

# History of Christ Episcopal Church

Soon after its founding in 1860, Episcopalians were worshipping at Valdosta. During Reconstruction Days, the Episcopal mission station was visited by clergy from the Diocese of Georgia, as well as from Florida, Alabama and Mississippi.

By 1871, a lot had been secured and a church building program was underway, with another \$100 raised for missions. There were only two families, twelve in all, and only half were communicants.

The Rev. Samuel Benedict held services in the Lowndes County Court House and in private homes prior to 1885.

The first vicar, the Rev. H. B. Stuart-Martin, became vicar in 1885. During his first year here, the cornerstone was laid at 309 Central Avenue. The first service was held in February, 1886.

The Rt. Rev. Edwin G. Weede, Bishop of Florida, consecrated Christ Chapel in December, 1887, in the absence of Bishop Beckwith of Georgia, who was traveling abroad for his health. And for sixty years, the congregation worshipped at the Central Avenue site.

After the Rev. Mr. Stuart-Martin's five year tenure, there followed a succession of clergymen who served the mission for periods of from three months to three years each.

The first resident vicar was the Rev. F. B. Ticknor (1892-95), but there was no vicarage. In 1892, the first Sunday School was established, with 15 pupils and two teachers, and Mr. Charles Thompson became the first organist and served in that post for fifty years, from 1892 to 1942.

Also in 1892, the first episcopal visitation was made by the Rt. Rev. Cleland Kinloch Nelson, Bishop of Georgia. However, no confirmations took place until twenty years after the church building was consecrated.

Col. Powhattan Whittle had given the church a lot on Ashley Street between Hill Avenue and Central Avenue, and in 1892 Bishop Nelson loaned the ladies of Christ Church \$360 to build stores. Since they found it difficult to repay the debt, the Rev. Mr. Ticknor suggested the ladies be organized. Christ Church Guild was formed in 1894, with Mrs. Lucien Lamar, its first leader, serving six years.

The hard-working ladies gave concerts, festivals and lectures in order to repay the Bishop in full with seven percent interest! In further, similar negotiations with the Bishop, they repaired their stores and the church, giving a mortgage on the stores as security, and later repaid the Bishop handsomely. In appreciation, he presented the church a set of candlesticks.

Through the years, the name of the women's group changed from Christ Church Guild to Woman's Auxiliary to St. Mary's Guild, back to Christ Church Guild, later to Woman's Auxiliary to the National Council and, most recently, to Episcopal Churchwomen. And the purpose shifted from fund raising to the current emphasis on prayer, study and service, with less preoccupation with organization structure, reflecting the pattern of women's work in the national Church.

In 1900, under the Rev. G. A. Ottman, the first vestry was formed, with Mr. J. L. Staten serving as first senior warden, and the organist Mr. Charles Thompson, as junior warden. This vestry agreed to pay \$200 annually toward the priest's salary, the first such local support.

Also during the Rev. Mr. Ottman's tenure, 1901, a reed organ was purchased, the first choir was organized and the first electric lights were installed.

With the profits from the sale of 50 dolls in 1901, the women bought a brass altar cross and two vases, which were placed on the altar on Easter Day, 1902. The vases are still in use.

In 1903, the Needle Woman's Guild, a forerunner of the present Altar Guild, was formed. Mrs. J. L. Staten, wife of the first senior warden, was first president.

In 1905, the Rev. R. G. Hamilton presented the first confirmation class to Bishop Nelson.

In 1910, at the suggestion of the Rev. H. B. Thomas, the women sold the stores on Ashley Street in order to build a vicarage at 105 W. North Street on a lot which had been purchased from the Frank Ford estate in 1909. Members of the Thomas family were the residents.

About the same time, the church was enlarged and a new organ was installed.

The choir was vested for the first time on Easter Sunday, 1921, under the direction of the Rev. J. J. Cornish. And though the Guild started a Parish House Fund in 1922, it was changed to an Organ Fund at the request of the Rt. Rev. Frederick Focke Reese.

The first adult Bible Class was formed by the Rev. Mr. Cornish in 1924. Following his retirement in 1932, the Rev. Armand T. Eyler became vicar and served four years. A pulpit in memory of Mr. Cornish was dedicated in 1935.

The Rev. T. G. Mundy became vicar in 1936 and served for ten years, during which the church was enlarged to provide choir stalls, extensive repairs were made to the vicarage, and adjoining land was purchased for a parish hall (in 1943).

Though there were only 80 communicants, ten young men from Christ Church served in uniform in World War II. And a communicant, Clifton Huntington White, was ordered deacon April 29, 1945, serving with Mr. Mundy until March 16, 1946, when he was ordained priest.

On January 1, 1946, a lot measuring 132 feet on North Patterson Street by 205 feet on College Street was purchased from Holmes estate for \$6,000. The site was directly across the street from Georgia State Woman's College (now Valdosta State College).

With the departure of the Rev. Mr. Mundy in March 1946, the Rev. Mr. White became vicar in June of that year.

In 1946, the Men's Club was organized, with Jerome Tillman as president. It has contributed to parish life through a number of service projects for twenty years, as has the continuing work of the women of the parish.

