

## A Short History of St. James'

Like many good histories, that of St. James' divides itself into three parts: the beginnings, the middle years, and the current era. Each of those periods has presented special blessings and opportunities—and special challenges.

### The Founding Era

St. James' came into being as part of a bishop's initiative that was met by a strong congregational response. The bishop was William Horsfall Johnson, the Bishop of California. The Bishop's title was then entirely accurate: at the time the Diocese of California encompassed the entire state. Bishop Johnson, most of whose parishes clustered around the San Francisco Bay area, had noticed the growing population of southern California and dispatched the Rev. Noel Porter to found a parish on what was then the western edge of Los Angeles. The effort bore fruit, and in 1908 the infant congregation, a mission church, began holding services at Pico and Ardmore. That building can today be seen at the corner of Wilton Place and 8<sup>th</sup> Street; it now houses a Presbyterian church. (The dove window in the small chapel at St. James' came from that original building and serves as a reminder of those early years.) The mission quickly achieved financial self-sufficiency and incorporated as a parish in 1912.

Bishop Johnson's initiative met with a strong response in part because Los Angeles was then beginning what would be almost a century of population growth and economic expansion, fueled by new industries (the movies, oil, airplanes) and World War I, all of which brought millions of immigrants to what they imagined was the eternal sunshine of Southern California. The new population needed many things, and among them were the civic and religious institutions that would turn a population into a civil society. The Church was one of those institutions, and St. James' found itself in the midst of a wave of new residential construction in what became Hancock Park, a prosperous and growing area of Los Angeles.

For the first decades of its life St. James served as Hancock Park's Episcopal church, ministering to the needs of a mostly white and generally well-off congregation. This prosperity of St. James and the surrounding area meant that, when Fr. Porter was subsequently consecrated as Bishop of Northern California, St. James' could offer its new rector the prospect of a growing

congregation and good budgets. The Rev. Ray Miller would serve as rector a remarkable 29 years and would inspire and oversee both the construction of the present church building and the growth of the congregation into a leading church in Los Angeles.

That growth involved some risk-taking. The story goes that the Rev. Miller identified a lot on Wilshire Boulevard where he thought the church should be built. When the vestry proved reluctant to buy the property, Fr. Miller bought it with his own funds, later selling it to a more amenable vestry for the same price for which he had bought it—although the value had substantially appreciated in the meantime. The parish constructed two large buildings on the site. The present concrete-Gothic church was constructed in 1925-26. Just west of the church the parish built a three-story structure that held offices, meeting space, a kitchen, many Sunday school classrooms, and even a basketball court on the third floor. The church building was originally financed in part with borrowed funds, and when the mortgage was paid off in 1940, a great celebration occurred—in which the usher holding the plate on which the mortgage was being transformed to ashes suffered burned hands!

At St. James,' as at many Episcopal churches throughout the country, parish life in this era revolved around two institutions—Sunday School and women's guilds. The Sunday School organized events and classes for the growing families of the congregation, as did Boy Scout Troop 10, founded under the parish's auspices in 1914 and still under its sponsorship today. Like the guilds, the Scout troop built community outside Sunday mornings. The guilds, composed entirely of women, played several roles. They provided financial support for the parish through rummage and holiday sales and similar events. They manifested social responsibility—often devoting funds to helping those in need. They created an opportunity for the parish's women—most of whom were not formally employed outside the home—to gather and share the triumphs and challenges of family life. Finally, they gave women a voice in shaping the life of the parish: no women served on the vestry of St. James until the mid-1970s.

Vestries were not only male and, like the parish itself, white, but they were typically drawn from the parish's most prosperous families—who were expected to provide the bulk of the parish's support, chiefly in the form of pew rents. At the December vestry meeting, the Treasurer would announce the extent of any budget deficit, and the vestry members would be expected to pull out their checkbooks and write checks to cover the deficit.

