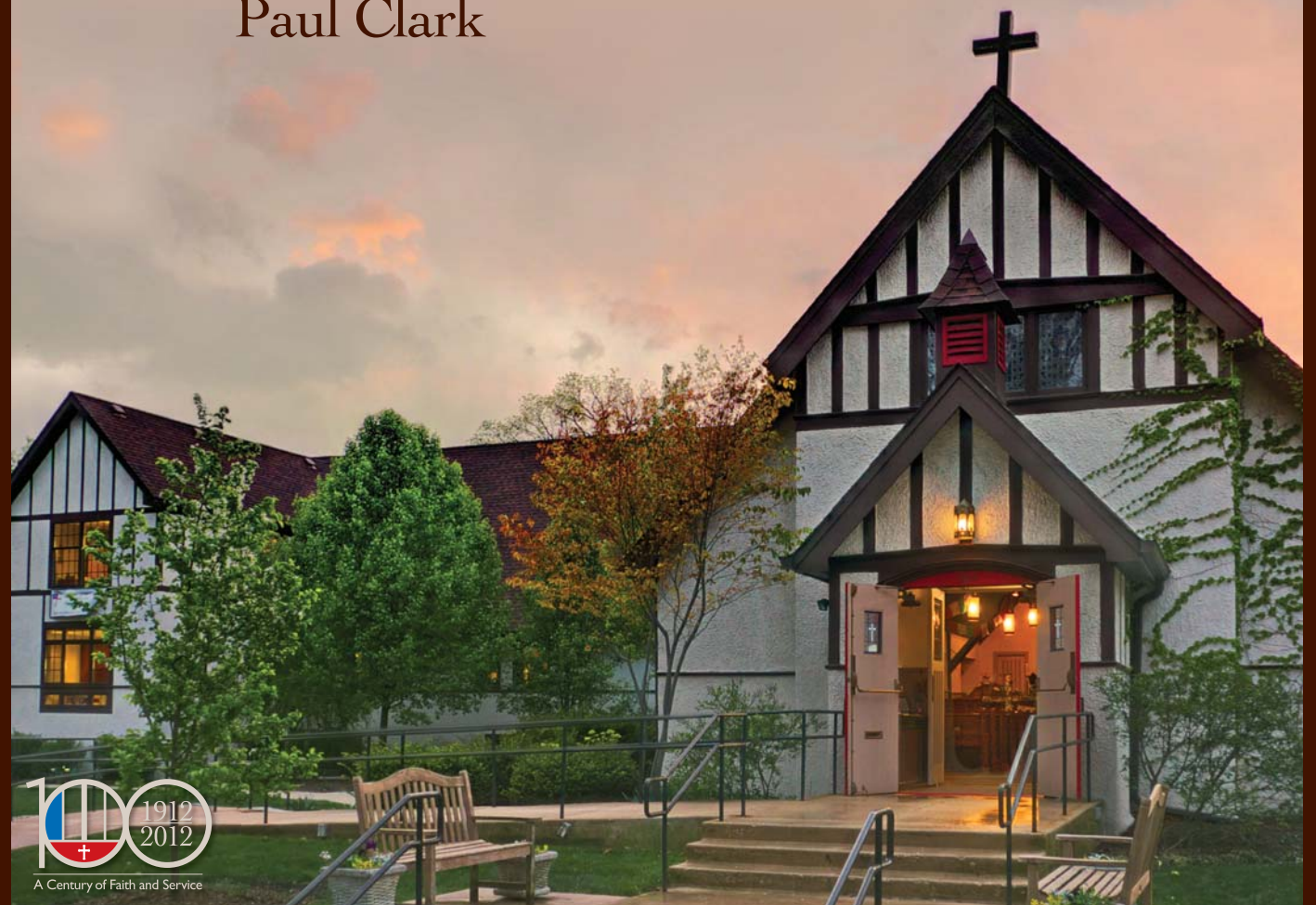


A History of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

Paul Clark



A Century of Faith and Service

A History of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

On Sunday March 17, 1912, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church held its first services in a newly constructed building in Oak Park, Illinois. The program for the first day of services listed "Some Things We Intend to Have," including three Sunday services; "a thoroughly graded, pedagogically correct school of religion; a choir of boys and men; "no sermon over twenty minutes long, except on special occasions;" and specific social activities for men, women, and high school boys and girls.

