

History of the modern St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Much of this information was taken from the History of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Louisville, Kentucky written by Ann E. Miller, a parishioner with supplementary information from Ed Hill and Lee Fletcher

March 16, 1948: Department of Missions advises Bishop Charles Clingman to proceed with mission at St. Matthew's.

Following World War II, Louisville began to expand. New young families needed housing not readily available in the city, so new schools and churches began to mushroom. On March 16, 1948, the Department of Missions of the Diocese of Kentucky advised Bishop Charles Clingman to proceed with the establishment of a mission at St. Matthew's.

April 2, 1948: Charter members meet in Bishop Clingman's living room.

At an April 2, 1948, meeting at the Bishop's home, fifteen of the twenty-seven persons in attendance (plus three by mail) signed a petition. Numerous meetings were held in homes in April and May making plans as well as reviewing resumes of potential clergy.

June 1, 1948: The Rev. Wilfred B. Myll was called as minister-in-charge. He later became the first Rector.

On June 1, 1948, the Rev. Wilfred B. Myll, assistant rector at St. Mark's Church in San Antonio, Texas, was called to be minister-in-charge at St. Matthew's. He accepted the call, to become effective September 1, 1948.

September 5, 1948: The first service was held at the St. Matthews Woman's Club.

The first service was held at the St. Matthews Woman's Club Building on Shelbyville Road. Conducted by Bishop Clingman, there were 43 attending the 8:00 a.m. Eucharist and 197 at the 11:00 a.m. service—most remarkable! The Diocese reported that the annual income of those signing the petition to start the mission was \$2,600, yet before the first service a Hammond organ, 250 kneeling pads, a lectern, and three sets of altar linens were donated by enthusiastic future communicants. While meeting at the Woman's Club, the nursery group met in the kitchen; the older children, sixty in all, met in two rooms with four tables in the center. By April, 1951, the mission had become a parish.

April 6, 1952: Ground breaking for first sanctuary (now Clingman Chapel and the Rehearsal Hall) was held.

The architectural firm of Hartstern, Louis and Henry was hired to develop plans for the church, and ground was broken in April, 1952, for the first unit. The design caused much comment and controversy as it was the first contemporary structure in the Diocese and one of the first of its type, for an Episcopal church, in the nation. The theme of the capital campaign for the first phase was "\$75,000 or Bust."

April 13, 1952: First Easter service held on current grounds.

In addition to the \$5,000.00 contributed by the Department of Missions, \$60,000.00 was pledged by members of the now established church toward building their own place of worship. The elder C. Robert Peter (father of Frankie Mathews) gave the funds to purchase the eight acres property at the corner of Massie Avenue and North Hubbards Lane (which reportedly cost \$17,000.00). Prior to the groundbreaking, services continued to be held at the Woman's Club except for Easter Sunrise services, the first of which was a freezing morning with a good sized choir and Evelyn Dorsey playing a pump organ donated by the Scheirichs—what dedication! The Easter service was held on the site of what is now Saints Hall.

June 21, 1952: Cornerstone was laid. It is located near the current side door to the narthex.

February 8, 1953: The first service was held in the original sanctuary.

The first service was held in the new sanctuary (now Clingman Chapel and the Rehearsal Hall) on February 8, 1953. The familiar wooden screen in Clingman Hall, the original sanctuary, ran horizontally behind the altar. Representing various biblical stories, it was designed by Carl Bach, whose wife Sue has helped create many of the church's admired banners, and was carved with a jigsaw by Lew Wright, husband of Neeley, a Bellringer and former choir member (both men are deceased). The wood carvings are now part of the Myll Chapel and the lectern in the sanctuary. The linoleum floor was laid by the men of the parish under the supervision of V. C. Glass, one of the founders.

June 23, 1955: Ground was broken on the 2nd phase of our campus.

By June, 1955, there were 539 members, many of them children. A classroom and office wing was added (the current office wing and downstairs classrooms). The first Sunday school classes were held in the new building on January 8, 1956.

1962: The capital campaign for our current sanctuary started. Construction begins on the new sanctuary.

