

Part II

Coming of Age, 1939 – 1969

Christ Church came of age between 1939 and 1969. This era witnessed the building of the church, the rectory, and the parish house. It saw a succession of priests come and go, each leaving the mark of his personality and talents on the church. These years brought Christ Church to full parish status and were noted for growth in numbers, in participation, and in community service by the congregation. There continued to be problems, of course—disagreements, money troubles—but the hallmark was growth.

When William Penn Price succeeded Frank Pulley as priest-in-charge on September 1, 1939, the congregation was still meeting in the American Legion Hut; then from 24 September 1939 to 16 June 1940, services were held at Hearne's Music Studio at 7:30 p.m. on Sundays. Mr. Price came over from Asheboro, where he was priest-in-charge of the Church of the Good Shepherd.

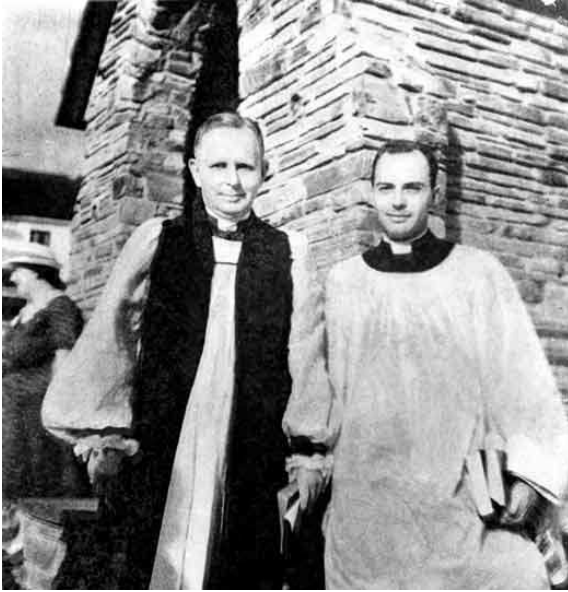
This was a big year for Christ Church, as further plans were made and construction was begun on the church building. There was some discussion of building in Badin, since many members lived there, but ultimately Bishop Penick declared that Albemarle was to be the site. The existing lot was found to be too small, so an adjoining lot was purchased from Mr. Floyd Teeter for \$1,200, Mr. Teeter giving the church \$100 on the cost. Mr. Walter Toy, affiliated with the architectural firm of Hook and Hook in Charlotte, drew up and donated the plans for Christ Church. He was an Episcopalian, and this was the first church he designed.



The contractor on the job was Mr. D. A. Holbrook. The stonemasons were Wagoner and Sons. Warren “Monk” Wagoner remembers that he and his father and brother quarried the stone in their own quarry in Davidson County. It is a type of slate called North Carolina Bluestone, and Mr. Wagoner says there is only one other building in Albemarle, a private home, made of stone from the same quarry. Mr. Wagoner adds that the church is unique in the rough texture of its outside surface.

The beautiful little church was ready for use by Sunday 23 June 1940 when Bishop Penick laid the cornerstone donated by Will Palmer of Palmer Stone

Works, Albemarle. The bishop and members of the congregation placed various articles and documents in the cornerstone and then followed a choir of local singers and of Saint Luke's, Salisbury, into the church for a confirmation service. Afterwards, a social hour was held on Mrs. Teeter's lawn.



First Service in Christ Church - 23 June 1940
Bishop Penick and The Rev. William Penn Price

The contract price of the church structure, which will seat 175 in reasonable comfort and over 200 squeezed together, was \$6,550. According to Mr. Price, the church furnishings cost \$779.60, and the heating plant, an electric oil burner, cost \$875. With the \$2,000 already invested in the two lots, the total cost of the church was a little over \$10,000.

D. A. Holbrook made paying for this a bit easier when, in July 1940, he agreed to finance the \$6,800 remaining debt on a ten-year basis, and many people donated money, time, service, and beautiful things as the church was made ready for use.