## The Middle Years

At the close of World War II St. James' was a large, well-off congregation with a broad array of groups and activities serving the needs of its membership. Ray Miller was succeeded by the Rev. George Barrett, who served from 1948-52, before going on to become Bishop of Rochester. Under his successor, the Rev. Ivor Curtis (1953-60), who also became a bishop, the parish hall was expanded to accommodate the 500 students who attended Sunday School and included a ballroom for teen dances and a number of other activities. One of our older parishioners reflected both on the strong guiding role of clergy and the continuing importance of the guilds: in 1957, after a brief interview Fr. Curtis told her which guild she would join—and she did as instructed!

Changes coming to Los Angeles and to American society as a whole also challenged St. James.' One change was demographic. As the population of Los Angeles spread westward, new parishes were founded—in Beverly Hills, Westwood, the Pacific Palisades. Where once the parish boundaries of St. James' stretched from Western Avenue to the Pacific Ocean, it now had to compete with other congregations for parishioners' loyalties.

Foremost among the challenges of this period were changing law and attitudes with regard to race. Like most single-family residences in Los Angeles before World War II, the deeds to houses surrounding St. James contained racial exclusion clauses, binding owners not to sell to other than Anglo families. When such clauses were declared unconstitutional in 1948, followed by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that state-sponsored racial segregation was unlawful, disruptions of old understandings posed large challenges, challenges felt within the congregation as well as in society at large. In the early 1960s these challenges came home in a pointed way. Nat King Cole, an admired African-American musician and a resident of adjoining Hancock Park, approached the then-rector of St. James, the Rev. George Terwilliger, asking if he would be welcome as a member of the congregation. When Fr. Terwilliger polled his vestry, he was told that Mr. Cole would not be welcome. Unhappy with this response, Fr. Terwilliger asked Mr. Cole to sing as a soloist at the Easter service. This gesture attracted city-wide attention, with television news trucks pulled up outside the church. Cole sang, and the vestry shortly thereafter requested Fr. Terwilliger's resignation after only two years as a rector. This unhappy event has a more hopeful sequel: when Mr. Cole died in 1965, his family chose St.

James as the site of his funeral, which was attended by stars from the worlds of music and film and the Governor of California.

In spite of such setbacks, the congregation began slowly to diversify, with African and African-American parishioners joining. Parishioners of color who joined the parish in the 1970s report both their pleasure at finding a racially diverse congregation and their feeling some discomfort at whether they “belonged” at St. James. The congregation sought to respond in several ways. Under the Rev. Sam D’Amico (rector from 1963-79) St. James’ expanded its outreach by founding St. James’s school. From its infant days in an apartment building on Gramercy Place to its present status as one of the city’s respected primary schools, St. James’ School has intentionally embraced ethnic and economic diversity and prides itself that its students come from many races and walks of life. The School’s more than 360 students receive a rigorous academic education, a grounding in Anglican spirituality, and a respect for many faith traditions. The School remains not an independent subsidiary of the parish, but an integral part of it, administered by a semi-autonomous School Board which functions as an advisory committee to the vestry and to which the vestry has delegated primary responsibility for and authority over all matters pertaining to the school.

Another response was the construction of St. James Manor, a HUD-financed, low-cost senior citizen residence that, again, was explicitly (by law) open to residents of all races and creeds; like the School, the Manor continues to be one of the parish’s more visible outreach efforts. The Manor is located a block from the church and parish hall and adjacent to the new parish preschool. The Rev. Robert Oliver, rector from 1979 to 1990, inspired and oversaw the construction of this project, which encompasses both the apartment building that once housed the School and a newer purpose-built structure. A separate board of directors consisting of St. James’ parishioners manages the 65-unit project, providing maintenance and selecting new residents—according to federal guidelines—as vacancies occur. The 1970s also saw the growth of a strong music program, one that has blossomed into one of the parish’s treasured hallmarks.

During this period, St. James’ opened a new era in governance. Women began to play a role in the formal governance and worship of the parish when Mary Morton became the first woman elected to the vestry and Sara Jane Thies the first youth representative on that body in 1971. The same period saw the first girls to serve as acolytes—previously an all-boys preserve--

and the calling of the Rev. Virginia Erwin as the parish's first woman priest. Quietly marking another break with the parish's past, Fr. Oliver appointed as Senior Warden an African-American, Francis Banks—the first such person to hold that position. Francis remarked that he thought he would never see the day that a southerner—Fr. Oliver grew up and had his first ministries in the South—would take such a step; for his part, Fr. Oliver regularly referred to Mr. Banks as “the conscience of the parish.”