The current sanctuary caused even more comment in the neighborhood. The tent-like roof, fashioned after gathering places of early Christians, alarmed many—too avant garde, too stark. Some referred to it as St. Pryor's after a restaurant at the southwest corner of Hubbards Lane and Shelbyville Road, or "the ski lodge church." For traditionalists, it was a huge adjustment, but the idea of worshiping in a circle was appealing to many, especially as the priest's back was not toward the congregation and members could easily see one another. The church was designed to bring the outside in—to bring God's world into our hearts and attention.

June 27, 1965: The current sanctuary is dedicated.

On June 27, 1965, Bishop C. Gresham Marmion dedicated the present structure, the third unit of the current plant. The Rt. Rev. David Reed became the Sixth Bishop of Kentucky, succeeding Bishop Marmion, in 1974. [Early in his retirement—in 1995—, Bishop Reed was invited by The Rev. Lucinda Laird to be part of the clergy staff at St. Matthew's, listed as "Bishop in Residence.]"

Our organ was given by the Scheirich family in memory of Carolina Scheirich. It was dedicated on April 30, 1967 as the Carolina Scheirich Memorial Organ. Prior to the construction and renovation in the mid-2000s the main organ was over the current choir area and the antiphonal organ was over the entrance. These two parts of the organ were switched during the construction and renovation.

1972: The Rev. Richard H. Humke was called as our second rector.

Fred Louis, the designer, was adamant about maintaining the integrity of the church's style and meaning. After the Rev. Mr. Myll retired in 1972, the Rev. Richard H. Humke, assistant at St. Francis-in-the Fields at Harrods Creek, was called to St. Matthew's. He agreed strongly with Mr. Louis and thus he formed an Aesthetics Committee to protect the spirit of the building and its worship space. So many new churches bring portions of their former selves to the new which are not in harmony with the design; often well meaning, parishioners wish to make gifts, often inappropriate to the design, thus in establishing this committee, it was hoped that could be avoided by reviewing all suggestions and offerings. The same is true for the landscaping which was done in consultation with the Olmsted Firm of Boston in 1952. Drawings and other materials by the Olmsted firm are in the Parish Archives.

1976: A covenant was signed with Holy Trinity Catholic Church

A covenant between St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and Holy Trinity Catholic Church was signed May 16, 1976, in which the clergy and laity pledged to undertake several activities, including to pray for each other at Sunday services, open dialogue between congregations for better mutual understanding, attend each other's services and join in meeting areas of need outside our parishes.

Together, the parishes have been able to finance and build multiple Habitat for Humanity homes, and to support the Every One Reads program of the Jefferson County Public School system with a significant number of volunteers.

September 21, 1980: On St. Matthew's Day the church was consecrated when the building was paid off.

A special service was held on the Feast of Saint Matthew. Presiding was the Bishop of Kentucky, The Rt. Rev. David B. Reed.

1986: The parish has the Mending the Nets Campaign to fund a renovation of the facilities.

In 1986 the existing facilities were renovated and a small addition was added (currently the choir robing room area). The building campaign was called *Mending the Nets*. By the time the Rev. Richard Humke retired in 1996, it was evident that St. Matthew's growth to 900 was exceeding its space. However, with an interim priest, the Rev. David Gable, and a search for a new priest, the notion to expand was put aside.

October 1997: The Rev. Canon Lucinda R. Laird was called as our third rector.

In October 1997, the Rev. Canon Lucinda R. Laird was called from St. Mark's Church (a congregation of 125) in Teaneck, N.J., to be the priest in charge at St. Matthew's.

September 1998: The parish celebrates its 50th anniversary.

In September 1998, the church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and was featured in a Speed Museum program, "Art and Soul." This highlighted the architectural and artistic aspects of St. Matthew's, including its highly regarded collection of over twenty banners created by members of the church.

A video was produced for the anniversary that is available in the Library along with interviews of six parishioners.

2001: The first Dimensions of Faith program was presented.