Mrs. William E. Walker was building fund treasurer at the time. Her correspondence shows money coming in from varied sources, many of them non-parishioners. Women's Auxiliaries from other churches, for example, made small donations. It is impossible to list all the people who gave so generously to the church, then and since—some would inevitably be left out—but perhaps some of the handmade gifts might be mentioned. Mrs. J. U. Loftin made beautiful communion linens, while Mr. John Hall made the hymn boards. L. H. Bright and the Reverend Mr. Price, with help from friends, made the kneeling benches, and Mrs. William Granger and her seventh grade class upholstered them. Mrs. Spencer Percival, described by Mr. Price as a “new and active member of the congregation,” made a curtain that separated the transepts from the nave. At the time, the church also had a children's altar, made by the Reverend Franklyn H. Board and Mr. James Strickland, characterized by Mr. Price as a “communicant who served and worked faithfully to keep the mission going during difficult days.” Mr. Strickland was warden while the church was being built.

One other gift deserves to be mentioned because of the unusual circumstances surrounding it. The S. H. Hearne family had earlier given a set of communion vessels to the Lutheran Church. When the Lutherans stopped serving communion from the common cup, the vessels were returned to the Hearne family, who then gave them to the Episcopal Church.

The congregation, of course, not only gave money and gifts to the church, but put a great deal of effort into fund-raising as well. Mr. Price particularly

mentioned Miss Jessie Ashby as a most active money raiser. Those who still remember “Miss Jessie” say that Christ Church was her life. She was small and sweet, but feisty too. One parishioner said something would have been missing from her life if she had not known Miss Jessie—something really nice and exciting, and another commented that while Miss Jessie never held the title “senior warden”, she often really was. One of Mrs. Shaver’s most frequently told stories was of selling pansies with Miss Jessie and other churchwomen. She said they bought the pansies for a half penny each and sold them for a penny apiece, only Mrs. Shaver preferred to tell people they were a dollar a hundred. She remembered taking the children of the church with her on weekends so they could run in and deliver the plants to “save her legs,” and she spoke proudly of making \$60 clear one year.

Perhaps Frank Pulley best summarized the building of the church after he visited in September 1940. He wrote of it as “one of the prettiest, and finest small Churches” he had ever seen and, in a newsletter to his Florida congregation, commented that the Albemarle mission had “only 30 or 35 members, and their venture of faith in building this beautiful modern Church is an example of love and zeal to all who see it. The members are not wealthy but they are earnest and eager. We pray that their effort to pay for their Church may be crowned with success.” He added that he and his family left Albemarle “with a profound appreciation of what God can do with a handful of truly inspired and active Christians.”

The Reverend Mr. Price, who presided over all of this, left Christ Church on June 30, 1941. He remained priest-in-charge at Asheboro until the fall of 1942 when he became a full-time civilian chaplain at Camp Sutton and, less than a year later, a uniformed chaplain serving in World War II. He was succeeded at Christ Church by Franklyn Herman Board, a newly ordained deacon, who conducted his first service on Sunday July 6, 1941. The church did not yet have a rectory, but Mr. Board was, nevertheless, the first resident minister of Christ Church, living at 462 Montgomery Avenue.

Mr. Board only remained at Christ Church a little over a year, concluding his ministry on September 27, 1942, when he accepted the rectorship of All Saints’ Church, Concord, but a number of noteworthy things happened during his tenure. The church school gradually died out as families with children moved away from the parish, but the communicant total reached forty-nine. Several beautiful articles, such as a new baptismal font, were added to the church, and



The early 1940's

the Woman's Auxiliary raised money for landscaping the exterior and laying the center and side flagstone walks. The mission committee decided that the windows in the sanctuary were admitting too much sunlight, so they commissioned a local painter to paint them a deep auburn until they could be replaced with stained glass. The church also saw its first wedding and its first ordination, as Mr. Board was ordained to the priesthood on June 11, 1942.

