

Centennial Moments in History
1997–2000
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The History of the Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928–)
Hard Work in an Interim

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 hard work in the interim period began with the previously-reported, parish-wide meeting on 12 July 1997. What is an “intentional” interim period? It is undertaken after a rector has left the church, often when the parting was acrimonious or when the parish is fractured or in decline. The church has lost its way, and there is disunity and a lack of harmony among the parishioners. Thus, a congregation intentionally takes an opportunity to pause, take stock of themselves, seek forgiveness from one another, rebuild trust, learn new ways to be a faithful church, and become reunited in ministry and mission as the body of Christ. When an intentional interim is effectively planned and implemented, it becomes a time of excitement, increased vitality, spiritual renewal, and new life for the church. Mr. Richard L. Battram, the senior warden, had observed at the 12 July meeting that the church had erred by not taking an intentional interim at the departure of the Rev. Edward Lloyd Salmon, Jr. Mr. Battram said, “We didn’t go through a true interim process when Ed left. We simply went out to look for another Ed Salmon.”

The church called the Rev. Gary Hamp, an Episcopal clergyman trained to be an interim pastor and to lead a congregation to assess itself honestly and openly, heal its wounds, vision its future, and then call a new rector. Mr. Hamp said that his main job was to “help prepare the parish for its next rector,” and that the parish would have to work hard at that too.

Mr. Hamp arrived in November 1997 and soon got an earful. As we can imagine, an interim pastor functions in part as a lightning rod: every bolt of lightning in the parish heads his way. He reported to the vestry that he was hearing “concerns about dollars, tension in the music program, communications in general, secretiveness and lack of candor, politics, scapegoats, Rite I vs. Rite II talk, and other destructive behavior and the performance of mean-spirited acts.” Worship attendance had declined 15 percent since the rector left at the end of June, and the Every Member Canvass that had just begun was running behind last year’s results at the same time with speculation that there could be a \$200,000 deficit for 1998 (multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 1.6 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI).

The Honorable Jean C. Hamilton was selected to chair a vestry sub-committee to address the parish’s much-expressed concern about the vestry selection process. The committee determined that the parish generally felt that “the vestry selection process needs to be more open and more publicity needs to be given about the criteria for vestry membership, and the Nominating Committee needs to be expanded to include church constituencies other than the six retiring members of the vestry and the rector.” Future annual selection processes were extensively

publicized well in advance, and leaders in various ministry areas beyond the vestry were asked to meet with the vestry's Nominating Committee and assist them in the nominee selection process. On the whole, the parish seemed to be satisfied with the process, for concerns about his topic subsided with the steps taken by the committee.

A rector search committee was formed in December 1997 and was chaired by Mr. Clarence (Turk) Turley. With guidance from Mr. Hamp, they hit the ground running, aware of the great weight that rested on their shoulders.

Pledge giving suffered, as was to be expected. By January 1998, 599 pledges had been received for \$1.28 million, a drop of 121 pledges and \$207,000 from the previous year. Yet there were positive signs that the parish was going to hang together and see this through. The vestry increased their pledges by an average of 12 percent, and 201 other parish households increased their pledges by an average of 22 percent.

Mr. Hamp observed at the January 1998 Annual Parish Meeting that "the parish is in a state of chronic anxiety; nevertheless, we are beginning to reduce our anxiety and anger while reestablishing a level of trust." He emphasized that "the parish needs to remove its focus from individual clergy and put it on the church and its mission." He said that he would retain the Rite I service, but would make "changes in the way various services are structured." He "urged flexibility," cautioning "that a new and great rector would make changes, and that if the status quo were rigidly adhered to, this would be a negative incentive for the incoming rector." At the conclusion of Mr. Hamp's remarks, the parish "gave him a standing ovation." The congregation was showing that it was coming to grips with the state of its health and was ready to work on improving it, and they extended trust to Mr. Hamp to serve as their physician. Admitting one's need for healing is the necessary first step towards healing. Ask any AA member.

The vestry retreat was held in February 1998, and "great strides were made in building teamwork and trust among vestry members." The vestry was engaged in its own healing process, another positive sign.

Mr. Hamp had said earlier that he would inaugurate several unnamed liturgical changes, and in the spring of 1998, he did. He included a foot-washing ritual at the Maundy Thursday service. He created an opportunity for parishioners to exchange the peace in the Holy Eucharist services, first preaching a sermon on the spiritual concepts behind the ritual and then printing the sermon in a *Dragon Tales*. The Passing of the Peace was a new ritual in the 1979 Prayer Book, and the rubric for this ritual says that "the Ministers and People may greet one another in the name of the Lord". The church thus far had not adopted this "you-may" rather than "you-shall" ritual. Mr. Hamp reported to the vestry that "most parishioners were favorably inclined to this change, but a few were very much opposed." He also announced that the church would change to the "I" version from the "We" version of the Nicene Creed the following Sunday. Some vestry members expressed concern that "there was too much change too soon."