No single event marks the emergence of the contemporary parish, but one can note a number of trends. One was the gradual diminution in the importance and membership of the parish's guilds. As women entered the work force in greater numbers and as the parish's membership began to come from a wider geographic area, the guilds gradually fell away, with the last one being formally decommissioned under the Rev. Kirk Smith, the parish's rector from 1991 to 2004, when he was called to become Bishop of Arizona. At the same time, the diverse congregation were hailing from an ever-widening circle, making it difficult to have weekday or evening gatherings that many could attend.

This period also saw another good news/ bad news event that continues to shadow the parish. At the end of Fr. Oliver's rectorship the parish, which previously had only a small endowment, received a bequest of some \$4 million from Amy Phillips, a former parishioner. The arrival of these funds was providential, because the City of Los Angeles had required us either to retrofit or to demolish the old parish hall. For a number of reasons retrofitting was not an option, so we needed to plan and construct the present parish hall. Part of the Phillips bequest was devoted to that task, allowing any number of activities from Scouting to Alcoholic Anonymous to book clubs to Education for Ministry to continue to flourish. The funds not used to construct the new hall were invested in the Diocesan Trust. Though these funds were never formally and legally restricted—and thus remained available for whatever uses the vestry and rector chose to put them—they began to be referred to, for understandable reasons, as “the endowment.” Over time the treatment of those funds became a source of misunderstanding and conflict, as will appear below.

During the same period the parish supported the School in acquiring a property at the north end of the block, previously occupied by some small retail shops; that acquisition allowed the School to expand its footprint; the combined footprint of the School and church facilities now

occupy the entire eastern side of our city block. The music program became stronger with the acquisition and refurbishing of the 1911 Murray Harris organ, previously located in the demolished St. Paul's Cathedral. The soup kitchen and food pantry programs were solidly established with dedicated space in the new parish hall, and a program initiated to bring bag lunches to those awaiting AIDS treatment at County Hospital.

Several smaller building and renovation projects also marked these years. Under the leadership of the Rev. Albin Davis, a long-time parishioner who served as priest-in-charge while the parish called Fr. Smith, we installed a columbarium and later refurbished the chapel, creating an intimate space that serves the prayer group that meets after the weekly soup kitchen as well as other services that might otherwise be dwarfed by the size of the main church.

Some moments of crisis also marked these years. The first came from outside, when in 1994 David Falconer, the beloved and successful organist, music director and School music teacher, was murdered during a robbery attempt as he journeyed home after choir practice. The second disruption came from inside. The Rev. Charles Rowins had headed the School since Fr. Oliver's rectorship and was much loved in the School community. During the last years of Fr. Oliver's tenure, the head of school assumed increasing autonomy, to the distress of the vestry, which saw the School's increased independence and sometimes loose financial practices as a threat to its continuation as a ministry of St. James. When the vestry and Fr. Smith decided in 1995 that Fr. Rowins had to leave, many school parents, most of whom were not parishioners, took strong exception: parish leadership had gravely underestimated Fr. Rowin's popularity with parents and also with many parishioners. In the wake of Fr. Rowin's departure some parishioners left the church, and parental distrust of the school board and of the parish took a number of years to heal. We are happy to report a currently warm and mutually supportive relationship between parish and School, but are also aware that the relationship needs continual nurturing, as both the School and the parish search for new leadership.

### The Contemporary Parish

In these years St. James experienced a wonderful congregational transformation: From a predominantly white and traditional congregation, our identity as both "Episcopalian" and "Anglican" brought in many West Indian and African parishioners; our embrace of diversity

brought in multi-racial and gay parishioners; our evangelization of our neighborhood brought in Korean parishioners; and the old guard not only stayed but welcomed the changes. We believe that by any standard we are the most diverse Episcopal congregation in the United States.