The wedding affords another glimpse into the life of the congregation because a number of parishioners still have vivid memories of it. On March 21, 1942, Miss Laura Maie Shaver and Lt. Robert Pettee were wed at five o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. At that time, the church had no choir. Laura Maie wanted one, so she asked fourteen friends to sing under the direction of Margie Mooney, choir-director at another church. Doris and Eddie Gehring were among those asked to sing. A number of people, including Doris, remember Margie looking at Doris and saying, "You're a pretty little thing, but you sure can't carry a tune." The wedding was a military one. Mrs. Gehring tells of a dispute at the rehearsal between her husband and a visiting general. Apparently, the military tradition about the location of the American flag is different from the Church tradition. During the rehearsal, the general kept moving the flag to the other side of the church, and Eddie kept putting it back. Doris does not remember who won.



Wedding - April 17, 1948
Mary Catherine Ritchie and Calvin Poole

Of course, by this time the United States was already at war with Germany and Japan, and the war had an impact on Christ Church, as it must have had on every parish in the country. Because of the number of men who went off to war, women served unofficially on the mission committee, even though this was not yet allowed by the Canons of the Episcopal Church. When questioned, some of the men merely replied, "There aren't enough of us. We couldn't do it without the women." The war also brought gloomy predictions for the future of Christ Church, at least for the duration. In a letter requesting financial assistance from the Church Building Fund Commission, Spencer Percival, senior warden, wrote:

We now anticipate a decrease in our church pledges by the members during the coming year for several reasons; first, several members of our church live in a town [Badin] seven miles distant from Albemarle and we can logically expect the present restrictions on the use of automobiles to become even more rigid in 1943, which may result in the temporary loss of these members; second, several of our members are now in the military service, with their families away from Albemarle for the duration, and others will probably be leaving soon;

third, the remaining members of our church may be forced to reduce their pledges by high taxes and the general increase in the cost of living.

Although the church never received the financial assistance requested, these forebodings proved overly pessimistic; the congregation would pay off its indebtedness only a year after the war. The shortage of gas did, however, make some difference to the life of the parish. Mrs. J. E. Yates (then Virginia Walke Liles) remembers her wedding on February 27, 1943. She was married at home because she lived in Badin, and it was considered unpatriotic to use the gas for all the guests to go to Albemarle for the ceremony.

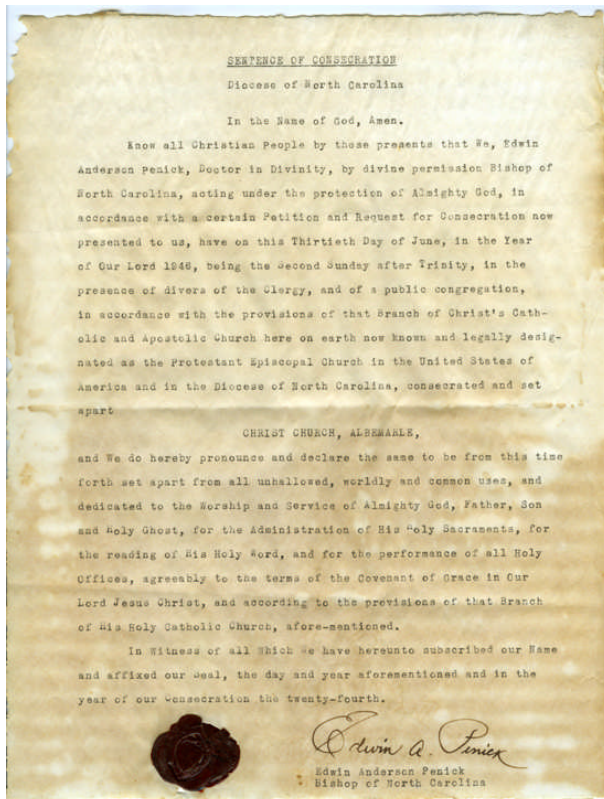
Although Frank Board came from Concord to perform the marriage, the Reverend Robert Hampton Price was by this time priest-in-charge of Christ Church. He began his tenure on February 1, 1943, and concluded it on February 25, 1945. The brother of the Reverend William Penn Price, he was ordained by Bishop Penick at First Lutheran Church on 21 December 1943. On his departure, Christ Church was without the regular services of a priest for about four months until the Reverend Edwin B. Jeffress, Jr., rector of All Saints' Church, Concord, agreed to serve as priest-in-charge of Christ Church as well.

