

Centennial Moments in History
1936–1938
No. 19
14 June 2012

The History of The Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928–)
The Rev. Dr. Block Leaves the Parish

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

January 1936 marked the Rev. Dr. Block's tenth anniversary as rector, the majority of the time during the difficult years of the Great Depression. He developed a plan called "The Anniversary Fund" to reduce the bonded building indebtedness and announced his plan to the parish in "An Open Letter to Our People":

On Monday night the vestry approved a plan that I offered in the confident hope that we shall, without strain and without pressure, reduce materially our bonded indebtedness. An initial charge of approximately \$10,000 [multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 15.2 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI] a year for the liquidation of principle and interest has been stifling us. Committed to the principle of a balanced budget, we have been without the services of necessary assistants since last May. . . . Six years have passed since we built our new equipment. Many have come into our fellowship who had no opportunity to contribute to our charming church and parish house.

I have suggested that my tenth anniversary be signalized by a reduction of one-half of our indebtedness. This can be accomplished as follows: one hundred families or individuals giving \$50 a year over a period of three years, making a total of \$15,000; fifty families or individuals giving \$100 a year for three years, making a similar total of \$15,000. With such a sum assured, we can ask those who are well favored financially to give the last third needed, \$15,000. . . . I am counting on those of the parish who are financially able and grateful for our church's ministry, to make this a Thank-Offering. There will be no campaign in the normal sense, no meetings to stir enthusiasm, no pressure of any sort put upon families of individuals. Within the next three weeks, representatives of the vestry will ask you if you are able and wish to be on this Honor List.

Within two months, \$159,355 had been subscribed, and \$3,380 of this amount had been paid in full. The year was 1936, the depths of the Great Depression! By September 1937, the bonded indebtedness had been reduced to \$80,000.

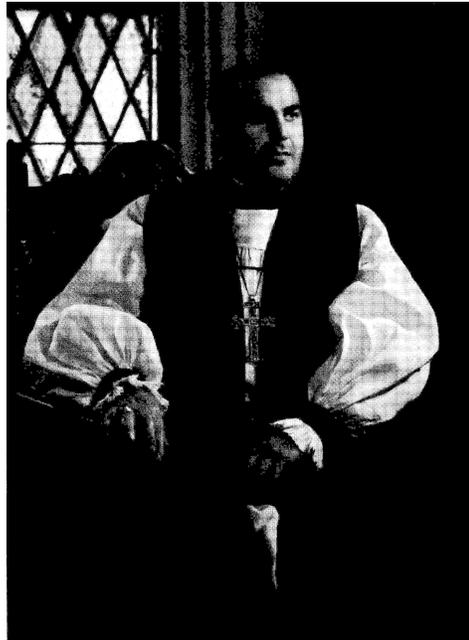
In January 1936, the month of his tenth anniversary as rector and prior to the announcement of "The Anniversary Fund", Dr. Block had announced to the congregation "with real travail of soul" that he had declined a call to become Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese of Kansas. On May Day 1938, he stood before the congregation to announce that he had accepted the call to become Bishop Coadjutor of the Episcopal Diocese of California. He expressed the difficulty in making

his announcement: “In all frankness, I did not desire to come here, but God has blessed me here, and I hope I have blessed you through my ministry. The very thought of leaving involves such an emotional wrench that I cannot talk about it now. . . . This has been the happiest ministry that any man could have.” He also expressed his views on life as a bishop: “No one wishes to be a bishop, no one could but prefer the life of a parish priest to that of a bishop because a bishop’s life is essentially lonely.”

Dr. Block had served as the rector of two parishes at one location: The Church of St. Michael and All Angels 1925–1928 and The Church of St. Michael & St. George 1928–1938. He had provided leadership for the highly successful merger, an extensive building expansion program, and through the dark days of the Great Depression. During his rectorate, the number of communicants had increased 295 percent, from 403 to 1192.

The parishioners of the Church of St. Michael & St. George presented Dr. Block with an elaborately wrought pectoral cross at a farewell reception prior to his departure for San Francisco. It was studded with diamonds from the estate of Miss Ada Winston who had been a parishioner of St. George’s Church before the merger and one of only two women vestry members in the diocese during that era.

At Dr. Block’s request, his consecration in California took place on 29 September 1938, the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. It was his tribute to the St. Louis parish that had called him in 1925. The pectoral cross he had been given before his departure from St. Louis was placed around his neck during the service of consecration. He is wearing the cross in the photograph to the right. Dr. Block’s pectoral cross, through the efforts of Mr. Keith Shaw, a now-deceased parishioner and gemologist, is currently in the possession of our church and was valued at \$3,000 in 2001. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Block became Bishop of the Diocese of California in 1940. He served as bishop there for 18 years until his death in 1958 at age 72.



A memorial window in the church was given in memory of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Karl Morgan Block and of his wife, Nancy Shackleford Block, who preceded him in death in 1945 at the age of 58. The two memorial plaques can be seen today on the interior walls of the nave. Bishop and Mrs. Block are two people among the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us each time we worship in our church.



Parishioners responded in a marvelous way to The Anniversary Fund, and during the depths of the Great Depression with no sign that the country was headed for better economic times in the foreseeable future. Why do you think parishioners responded so well in such difficult circumstances? What might we do today to help parishioners respond in like manner?

Every beloved rector eventually leaves a parish to become a rector elsewhere, to be consecrated a bishop, to retire, or by death. How should parishioners respond at the time of a beloved rector’s leaving so that the church’s future can be as bright as possible?

My brother, the people have chosen you and have affirmed their trust in you by acclaiming your election. A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings.

You are called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.

With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world. Your heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope. Your joy will be to follow him who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

(From The Examination portion of the liturgy for the Ordination of a Bishop, 1979 BCP)

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