

Chapter 3

Meeting the Challenges of Growth

The information in this chapter of our history was obtained primarily from vestry records, minutes of congregational and Women's Auxiliary meetings, and interviews with our long term members. This decade is remembered by most of the older parishioners as "the glory years of St. Luke's." It was an exciting time, a period of enchantment, when close relationships were formed and when the church was the focus for the community. This was also a period of great expansion in the area, and accordingly, the church experienced unprecedented growth. The increase in membership is best captured by this quote from the Annual Report published in December, 1959. Alex Robertson reported that in 1949 he preached to "as few as twenty people," while Ed Bush could report at the close of the decade, "We now have an average of 675 persons attending the church and church school."

Initial Plans for Expansion

As 1949 drew to a close, Alex Robertson and the vestry had agreed that the central aim of St. Luke's should be to become a "real Episcopal community church" with facilities for a large Sunday School and a parish hall for the benefit of the church and community. With that as an aim, the leadership had decided that the church needed to be enlarged and thus had secured unofficial approval from Bishops Goodwin and Gibson. Proof of our overcrowded conditions was that for a period of time, Sunday School classes were held in cars, normally station wagons, in

the parking lot! To implement the expansion plans, the vestry asked Robert A. Wilgoos, a church architect, to prepare preliminary plans, with approximate costs, for enlarging the church and building a parish hall.

At about the same time the need for a rectory became clear. Mr. Robertson, Carl Stevens, and John Briar, Jr. were appointed to contact Michael Holland, the owner of the house at 208 Wellington Road, to determine whether he would be interested in selling it to the church. By the late spring of 1950, the church had purchased the house on Wellington for \$17,500 with a \$500 down payment, and several industrious members of the congregation repainted and redecorated the interior and exterior of the house.

The major item of business for the church over the course of the latter months of 1950 and well into the next year was how to finance the church expansion and parish hall. As a first step, approval had been secured to mortgage the church property, then valued at about \$32,000. Another source of income was a loan of \$10,000 from the Diocese of Virginia. Finally, a Building Fund Campaign Committee was formed under the able leadership of E. N. Montague. Mr. Montague, who later in the decade would serve as Senior Warden, was a perfect choice for the position and impressed parishioners as "a very imposing and energetic man with a natural flair for organization and leadership." A goal of \$25,000 in pledges was

established and the Building Fund Campaign officially kicked off in the spring of 1951.

The Rev. Alexander M. Robertson

The church took time off from the fund raising efforts in the spring of 1951 to celebrate the ordination of Alex Robertson as an Episcopal priest on May 26, 1951. The ordination was a milestone in a journey that had begun when Alex first came to St. Luke's in 1948 as a Seminarian. He and his family (his wife, Dorothy; his daughter, Janet; and his sons, Sandy and James) became an integral part of the St. Luke's congregation.

The Building Expansion

The vestry received two bids for the building expansion, one from Eugene Simpson and Brothers and the other from the John L. Reidand Company. As the bid was lower and the construction time shorter (120 days), Simpson was selected. By June of 1951, the contractor was on site and laying out the building plans.

With the construction project underway, attention now shifted to the need within the church: new pews, an organ, parking areas, and a carpet for the center aisle. A proposal for 36 new white pews with mahogany seats and trim was accepted. The vestry decided to purchase a powered reed organ not to cost more than \$550, using the \$440 bequeathed the church by Miss Eugenie Bullmer as a starter. The parking lot initially would be gravel but would be replaced by asphalt in the summer of 1952. In June, a red and black mixed Daraghushian church carpet was purchased for the center aisle.

By November, 1951, although the church expansion and parish hall were essentially complete, dedication was delayed until the installation of the pews. One of the many

positive aspects of the church expansion was the opportunity to dispose of the old furnace and large oil tank. These were donated to the Plymouth Haven Baptist Church.