Mr. Jeffress conducted his first service on 8 July 1945, which, he recorded, was his birthday and three days after the birth of his first child. One of his memories was of conducting a special service of prayer for Ed Gehring, who developed the first symptoms of a brain tumor in 1946. Mr. Jeffress also wrote of lighter memories of the Gehrings:

One evening at Christ Church as the Congregation was singing the hymn before the sermon Johnny Gehring about 5 or 6 [his mother says 3 or 4] walked up and entered the Pulpit. All the congregation could see was the top of his head. I remembered that I had some small pictures in my vestment case. I went into the Vestry room and got one of the pictures. I returned just as the Hymn was concluding. I gave Johnny the picture and told him to go show the picture to his mother. Johnny jumped out of the Pulpit and ran down the aisle. His mother grabbed him. I'm sure no one heard my sermon for after the service they all wanted to know—"What did you say to Johnny?"

Johnny Gehring played a part in another event that took place about this time, or perhaps in the early 50s (dates for this are not clear). The congregation organized a womanless wedding to raise money to buy an organ. Jim Turner remembers that Allen Surratt was the bride, which must have been a sight to see since he was a big man with a deep bass voice. Jim, himself, was one of the bridesmaids, and Johnny was the ring bearer. The men wore evening dresses, and tickets were sold for a dollar apiece, mostly from Wilhelm's Esso. The wedding played to a nearly full house.

The Reverend Mr. Jeffress' tenure also saw the consecration of Christ Church. He wrote that "through the generous contributions of Dr. J. U. Loftin the Church was able to pay off its indebtedness," making consecration possible.



Sentence of Consecration
June 6, 1946

The Petition of Consecration for the Church was prepared on 6 June 1946, and on Sunday, June 30, S. M. Percival, senior warden, read it. Then Mr. Jeffress read the sentence of consecration. Bishop Penick called the service “the hour of fulfillment” of a hope cherished by the congregation since the church was founded. The festivities concluded with a picnic lunch on the terrace of Morrow Mountain Lodge. The congregation expressed its gratitude for this joyful event by dedicating the day’s offering to the rebuilding of churches in countries devastated by war.

During this post-war era, Christ Church had an active Woman’s Auxiliary, not only on the local level, but also at the district level. Three Christ Church women were District of Richmond officers, Mrs. Harvey A. Cox serving as Chairman and

Mrs. William Walker as Secretary in 1947 and Elmina Hearne Surratt as Secretary of Christian Education in 1948.

In the summer of 1948 Hall Partrick, a seminary student, worked at Christ Church, returning for his final seminary year in the fall. By this time the congregation was anxious to have a full-time, resident priest, so they requested that Bishop Penick assign Mr. Partrick to Christ Church upon his graduation. Jim Turner, Frank Lyerly, and Bill Wilhelm drove to Raleigh to discuss the matter with the bishop. Their hope was to build a parish house and, as Mr. Partrick was single at the time, to let him live on the second floor. The bishop, however, insisted that a rectory be built first, which was just as well because Mr. Partrick was engaged by the fall of 1948 and would be bringing a wife with him when he came.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Jeffress conducted his last service as priest-in-charge on December 26, 1948. During the month of January, Eddie Gehring held lay readers services, and in February the Reverend Robert Bird, newly arrived in Concord, agreed to serve as priest-in-charge until Mr. Partrick was ordained and became available.