The church building on Central Avenue was sold in September 1946, and deconsecrated in 1947. The congregation moved its center of worship to the college and stayed fourteen months, while a new church building was under construction.

Ground was broken on May 3, 1948, and the cornerstone from the old church was re-carved and laid at the new site on September 10, 1948, with Mr. Arthur W. Goodin as the Bishop's deputy for the occasion. W. Jerome Tillman was senior warden.

On February 20, 1949, the church was dedicated at 10 A.M., and at 11:30 A.M. the vicar celebrated the first Holy Communion in the new building, with special intention of thanksgiving to God.

The period 1949-54 was one of enormous growth, during which the budget quadrupled, the \$83,000 cost of the new church was paid in full, the St. Martin's Fellowship youth group was formed, a parish council was organized, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew was started, the Girls Friendly Society was begun, the Altar Guild was formed and the Woman's Auxiliary was divided into guilds.

After the Rev. Mr. White had accepted a call to All Saints Church, Lakeland, Florida, the Rev. Michael J. Kippenbrock became vicar on May 1, 1953.

A classroom wing was added to the parish house and named Barnwell Hall that year, and it was dedicated in March, 1954.

At the Diocesan Convention on May 11, 1954, Christ Church was admitted to the Diocese as a parish with Father Kippenbrock as rector.

In September 1954, the Christ Church (weekday) Kindergarten was established under the direction of Mrs. G. W. Tayman, and it has been in continuous operation to the present. The church was air-conditioned in 1956.

The Rt. Rev. Michael Yashire of Japan came to Christ Church as guest of the Woman's Auxiliary in 1957, making an address on the V.S.C. campus which was open to the public and well attended.

In January 1959, with the vestry's purchase of property on College Street adjoining the church, the Auxiliary opened a thrift shop to meet monthly payments on it. This shop was operated at a profit for seven years.

Named Stuart Hall, the building on the College Street property housed the weekday kindergarten and the lower grades of the Sunday School.

In 1963, the communicant strength of the parish had grown to 250, and the budget was more than \$26,000. Extensive renovation of the church was undertaken at a cost of \$14,297.07, under the direction of architect Blake Ellis, a communicant. Upon its completion on October 1, Father Kippenbrock accepted a call to the Diocese of South Florida.

The Rev. Ernest Stires of Sea Island, Georgia, and Lake George, New York, served the parish as interim priest until August 1, 1964, when the Rev. Brevard Springs Williams, Jr., became rector. The Williams family occupied a new rectory until September, 1966, when he left Christ Church to become a United States Air Force chaplain.

The parish was host to the Diocesan Convention in February, 1967, during which the Archbishop of the West Indies, the Most Rev. Alan Knight of Georgetown, Guyana, was present to preach the convention sermon. Services and business sessions were held at the Mathis City Auditorium.

The Rev. Mr. Stires served as interim priest again, until the Rev. Henry Irving Louttit, Jr., accepted a call to be the third rector (the 26th pastor). He was installed on April 1, 1967.

Since then, Stuart Hall has been completely renovated at a cost of \$56,000 to provide adequate office space and additional classrooms. A cloister walk connecting Stuart Hall to the main building was added and new playground area and landscaping were also undertaken, under the direction of architect, Joe Bright

Thus in its first century Christ Church has grown from six communicants to 298, from a budget of \$100 to \$54,861,62 annually, and from irregular services in private homes to a complete schedule in a beautiful church.

FATHER LOUTTIT COMMENTS  
ON OUR HISTORY

It is very important to recognize what a few dedicated people can do. Two families, better than 100 years ago, started our congregation. Unfortunately we have no parish records from before 1906. There are a few entries in 1906 of things that happened in the preceding 30 years, but we know little of the people or events in that period of our history. Still it must have been a frustrating time. Fourteen years from purchase of land to first building -- many vicars only staying three months (with a year between). But the seed was planted and the faithful carefully tended the seedling.

Note, that for better than 70 years Episcopalians in other parts thought it worth while to subsidize Christ Church. The greater portion of our gift to the Diocese goes today to help mission congregations just like Christ Church (from 1871 to 1954)!

Again in 1947 a few faithful families saw God's promise and committed themselves to build our present Church. There may have been 100 people in town who claimed to be Episcopalians (today there would be about 500) but about 20 families carried the load.

Do we have the vision of those two families who bought the property in 1871? Or the vision of some of our present members who built a church that would seat twice the membership in 1948? We are not asked to build much more for this congregation. With a budget in 1974 of better than \$80,000 we should be able to refurbish our plant. In June with help from the Diocese we will have our first fulltime assistant. (Father White, now rector of All Saints, Lakeland, Florida, studied for the ministry while a faculty member at Valdosta State College and assisted the vicar before becoming fulltime vicar in 1946.)

Our vision must look forward to a ministry of service to our community, a deepening of our own commitment and understanding; to the day of a second congregation in Valdosta; to a vigorous ministry in the surrounding communities of Quitman, Adel, and Nashville.