

Centennial Moments in History
1928–1929
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The History of The Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928–)
Change, Change, Change

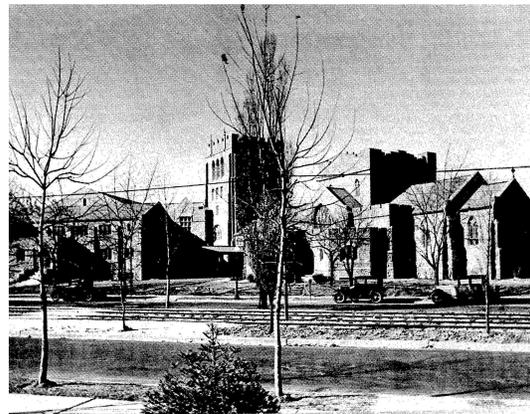
Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

— Hebrews 12:1–2a

The Rev. Dr. Karl Morgan Block who had been rector of St. Michael and All Angels continued as rector of the merged parish. Paul Fries, who had been organist and choirmaster of the church since 1927, continued in his role as well.

Work began in December 1928 on the enlargement and reconstruction of the church and parish house. Planning for the \$350,000 project (multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 12.7 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI) had been underway before the merger was considered. During the twelve months of construction, worship services were held in Graham Chapel on the Washington University campus where the St. Michael and All Angels Mission had met for worship before construction of the church. The Sunday school met at the nearby Community School on De Mun Avenue, and temporary church offices were established in a building on Delmar Boulevard. Dr. Block took a leave of absence from late May until September 1929, and during that time the office functions were performed in a room on the second floor of the rectory.

There was no additional land on which to expand. In order for the parish house to be enlarged to twice its original size, it was necessary to move and turn the structure from its location with its long axis at a right angle to the church to its present location parallel with Wydown Boulevard. The 1,700-ton, two-story building was raised from its foundation and placed on a new foundation. This engineering feat took six weeks of planning and preparation and was completed in eight hours. A 24-horsepower tractor provided the energy for an extensive system of blocks and falls that drew the structure over 180 rollers of three-inch shaft steel. Fifty tons of stone was piled upon the center floor to prevent buckling as the ends were shifted and the building drawn to its new foundation. To move the building, 320 jack-screws were used along with 35 carloads of heavy timbers that were required for the understructure. This was the first time that a stone building of comparable size had been lifted and moved in St. Louis, and the project attracted widespread attention. A new wing was



The reconstructed buildings as seen from across Wydown Blvd. Note the Clayton 04 tracks in the foreground.

added at a right angle to the newly located parish house. The expansion provided a number of new and rearranged rooms that could accommodate varied activities.

The original church building was enlarged. The nave was expanded three bays to the west to create its current seating capacity of 455 (based on a 21-inch-wide spacing per seat). The chancel was extended east to provide for a larger choir and sanctuary. To accomplish this, the sanctuary was cut free and moved east to its present position, and construction filled in the intervening space. This allowed for twice as many people to be accommodated at the communion rail. The former choir vesting room was transformed into the beautiful St. Mary's Chapel. The main or Wydown entrance of the original church was made into a baptistery, complete with murals and stained glass windows designed especially for the area.

The enlarged church and parish house were then connected to each other by the three-story Jay Herndon Smith Memorial Tower. Mr. Smith had served on the vestry of St. Michael and All Angels (1916–1927), and had been senior warden in the latter years. Dr. Block said that “it was the vision of Mr. Smith that gave rich promise to the successful achievement of our plans for a greater St. Michael and All Angels Church.” The third floor of the tower was made into living quarters for use by a curate that Dr. Block hoped to hire in the near future.



The church had to absorb a great deal of change in very short time. In less than two years, a plan had been developed and approved for a significant, disruptive, and expensive expansion of the buildings. In the midst of the planning process a merger had been approved by two parishes, and the blending of parishioners from both previous parishes had occurred as reported in the previous e-letter — no small task! The blending of two parishes was accomplished while the congregation had to worship, conduct Sunday school, and conduct office functions in three different off-campus locations. Then the congregation had to move into its expanded church and parish house and learn how to use them effectively. There was one more significant change underway that had been initiated beyond the parish: The 1892 *Book of Common Prayer* was replaced in 1928 with a new edition. The changing of a Prayer Book may be one of the most difficult changes in Episcopal life.

Perhaps several major changes are best addressed all at once rather than stringing them out by doing one after the other, thereby creating a long period of continuous change. Several major changes done at one time often create no more disruption than one major change; it's the length of time in addressing change, not the quantity of changes, that has the more disruptive impact. What do you think?

What changes, if any, do you think are necessary if we are to achieve our goals as outlined in our most recent strategic plan? How might we best introduce those changes?

What changes, if any, do you think are inevitable due to changes in our culture (our mission field) that we can't control? How might we best introduce those changes?

What can we parishioners do in attitude and action to create an environment where needed or inevitable changes can be accomplished successfully with the least possible amount of disruption?

Here are some thoughts about change that are worth pondering:

- *The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we're ready for it.*
(Arnold H. Glasow)
- *Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have got it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known.* (Garrison Keillor)
- *Strangely enough, this is the past that somebody in the future is longing to go back to.*
(Ashleigh Brilliant)
- *Running a [parish] is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do.*
(Price Pritchett)

— John R. Tyler
Historical information from *Trilogy* by Harriet Davidson