The next order of business, then, was to get the rectory built for the Partricks. It was staked out and grades set for excavation on Easter Monday, 18 April 1949, on a lot located on Cannon Avenue. James Turner, Max Hollis, Frank Lyerly, Wayne Alexander, and Bill Wilhelm assisted the contractor Caldwell Holbrook in

this work. The rectory was not quite finished when the Partricks arrived, so Hall and his new wife, Charlotte, lived with Jim and Sara Turner for a while. In November Bishop Penick wrote to Jim Turner expressing pride in “the fine achievement of Christ Church congregation in building a rectory.” Apparently some members had opposed the project because the bishop added, “That action, expensive as it may seem to some, was necessary to secure the services of a resident minister. I don’t know anything you all could have done that would afford a better guarantee for the future security of Christ Church.”

The Reverend Mr. Partrick became Christ Church’s first full-time minister-in-charge on July 1, 1949, and was ordained to the priesthood at Christ Church on December 22, 1949. His would prove to be a most effective ministry. He quickly gained the love and respect of the congregation, added considerably to their numbers, and did a great deal to build community during his four years service.



Hall Partrick

Many parishioners still remember him fondly. Doris Gehring says he is the only person she has ever known to whom worldly possessions meant nothing. Frances Harris’s comments suggest that he was not exactly what the Albemarle community expected in a minister. It seems that Mrs. Shaver gave the Partricks a membership to the Cotillion Club shortly after they arrived, and it was the talk of the town. Some were shocked to think of a minister *dancing* and possibly drinking too! According to one parishioner, Hall was the kind of person who would come see you at 9:00 o’clock at night unannounced. One night some of the men were playing a little poker when, to their surprise, the doorbell rang. It was Hall. They invited him to come in and take a hand in their ten-cent game. He sat down, and they kept on dealing.

On a more serious note, Jim Turner remembers Father Partrick’s ministry to the local prison camp. The various ministers in town would take turns holding services there on Sundays. Hall was not sure that the other ministers entirely approved of him. He went in a T-shirt and always took a pack of cigarettes to share with the men. They would play softball, sit around and talk, hold a short service, and sing a few hymns. He said he never talked about anything unless the men wanted to and never preached a formal sermon. Whether or not his colleagues condoned his methods, the prisoners liked him. Apparently the rest of the community grew to appreciate him, too, because in 1952 he was chosen Young Man of the Year in Albemarle “due to his extensive activities in the community.”

By 1950 the population of Stanly County was 37,130, with 11,798 people residing in Albemarle. This considerable growth was not well reflected in growth at Christ Church until Hall Partrick arrived. In 1948 the communicant total was

still only thirty-six, out of fifty-seven baptized persons, about the same as in 1938. But on December 5, 1952, in a letter to R. F. Lyerly, Bishop Penick commended the congregation and especially Mr. Partrick “for the vigorous way in which you all have cooperated in building up the Episcopal Church in the Albemarle-Badin area.” By 1953, when Mr. Partrick left, the number of communicants had jumped to fifty-two, and the number would have been higher, still, except that more communicants continued to move away from the area than to move to it. Growth, then, stemmed largely from confirmations of people baptized in other churches. In the years 1946-1949 only one such person was confirmed at Christ Church. In 1950-1951 seventeen people baptized in other churches were confirmed. These came mainly from the Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches, with one from the Congregational Christian Church and one from the Roman Catholic Church.



A 1951 survey, made in anticipation of building a parish house, gives an interesting profile of this growing congregation. Almost 40% had been members of the Episcopal Church for less than five years. There were twenty-seven church families, twenty-five of which lived in town. In fact, 56% of the congregation lived within a mile of the church, and 40% were born in Albemarle. Besides housewife and student, which were the leading occupations, manager and professional outnumbered all others, followed by semi-professional, clerical-sales, craftsman, laborer and retired. Almost two-thirds of the adults had been to college. It was a fairly young congregation with 28.9% under fifteen years-of-age. As might be expected in 1951, it was 100% white, with 90% of the members listing themselves as Anglo-Saxon or Scots-Irish and 10% claiming some other northern European background.

