

Chapter 2

No Tires for the Gospel Wagon

The information in Chapter 1 of the history of St. Luke's Church comes from long-time members; it is supported by statistics from the Parish Register. We were a mission, existing by the grace of God and the extraordinary energy and dedication of the Seminarians and members of the congregation, old and young, with emphasis on the young.

The Children: At Play and at Work

Then, as now, Sunday School was very important. Several people recall fondly a picnic on the Seminary grounds during the early forties, at which the St. Luke's children were joined by those from other area churches. The food was wonderful; so were the games, especially the sack races.

Everybody joined in cleanup days at the church. Ann Miller remembers a time when she rode her bike over to help scrub the building for Easter. There was no water in the church, so she and her friends had to walk across Fort Hunt Road and bring back buckets full from the home of an obliging neighbor. On that day, Ann's dog, Jimmy Edward Brown, had followed her. He soon learned what fun it was to slide in the soapy water on the floor of the church, and the cleaning project was foundering. But Mary Jane (Briar) Smith, then as now equal to any occasion, penned Jimmy up in the choir stalls so that work could continue, and St. Luke's did sparkle for the Great Feast.

The Junior Vestry: At Work

In 1940 the Junior Vestry sent a petition to the Diocese, and the Diocese paid the remaining money owed on the furnace. The vestry also improved the heating situation, at least temporarily; they discovered that the fan and blower system had been installed in reverse, and they had it corrected.

An "unknown benefactor" mowed the church lawn during the summer of 1940. Fall came, and the secretary was instructed to write him a thank you letter, but no one knew who he was. Apparently, his identity was never discovered. It would be nice to thank this person in 1989; disclosures welcome!

The Junior Vestry was quite busy in the fall, purchasing benches for the use of the Sunday School, at \$1.50 each, and ordering a church flag from New York. By now the Vestry was holding many of its meetings at Snowden School. When the school burned in February, 1941, the young people expressed great sorrow at the loss of their "Ark". They were grateful to the King's Daughters, who offered the use of Sherwood Hall for meetings of the various church groups.

Becoming a Mission Church

In the fall of 1941, the status of St. Luke's changed from that of a Mission to a Mission Church; an official Parish Council was formed

and held its first meeting on October 18. The Junior Vestry, too, continued to function.

At the October 18 meeting, the Reverend Edward R. Welles, rector of Christ Church, Alexandria (now the retired Bishop of the Diocese of SW Missouri) presided. He opened with a prayer he had composed especially for St. Luke's and had used for the first time when he administered Holy Communion at the church on October 12.

A dedicated and energetic priest Edward Welles must have been! In addition to his duties at Christ Church, he agreed to provide Holy Communion at St. Luke's on the second Sunday of each month; to take it to shut-ins; to perform marriages for ". . . Christians who were active St. Luke's members"; and to conduct funerals. He also supervised the work of the Seminary Boys, who continued to hold the regular Sunday services. (The Council was paying them \$20 a month for their transportation.)

A New Name; A War

Members of St. Luke's 1989 Vestry will not be surprised to learn that the first business discussed by the new Council was the furnace bill. It was also reported that the Junior Vestry had made a sign for the church but had decided not to put it up until after Halloween. (Wise children!) And the secretary was directed to write to the Diocese of Virginia, asking for an official name change from St. Luke's, Snowden, to St. Luke's, Wellington. The minutes a few months later reveal that the Diocese agreed to the new designation.

In December the treasurer proudly reported ". . . \$150 on hand, with janitor and electric bill paid." The United States entered World War II that month; the treasurer also recorded that \$5.00 was given to the Army and Navy Commission and a smaller sum to the British Relief Missions. These contributions, made

through the Diocese, continued every month for the duration of the war.

Young People's Groups

Sunday School attendance in late 1941 and early 1942 averaged 45-50 per Sunday. The young people planned, organized, and presented a Christmas program as they did each year. (The programs were often given in a cold chapel; the furnace just never did behave!) Superintendent Steve Tylour proposed and the Council agreed to buy the children oranges and candy for Christmas. In February, Steve was called into military service and was replaced by Harry Jones.

In the spring, two new young people's groups were organized under the leadership of Robert Carl Stevens and his wife Jean. These groups, the Knights of King Arthur and the Queens of Avalon, met on Friday. We don't know a lot about them, but they must have been working as well as playing Christians. This wonderful quotation comes from Council minutes: "Mr. (R. Slater) Lamond spoke of some junk that had accumulated at the back of the chapel, and it was decided to have Mr. Harry Jones, King of the Knights of King Arthur, sell it for their Lenten offering."

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Mr. Welles reported that he had applied to the Fairfax County Rationing Board for tires for the Gospel Wagon. But in May he informed the Council that the Board had not replied and he advised laying up the station wagon "for the duration."