Recognizing the important role of all these communities, Fr. Smith appointed the first African, and the first Korean priests in St. James' history. This growing diversity came with challenges. As the Anglican Communion—and the Episcopal Church in the United States--struggled over whether and how to recognize gay and lesbian relationships, part of the African community found itself unable to accept the parish's explicit welcome to these members of the Kingdom, and some left in protest or discomfort. The African congregation that remains has welcomed both clergy and parishioners of every sexual orientation.

During this period we were also successful in attracting the talent of (now-Canon) James Buonemani, to replace David Falconer as our music director; under him the music program has achieved even greater national and international distinction. We enjoy fine liturgical music, the hallmarks of which are our exceptional choir and the restored and refurbished Murray Harris organ. In addition, Great Music at St. James' sponsors monthly Evensong services, organ recitals that highlight leading musicians from around the world, and Compline services sung in Gregorian chant. Testifying to the choir's excellence, it has been asked to serve as visiting voices at some of Britain's leading churches, including Westminster Abbey. At home the Great Music program attracts an audience from across Southern California and is financially self-sustaining. The music program continues to be one of the parish's distinctive strengths.

With generous donations from several parish families, the church now boasts a complete set of stained glass windows, all designed and manufactured by the Judson Studios over a period of a century.

During the same period, problems with office administration practices arose. The church suffered the untimely death of a very capable parish administrator. Despite interim assistance from parishioners and others, attention to administration declined during the latter years of Fr. Smith's rectorship and the interim period that followed his call to be Bishop of Arizona. The next rector, Father Paul Kowalewski, who served from 2005-2013, inherited an administration in disarray. Despite efforts to impose more orderly business practices, problems continued, particularly a perceived lack of transparency in the budgeting process and in hiring and firing

decisions. For a time, the remainder of the Phillips bequest and a rising stock market meant that these funds could be used to cover deficits. Unfortunately, as the investment markets collapsed in 2008-09 and, as the parish continued to draw on those funds, the principal also dwindled. The unhappiness and distrust engendered by this “disappearing endowment” was exacerbated by what parishioners report was a lack of transparency about the parish’s financial condition.

On the positive side of the ledger, Fr. Kowalewski continued his predecessors’ efforts to expand inclusivity. He appointed the first openly gay assistant, The Rev. Neil Tadken, who was ultimately welcomed even by the more traditional parts of the Saint James’ community. Fr. Kowalewski was also intentional about reaching out to the School, strengthening the relationship between the head of the school and the rector with regular meetings and invitations to participate actively in Sunday liturgy. He also took on the task of teaching religion to the fifth graders. His efforts, matched by those of successive heads of school and parish leaders, completed the healing process and led to the current strong and healthy relationship between parish and school that the St. James’ community enjoys today. Fr. Kowalewski also supported the start of an Education for Ministry program, in which lay parishioners pursue a course of study that in some ways parallels seminary education.

Marking the church’s centennial in 2012, the parish renovated the interior of the nave and updated bathrooms in the narthex. During this period the parish also brought its preschool—previously located on rented property—onto a parcel of land owned by the parish and adjacent to St. James’ Manor, built an entirely new building to house the preschool on land donated to the school by the church, and brought the preschool’s administrative structure under the School’s umbrella, thus expanding a major ministry.

The cooperative engagement of the School and parish communities extends beyond real estate. The parish and School are now engaged in a joint site planning process, one of whose goals is the better and more coherent use of the space between church and school—space now occupied by a small and underutilized parking lot. As a small symbol of this cooperation, the School successfully sought a grant that enabled renovation of the pool and fountain in the center of our courtyard; as a result of this renovation the pool now boasts not only some beautiful water-cleansing plants but what is likely the largest population of turtles in the mid-Wilshire area! Together with these accomplishments came some negatives. During this period the parish

struggled to attract and support women clergy. Programs for children and youth did not thrive. Difficulties, and perhaps reluctance to deal with the parish's administrative structure and financial reporting, led to a number of years in which our declining financial position was either unclear or at any rate not disclosed to the wider parish.

