

Centennial Moments in History 1920–1925

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The History of the Church of St. Michael and All Angels (1912–1928) Church Programs Expand

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 January 1921 Annual Parish Meeting was delayed until the evening of 8 March 1921 so that the meeting could be held in the newly completed parish house. About 170 persons attended the dinner and meeting that followed. Miss Isabella N. Skinker was elected to the vestry, but soon resigned due to ill health. It would be 42 years before the next woman would be elected to the vestry. (Mrs. William H. Burritt and Miss Ada Winston served on the vestry at St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church 1919–1928, the only other women to serve on a vestry in the diocese during that era.)

The new Susan Mount Memorial Parish House was located south and west of the church with its long axis at right angles to the church and with the entrance on the east side of the structure. The first floor included an auditorium with stage, a room for the primary departments, and a study for the rector. The basement with hardwood flooring contained a kitchen, dining room, and gymnasium. A Guild Room was in the balcony with windows that opened into the auditorium. The hot air furnace that heated the church was removed and a new steam heating system was installed to heat the church and new parish house.



Susan Mount Memorial Parish House

The parish house made possible many new activities. A Dramatic Club was formed, and plays and recitals were given in the auditorium. The members of the church's Boy Scout Troop 28, led by Scoutmaster Paul Miller who was the church organist ca. 1917–1921, were given instruction in the newfangled radio. The first radio station in Missouri, WEW of St. Louis University, began broadcasting in 1921. In April of that year, the station began broadcasting the first regularly-scheduled weather reports that were received by a scattered few sets and the ears of an astonished audience. A Baccalaureate Service for graduates of Hosmer Hall was held at the church in June 1921. The rector and his wife held the first series of tea-time get-togethers for the young people of the parish and for the nearby university students. The Women's Guild gave a bazaar and turkey dinner on 7 December 1922, the first large affair to be undertaken in the new parish house.

The church experienced significant changes in leadership in 1923. Bishop Tuttle died on 17 April of that year after an episcopate of 55 years, 11 months, and 17 days, one of the longest in the

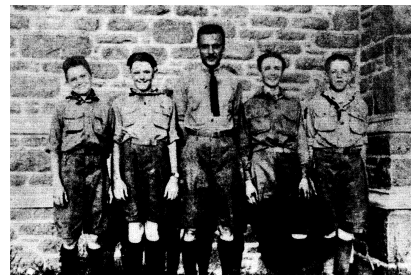
Anglican Communion. He had served simultaneously as Presiding Bishop of The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America for the last 20 years of his life. The Rt. Rev. Frederick Foote Johnson, who had been Bishop Co-adjutor since 1912, became the fourth Bishop of Missouri. On the day of Bishop Tuttle's death, Bishop Johnson, acutely aware of the weight that had fallen upon his shoulders, wrote in his journal, "Give to me, Lord, an understanding heart, that I may both perceive and know what things I ought to do, and may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same."

After a rectorate of 11 years, the Rev. Norton left St. Louis in July 1923 to become the rector of St. Paul's Church in Rochester, NY where he would become close friends with Mr. George Eastman and remain as rector until his retirement in 1948. During his rectorate, the Church of St. Michael and All Angels had grown from a mission to a thriving parish with over 500 communicants.

After a five-month interim, the Rev. Robert J. McFetridge became the church's second rector on 1 November 1923. He was 47 years old and had come from St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia, one of the oldest and most historic churches in the country.

During the month of his arrival, the Anglican Communion was caught up in a controversy related to questions about the interpretation of the creeds regarding the virgin birth. The House of Bishops met in Dallas on 14 November 1923 and issued a pastoral letter that was to be read in all United States parishes (it is online at <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/pastorals/dallas1923.html>). Some clergymen refused to read the letter to their congregations. Others defied the language of the letter, stating that belief in the virgin birth was not a necessary part of Christian faith. The press picked up on the squabble and fanned the flames ("There is nothing new under the sun"; Eccl 1:9b), sometimes quoting clergymen who would rather have been about the Lord's business. Bishop Johnson, in his Christmas sermon at Christ Church Cathedral, said, "I personally accept what is written in the Creed. If any man cannot accept this Creed, I wish the Church might make way for him to come with whatever acceptance he can give." However, just two weeks earlier, Mr. McFetridge had been quoted as advising those who could not in honesty accept the doctrine of the Protestant Episcopal Church to "leave the church honorably rather than abuse its privileges and do violence to the most solemn vows that man can hope to take." The controversy was soon exacerbated by the theological arguments spawned by the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 in which Clarence Seward Darrow and William Jennings Bryan jostled over the scientific theory of evolution.

Mr. McFetridge tendered his resignation in November 1924. He presided at the Annual Parish Meeting on 19 January 1925 and left the church shortly thereafter. Parish records show that his tenure had been highly successful by measurable standards. The Sunday school had grown to 297 scholars at the end of 1924 from 188 the year before, an amazing one-year increase of 58 percent. The church's Boy Scout Troop 28 had 80 members, all members of the parish, and was recognized as one of the best troops in the city; one-fourth of all the Eagle Scouts in the city belonged to the troop, and the troop won many honors at city-wide Jamborees. The scoutmaster's Annual Parish Meeting report noted that "the worst scouts were from Country Day where the fellows were in school until 5:00 p.m. and couldn't participate fully." The report also noted that Cpl. Montgomery Skyler Batdorf and Capt. Alexander Rives Skinker who had fallen in the Battle of the Argonne in France



Members of Scout Troop 28
with Scoutmaster Paul Miller

in September 1918 had been assistant scoutmasters prior to the Great War. The parish was required to report to the diocese each year the number of Easter communions. The number in 1924 was 300, a 22 percent increase over the number a year earlier.

With this record of growth, why was Mr. McFetridge's tenure so short? We are left to wonder if the theological controversies of the day might have been to blame.



The addition of a parish house made possible a great expansion of ministries and activities that contributed to the continuing explosive growth of the parish. Parishioners had new and expanded ways of connecting to the parish community, and connected parishioners grow spiritually in their love of God and others, fueling future spiritual and numerical growth. What are the ways we can help parishioners better connect with our parish's ministries and with one another?

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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