

St. John's Centennial

1930-1949

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With the stock market crash, things were looking pretty grim. Industrial output dropped to less than half of that of early 1929, hourly wages dropped 60 percent, and the US had around 14 million unemployed. The Northwest was better off than other parts of the country, but Kirkland had its unemployed as well.

And, St. John's felt the pain of the Depression, too. Diocesan help was curtailed, there was no regularly assigned priest from 1932 to 1938, and the Sunday School closed its doors. Lay readers stepped up to conduct services, and visiting priests came once a month to serve communion. Times were tough, but St. John's members were tougher!

Everyone pitched in. Gerald Pratt conducted services each Sunday as lay reader, Olive Allison tidied up the building and then played organ for services. The first person to arrive for a service or meeting lit the fire in the stove to warm the place up, and everyone assisted to keep the church going. In 1936 there were only seven families and twenty-two communicants, and the church treasury was down to \$401. Visiting priests during this time included a medical missionary to Alaska who was a retired priest, a Ft. Lewis chaplain, and priests from parishes in Seattle, Mercer Island, and Auburn. But, it was Gerald Pratt who was the person who could be counted on every Sunday to keep the church going.

The year 1940 was a real turning point for St. John's. St. John's and Emmanuel Mission on Mercer Island received the leadership of clergy with the arrival of the Reverend Richard Underwood. Richard Underwood was a remarkable man who had spent ten years teaching English, French, and Sociology at Central China University under the American Church Mission, China. He started as a layman, was ordained deacon as a 1933 and a priest in 1935. But persecution of Americans in China was beginning, and they were called "foreign devils", spat on, and even stoned. As the political climate worsened, he and many others in the mission field returned home in 1936. China's loss was definitely St. John's and Emmanuel's gain! Both missions grew under the capable leadership of this deeply spiritual man.

Then on December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked, and World War II began. Kirkland and towns throughout the country experienced a renewed national unity and purpose. This renewal and sense of purpose was reflected at St. John's as well.

The 1940s brought more changes in clergy. Unfortunately, Richard Underwood died quite suddenly on December 10, 1942. In 1943, the Reverend Frederick J. G. Kepler came to serve St. John's and Emmanuel Church. And, in 1944 the number of families attending St. John's jumped to 50 (compared to 17 the previous two years), and the church school, which had reopened in the late thirties, had ten pupils. In 1947, Frederick Kepler was followed by the Reverend Lewis Bailey, who served as St. John's first full-time vicar until 1949. The Reverend Arthur Vall-Spinosa of St. Thomas, Medina, completed the decade during the winter of 1949-1950, serving one quarter time at St. John's.

In all, the 1940s continued the upswing at Kirkland and St. John's. We won a war, men returned home, the local shipyards continued at a busy pace, and the economy was good. St. John's Afternoon and Evening Guilds (renamed St. Margaret's Guild and St. Monica's in 1955) continued strong support of the mission church. St. John's ended the 1940s with 81 families and receipts of \$5,104, the highest in its history. In fact, the mission's growth had been so rapid, that even with its several additions, the little brown church building had actually become too small.