

**Centennial Moments in History**  
**1978–1982**  
No. 31  
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**The History of the Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928– )**  
**Growth and Resulting Change, or Is It Change and Resulting Growth?**

*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

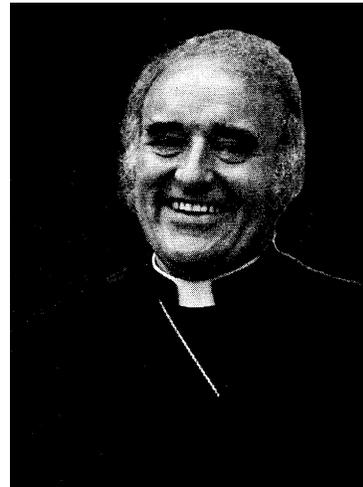
The year 1978 began with the Rev. Joseph T. Swift, retired chaplain of St. Luke’s Hospital, in charge of the parish as “interim pastor”. It was a time of change for more reasons than one. The “1976” Prayer Book that would be adopted in 1979 was being used in parishes on a voluntary, introductory basis. At our church, the new Prayer Book was used at the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship services, with the 1928 Prayer Book continuing to be used exclusively at the 8:00 a.m. service. Holy Communion was celebrated at all 8:00 a.m. worship services and celebrated once per month in the other two services according to long-standing tradition.

A change of this significance required deft handling and explanation by the clergy. Instructions on when to stand, sit, and kneel, etc., were often explained by the officiant or celebrant in the services and included in the printed service leaflets. Mr. Edward A. Wallace, organist & choirmaster, explained the transition from a musician’s perspective: “There is very close similarity in Rite I to the 1928 Prayer Book, but so much more variety and flexibility. Hopefully, we can look forward to liturgical stability without stagnation. The coming years should be a period of intense musical creativity in the Episcopal Church. The proposed Prayer Book has presented opportunities and challenge. The future use of music in worship relies on our ability and willingness to respond to this challenge and our courage to transform problems and resistance into opportunities.”

Parishioners expressed their impatience with the long search for a rector. But amidst the continuing uncertainty, the year 1978 began with the highest pledge amount in history, \$198,000 (multiply all dollar figures in this e-letter by 2.7 to get an approximate present value, based on the CPI). There were 531 pledging households, a drop from the prior year and typical during an interim period. The church had the largest Sunday school in the diocese with 231 students enrolled. There were 1,517 communicants and 26 baptisms in 1977, and 32 people were presented for confirmation. The average Sunday attendance was 339 (excluding the summer months), and the junior choir had 38 singers.

The vestry announced in the fall that the Rev. Edward Lloyd Salmon, Jr., rector of St. Paul’s Church in Fayetteville, AR, had accepted a call to come as rector. In his 14 October 1978 letter to the parish, he said that “the central core of all ministry is to focus on the person of Jesus Christ and his saving power.” Mr. Salmon’s first Sunday with the church was 19 November 1978. The rector reported to the vestry in January 1979 that the continuing transition to the new Prayer Book “will be moving slowly, in a well-defined and not arbitrary way, always being aware of the traditional stance of this parish.”

Existing programs were expanded and new ones were created at an accelerating rate in the next few years, especially in adult Christian education. The expanded programs meant additional clergy and lay leaders to create and manage the growth. As programs expanded, numerical growth exploded. This all required increased pledges. There is a complex relationship among new programs, additional clergy, numerical growth, the requirement for additional financing to pay for it all, and the growth of new and increased pledges. I invite us to keep this complexity in mind as we read what follows in this and future e-letters, for our understanding of it is crucial to planning and creating our future.



The Rev. Edward Lloyd Salmon, Jr.  
(1979 photo)

Mr. Salmon added clergy staff. The first was the Rev. Donald Armstrong III who came in April 1979 from St. Luke's Church, North Little Rock, AR (a short walk from the house in which I grew up!). The parish had grown by 100 communicants since Mr. Salmon's arrival, and Mr. Salmon announced that a third clergyman must be hired. Soon the Rev. William A. Baker, Jr. was on staff. There were 235 students in the Sunday school and 700 people were attending the four Sunday services with the largest attendance at the 9:15 a.m. service that was "maxed out". This was slightly more than double the attendance of 1978.

Four adult Christian education classes were offered in September 1979 with as many as six at high seasons of the liturgical year. Some of the adult classes were held twice each Sunday. Classes were also offered in the summer months. By October 1982, 170 adults were participating in the Sunday classes. Weekday education classes also grew. In addition to the Rector's Forum on Sundays, the rector taught two classes on Tuesdays (11:00 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.) for all parishioners, a Wednesday morning (7:00) class for men, and a Thursday morning (7:00) class for women. He also had a taped radio program that was broadcast at 6:45 a.m. each Sunday on KMOX-FM. The Rev. C. Frederick Barbee was added as a fourth clergyman in January 1982 to nurture the robust adult Christian education program. He visited New York City parishes in June 1982 to review their approaches to adult Christian education and reported to the vestry that "churches which were teaching are growing and are able to cope with the problems faced by parishes of the 1980s." In 1982, there were 120 adults enrolled in the Wednesday evening Bethel Studies program, an intensive Bible study course led by clergy and laity.