On May 11, 1952, the Fourth Sunday after Easter, a special service to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone and to dedicate the church and parish hall was held. Bishop Gibson officiated at the service which included the vestry's placing of church symbols into the foundation: the cross (Maurice Herndon); the Holy Bible (A. H. Cotton); the Book of Common Prayer (John Briar, Jr.); and the Record of Founders (Charles L. Coston).

St. Luke's Becomes the Center of Activity

With the completion of the building expansion, St. Luke's became an even more prominent center for community activity. Not only was St. Luke's one of the few churches in the local area, but the Mount Vernon region was experiencing phenomenal growth. Our membership expanded dramatically. By the end of 1952, there were 142 active communicants with an average attendance on Sunday of well over 200. Other manifestations of this growth were an increase in the annual budget from about \$2,000 in 1949 to \$17,700 in 1953, and expansion in number of vestrymen from 5 to 17 (five of whom were non-communicants, another indication of the community or ecumenical nature of the church).

Another reason for our growth was the evangelical efforts of the vestry, which included men of considerable talent, persuasiveness, and initiative. Vestry members such as Senior Warden Maurice Herndon, a "great charmer" with a knack for communication, would periodically visit the newer areas of Hollin Hall and Hollin Hills to recruit new members for St. Luke's.

The church had many activities for all ages. In addition to church services and Sunday School classes, the church had a number of very active groups. For the men, there was the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, a lay organization dedicated to the spreading of Christ's word among men, particularly young men. The Brotherhood participated in lay reading, made hospital calls, and studied the Bible. There was also a Junior Brotherhood of St. Andrew which was made up of acolytes, which later became the Crucifer's Guild.

Although there was an all male vestry at the time, women played a vital role in the life of St. Luke's. The Women's Auxiliary or Women of St. Luke's was an extremely important and very active organization within the church. Because there were over 150 women in the group, they divided the organization into circles of about twenty each; once a month they met in someone's home. This group did many of the functions that are presently done by our committees. In fact, they instituted most of the outreach programs at the time. In the 1950's, few women worked outside their homes. Thus, these committed ladies could turn their considerable energies to the affairs of the church. They were prodigious fund raisers; their annual operating budget often exceeded \$3,000, and for several years, the Women of St. Luke's contributed \$1,500 to the church budget. A typical year's functions included sponsoring covered dish suppers and ice cream socials, cooking for the St. Luke's Men's Club, helping the Boys' Home at Covington, sending money to St. Ann's, providing hostesses at the door on Sundays, and maintaining a scholarship fund. In the early 50's, the Women of St. Luke's hosted over 250 Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Virginia for a weekend. But perhaps the most well remembered of their activities were the bazaars. The women developed the plans, made the merchandise, and decorated

and staffed the booths, of which the favorite was the Kissing Booth. For \$1.00 you could purchase a kiss from one of the comely ladies. These bazaars were a great source of funds to finance the women's activities and the proceeds were often in the \$1,000 range. This group was led by a series of remarkable women including Mary Jane Briar (Smith), Anna Lou White, Bettie Davis, Betty Smith, Dora Bridges, Connie Chappel, Margaret Leahy, and Thelma Clark.

For the teenagers, there was the Young People's Fellowship (YPF), the forerunner of today's SYC. As St. Luke's was the center for community activity, so too was it an interdenominational center for the youth of the area. In the mid 50's, the YPF was sponsored by Colonel George Swindell and in its heyday included 50 to 60 teenagers. They met each Sunday evening for an Evening Prayer Service conducted by the young people followed by a discussion session. The evening usually would conclude with some type of recreation. Once a month, the YPF sponsored a big event such as a dance, a movie, a trip to an amusement park or a retreat to Shrine Mont or Roslyn. A young Charlie Johnson was a leader of this group as were Nancy Howard, Betsy Simmons, and Barbara Baker. As an interesting sidelight, Chuck Robb, later governor of Virginia and currently a U. S. Senator, was also an active member.