"And this petition requests changing the term 'sinner' to 'person who is morally challenged.' "

Clergy associates looked for and moved to new opportunities when they became available, for they knew that their resignations would be accepted by the next rector. Mr. North left to become associate rector of Christ Church of the Ascension in Phoenix, AZ where the Rev. Dr. Semon was now rector. Mr. Kinman left to become Coordinator of Campus Ministries for the diocese, a ministry he had developed. Mr. Hamp quickly brought in two interim associates to fill the gaps: the Rev. Dr. Thomas Barnett and the Rev. Gretchen M. B. Pickeral.

These first months had been time for pausing, coming to grips with what had happened, and rebuilding trust. Now it was time for the congregation to work with intention on the healing and visioning processes that would serve as preparation for the reception of a new rector.

A series of parish-wide meetings were held, and the congregation explored three major areas of church life. The first meetings were held in June 1998, and the topic was “Challenges That Confront the Church in the 21st Century.” Meetings in October explored “A Historical Reflection of the Church of St. Michael & St. George.” There was much storytelling. There were tears, but to the relief of all, they found that they had much to laugh about too. Several parishioners were asked to write their reflections on the meeting, and the reflections were included in a four-page document published to the church. Two of those reflections follow:

What I enjoyed most about History Day was the entertaining stories. I had not expected to laugh as much as I did. In particular, the story Natalie Dohr told about her Sunday school class, which was made up of Natalie and other prominent St. Louisans, and how they would skip their class and ride the trolley and be back in time for the end of services. I look forward to my son having memories like that. What I learned was that no matter who the rector was, there was always conflict and strife, and that there were people there at History Day who had left the church during periods of conflict, but who came back again. And the people were the constant. Rectors came and went, but the one constant was the people. They saw the church through the good times as well as the bad. Hopefully, that will be the same this time, too. Those were the same people who were there at History Day. There was Natalie, and she's obviously going to see us through this conflict, as she has in the past.

— Laurie Brown (member since 1991)

The meeting in the Great Hall recording personal and other events at our church over the past 70 years was, for me, a very moving experience. Most who were present expressed, in their own way, their love and faith in our church and its importance to them. Differences, if any, paled while hearing them recount their personal experiences in the church. It became apparent to me, more strongly than ever, how important St. Michael's is and how lucky I am to have this church to worship in. In good or bad times all of us know that it is there to help. It was no surprise to me to hear the expressions of love and enthusiasm at this meeting, and it left me with a wonderful feeling.

— Hugh Scott (member 70+ years)

May the results of our year-long Centennial Celebration be as bountiful as the results of that one-day celebration on a Saturday in October 1998.

The meetings in November were “A Visioning Workshop” where participating parishioners began to vision what kind of church they wanted for the future and what its guiding mission would be. They were preparing themselves for the next chapter in their life and for their next rector.

The search committee reported to the vestry in the first days of January 2000 that they were ready to present a candidate for the position of rector, and on 8 January 2000, the vestry extended a call to the Rev. Andrew John Archie. The date was the dawning of a new millennium, and it also signaled the beginning of a new chapter in the life of The Church of St. Michael & St. George. Mr. Archie graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary in 1986 and then served as curate at The Manakin-St. Luke's Cure in Powhatan, VA. In 1987, he became rector of St. Peter's Church in Purcellville, VA. Mr. Archie's first day as the rector of The Church of St. Michael & St. George would be 2 April 2000.

Mr. Hamp made plans for a smooth transition, something interim pastors do well, and his last day in the parish was 27 February 2000. He went to Birmingham, MI to serve as the interim pastor of St. James's Church. What he had done for our parish, he would now do for that parish. Mr. Richard L. Battram, who had served as senior warden from the last days of Dr. Semon's rectorate through the interim, praised Mr. Hamp's ministry to the church in a parish-wide letter.

Mr. Hamp's work was done; the church's work continued. It was now up to the church to make the most of what they had learned and experienced in the interim and to carry it into the future.



Do you think the intentional interim process was optional or necessary? Why?

Mr. Hamp introduced several liturgical changes. How did the parish respond? Mr. Hamp was not going to be the next rector, so he had no personal stake in creating an altered liturgical tradition in the church's life. Why do you think he introduced the changes?

A physician's role is to diagnose a disease, prescribe medicines and regimens that will affect a cure, and to encourage the patient to take the prescribed medicines and faithfully to follow the prescribed regimens. What is the patient's role in his or her own healing? How might this be a metaphor for an intentional interim process?

Based on what you have read here — and experienced if you were a parishioner during the interim time — how would you assess Mr. Hamp's effectiveness? How would you assess the efforts of the parishioners during the interim?

The church studied and discussed the challenges that confront the church in the 21st century (as perceived in 1998). What would you say are the challenges the church faces today?

Do you think it advisable to have an intentional interim process even when a parish is healthy and in harmony when a rector leaves? Why, or why not?

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us in the midst of our struggles to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— John R. Tyler