

III. ALL SAINTS' THEN AND NOW

We have served downtown Palo Alto for over a hundred years, since 1892; the great-grandson of our first Senior Warden is still an active parishioner. The site for our church, a few blocks from the birthplace of Facebook, Google, and other 21st century enterprises, was originally a quarter of a wheat field donated by Timothy Hopkins, founder of Palo Alto and heir to the railroad fortune of Mark Hopkins, one of early California's "Big Four."



After a series of rectors in the early part of the century, the congregation called the Reverend Oscar Green in 1926. Mr. Green, as he preferred to be called, was a Texas-raised Baptist who turned Episcopalian during a stint in the ambulance corps in World War I. The parish hall, completed two years after Mr. Green's arrival, made Sunday night spaghetti suppers possible for Stanford students throughout the Depression. Funds for the parish hall were donated primarily by Edwin P. Gamble and his daughter Elizabeth, who were heirs to the Procter & Gamble fortune. For the next three decades, Miss Gamble kept All Saint's budgets in the black – and ensured that building fund drives met their goals.



When Palo Alto mushroomed after World War II, All Saints' was tempted to move south along with other churches. But All Saints' stayed downtown. In 1941 there were already 206 children in Sunday School. By 1957, there were 600 families on the parish mailing list.

Sunday School classes were crammed into kitchens and closets. The answer to the space crunch was a two-story education building completed in 1958, which now provides space during the week for twelve-step groups, community meetings, and other activities.



Oscar Green retired in 1961 and was followed by The Reverend Richard Byfield, who brought to All Saints' a new emphasis on the social gospel – and change. He led the church through the 1960s, marching with Dr. King in Selma and on peace marches. In 1967, our old brown shingle church was replaced with a radical new concrete church in the round, to focus attention on the central altar and the celebration of Holy Communion. Our present spirituality owes much to that radical step. Father Byfield resigned in 1970.

The Reverend James McLeod led us into the 1970s, still a tumultuous time in our country. Membership was down and the parish was in debt. But community outreach continued. All Saints' began opening its 10-year-old education building to local community groups in need of space such as the Peace and Justice Center and Urban Ministry. La Comida, a lunch program for senior citizens, served meals in the parish hall for six years during that period. In 1976, the late Patsy McAfee contacted eight other churches and started the Food Closet, which is still housed at All Saints'.

When the Diocese of California was divided in 1980, All Saints' cast its lot with the new Diocese of El Camino Real, which stretches from Palo Alto south to San Luis Obispo. In February 1993, our Rector of 22 years, James McLeod, resigned to become Canon to the Ordinary of the Diocese of El Camino Real. During that year the Vestry voted to demolish and rebuild the Parish Hall. After Jim's tenure as Canon to the Ordinary, he returned to All Saints' where he worships with us and sings in the choir. Although he was long ago given the honorary title of Rector Emeritus, Jim takes care not to engage in any leadership in the parish.

The Reverend Margaret Irwin was called as our new Rector and was installed in March 1994. Under Margaret's leadership the new parish hall was completed, including the generous space still used by the Food Closet. All Saints' became involved with Peninsula Interfaith Action and hosted a huge "action" at the church which eventually led to the building of the Opportunity Center for the homeless in downtown Palo Alto, a natural outgrowth of the interfaith Urban Ministry which had its start in the All Saints' education building. Margaret retired in 2004.

Over the past three years, All Saints' has experienced significant transformational events, with the transition of clergy leadership being at the center. In 2005 we called the Reverend Ian Montgomery to be our Rector. Ian's rectorate was characterized by a number of achievements, including Vision 2007, through which we sought to reenergize our ministry to children and youth and repair our Education Building with the goal of becoming a downtown center for music, social outreach and the arts. In 2008 the Vestry and Ian mutually discerned that All Saints' and Ian were not a good fit for each other. With the support and partnership of Bishop Mary and Brian Nordwick of the Diocese of El Camino Real, our choices and actions in managing these important steps were and are inspired by a deep regard for God's presence in our lives and our decisions, in understanding All Saints' purpose and working to achieve it.

Bishop Mary recommended that we spend two years with an experienced interim pastor in preparation for calling a permanent rector. The Reverend Sherridan Harrison has helped us begin to sort out the lessons to be learned from our recent history and listen to God's voice in all circumstances. And we have learned, and listened, and we are excited about calling our new rector, whoever he or she may be.

