

St. John's Centennial

1950-1959

Anna Aubry

The 1950s opened with a continuation of the growth St. John's had experienced in the 1940s. Thanks to bequests from the estates of two notable parishioners, Frances Gordenier and Mabel Barnes, the church acquired its first vicarage. It was located on NE 90th near 116th NE. It is interesting to note in these short history chapters how St. John's has benefited from the dedication and contributions of individuals throughout the decades.

Mrs. Gordenier was a native of England and an early member of St. John's. She was a widow and lived on Rose Hill with her brother. She attended church services faithfully and walked to St. John's each Sunday. She died in 1949 at the age of 85 and left her small home to her church.

Mabel Barnes lived in the Medina area and remained a faithful member of St. John's until a mission church (which later became St. Thomas) was formed in Medina. She left a bequest to St. John's in her will, and that bequest also helped fund a much-needed, new vicarage.

Father Alfred Griffiths and his family were the first occupants of the vicarage. He served as vicar to both St. John's and a new mission at Kenmore, the Church of the Redeemer. (The two missions became known as the Northeast Lake Mission.) Fr. Griffiths' four years at St. John's saw continued growth in both congregation and property. An additional lot was purchased in 1951 with a loan of \$500 from the Diocese. A year later an additional loan of \$6,000 enabled the purchase of a lot and house adjoining the church. This house was rented for a time and later torn down. This later loan was paid in 1955 with money from the sale of stock given to the church by Mr. Louis Marsh. Since our church was continuing to grow, work had begun to remodel the little brown building.

Then late at night on September 9, 1953, that little brown church building caught fire. Fortunately, many valuable articles, vestments and prayer books were saved, but the building was a total loss. Exactly thirty years after its founding, St. John's was once again without a building.

However, within a week of the fire, the parishioners began plans for a new building. Father Griffiths recorded that their response was tremendous. One man donated \$1,000, and a young boy emptied his piggy bank and donated the entire contents, money he had been saving for a sailboat. In all they raised \$30,000! Many other churches sent gifts and, with the fire insurance, an additional \$19,577 was added. Soon architects Durham, Anderson and Freed of Seattle and contractor E.F. Schuck were hired. The winning bid amounted to about \$60,000. When finished and furnished the total came to between \$75,000 and \$80,000.

Ground was broken on January 17, 1954, and Bishop S. Arthur Huston laid the cornerstone on April 25th. By autumn the new building was ready and was dedicated on September 5th. Quite the red-letter day for all the members who had worked so hard for the new building!

Gladys Burr donated \$1000 toward the purchase of a used Wurlitzer Electronic Organ, and other parishioners also donated money to meet the total price of around \$4000. The organ was located in the alcove on the left side of the church along with the choir. And, Gloria Johnson became the first organist/choir director.

The long-awaited dedication day arrived. Bishop Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., knocked on the door three times with the foot of the pastoral staff and said, "Open me the gates of righteousness, that I may go into them and give thanks unto the Lord." With the congregation inside, facing the door, the senior warden, Gerald Pratt, opened the door and said, "This is the gate of the Lord, and righteousness shall enter into it." More than 300 people attended this impressive service.

Father Griffiths was called to return to the Philippine Islands to assume his new position as headmaster of Brent School in Baguio. He was succeeded by the Rev. Charles A. Forbes who served St. John's until the end of

1957 when he became chaplain at the University of Washington. On July 1, 1955, Fr. Forbes married Carolyn Liddell, a member of the parish, with Bishop Bayne presiding. After Fr. Forbes left, the parish was without a vicar for nine months, and the Rev. Thomas Bennett, a retired priest from Montana, was the interim priest.

In September 1958 the newly assigned vicar, the Rev. Robert F. Hayman arrived. He had come from St. George's By-The-River in Rumson, New Jersey. The old rectory was sold and newer one purchased in preparation for his arrival.

Several other interesting developments in church life occurred as the fifties drew to a close:

- One of these the establishment of the Saints Alive Thrift Shop by the women of St. John's at 117 Central Way in downtown Kirkland. Audrey Chatelain accepted a "temporary" appointment as store director, and remained store director throughout the life of the store. Proceeds from the thrift shop were used for outreach in the community.
- Also, the church purchased four lots across the back street from the new building in 1959. One had a small home on it which was rented out for a time and later was torn down.
- And, St. Margaret's Guild continued to function strongly. Among its important contributions were the silver ciborium for the altar, carpeting for the church, carpeting and drapes for the Gordenier Room (now the chapel at the back of the church), and a refrigerator and freezer for the kitchen.

The 1950s saw St. John's rising like a phoenix from its fire.