The director (name unknown) who summarized the survey concluded that it was imperative that a parish house be built and recommended “that the Department of Missions, together with the Workshop Committee, study the needs of this area and place the building of the parish house among the projects for immediate action in the Diocese.” Such rapid action was not taken, but the subject continued to be discussed, and the parish house was actually built five years later.



Choir and congregation, among whom are:
Mrs. Bill Wilhelm, Coy Ritchie, Jr., Mrs. Milton Brown, Miss Blanche King, and Miss Jessie Ashby

In spite of this lack, the congregation evinced a lively concern for Christian education. Sunday School enrollment was up to twenty-six in 1951, and a Sunday School workshop, which included all communicants, was held in January 1953. This resulted in a stronger program, leading particularly to regular Sunday school faculty meetings. In addition, the Woman's Auxiliary and Layman's League saw to it that every child who was old enough was able to attend church camp each summer. In May 1953, plans were being made for eight children to go to Vade Mecum or Kanuga. Christ Church also helped provide Christian education in the local schools. A number of churches chipped in to pay the salary of a Bible teacher in the high school. Adult education was considered, too. Annual fall preaching missions were said to have "deeply strengthened the bonds in the congregation," and Father Partrick led Lenten study groups using the Church's Teaching Series.

Active parish organizations included an Acolyte Guild, formed in 1953, a Layman's League, an Altar Guild, and the Woman's Auxiliary continued. According to a 1953 article in the *Carolina Churchman*, the Layman's League, "now developed into an effective congregational force," was then busy "erecting a fenced-in play-yard at the rear of the church to provide a nursery for Sundays when weather permits." The laymen had also "beautified the church grounds and transformed the...transepts into adequate Sunday school classrooms," and they had played a leading role in "placing a fine new electronic organ in the church." The Altar Guild not only performed its usual role of preparing the church for services, but also provided a complete set of prayer books and hymnals. One of the memorable activities of the Woman's Auxiliary during this period was the compilation of a cookbook, *Song of the Kettle*, to be sold to raise money. Mrs. Shaver began and directed the project, which took many months.



Altar Guild
Doris Stickney and Maggie Snuggs

The women of the Auxiliary were also active on the district and diocesan levels at this time. From 1950-1952 Frances Harris served as District of Richmond Chairman, and Charlotte Partrick, Mrs. J. E. Johnson, and Doris Gehring also served as district officers. In 1949 Elmina Surratt was Diocesan Secretary of Christian Education, and in 1952 she was Director of the Woman's Auxiliary Conference at Vade Mecum.

To the sorrow of the congregation, Mr. Partrick left Christ Church on 1 June 1953 to go into overseas mission work in Haiti. Elmina Surratt made some notes on his subsequent career, only a portion of which pertains to Christ Church. She recorded that in Haiti he was appointed Dean of the Theological Seminary, served

on the staff of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Port-Au-Prince, and ministered to several rural mission churches from time to time. "Because of his responsibility and particular interest in the field of Christian Education, he became closely associated with the Sisters of the Society of St. Margaret. It was he who introduced the members of the Congregation at Christ Church and the people of the Diocese to Sister Anne Marie, Director of Holy Trinity School." Over the years, Sister Anne Marie would play an important, if usually distant, part in the life of the Church in Albemarle.



90th Anniversary Celebration—left to right: Alva Hawkins, Ruth Little, Charlotte Partrick, The Rev. Hall Partrick, Elmina H. Surratt, Frances Harris, Addie Belle Loftin, James C. Wilhelm, Ada W. Shaver

Christ Church was not to be long without the services of a minister. Bruce Daniel Sapp, newly graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary, was ordained a deacon at Christ Church, Raleigh, on 17 June 1953 and took up his charge in

Albemarle less than two weeks later, arriving with his wife, Tharon, and two small children. He was ordained to the priesthood at Christ Church on 18 December 1953 and remained in Albemarle until October 1956.

