

The Early Years Of St. Martin's-In-The Field, Delaware Selbyville

During the years of 1944 and 1945, a small number of people who were communicants of the Episcopal Church before coming to Selbyville, discussed with their former priest the need for an Episcopal Church here.

The Reverend R.Y. Barber, Rector of St. Philip's Church, Laurel, was instructed by the Diocese to visit the area and sound out the possibility of starting a mission here and report his findings. He visited the homes of interested people and decided that they were worthy of all the help the Diocese could provide.

The Rev. Edward Ehart, Rector of Grace Church, Talleyville, and a member of the Executive Council of the Diocese of Delaware, suggested that the task of organizing and building a mission be placed in the hands of the Rev. Olin G. Lager, Rector of St. Paul's Church, Berlin, Maryland. Rev. Lager was willing to serve as Priest-in-charge, and under his direction a petition was circulated and signed by thirty-five persons. The petition was sent to the Bishop of Delaware beseeching him to take an interest in the small group and to assist it in arranging for regular service under the auspices of the Episcopal Church. As a result of this action, a mission was organized by authority of Bishop McKinstry and services continued regularly until seven years later when the Church became a reality.

During this period morning service was conducted by the Reverend Lager and sometimes visiting clergymen, every Sunday between 9:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. The place of worship was provided by Mrs. Lynn Pomeroy, Sr. The gifts of an altar, plus altar linens, were received. A year before dedication of St. Martin's-in-the Field, seven souls were baptised, ten confirmed, two received and three transferred from St. Philip's, Laurel, Delaware.

The small group worked faithfully toward its goal; its activities were limited, but every conceivable means of fund-raising was used to create a land and building fund. Many obstacles were overcome and finally a building site was obtained. The money was provided by a few persons digging deeply into their own pockets. Mr. Houston Wilson, an attorney in Georgetown, and a member of the Executive Council, conceived the idea of a revolving fund from which Parishes and Missions could borrow for building and repair services. This fund proved to be the answer to everyone's prayers.

Finally, plans were completed and the church building was erected. The generosity of many people in the community and Diocese, despite the opposition of some, the enthusiasm of others, with the help of Almighty God, brought Episcopalians in southern Sussex County a new church of their own.

The name of Saint Martin's-in-the Field was chosen because over two hundred years ago this area, including Somerset County, Maryland, to the Indian River in Delaware, was known as St. Martin's Parish. The mother church is Old Saint Martin's Showell, Maryland, and it was felt the name was appropriate; it was approved and accepted by the congregation.

On March 31, 1952, Saint Martin's-in-the Field was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. Arthur R. McKinstry of Delaware. Many Diocesan leaders and clergy were present. It was announced that the Mission's indebtedness would be for the church building only, that the Diocese was able to make a gift of the Parish House.

Other gifts were received, some as memorial and some as outright gifts. The Bishop's chair was given by the Episcopal Churchwomen; the Processional Cross was presented by St. Paul's Church, Berlin, Maryland; the American Flag was the gift of the Auxiliary of the Mason-Dixon Veterans of Foreign Wars. Also received were the marble altar, candlesticks, alms and receiving basins, lecturn and Bible, Baptismal font, frontals and superfrontals. The generosity of people was overwhelming. Almighty God has conquered. So be it, Amen!