St. Luke's has a rich history of sponsoring scouting activities. From the beginning of the decade, the church supported a Cub Scout Pack. Its first guiding spirit was Maurice Herndon. On July 7, 1951, Boy Scout Troop 654, under the leadership of Scoutmaster Ed Harn, was established to be officially known as "The Mount Vernon Scout Troop". From the outset, this has been a superb troop and in fact, was chosen the best troop in the Washington, D. C. area in 1957. In 1954, another Cub Scout Pack, 690, was added. There was also a very large

scouting program for the girls, and by mid-decade, 150 Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and Brownies were meeting each week in the parish hall.

Alex Robertson Leaves

In early December, 1953, Alex Robertson announced that "after much soul searching and prayerful thought" he had decided to accept a call to become the rector of Emmanuel Church in Richmond. In his letter to the parish, he stated that it was the "hardest decision I have ever had to make," but that it "was time for a change." For the next five months, a Calling Committee consisting of Ed Montague, August Cotton, Fred Waite, Charles Coston, Al Gallo, and Fred Bishopp travelled far and wide interviewing prospective rectors. As is often the case, it was a frustrating time and the vestry minutes show that the congregation grew impatient with the search for a rector.

One of the interesting events that occurred during the post-Robertson period involved a gift to the church of eight acres of nearby land by John E. McPherson, the developer of the Hollin Hall community. The church accepted the land and, in turn, conveyed it to the Mount Vernon Citizens Association "for the purpose of developing and operating a community recreation park." This area, of course, is now known as Mount Vernon Park Association.

The Rev. Edward P. Bush, Jr.

In May, several members of the Calling Committee journeyed to Eastville, Virginia, and found the Reverend Edward P. Bush "well suited for the position of Rector of St. Luke's." Accordingly, the vestry formally issued a call to Ed Bush. Because of his warmth and personality, Ed Bush was accepted immediately by the parish. He has been described as "a loveable guy," "very spiritual," and "a superb and

inspiring preacher." To many, his greatest strength was his enthusiasm. He built on Alex Robertson's solid foundation and even strengthened the spirit of the church. Ed Bush emphasized lay ministry. He got the congregation involved in lay reading. He was assisted by an extraordinary group of seminarians, but more about them later.

The Bush family consisted of his wife Anne; daughters Anne Stuart, Betty, and Julia; and son Philip.

One of the strongest aspects of life at St. Luke's was the vitality of the Christian Education program, particularly the Sunday School. By early 1955, St. Luke's had two separate Sunday Schools, one for each service, and two superintendents. The membership was about 400 children and rising every month. Finding adequate classroom space was a pressing problem for the vestry at this time. One of the solutions was to provide curtains in the parish hall to create six separate classrooms. Besides the physical space limitations, there was a critical need for trained Sunday School teachers. At this time, there were about 40 full-time instructors with several on-call volunteers. To focus the Christian education program, an "intensive weekend" conference was held the weekend of April 29. The conference was led by William Byrd and Leo Hutchison and brought together 24 couples to chart the future course of St. Luke's Christian education.

Building Campaigns

Some of the most vivid memories of our parishioners concerning that period are the building campaigns. These recollections are also supported by church records, wherein hardly a vestry meeting passed without some reference to a building campaign. Within two years after the initial church expansion, another building campaign was initiated (September, 1954).

Some members of the vestry favored hiring a professional fund raising group such as the Wells Organization, while others took an opposite view and worried that further expansion could mean a loss of the feeling of intimacy that characterized St. Luke's. This ambivalence would continue to be a source of controversy in the coming years. By the fall of 1955, the vestry was considering a two part plan proposed by John P. Smith, Jr. of adding six rooms by expanding the parish hall to the south and buying property adjacent to the church to alleviate Sunday School overcrowding. Because of a shortage of funds as the Building Fund Campaign drew to a close, it was decided to buy only the property to the north and south of the church. Four homes were ultimately purchased: 1634 Fort Hunt Road (the "White House") and 1638 Fort Hunt (the "Corner House"), both south of the church; 39 Wellington Road (the "Gold House"), west of the church; and 1630 Fort Hunt Road (the "North House").

