They feel they are usually aware of or involved in the decisions, and that after what they have been through as a congregation, these are small issues of change.

### *Leadership Perspective (on why it has worked)*

The leaders feel that the initial acceptance of Pastor Karl came from their perception of him as a “hometown boy” and an “adopted son.” Having ties to the region and an appreciation for the culture of the people allowed for trust to begin almost immediately. They found, however, that many of his personal characteristics were also a good match for the congregation. They are pleased that he is a warm, hugging, people person and feel that he has not imposed change but rather challenged them to look at change. He did not come to “lay down mandates,” but there is good give and take on both ends. He has solicited and accepted feedback from congregational members as part of his growing experience and they have seen positive change. Recently they have been willing to acknowledge that the “Bishop made a good match.” Although some feel that the strength of a congregation is “in the people, not the pastor,” others feel that the “pastor makes the church.” There is an acknowledgement that Pastor Karl will be able to move the church forward using skills that past pastors have not needed. All seemed to feel that the Holy Spirit was alive during this call process.

## Christian Life and Fellowship at Grace

The council has been divided into four primary ministry teams: Worship and Music, Congregational Life and Fellowship, Evangelism and Outreach and Christian Education. The current and previous presidents of the council have both have been extremely effective in providing leadership to Grace in difficult times.

Adult Education takes many forms and appears very important to the members as evidenced by the large numbers that attended the two Bible studies between services on Sunday. One study is led by the retired pastors and focuses on the lessons of the day. The second Bible study is led by the church assistant who is also planning to go to seminary in the near future, and focuses on the Crossways Bible Study or a contemporary issue and the faith. Both groups were well attended with over 25 people attending. There is also a Book study that meets to discuss current books.

Sunday school continues to be challenging as few children currently attend, but it appears to be growing in numbers. Many more children are involved in the Children's Sermon than stay for Sunday school. Some members indicated that the decline came after Noah's Ark Day Care took over the use of the fellowship building and that the "children felt displaced." This is an area of attention for Pr. Karl and the ministry team. Vacation Bible School is held with the Episcopal Church and has good attendance.

Pastor Karl and the Council are continuing to address the issue of youth involvement as well. There are currently four youth in confirmation and two youth went to the ELCA Youth Gathering. There has been a shared youth program on Wednesday nights with the Episcopal Church, but that is not as strong as it has been in the past.

Pastor Karl and the Council see Noah's Ark is a great outreach opportunity for Grace. Pastor Karl spends time at the Day Care when the children are there and does parts of the daily/weekly program. In addition, there is a Wednesday evening meal, worship and activity for the families that is led by the pastor and members of Grace. A few of the council members indicated they joined Grace because of their involvement at Noah's Ark, and they knew of others who did the same. The board of Noah's Ark is comprised of members of Grace, Noah's Ark, parents and teachers. The cooperation of these individuals resulted in the loan being paid off 6 months early.

The Women's groups have organized into two large circles and they continue many of the traditions of Grace. There is a holiday bazaar that raises funds for scholarships and they are involved in other aspects of church life. There is a quilters group that meets on Wednesday morning to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief. The pastor stated that "much of the work of the church happens on Wednesday mornings."

The yearly Wild Game Dinner was identified as the most important social, fellowship and outreach activity of Grace. The dinner attracts patrons from all over the area for a dinner of wild game. Last year Pastor Karl surprised everyone by serving communion to the volunteers. "Fellowship is the reason for the dinner" and many past members of Grace

come back to work together. Approximately \$5000-\$6000 has been raised for the church. There continues to be discussion about how to use this money.

In addition, fund raising happens as the need arises for a particular church project or a church or Bandera family that needs help. Earline spoke about the money raised in three fundraisers to help her daughter who was burned severely in an accident. She was teary when telling how thankful she was for the loving members of Grace.

The church is involved with other churches in the area and joins with them on various activities. There is a cowboy service with the Episcopal Church once a year and some of the children and youth activities are done jointly (VBS, youth activities). In addition they sometimes worship together in jointly planned Thanksgiving, Easter Sunday Sunrise services and have participated in a Cantata at Christmas.

