

Centennial Moments in History

1941–1945

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The History of The Church of St. Michael & St. George (1928–) The War Years

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

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, seven months after the Rev. J. Francis Sant's arrival. By 1940, the country had come to realize that it was only a matter of time until the nation would be forced to engage in the war. Given the situation, the subscription effort for the organ replacement was suspended. On 7 December 1941, the Empire of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and ended all speculation about if and when the nation would be plunged into war.

The 13 April 1942 issue of *Life* magazine (the issue cost 10 cents, and a yearly subscription could be had for \$4.50) showed on every page how quickly the nation had shifted into wartime mode in just four months. The issue carried major articles on the Battle of the Philippines, the Battlefield of Bataan, profiles of the army high command, and bomber plants. The longest article was titled *Voices of Defeat* and had the heading: "While our country fights for its life, some Americans sow lies and hate inside our lines. They abuse free speech and spread Hitler's propaganda. But they are easy to handle once their communities are aroused."

The magazine's advertisements signaled the new wartime environment. An ad for B. F. Goodrich proclaimed the company to be "first in rubber in war or peace" and listed eight ways to make tires last longer, concluding with an admonition: "Remember, every ounce of rubber you save helps your country." A Realsilk lingerie ad showed a drawing of two automobile tires and said, "These are the tires you don't need to use when you Shop-at-Home with Realsilk." An ad for Soft-Light eyeglass lenses asked, "Are you sure your eyes are doing their part to help you keep up with today's all-out production?" and concluded, "Buy defense bonds for victory." A General Electric ad began, "To war workers and others who must drive at night! How better light for your car can mean greater safety, fewer accidents, [and] more time for vital war work."

A NoDoz ad was headlined, "How to keep awake on the production line." The H. J. Heinz Company's full-page ad discussed "the truth about food shortages." Nylon was commandeered by the War Production Board to make parachutes and tires, and nylon stockings soon disappeared from store shelves. A Kayser Hosiery ad introduced Kayser Victoray stockings made of rayon, claiming that the company's "Lastlon" process provided rayon hosiery with a "smooth, clinging fit . . . long wear . . . [and] thrilling glamour," all for the price of \$1.00 per pair. An Ivory Snow ad proclaimed that "perspiration is acid that eats stockings" and advised that regular washing of stockings with Ivory Snow would make them last 20 percent longer. An article proclaimed that "patches are popular" and that it was now fashionable to use them to extend the life of clothing.

Illustrated directions were included showing how to design and apply patches to various articles of clothing. It was now patriotic to wear patched clothes, for it showed one was doing his or her part to help on the home front.

Everyone was involved in the war. Many were in uniform and being shipped overseas in ever-increasing numbers as deployments accelerated; factory workers who made peacetime products now made war machines and supplies; women rushed to factories and offices to fill positions left vacant as men went overseas; and everyone at home had to deal with shortages of everything. Gasoline, tires, sugar, meat, silk, shoes, nylon, and even chicken wire were just some of the items rationed as raw materials and production capacity were diverted to the war effort. Passenger automobiles would not be manufactured during the war as automobile plants were converted overnight for the production of jeeps, tanks, airplanes, and other war weapons and materials.

The Church of St. Michael & St. George was deeply affected, as were all churches and every institution of society. Vestry minutes and church bulletins of the war years describe the abrupt changes in parish life brought on by the war. The sexton immediately left his job to work in a small arms plant. There was a gradual decrease in the number of male voices in the choir. In April 1942, the Rev. Tittmann, who had served as assistant rector for three years, left to become rector at St. Mary's Church in Arlington, VA. The following December the Rev. G. Richard Wheatcroft came as assistant rector and remained in that position until January 1945.

The Oil Rationing Board reduced the oil supply to the church by 30 percent, and there was fear that churches might have to convert to coal-fired heating plants. To save fuel oil, the church and parish hall were heated only on Sundays and Tuesdays, and all meetings and choir rehearsals during the heating season were held only on those two days each week. The rector urged parishioners to "double up" and share rides to church services as a way to save gasoline. Gas rationing made delivery of flowers to the sick difficult, but that ministry was never discontinued. Parishioners were urged to invite servicemen worshiping at the church into their homes for Sunday dinner. Throughout the war, the church contributed annually to the program for servicemen at Christ Church Cathedral where every Sunday 300–450 servicemen were guests for supper and for the evening at the Cathedral. Churchwomen devoted Tuesdays to Red Cross sewing and making surgical dressings, and many worked faithfully throughout the war as Red Cross Nurses' Aides. The Civilian Defense Headquarters asked that the congregation practice evacuation of the church to a bomb shelter in a designated area in the basement.

In May 1944, Bishop William Scarlett and all other bishops received the following telegram from the Rt. Rev. Henry Knox Sherrill, the Presiding Bishop:

In view of the nearness of invasion [of Europe on D-Day, 6 June], will you invite your clergy to open churches when the news of battle has been confirmed, summoning their people to unite in prayer for God's blessing on our armed forces and upon all who minister to their needs, for an early, honorable and lasting peace.

Victory-in-Europe Day, 7 May 1945, signaled the end of the war in Europe. The war raged in the Pacific until Victory-in-Japan Day on 2 September 1945.



An Honor Roll of parishioners serving in the armed forces had been compiled in January 1943. It listed 111 names, and the compilers said that the list was thought to be incomplete. Eleven parishioners gave their lives during the war. Windows were given in memory of these 11 servicemen. A memorial plaque by the windows on the north wall of the nave lists their names and is pictured near these words.

The U.S. ended its nine-year military engagement in Iraq at the end of 2011 and continues an even longer one in Afghanistan as I write this, but most of us are largely unaffected in any direct, personal way. Nothing is rationed. We heat the church buildings seven days a week. Advertising makes no mention of war. No factories have been shifted exclusively to the production of war weapons and materials, making their peacetime products scarce or non-existent. No one is encouraged to buy war bonds to fund the war that is being underwritten by increased federal debt. No one has been drafted since December 1972 when the Vietnam War was in its last days. It is hard for us to grasp today how greatly everyone sacrificed in every way imaginable during the Second World War.



Last week we read about the steps taken during the war years to place the church on firm financial footing. These steps were taken under the conditions described above. How would you describe those conditions in your own words?

We are in the midst of an economic recession. Compare the conditions and personal sacrifices of parishioners during the 17 years of the Great Depression and the ensuing war years (1929–1945) with those of the current economic recession that thus far has lasted less than four years. Who do the parishioners of those earlier years inspire you to be? What do they inspire to do?

*God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before thy throne arise.*

*Thy love divine hath led us in the past,
In this free land by thee our lot is cast;
Be thou our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
Thy word our law, thy paths our chosen way.*

*From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
Be thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase,
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.*

*Refresh thy people on their toilsome way,
Lead us from night to never ending day;
Fill all our lives with grace and love divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.*

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