

Centennial Moments in History 1982–1986

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The History of the Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928–) Growth and Expansion Continue

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 year 1983 began with continued growth and expansion. The attendant challenges continued as well. Budget deficits were being largely supported by special gifts from a few generous parishioners. The Rev. Salmon responded that the dependence on gifts “is a most dangerous position.” The budget for the year was \$559,000 (multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 2.1 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI). About \$750,000 had been spent in the previous four years on the building, yet \$800,000 in deferred maintenance remained. There were 320 students in the church school (this term was beginning to edge out the term “Sunday school”), and there were 155 post-confirmation youth. Mr. Salmon reported that there was no room for further growth.

At mid-year, borrowing to meet budget and cash-flow needs had risen to the vestry-authorized limit of \$160,000, and the vestry had to increase the limit to \$200,000. The rector told the vestry that “parishioners must financially support our ministries, or the overall ministry must be cut back.” When the debt reached \$350,000 in November 1983, the vestry determined that debt reduction was mandatory, and they hired a consultant to guide the fall Every Member Canvass. His fee and expenses were paid by the Endowment Fund.

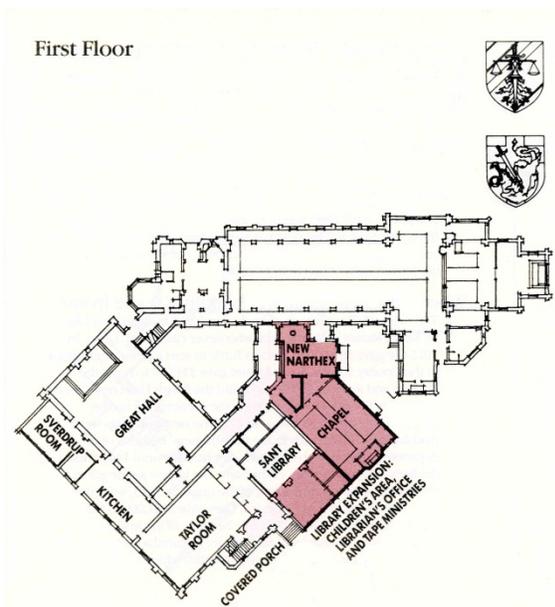
Parishioners responded. At the January 1984 Annual Parish Meeting, it was reported that 587 pledges had been received totaling \$606,000, a 67 percent increase over the prior year, even though 185 pledge cards were still out. This good news was accompanied by continued numerical growth. There were 167 in the youth program (excluding those in confirmation class). The Sunday and Wednesday evening adult classes had 500 enrolled. Echoing his comments of the previous year about lay ministry, the rector said that “we must develop a strong parish family that will be involved in lay ministry.” Dedicated lay people, with the oversight and counsel of clergy, made it happen. By the end of 1986, there were 18 organized lay ministry groups. Diocesan membership had declined precipitously in the prior five years while our church was experiencing substantial growth. The church had found a way to grow numerically in an established, non-growing neighborhood, proving that a St. Louis church doesn’t always have to be moving westward to grow.

In April 1984 the church school was at capacity. Plans were made for a second church school to begin in the fall at the 11:15 a.m. hour. Adult education continued to grow as well with 712 adults attending classes on Sundays and throughout the week. A number of simultaneous Wednesday evening classes were now conducted most weeks September-May, with an average weekly attendance of over 400 adults.

The robust hunger ministry continued to expand, and the St. Michael's Houses ministry reports to the vestry depict rapid growth in this ministry and make for an inspiring read. The passionate and goal-oriented leadership of this ministry leaps off the report pages. Results followed. The ministry acquired 37 houses in one three-year period (1984–1986). Almost 100 people, including 67 children, had been helped, and \$86,000 had been contributed by parishioners and partnering church groups in 1985.

The 1984 budget had been \$733,000, and the 1985 budget was set at \$866,000, a figure the rector felt was \$200,000 lower than needed. By December 1984, pledges for the 1985 budget had reached \$674,000. Nevertheless, by mid-year 1985, the borrowing limit again needed to be increased, this time to \$400,000.