With Fr. Kowaleski's retirement, St. James embarked on a pair of interim rectorships, first with Fr. Tom Discavage and currently with Bishop-in-Charge Catherine Roskam. Working with vestry these two interim clergy have sought to advance several goals. Fr. Discavage worked to put our financial house in order and continued to foster a strong school-parish bond.

Bishop Roskam has continued this effort and focused as well on greater transparency in all matters of parish governance and the task of restoring trust within and among the several groups comprising the parish. This work is still in progress, but we believe that a very substantial measure of trust has been restored. Second, we have continued to expand our ethnic and cultural reach: we have long had a sizeable Korean congregation, but in the last few years, with the support of the Diocese, we have established a separate Korean language service, which on most Sundays worships separately under the leadership of Fr. John Kim, but joins the principal worship service on Second Sundays. Though these members of the congregation bring new perspectives—and a wonderful Korean choir—to enrich our life, this ministry also faces challenges. The chief of these is, unsurprisingly, communication: most members of this congregation have only limited English, and, while they express appreciation for the pastoral care and liturgy conducted by Fr. Kim, they also report feeling isolated from the broader life of the parish. It is fair to say that we need to be more thoughtful and intentional in addressing the challenges of this ministry.

We continue to support the African Fellowship, which includes both parishioners and those from beyond the wider community. We now also have a pair of active, admired women—Bp. Catherine Roskam and the Rev. Jenifer Chatfield--leading us as clergy. We have extended our outreach to the hungry and homeless in our part of Los Angeles: the soup kitchen draws volunteers both from within and without the parish and includes an informal, voluntary chapel service led by a member of the congregation. Recently another parishioner, SaraJane Thies, sponsored a very successful Christmas "gift tree," in which members of the congregation picked an "ornament" listing a want from a homeless person—ranging from a grocery gift card to a pair

of shoes—which were then bought by parishioners and delivered at Christmastime. Father John Kim sponsors a residence homeless, aged Korean men. The parish has developed strong ties with local city officials and the police, who know of and support our homeless/hunger initiatives. Another parishioner, Geraldine Hurley, has organized several interfaith education efforts, with special emphasis on Islamic communities in Los Angeles. And we are in the early stages of exploring how the parish might respond to those facing or fearing detention or deportation as a result of their immigration status.

New programs and worship aimed at children and families are drawing a strong response. We have instituted a new “Second Sunday” family service at 9:30, which not only draws substantial attendance but also further deepens the relationship between parish and school communities. And we continue to foster and treasure our conspicuously multi-ethnic and multi-racial congregants, whose first languages include scores of tongues and come from all over the world, including several African countries, Central America, Korea, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Philippines. A unusual feature of St. James experience with diversity is that from the first we intentionally sought to be one parish with many languages and cultures—rather than having an ethnic group “nest” within the physical structure of the church; that decision continues to enrich us, but it also presents challenges. One such challenge is that of integrating all these groups *as* a single congregation, but we meet that challenge with joy and creativity and continue to celebrate our diversity.

Like many main-line churches in these days of declining interest in traditional worship, St. James’ confronts financial challenges. We have, however, with substantial retrenchments—and painful programmatic loss—achieved budgetary near-balance, and the vestry is committed both to continuing that balance and to active fiscal oversight. But financial growth is dependent on growing the congregation, increasing the proportion of pledging members, and making more imaginative use of volunteers, as an earlier era did with the parish guilds.

A final challenge—common to many urban parishes—involves ways to build community across the lines of a diverse congregation in an era when changing work and family patterns combine with economic challenges, leaving many with less time to devote to volunteer activities and to parish life beyond Sunday morning.

Embarked on its second century, St. James' is ready to enter the next stage of our pilgrimage. A revitalized stewardship committee embraces its mission as a continuing one, and we aim at 100% pledging as a congregational goal. Volunteers have stepped up to fill gaps caused by budget cuts. Under the dedicated guidance of our interim clergy the most critical programs have continued during this period. Indeed we have created several new ministries, ranging from the preschool to a revived Sunday School program and a new, successful additional family service. Our liturgy and music programs continue to thrive. Our journey of faith continues.