Much is happening at Grace Lutheran and the Pastor and Church Council have engaged in a visioning/planning process to continue the excitement.

#### Worship and Fellowship Hour

Worship at Grace was a wonderful experience of spiritual activity. The early service included guitar playing by older and younger members. The church is small, and even when not full, has the feeling of being full. Although the first service was the contemporary service, it was pretty traditional. Pastor held the interest of the youth during the children's sermon by washing their hands as Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples. His sermon was about "uproar" and he shared a story/song about the Mississippi Church Squirrel Revival which was very entertaining (the squirrel got a weed eater in his fruit of the looms and "caused a revival to set the church back on the straight and narrow.") This tale really appeared to get the congregation excited about Acts being a book of "uproar" and excitement in our faith. Prayers were inclusive of those in need, in the congregation, community and world and a special offering was taken for the areas of Texas hit by the recent tornados.

Between the two worship services, there was a brief fellowship hour in the narthex and coffee offered in the Fellowship Hall. Pastor Karl's hope is to bring back the fellowship hour to the narthex so that the concern about the two services splitting the church will be less an issue. Sunday school students and Bible study adults moved to the Fellowship Hall where they found their classes or groups and study began. Pastor Karl went with the Sunday school students while other pastors and church leaders led the adult groups. Adult education appears to be particularly important at Grace.

The second service was much more traditional in nature. There was good participation and the parishioners shared the excitement offered in the sermon. There was definitely a difference between the services, but it appeared as though most parishioners would be comfortable at either service.

## Congregational Meeting

There was a brief congregational meeting held after the second service to elect officers, ministry team/committee chairs and delegates to the Synod Assembly. The current president, Ken, presided over the meeting, as his office was not up for election. Approximately 38 –40 people attended and nominations were taken from the floor. There was considerable interest in determining the leadership of the congregation in a forward-looking, supportive way.

## Gifts and Challenges

### *Gifts*

Grace has a number of gifts that have made it a good place for a First Call pastor. This congregation has been through a number of serious incidents that have shaken it, but there is a strong, solid faith that God will see them through. Although there has been opportunity to put blame on others for some of the things that have happened, there has been an attitude of moving forward to continue the ministry of God.

Grace is also blessed by a diversity of people. Differences do appear to exist, but they appreciate all the different people that have come together to worship God: historians, long time members, winter Texans, those that commute to attend, young families, those who have come from different faith communities, those that have moved from out of state and made Bandera their home, those returning to the church and the unchurched who are finding their home at Grace. It is an eclectic group of people to be celebrated, and the differences, although challenging at times, seem to give energy to Grace as well as the resiliency it has shown over the years.

With the growth of Bandera and the success of the daycare, Grace is in a position of growth as well. The outreach and evangelism activities of this congregation continue to be strong and will continue to become even more creative in their ability to bring people to God.

Because of the diversity of Bandera and Grace Lutheran, the parishioners have been willing to look at change to meet the needs of the eclectic population while holding to the beliefs and traditions of the Lutheran Church. Although this has been challenging, it is one of the ways that freshness is brought into the church.

### *Challenges*

As noted earlier, some parishioners feel that the strength of a congregation is “in the people, not the pastor,” while others feel that the “pastor makes the church.” Outreach and evangelism must be shared by all in the church and is not the sole responsibility of the pastor. Grace has shown its ability to grow in numbers again and again. With some stability in the pastoral call, it now has the ability to become the church it was in the 70’s and even more.

Change comes slowly and Grace has been able to adapt to small changes. The need to continually look at who they are and how best to meet the needs of the wonderfully diverse population while still holding to the Lutheran tradition will be an ongoing struggle. It will be important to hold up the issue of “grace” while educating all in the teachings of the Bible and Luther. How Grace is able to translate the important parts of others faiths and traditions into the church will be a difficult but exciting challenge.

Grace’s resiliency, faith in God to lead them, its diverse population and willingness to take risks to make change have all played an important part in their being a good place for a First Call pastor. In addition, Pastor Karl being a “known” person, the group of mentor pastors and Grace’s ability to make the family welcome were all factors in this “good match.”