At the end of the 1985, there were 2,548 baptized members reflecting a gain of 1,000 baptized members since 1978. There were 585 adults in classes on Sunday and throughout the week. The children's and youth choir program had grown to seven choirs, and there were 345 students in the church school (nursery through eighth grade). The severe need for additional space, as well as deferred maintenance needs, required a capital campaign in 1986 with a goal of \$1.8 million. In addition to taking care of much deferred maintenance, the buildings would be expanded to include on the first floor (depicted on the right) a second chapel that would be named St. George's Chapel, a Wydown narthex to connect the church nave and new chapel (requiring the removal of the baptistery), an area that would become today's Canterbury Bookstore, and additional rooms for use by the church school and other groups in the undercroft of this area and on the second floor above it. By March 1986, \$1.3 million, or 70 percent of the goal, had been pledged to the capital campaign.



Operating expenses remained a challenge. The rector told the vestry in March 1986 that “there was no way to increase 1986 income, and expenses must be reduced.” To mitigate reductions, the fall 1985 Every Member Canvass goal for budget year 1986 was set at 700 households pledging a total of \$900,000, a 30 percent increase, and on the heels of an incomplete capital campaign.

Discussions of ways to reduce expenses are prominent in the mid-year 1986 vestry minutes. Mr. Eric Turner who had come two years earlier as youth director returned to seminary, and his position was not filled. The rector told the vestry that “we need to get out of the rectory business” and that he had “plans to sell the rectory and provide a rector's allowance instead.” (These plans obviously did not come to fruition, and there is no further mention of this topic in future vestry meeting minutes.)

By July 1986, \$1.6 million had been pledged to the capital campaign, but things were not as rosy on the operating budget side. The accumulated deficit for the previous eight years had reached \$343,000.

By the end of 1986, baptized membership had reached 2,657 — exceeding the prior high in 1938 of 2,264 — with an average weekly Sunday worship attendance of 985. There were 375 adults in five Sunday classes, 215 in Great Wednesday classes, 70 in other weekday classes, and an average of 200 in summer Sunday morning classes. There were five choirs for children and youth, including two handbell choirs, and there were 350 students in the church school.



"They're never going to believe this back home!"

An interesting sign of the growth during this period is the number of adults that were confirmed each year. In 1985 alone, 42 adults were confirmed compared to 28 eighth-graders. All of these adults came from protestant denominations. Six adults were received from the Roman Catholic and perhaps Eastern Orthodox Churches.

In 1986, the term "Holy Eucharist" began to supplant the term "Holy Communion" in the worship service leaflets. The service of Holy Eucharist was conducted at all 8:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. services; on the second and fourth Sundays at the 9:15 a.m. service; and on the first and third Sundays at the 11:15 a.m. service. The service of Holy Eucharist was slowly but surely being used more frequently. The transition to the new 1979 Prayer Book was taking time, and the rector had stayed true to his wise words upon his arrival when he had said that in the continuing transition to the new Prayer Book, we "will be moving slowly, in a well-defined and not arbitrary way, always being aware of the traditional stance of this parish."



In what ways was the parish growing numerically during the years 1983–1986? What do you think were the reasons for this growth? How might we grow numerically today?

What things reported in this abbreviated historical summary provide indications of spiritual growth in the parish? What things might aid the parish's spiritual growth today?

How well was the parish's financial growth keeping up with its numerical growth? What are the reasons for your answer, and what lessons can we learn from this history as we forge our future?

Mr. Alex Agase, college football "coach of the year" in 1970, was once taken to task in a Monday morning press conference for his decisions on the gridiron the previous Saturday afternoon. He responded, "If you really want to advise me, do it on Saturday afternoon between one and four o'clock. And you've got 25 seconds to do it, between plays. Not on Monday. I know the right thing to do on Monday." In an earlier e-letter, I offered this axiom: "Running a parish is easy

when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do." If you had been rector or a member of the vestry in the years 1983–1986, what would you have done differently? The same?

*God, who stretched the spangled heavens
Infinite in time and place,
Flung the suns in burning radiance
Through the silent fields of space:
We, your children in your likeness,
Share inventive powers with you;
Great Creator, still creating,
Show us what we yet may do.*

*As each far horizon beckons,
May it challenge us anew,
Children of creative purpose,
Serving others, honoring you.
May our dreams prove rich with promise,
Each endeavor well begun:
Great Creator, give us guidance
Till our goals and yours are one.*

— John R. Tyler