By the spring of 1956, pressures were again mounting for another building fund campaign. A number of the vestry members believed that it was time to employ a professional fund raising organization and Ed Bush suggested Thomas White and Associates. Essentially, the drive would consist of a concentrated Every Member Canvass conducted by professionals over a five week period. This group had been very successful in conducting a campaign at St. Mark's which had experienced a 146 percent increase in total amount pledged. After a summer of often contentious discussion, Thomas White and Associates were employed to conduct a campaign beginning in the fall. To acquaint the congregation with the purpose of the campaign and encourage participation, the White group published a handsome brochure entitled, "New Horizons", a copy of which is on file in the church office.

The campaign initially begun by the White organization ran for several years and eventually provided funds for the purchase of the adjacent bungalows.

As 1956 drew to a close, the congregation elected a new vestry with John Smith as Senior Warden, Bob Alsover as Junior Warden, and Ed Montague as Senior Warden Emeritus. The congregation also approved a 1957 budget of \$54,394 from over 280 pledges and a basic salary of \$5,400 for the rector. As a sidelight and as a victory for women's rights, the President of the Women's Auxiliary, Betty Smith, was approved to sit on the vestry "with a voice but no vote."

Seminarians: The Dynamic Duo

As was underscored in the first two chapters, St. Luke's was nurtured in its early years by a number of extraordinary seminarians. That trend established in the 1930's certainly continued in this decade. Although there were several seminarians during this time, including Taylor Scott, Tom Brown, ___ Reese, and Gene Patton, two were particularly prominent: Pat Sanders and Herb Gravely. Each had earlier careers and hence were older and more experienced than the typical seminarian.

Pat Sanders was an ex-marine who had been the vice president of an iron fabricating company in Georgia, during which time he had been very active in the Diocese of Atlanta. Pat was also a talented musician and his tenor saxophone was heard at several St. Luke's social functions, most notably with a jazz group at the bazaars. Herb Gravely was a big man with a very jovial personality and a charismatic way. Earlier in his life, he had been in sales with an automobile agency, and it is said that the skills of persuasiveness and persistence learned in the business world were clearly in evidence in his work at St. Luke's.

Both individuals were very active in the Christian education programs of this era and in training Sunday school teachers. This latter responsibility was critical not only because the enrollment in the two Sunday schools was now well over 400 and thus required a large number of teachers, but also because the accepted material and course outlines were the Seabury series. The Seabury series was particularly difficult to administer because it relied upon group dynamics and teacher dedication and motivation.

Although the parish was generally dissatisfied with the Seabury series, nevertheless the vestry in April 1956 asked Herb Gravely to be retained as the Director of Christian Education to implement the program. In this capacity, he would develop course outlines and lesson plans and train Sunday School teachers. A year later, Pat Sanders was employed in a similar capacity; and during June, July, and August he trained teachers two to three times a week and three Sundays out of four. Thereafter, he was employed full time until 1959.

Herb Gravely and Pat Sanders are also fondly remembered for their substantial contributions to the Christian growth of our young people. Both were very active in the YPF where they not only organized exciting and meaningful worship services and discussion sessions, but they also enjoyed the social activities with the teenagers. It is interesting to note that when Herb Gravely was ordained the summer of 1957 in North Carolina, over 20 St. Lukers were on hand to join in the celebration.

In addition to being blessed with such outstanding seminarians from the Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), St. Luke's also provided three of its own to the seminary during this time. Charlie Johnson was a first at St. Luke's. He was an acolyte, then rose to President of the YPF, and later was sponsored

by the church to the seminary. A year later Gene Grumbine was also sponsored to VTS; the proceeds from the Women's Auxiliary bazaar of 1957 were used to offset his costs. Additionally, he and his family lived in the Church Annex (one of the adjacent houses that had been purchased) during the summer. Lastly, our Junior Warden for 1959, Glenn Hewlett, announced in August of that year his intention to enter the seminary in Lexington, Kentucky.