A Half-time Rector

That summer St. Luke's asked the Executive Committee of the Diocese of Virginia to have a half-time minister assigned to St. Luke's Chapel, his services to be shared with the Groveton

Chapel (Christ Church). St. Luke's would be willing to contribute \$35 monthly toward his salary, as long as the Diocese did not require sharing him with more than one other church. We reported 34 communicants and a Sunday School membership of more than 100.

The Diocese listened. In September, 1942, the Reverend Foxhall Parker Thornton came aboard. He lived in the Groveton area and took care of the two congregations.

Mr. Thornton's service to St. Luke's was more than spiritual. At the October Council meeting he stated that the floors needed sanding and that he knew where to rent a sander for \$3.00. He promised that if he could get a little help, he could ". . . sand the floors in an evening and have time to oil and wax them before next Sunday." Present clergy, please note!

A Growing Community; A Growing Church

St. Luke's continued to grow and to expand its services to the community. The homes in Tauxemont were built to accommodate some of the people coming to Washington for war-related jobs. A building committee was formed at St. Luke's. A midnight Christmas Eve service was added; a monthly church newsletter began. It was sent to people throughout the rapidly-growing community.

An ironic note: The council authorized the rector, in December, 1942, to have the furnace and pipes covered with that wonderful insulator, asbestos!

The spring of 1943 was exceptionally busy. A Lenten study class began. Trinity Church, Arlington, presented a gift of chancel furniture. A committee was appointed to buy a lawn mower. The Boy Scouts made tables and chairs for the use of the Sunday School, free lumber having been donated by a Mr. Jergen. The church

offered the use of land on both sides of the building to Tauxemont residents, so that they could raise Victory Gardens. An Altar Guild was formed and Mrs. Stevens, presented a ". . . beautiful set of hangings" from her former church, Grace, in Medford, Massachusetts. And ever and anon, at almost every Council meeting, people talked about the ill-performing furnace.

During the summer the Council did not meet, but a Women's Auxiliary was formed, Mrs. Mafie Lloyd being elected its first president.

The council noted in its September meeting that the Bishop had granted the church use of a temporary building, a chapel trailer from the Seminary, as well as \$30 to repair it. St. Luke's was outgrowing its sturdy little chapel.

The minutes of one meeting opened thus: "Mrs. (John, Sr.) Briar reported that the coal bin is full and has been paid for." John and Florence Briar, our older members say, often bought the fuel for the church, and John came in on Saturday night to start the furnace. Members of the Junior Vestry often had this honor; they also visited people living around the church and asked for money with which to buy the coal.

A Tenth Anniversary

St. Luke's celebrated its tenth anniversary on October 24, 1943. (It had been ten years since the chapel was built, although the church as a body of worshippers had existed since 1929.) Olaf and Eugenie Saugstad, of Arcturus, presented inscribed tablets to be placed on either side of the altar, one the Lord's Prayer and the other the Apostles' Creed. They were beautifully done in black lettering on a gold background, and the youngsters were glad the letters were large. They could be seen all over the church, a handy bit of assistance for them when they had forgotten those things which they ought to have remembered.

(The Saugstads were an unforgettable couple in the annals of St. Luke's. Both taught in Washington; she was an artist and he a metal designer. Their house was unusual in shape and design, and it had a tree growing through the middle of it. Mrs. Saugstad was a woman of strong convictions. Once, during a sermon that was somewhat political, she rose from her pew, announced loudly, "I didn't come to church to hear this," and swept out of the building.)

Plans for Expansion

The optimism and vitality that had kept St. Luke's alive were evident in the remarkable stewardship of the congregation during the years of war and scarcity. The trailer was put in place, and Mrs. Briar lent a portable organ for use in it. The Building Committee began to take bids for the construction of a Parish Hall (one contractor proposed a cinder block structure at \$5000). A discussion about selling the trailer tires lasted several months. A heating company agreed to renovate the heating plant for \$300. And Mr. Thornton presented his budget for 1944: \$1400.

The March, 1944, Council minutes were in an unfamiliar hand; R. Slater Lamond, who had served as Secretary-Treasurer for several years, had been called into military service. In April the Easter special offering went to the Bishop's War Relief Fund.

At its meeting on June 5, 1944, the Council ". . . took time out to hear the President's broadcast . . ." (about the Normandy invasion). But back the members came to their task of keeping the church doors open. Would "Mrs. Briar's handyman", someone wondered, be available to clean the church? More work was needed on the furnace; or perhaps a "stoker furnace" would result in "more even distribution of heat" and therefore ". . . better attendance at services." Shortly thereafter there was an

anonymous donation to buy the stoker furnace. In September, though, the Council decided to buy an oil burner instead.