That day, there were three services: a sunrise service of Holy Communion at 6:00 a.m. with a choir of 30 vested men; Morning Prayer at 11:00 a.m. with a sermon by the vicar and first priest-in-charge, the Rev. Bernard Iddings Bell; and Evensong at 4:30 p.m.

The first program (or service leaflet, as we now think of it) emphasized education; worship; finance and social activities; and civic and missionary works — cornerstones for St. Christopher's for 100 years. The first program also stated the church's "motto," from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

What follows is a short history of what the members of a "little church," as one of its long-time members called it, have done to carry out that mission for the last century.

Before the Village of Oak Park was established, the population of the area had steadily grown since Joseph Kettlestrings bought 173 acres of land just west of Chicago in 1837. The population continued to boom after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 as city dwellers sought new places to live. Frank Lloyd Wright built his first home in the area in 1889 and designed several additional homes in the surrounding neighborhood. To accommodate the expanding town, but also contributing to its growth, the elevated train system from the city built its first station in Oak Park in 1900.

By the time the village was incorporated in 1902, the central and northern parts of the village had been steadily developed for years with stately homes, a thriving business district, and several churches. The first Episcopal church in the area was built in 1879. At the time of incorporation, horse-drawn carriages and automobiles shared the streets. There were about 10,000 residents at the time and the population in the south part of town was about to boom.



The Children's Choir in the mid-1950s. Rich Nied, still a choir member in 2012, is third from the left.

Many places of worship were constructed in the village in the first few years after incorporation: Grace Episcopal Church; Mount Carmel Baptist Church (the first African-American church in the village) in 1905; Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in 1908; St. Edmund's Roman Catholic Church in 1910; Ascension Roman Catholic Church in 1912; Cuyler Avenue

Methodist Church (now Cornerstone United Methodist Church) in 1914; the First Church of Christ Scientist (now the Arts Center of Oak Park) in 1916; and First Congregational Church (now First United Church), which was rebuilt in 1917 after the original building burned down in 1916.



In 1905, S.D. Gunderson began developing land south of Madison St. and east of Oak Park Ave., in the area known as "South Prairie," building hundreds of homes over the next few years. To encourage people from Chicago to move to the new suburb and in particular to purchase his new properties, Gunderson paid for a commuter depot to be built on the metropolitan elevated line at Maple Ave.



The purchasers of these new south side homes were generally self-employed businessmen from Chicago. One of these new residents, Francis Pugh, moved with his family from Chicago into south Oak Park in 1905. Pugh was a devout Episcopalian, but Grace Church was too far to attend on a regular basis because it was located in what was then the northern part of the village. So, he made arrangements to conduct Morning and Evening Prayer as well as Sunday school classes in a

A solitary house sits south of Madison Ave. near Ridgeland in 1903, just prior to the first big housing boom in South Oak Park.



