



## NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, February 17, 2022

### **A YEAR, A CENTURY, AND GRACE'S ENDURING LEGACY: Historic Downtown Church Celebrates Organ Centennial and Pastoral Anniversary on March 6th**

SAN JOSE—As the Roaring 20's was just clearing its throat, San Jose visionaries were enhancing the lived experience of city dwellers by introducing cutting edge technologies to everyday experiences. In 1922, the Liberty Theatre, one of Silicon Valley's last-standing silent movie theatres, unveiled the state of the art Robert Morton theatre organ, which was euphemistically called an orchestra of one (since it incorporates several actual instruments, instead of traditional pipes), as the centerpiece of their expanded services. Exceptionally rare today, the Liberty Theatre's Robert Morton organ found a new home in the newly relocated and constructed Grace Baptist Church, some 20 years later, where it would remain in continuous use for the successive eight decades. On Sunday, March 6, 2022 at 11:00 AM, Grace Baptist Church will launch 13 months of Centennial Celebrations.

Centennial programming will begin with a "Service of Song," featuring guest speaker and internationally renowned concert tenor Dr. Gregory Hopkins (presently Professor of Voice at Howard University and Minister of Music at Harlem's famed Convent Avenue Baptist Church); and performances by New York City based vocal performing artist/playwright/director Angela Watson; Grace Baptist Church organist and jazz pianist Franz Robért; Grace's Minister of Worship and Arts and veteran songwriter (for artists like Amy Grant) Benton Stokes; and celebrated percussionist and former band leader for Tower of Power Ron E. Beck. Grace will host concerts with leading national level performers, like organist and LGBTQIA activist Mark Miller and rising jazz piano sensation Kenneth Peagler, for the next year to commemorate this last of its kind instrument.

"For the next 13 months, Grace will sound the Liberty Theatre Organ for Justice, and hope the community will find ways to support and maintain this San José relic and treasure," said

Grace's Senior Pastor Rev. George E. Oliver. "80 years ago, when this work of art was threatened with destruction, in the midst of war and depression, our forebears built a sanctuary around this instrument to save it; and now it is the only organ of its kind to remain in a single California city," Oliver continued.

Bill Brooks, Grace's point person on the organ, has spent decades organizing concerts, silent movie screenings, and lectures to draw attention to the organ, listed on the American Theatre Organ Society's national registry. "I want future generations to hear the genius of those who came before, and that means finding new breath for new songs," he said.

Brooks has been raising money to attempt to fully restore all the ranks, but budgetary constraints connected to Grace's other ministries (unhoused shelter, Sanctuary Room, and shower program) all demand greater attention, but he hopes the Centennial will help highlight the organ's historic importance.

Grace will also celebrate Rev. Oliver's first year as Senior Pastor. Over the last 12 months Grace rebounded from tragic losses in the shelter in November of 2020, faced Easter threats from White Nationalist groups, and took deep budgetary blows like most other religious institutions during the pandemic. At the same time Rev. Oliver helped Grace take strong public stands against hate and injustice, led with other clergy on issues ranging from climate change to criminal justice reform, oversaw a one-year 25% increase in active membership, introduced new grant funded initiatives like the Juneteenth Street Festival, and helped the church successfully engage an important proposed student housing development that will make Grace have greater impacts in the community's most significant areas of need.

The Service of Song commemorating Graces Liberty Theatre Organ Centennial and Pastoral Anniversary will begin at 11:00 AM, Sunday, March 6th, and is open to the entire public. For more information please go to [www.graceinsanjose.org](http://www.graceinsanjose.org) or e-mail [office@graceinsanjose.org](mailto:office@graceinsanjose.org) Donations to support Grace Baptist Church preserve the Liberty Theatre Organ can be sent online at <https://www.graceinsanjose.org/give-online/> or mailed to Grace Baptist Church; 484 E San Fernando St; San Jose, CA 95112 (Please write "100 Year Celebration" in memo).

**#ENDS**

**Word Count = 687**

ABOUT Grace Baptist a church centered in the heart of San Jose, California, and our hearts beat with the inclusive rhythm of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are a diverse family ranging from college students to seniors, who throughout our century here fought for justice, put stone equity into expanding the Kin(g)dom of God, and pried open doors of welcome wherever we could. Walking in Jesus' way, we gather together to reflect the incomparable love of Jesus Christ, and on how we can transform the lives of the human family, both near and far. **Whoever and wherever you are, you're at home with Grace.**

Rev. George E. Oliver

*For interview requests, or follow-up please call 413.885.8191*

PHOTOS



Dr. Gregory H. Hopkins, Grace Baptist Church Liberty Theatre Organ Centennial



Angela Watson, Grace Baptist Church Liberty Theatre Organ Centennial Guest Vocalist