The Building Committee continued to wrestle with various approaches to providing for the needs of the church and of the community. One suggestion was to hold some of our services in the Mount Vernon Fire House, services "more like the Baptists." St. Luke's was serving people of several denominations and trying to do well by them. The community was also serving St. Luke's. The King's Daughters sold Sherwood Hall and donated dishes, silverware, and linens to the church.

The War - and Polio

The Sunday School picnic had to be postponed until cool weather that year because of the polio epidemic. But other work and play continued. The chapel was painted and waterproofed, \$75 having been donated for this purpose by the Women's Auxiliary from the proceeds of their spring rummage sale. Parishioners gathered for a celebration of St. Luke's Day, bringing their own box lunches.

Several young men from the parish were serving in the military: Dudley Embrey, Raymond Rogers, Roland Rogers, David Hancock, and Steve Taylour. In December the church bought each of them a subscription to "The "Link, a pamphlet written especially for service men.

Beautification was part of the 1945 agenda. Malcolm Mathieson offered some mimosa trees from the Wellington estate if members of the congregation would be willing to help with transportation and transplanting. The Council decided to sell the trailer because it ". . . detracted from the church's appearance."

The ladies of Holiday House were contacted in September and asked if St. Luke's could hold the Sunday School picnic there. People had been unwilling to hold it during the summer

because they were still wary of polio; now cold weather had set in and the outdoor areas were not feasible.

Our First Acolytes

David Ditto was appointed our first acolyte in October. The following month David Sipes asked if he could be one, also. The Council agreed, and asked both boys to pay half the cost of their vestments! The church accepted the offer of an altar by the Saugstads, and a committee was appointed to choose a design.

Bad news in January, 1946. The new oil burner was proving unsatisfactory. The Council said so again in February.

Chilly they might have been, but St. Lukers went on with their plans to be the Body of Christ in this place. Lenten services were held that year on Friday evenings, with choir practice afterward. The two Davids were urged to attend Acolyte Camp in the summer, St. Luke's agreeing to cover half of the cost. There were plans for a Young People's League in the fall, and for the picnic to take place on the Mount Vernon picnic grounds. It was probably one of our larger picnics; in October the Council discussed making separate "rooms" for the Sunday School classes by running curtains on wires.

The Seminary Boys Again

What to do about the overcrowding? For the next year and a half, Council members kept proposing that Army surplus chapels be brought up from Richmond (the war was now over), and other Council members kept voting the idea down.

It was back to the Seminary Boys to lead the services, Mr. Thornton having become ill, and the Council voted to pay them \$5.00 a Sunday. By July, though, Alex Robertson, who was to become the first full-time Rector of St. Luke's,

was here. Alex was a Seminarian at that time; he would remain at St. Luke's as a deacon and would be ordained to the priesthood in May, 1951.

Alex Robertson was an interesting, dynamic leader. At one time a fire brick salesman in Pittsburgh, he had graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. He had been director of a comedy group and an organist at All Saints Episcopal Church, also in Pittsburgh.

What Kind of Building?

St. Luke's leaders were convinced that we needed a larger building, but they wanted to be sure that what they built would be right for both the congregation and the community around. They contracted with the World Federation of Churches in Washington for a survey of denominational preferences in the area. The survey was out-of-date by the time it was completed, so fast was the area growing. We decided to add a Parish Hall and to enlarge greatly the Sunday School facilities. In the meanwhile, so many organizations in the burgeoning community were asking to use our existing facilities that one Council member was put in charge of processing the requests.

An All Male Vestry

Now it was time for St. Luke's to become a self-sustaining church. Under the Diocesan canons, this meant the election of an all-male Vestry. Talk about moving backward in order to progress! Shades of Aggie Finks, Florence Briar, Jean Stevens, and a host of others of the feminine persuasion who had brought us this far.

At any rate, at a meeting on September 28, 1949, this was accomplished. Five members who were bona fide communicants, and "known to the treasurer" (John Briar, Jr., Reginald Crump, Carl Stevens, Maurice Herndon, and

August Cotton) and two associates, representing the non-members and attesting to the community character of St. Luke's (Harry Williams and Percy E. Smith) were elected. Maurice Herndon was our first Senior Warden.

Approval for Expansion

The new Vestry, along with Alex Robertson, moved quickly. They asked Mr. Mathieson to fund the new Parish Hall, but he replied that it was ". . . too big an undertaking" for him. Then Alex Robertson invited Bishop Frederick D. Goodwin to a square dance at the church, where the Bishop must have liked what he saw. On October 23, there was a parish meeting after church. On October 26, the Council met with Bishop Goodwin and Suffragan Bishop Robert F. Gibson. They approved the larger building.

As 1949 drew to a close, Alex Robertson outlined the 1950 budget and made known his earnest desire to become the full-time Rector of St. Luke's.