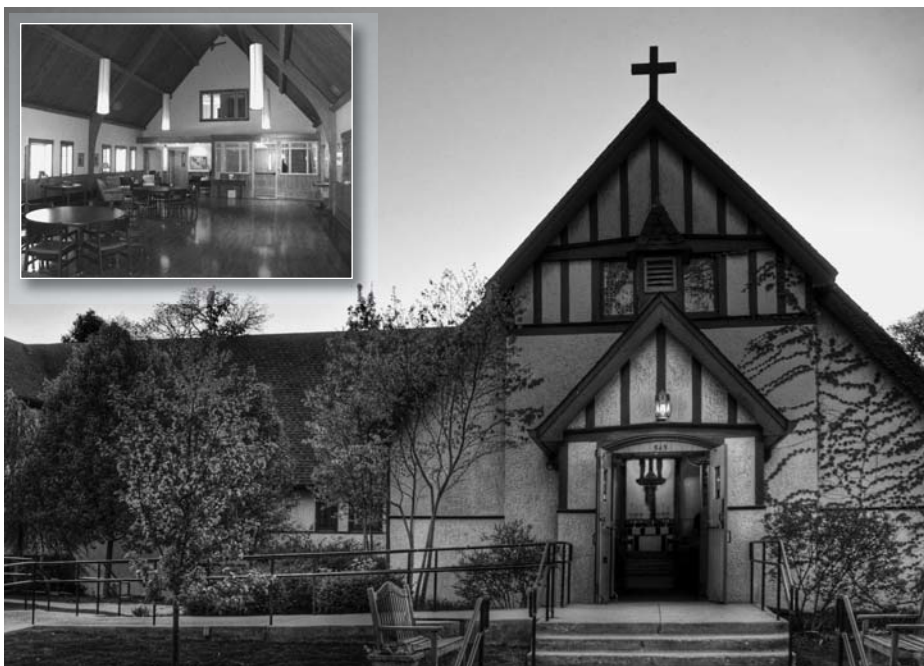
Lessons and Carols – 2011

of the stained glass. There is an ancient tradition that attracts people, an emphasis on beauty and mystery that is inherent in the liturgy and the spaces.

St. Christopher’s Church is a living entity, and like all living entities, it is constantly renewing itself. Parishioners move away, die, or join other churches. And yet, for decades, the church annually receives between 70 and 100 pledges of financial support. Over the years, some members have remained constant, but the names and numbers of its supporters have frequently changed; for example, according to pledging lists from 1991 and 2012, only 14 families pledged both years. The parish renews itself because it attracts new families and individuals who seek a closer relationship with God and with a community.

In her rector’s report delivered at the 2012 Annual Parish Meeting, Rev. Coffey said – Jesus taught with *inner* authority, which came from a secure sense of God, himself, and the world. It came from intimate encounter with the Living God and a loving bond with humankind. True authority isn’t something conferred by rank or role, but something conveyed from within by those who are open to engage with holy questions.

For 100 years, St. Christopher’s Church has kept its door open to those willing to walk in and be engaged. †



Ed Mampre

In 2012, parishioners Art Carnot and Ed Mampre had been members of St. Christopher’s for over 75 years. Ed, a faithful and active participant in the 8:00 a.m. service each week, writes,

“I was born in May 1924 and baptized [at St. Christopher’s], then confirmed in 1936. I was in the Boys’ Choir then and an acolyte until going into the Army Air Force in 1942.

“I was married in 1952 and my wife became an Episcopalian. We had four children from 1955 to 1960. All were baptized and confirmed at St. C’s; three of four were married at St. C’s. Six of fifteen grandchildren were baptized at St. C’s.

“I served on the Vestry two times. Started Boy Scout Troop #5 at St. C’s in 1956 but could not compete with the schools so it was disbanded.

“The best years of my life are still to ahead of me at St. C’s which I call a friendly and family-oriented church.”

This history is a continuation of histories written by parishioners for the 40th, 50th, and 75th anniversaries of the parish, as well as the parish profile prepared in 1997.

It also is based on 100 years of Vestry and Finance Committee meetings, annual reports from rectors, the *Messenger* (which has been published for 67 years) and weekly service leaflets. The writers also benefited from the boxes of memorabilia saved by longtime parishioners such as Edith Aldworth and Mary Jean Sanders.

The history was prepared by Paul Clark and Kelly Clissold, with assistance from Wendy Norris. Jane Messah-Ericksen copy-edited the text. Contemporary photographs were provided by Paul Goyette. The cover photograph is by Michael Kohnhorst.

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

A Century of Faith and Service

We seek unity with God and one another in Christ through solemn and joyful worship; vital and supportive community; formative Christian Education; and the sharing, through outreach, of our diverse gifts.