The rector wanted lay people to "go beyond being nurtured to becoming task-oriented in the context of the Great Commission." To this end he established an Office of Lay Ministry to "help each



*"Okay, four-year-olds! Let's polish off the Book of Leviticus!"*

parishioner focus more clearly on his/her Christian witness and service both within and without the church.”

Organized college, singles, and young marrieds ministries were begun, and the youth program was intensified. Mrs. Marian Clifford, the Director of Children’s Education, and her dedicated lay volunteers were growing the Sunday school by leaps and bounds. Mrs. Clifford initiated a robust training program to prepare future teachers, and the program proved popular and useful for experienced teachers as well. I discovered while reading Mrs. Clifford’s inspiring ministry reports to the vestry that she once worked as a mathematician and computer programmer at the Navy Underwater Ordnance Station in Newport, RI. Who knew?!

By 1982 there were three children’s choirs with 85 singers. Ministry to the shut-ins and senior adults who had great difficulty in getting to church was strengthened and expanded. The cassette tape caught on in the late 1970s, and a tape ministry was begun so shut-ins could hear the sermons at home. Of course, parishioners who brought the cassette tapes to a shut-in’s home and interacted with that person were the heart of the ministry. In September 1981, Mr. John Williams was hired as parish administrator, and Evening Prayer began to be read M–F in the chapel. Limited space was a huge issue, and a capital campaign in 1979 and other approaches were used to rearrange and refurbish existing space to make it more useable for the expanding programs. All of this and more brought huge financial challenges.

Clergymen were added in advance of pledges to pay for them as an investment in the future. Arrangements were made with the Endowment Fund to pay for the added clergymen’s expenses (salary, benefits, moving and car expense, et al.) for 18 months with the belief that the growth in programs and increased clergy ministry would generate growth in membership and pledges needed to sustain the added staff. The budget had grown from \$219,000 in 1979 to \$446,200 in 1982. There were deficits each year, usually covered by a combination of borrowing and the use of capital campaign funds, and the vestry minutes show how the rector and vestry struggled together to make ends meet and at the same invest for growth.

For Mr. Salmon, it was full speed ahead even though annual deficits and cash flow issues often caused concern. He always counseled against letting this set the agenda. In establishing the 1979 budget, the Finance Committee had hoped “to reduce expenses in order to fit income”. At the 1980 Annual Parish Meeting, the rector said that “growth and vitality of the parish will be such that the financial needs of the parish will be taken care of by expansion.” At that month’s vestry meeting, the pledge results indicated a year-end deficit of \$37,500. The rector said that “the proper way to deal with a deficit is not to cut back in programs but to revitalize the parish, and this will take two or three years.” As deficits continued, the rector counseled in February 1982 that “a healthy fund-raising focus is on building a strong Christian community,” and that this happens “when a high percentage of lay people have a stake in the community’s ministry and are related to the life of the parish.”

The good news was that pledges had increased in three years from \$190,000 to \$355,000. Yet when all the expenses were tallied for the upcoming year of 1983 that included the expenses for added clergy staff that would no longer be paid by the Endowment Fund, the Finance Committee reported that pledges would have to increase 50 percent to provide a balanced budget! On top of this, the vestry needed to borrow \$150,000 to cover unfunded capital improvements and deferred maintenance items that had demanded attention for some time and could not be addressed by the receipts of the recent capital campaign. When it was reported in December 1982 that expected pledges for the 1983 budget would fall \$100,000 short of the goal, it gave the vestry heartburn.

The rector responded that the “the goals of the parish will not be met if economic constraints are used as a reason for cutting services.”

The first five years of Mr. Salmon’s rectorate were exciting, financially risky and challenging, and productive in numerical growth (that can be measured) and spiritual growth that numbers alone cannot measure. I have omitted much in this long e-letter. As Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear it now” (John 16:12). Such is the nature of recounting history, and especially the history of our marvelous parish.



What would you say were Mr. Salmon’s priorities when he began his ministry with us? How did he go about addressing those priorities? In what ways did parishioners respond?

I mentioned earlier that there is a complex relationship among new programs, additional clergy, numerical growth, the requirement for additional financing to pay for it all, and the growth of new and increased pledges. Trying to determine the “prime-mover” factor that then leads to the second factor that then leads to the third factor, etc. can be like trying to determine which comes first: the chicken or the egg. Perhaps all these factors are like love and marriage: they go together like a horse and carriage; you can’t have one without the others. What steps do you think we should take today to grow numerically and spiritually, and in what order? How might we take those steps given our current level of pledge income and expenses? What role does the rector play in taking these steps? What role does the vestry play? What role do you and I as parishioners play?

An Episcopal Church survey in 1982 showed that “the denomination is becoming elderly. Only six percent are between the ages of 18 and 29, while 56 percent are over 50. Nearly six in 10 adult Episcopalians were previously with other denominations, principally Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Baptist”.

We sometimes think that The Episcopal Church only recently began to age, and that the movement of people among denominations is a relatively new phenomenon associated with today’s church-shopping culture, yet these phenomena were prevalent 30 years ago. Recent surveys show that these phenomena are continuing. How can our church reach out to younger generations?



*Yuppies of the Old Testament*

What should we do to attract more people not just to grow numerically, but to bring people in contact with the gospel? Jesus did not command us to grow a church, per se; he commanded us to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20).

*Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.*

— John R. Tyler