Day School Opens

In 1957 the church leased space to a group of women from Tauxemont in which to operate a Day School. But St. Luke's Day School as we now know it was established the next year, primarily because of the hard work of Bill Williams, a Vestry member, who set up guidelines for the school, with the encouragement and support of the rector. It opened with an enrollment of 30 five-year-olds, one class of 15 taught by the Director, Naomi Pennington, and the other by Bernice Whitestone, who was also church organist. The Vestry issued a charter which stated the school's purpose: "To provide a wholesome pre-school education and Christian experience for the children of the community. Teachings of the Day School shall be based on a Christian philosophy of education. The educational standards shall equal or exceed those of other area private and Fairfax County schools." The organization was to be self-supporting and non-profit.

The Mission Church: St. James

With the dramatic growth in the Mount Vernon area, pressure began to rise for establishing a mission church. By September, 1957, the Potomac Strategy Committee supported the need in the Ft. Hunt area. In response, the Future Plans Committee of St. Luke's recommended that a mission church be established in the Woodlawn Manor area in the

summer of 1958. Accordingly, the first organizational meeting of this new mission church was held on June 5. At that meeting, it was decided that the mission would be parochial with St. Luke's sponsoring. It was expected that initially 25-30 St. Lukers would form the nucleus of the mission and that lay readers from the church would be expected to assist. Ed Bush would conduct at least one service a month. A month later on July 21, a second meeting of the mission was held with 19 attending. The mission name was selected (St. James) and a vestry committee was elected. Committee members were John Tazewell (who was to be St. James's first Senior Warden), James Carr, Philip Arnest, James Chandler, and Mary Small. The group identified three primary objectives: building a dedicated congregation, securing a rector at the earliest possible date, and laying plans for the church building.

During the fall of 1958, the vestry was consumed with the plans for St. James. On September 14, the altar appointments were dedicated. A building committee with Herb Newell as chairman studied various church plans while the vestry sent a formal request to the diocese for the assignment of a rector. By April of 1959, The Reverend Herbert Willkie had been called and would report June 1.

The Challenges of 1959

As the decade drew to a close, St. Luke's was experiencing a number of difficult challenges. On the financial side, the expenditures were exceeding revenues and in 1958 there had been a substantial deficit. To meet these expenses, the Church Expansion Fund was tapped for \$5,800 and the Emergency Fund was a source as well.

Consequently, the congregation adopted a budget for 1959 of \$51,300 based upon actual income received during 1958. As a result of this

austerity, the church was well behind the goals set for the Long Range Expansion Plan adopted at the annual Congregational Meeting on November 7, 1957. Moreover, the church was unable to afford a new rectory for the expanding Bush family, daughter Julia having been born June 3, 1958.

There was also the problem of facilities and personnel that were inadequate for the needs of the congregation. Housing the burgeoning Sunday School population continued to challenge the rector and vestry. In a letter to the congregation in October of 1959, Ed Bush spoke boldly of the need for "having a nave to accommodate 400-500 people and a parish hall that will provide educational facilities for 1,000 children." Ed Bush also called for an Associate Rector at St. Luke's, a full time secretary, and a Director of Christian Education. With these challenges, the goal for the Every Member Canvass was set at \$60,000 to support the 1960 activities.

Ed Bush Announces His Resignation

This glorious period ironically ended on a down note. At the last vestry meeting of the decade, Ed Bush submitted his resignation, effective January 31, 1960, which was accepted "with profound regret."

Thus closes this extraordinary decade in St. Luke's history. It is hard to imagine a more vital and exciting time, a time when St. Luke's was indeed blessed with two able and committed rectors, a host of senior and junior wardens to administer the church, and a congregation anxious to lend their talents and energies to the building of the church.

