2G Church History

**Church History**

Our Mission Statement: *“Saint Martin’s is a worshiping community, growing in Christ, reaching out to welcome, heal, nurture, and serve.”*

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MARTIN**

The Church of St. Martin held its first service on September 20, 1953, in the Varsity Theatre in downtown Davis. Appropriately the movie playing the theater that evening was “From Here to Eternity.”

Davis was a small university town in 1953, just beginning to grow rapidly. There was no Episcopal church in town, and a group of Episcopalians missed their familiar liturgy, and they missed having an Episcopal Sunday School for their children. They decided that one was needed, and within five months they gathered enough signatures and pledges of money and volunteer work to convince Bishop Noel Porter of the Diocese of Northern California to establish a mission church in Davis. They proposed the name “Church of St. Martin” because they admired the ministry of the fourth-century Bishop Martin of Tours, France. They were familiar with the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, and Davis was surrounded by fields, so the name seemed appropriate.

In March 1953 the group began working to get their church. They selected six men to serve on a Bishop’s Committee; they raised money to pay a minister; they persuaded the bishop to establish a mission church in Davis; and they received money from the diocese to support an Episcopal ministry for university students. The church remained a mission, under the control of the diocese, until 1974 when it became a fiscally independent parish.

Church services were held in the Varsity Theatre for three years. For the first two years the Rev. Charles Williams, Rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Woodland, led the services, then in January 1955, the bishop appointed the Rev. Clyde Everton Vicar of St. Martin’s. The diocese purchased a small house at 311 Seventh Street for a residence for the vicar and his family. In August 1956 the congregation, with a loan from the diocese, bought a house at 211 First Street, and church services and Sunday School were held there for the next seven years. In 1959 the diocese bought a lot on Elmwood Drive and built a new vicarage.

By the late 1950s times were changing. Bishop Noel Porter retired in 1957, and a new bishop, the Rt. Rev. Clarence Haden, was elected. Bishop Haden saw that the population of Davis and the university were increasing rapidly, and he had high hopes for St. Martin’s. In the fall of 1961, he appointed the Rev. William G. Burrill to replace Everton as vicar and urged him to build up the congregation and student ministry. Burrill remained at St. Martin’s for 20 years.

The church and Sunday School flourished and soon outgrew their cramped quarters on First Street. In 1962 Burrill and the Bishop’s Committee persuaded the diocese to buy a large lot at 640 Hawthorn Lane where they could build a proper church building. They contracted with Watanabe, Lipscomb and Fornoff, an architectural firm in Berkeley, to develop a master plan for church buildings to be built over a period of several years. In 1963 the church built a Parish Hall with a kitchen, and a classroom wing with three classrooms, and services were held in the Parish Hall for four years. The sanctuary, built of stone and redwood with a distinctive stained glass window in the ceiling, was completed in 1967, and the first service in the new building was held on December 10, 1967.

In the forty-plus years since the church was built on Hawthorn Lane, there have been additions and improvements in addition to landscaping and maintenance of the physical plant. Some important additions: Pipe organ installed (1982), wooden pews replaced folding chairs in the sanctuary (1992), new classrooms and large deck built (1993), beautification of the altar and church walls (1997), construction of Administration Building with four offices and Blanchard Library (1998), parking lot lighting (2000), columbarium (2005), needlepoint kneelers (2007).

Since 1974 when St. Martin’s became a parish, there have been four rectors: William Burrill (later Bishop of Rochester, New York), Mark Starr, Barry Beisner (later Bishop of Northern California), and Mark Allen. Over the years there have been eleven assistant rectors, including four women: Mary Goshert (the first woman priest in the diocese), Suzanne Paglen, Anne Blampied, Debra Warwich-Sabino and Lucinda Ashby. In addition, the Rev. Sarah Motley and the Rev. Ann Hallisey have served as associate rector. Four priests served as interim rector during the search for a new rector: Judson Leeman, Frank Henriques, Ogden Hoffman and the Rt. Rev. George Hunt. There have been two deacons: the Rev. Les Blackmore (1967-68) and the Rev. Ven. Ernest Lewis (2002–2011)