The purpose of Dimensions of Faith has been to invite thinkers and writers to explore the interface of religion and culture, as we continue as a parish to challenge our minds and renew our spirits. Speakers in this dynamic series have included Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan, Alan Jones, Brian McLaren, John Shelby Spong, Sara Miles, Nora Gallagher, Amy-Jill Levine, Sara Miles, Alan Jones, Becca Stevens, John Shore, Otis Moss Jr. and Ward Ewing.

March 11, 2005: Building the Sprit campaign was kicked off with a candlelight dinner at the Cathedral.

In late 2002, St. Matthew's was notified that it was the recipient of a \$2,000,000. bequest from Eleanor Augustus. Eleanor and her husband, Ed, had been faithful, longtime members of the church, as well as Eleanor having been a much beloved Sunday School Teacher. This bequest was a huge surprise and the Vestry decided to step back and consider how best to put the generous gift to use, reflecting the Parish Mission Statement: "Our mission is to be a caring, inclusive community, centered in the Eucharist and grounded in the Gospel so that we can reach out as Christ's hands to the world." After much soul searching, a significant gift was made to All Saints' Conference Center, with the balance of the Augustus bequest placed in reserve for further prayerful consideration by the Vestry and the congregation. The latter met in small groups over a period of several weeks to consider the necessity for, and feasibility of, a Capital Campaign to refurbish and enlarge the present building. After several months, with the assistance of an outside consultant meeting with clergy, staff, and communicants, it was decided to go ahead with a campaign, using \$1,000,000 of the Augustus gift as seed money. A Candlelight Dinner for the congregation (planned by Ann Miller) was held at Christ Church Cathedral as the opening of the "Building the Spirit" Capital Campaign, with \$2,700,000 as the goal. The successful campaign ended in June, 2005.

September 25, 2005: Ground is broken for the new construction.

On September 25, 2005, in celebration of St. Matthew's Day when the church's annual picnic is held, a greatly anticipated groundbreaking took place with the new construction to begin in October. Many things about St. Matthew's have made it unique and outstanding. For instance, behind the present choir area (west side), a Memorial Garden is in place. It was the first such garden in the Kentucky Diocese, having been established in the early years of the Rev. Mr. Humke's tenure.

St. Matthew's reaches out as Christ's hands in the world

St. Matthew's outreach programs have been substantial in the Louisville community. The Rev. Mr. Humke was a founding member of Hospice, Philip Ardery, a fifty year member of the church, spearheaded the establishment of Wellspring (housing for the bipolar and schizophrenic), while Jonnie Vatter Hoge organized the support group, Survivors of Suicide which meets twice monthly at the church. Members of the parish have long been involved in volunteer work at the Norton Hospital, Home of the Innocents, Episcopal Church Home, Wayside Christian Mission, Habitat for Humanity, St. John's Day Shelter, the Cornerstone (for young single mothers), House of Ruth (support house for HIV/AIDS patients and their families), the prison ministry, Prodigal Ministries, and the Renewal of Christ Church Cathedral. Two members of St. Matthew's played a key role in the development of Kentucky's Companion Diocese relationship with the West African Diocese of Sunyani and Tamale, Jo Brendel and Susan Herlin (Broadhead) made the initial "scouting" visit in 1985 to that diocese in Northern Ghana and introduced the St. Matthew's congregation to some Ghanaian customs in parish worship on their return. Other members of the parish went to that diocese on work projects, during the Companion relationship, most notably Chuck Hamrick who engineered an irrigation system for a tree planting project in Binaba. There were also several visiting preachers from Ghana, at St. Matthew's, notably Bishop Joseph Dodson and The Rev. Emanuel Arongo who was sponsored for seminary studies in Louisville and is now the Bishop of Tamale.

Since 2005, St. Matthew's has co-sponsored five Habitat for Humanity Homes with its covenant companion Holy Trinity Catholic Church. It has initiated an oral history project as part of its refurbished library and archives. Additionally, it has begun a Community PreSchool and a Dare To Care Food Pantry.

October 2014: Rev. Kelly Kirby was called as our fourth rector following the Rev. Canon Lucinda R. Laird assuming her position as Dean of the American Cathedral in Paris in 2013.

The parish continues its strong traditions today with a strong emphasis on outreach. Check our outreach page for the many programs in which our parishioners are involved.