Liturgy has been important at St. Martin’s, and music has contributed to the beauty of the liturgy. In the early days, David Winkler, Elizabeth Homann, Makoto Yaguchi, Lucile Evans and Robert Below played a small organ at various times in the First Street church. In 1967 Dona Lee Brandon was hired as Organist/Choir Director, a post she filled for 28 years. She was followed by Alan Lewis, Christopher Reynolds, Rob Sabino, Betsy Butler, Claudine Martinez and Sarah Eyerly, who provided music at various services. In 2008 Gerard Montana was hired as Music Director.

The laity has always played a strong role in the history of St. Martin’s. People of faith got together to found the church in 1953, and people of faith have been giving of their time, talent and treasure ever since to keep this church going and to care for those in need in Davis and the world. St. Martin’s has reached out with money and volunteer aid to people in our region, Africa, Central America and on Indian reservations in the U.S. Our buildings are regularly used for parish and Youth Group activities and by community groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Boy Scouts and Davis Community Meals. For a number of years classrooms were used five days a week by a special education program of the Yolo County Office of Education and later the International Parent-Child Learning Center. Church members serve on the Vestry and in the Altar and Flower Guilds; they sing in the choirs, hold craft fairs and do needlepoint; they are Healing Ministers, Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors, Acolytes, Lectors, Christian Education teachers and Youth leaders; they volunteer at the Belfry, a drop-in center for university students sponsored by St. Martin’s and two Davis Lutheran congregations; and they are members of numerous parish commissions that do the necessary work of keeping our buildings and grounds in order and our congregation happy.

Shipley Walters, June 2008

**History Continued…**

In 2010, St. Martin’s carried out a capital campaign and raised $1.1 million dollars, to make needed improvements to our facilities. The parish hall roof was replaced in September of 2010. However, the majority of the construction and renovation work was done from May to September of 2011, after almost a year of planning.

The addition of a narthex (or lobby) and large wooden shade structure gave a completely new look to the front of the church. One notable feature of the narthex is a built-in 7 x 7 foot baptismal pool made of concrete and unpolished granite. St. Martin’s baptismal pool has a simple and natural design and, according to rector Mark Allen, allows our architecture to reflect our theology of baptism. Rev. Allen explains that baptism by immersion is the most ancient form of baptism and was most likely used in the church until the Middle Ages. It was recovered in the Catholic wing of the church as part of the liturgical renewal movement in the 1950s and ‘60s. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer states the following in its instructions about baptism: “Each candidate is presented by name to the Celebrant, or to an assisting priest or deacon, who then immerses, or pours water upon the candidate…” (*BCP page 307*). All the language of the prayer said over the water in the baptismal rite implies the generous use of water in baptism (*see BCP page 306*). The baptismal pool has a brass water feature, which allows water to gently flow into the pool. On the wall above the pool is a spectacular stained glass window in the shape of a cross.

The interior of the sanctuary was also renovated. Energy-efficient windows were added as well as new roofing, paint, carpeting, lighting, and a sound system. The sacristy and vesting room were also completely reconfigured. While construction took place, churchgoers worshipped in the parish hall, where we originally worshipped from 1963 – 1967 while the main church building was first being built.

The parish hall and adjoining kitchen were also remodeled and upgraded in order to provide more functional, more energy efficient, and more pleasant space. This building is essential to St. Martin’s outreach efforts and is where Davis Community Meals offers three meals each week to the community. Finally, one of our classroom buildings was also remodeled to provide better classroom and meeting space and to add a music classroom named after St. Martin’s first music director, Dona Brandon. On the exterior, many of the concrete walkways were redone to remove steps and make our buildings more accessible.

Architect Eric Doud of Designworks in Winters designed the additions and remodeled areas. Monley-Cronin, Inc. of Woodland was the general contractor. We are grateful to have this updated, more welcoming space and to be able to use it among our tools for ministry for many years to come.

Janet Lane, September 2011.