As some parishioners remember, Hall Partrick was at first a hard man to follow. People were rather prone to tell Mr. Sapp “Hall did it this way.” This was particularly true when one of the tiles of the church roof came loose. Members of the congregation kept pointing it out to Mr. Sapp, apparently expecting him to fix it. Frustrated when he did not respond, they said, “Well, Hall always fixed the tiles himself.” Dan Sapp put an end to such remarks when he calmly replied; “It’s going to be awfully expensive to get Hall back from Haiti to fix the roof.”

In any case, the new priest quickly won the respect of the congregation in his own right. Marie Chivington remembers the welcome he offered to newcomers. She and her husband, Jack, moved to Albemarle during Mr. Sapp’s tenure. They had just entered their hotel room when the telephone rang. It was Dan Sapp calling to tell them he was going to pick them up and take them to look at places to buy or rent. He soon got their daughter, Cherry, enrolled in the Baptist kindergarten, and the whole church was most supportive. Marie speaks warmly of how wonderful it was to move into a new community and to find in the church a built-in family. Marie was born an Episcopalian, but Jack was not. He was so impressed with Dan and Christ Church that he became a very active church member. Stories are still told of Jack’s confirmation when a ray of sunshine covered him just as the bishop laid his hands on his head.



The Rev. and Mrs. Daniel Sapp
with two of their children

Various small recorded incidents help to illuminate the life of the parish during Mr. Sapp’s tenure. Allen and Elmina Surratt donated the church’s first beautiful stained glass windows—those behind the altar. Dan Sapp moved his office from a room uptown to a corner in one of the transepts of the church. The mission committee talked about the possibility of making Christ Church self-supporting and, thereby, elevating it to parish status, but that would not be successfully done until 1963. In fact, money was a serious problem in these years. A decision was made to take out a bank loan on

the signature of as many members as possible and to set up a schedule of regular payments, but the details of the transaction are not recorded. One parishioner does remember the mission committee paying the interest on a loan out of their own pockets, but whether or not that was at this time is not clear.

Serious efforts at evangelism were made under Mr. Sapp. The Reverend Joseph L. “Jody” Kellerman agreed to conduct a preaching mission at Christ

Church in 1955 in an effort to bring in more members. He requested that each church family plan to bring one other family to the weeklong series of services. His correspondence suggests, however, that he was disappointed in the response. Another attempt at evangelism was made in 1956 when the mission committee agreed that Christ Church should participate in a radio worship service being set up by the new Albemarle radio group. Nothing further is recorded of this.

As for Christian education, there were an average of about fifty church school members mentioned in the parochial reports for these four years. These were divided into four classes: kindergarten, primary, junior, and adult. An attempt was also made to establish a Vacation Bible School, but no evidence remains as to whether or not this was successful. Finally, the church continued to subsidize a portion of the salary for a high school Bible teacher.



Frances Harris (center)
Jean and Crenshaw Thompson

A list of parish organizations at this time still includes the Woman's Auxiliary, an active Layman's League, an Acolyte Guild and an Altar Guild. Newer organizations were a Junior Girl's Auxiliary and a Junior Choir under the supervision of the organist, Mrs. Richard Daly. Members of the Woman's Auxiliary remained active at the district and diocesan levels. Frances Harris served as District of Richmond Chairman in 1953 and as Vice-Chairman in 1955 and 1956. Other district officers were Mrs. J. E. Johnson, Jr. and Doris Gehring. Elmina Surratt was Diocesan Secretary of Christian Education in 1954 and 1956, and she led a workshop on Christian Education at the Conference at Vade Mecum in 1955.

One of the major concerns of the congregation during Mr. Sapp's incumbency was the building of a parish house. The mission committee discussed this with Bishop Baker in 1953; he agreed the need was great but said the debt on the rectory should be reduced first. By 1954 the debt had diminished to \$8,000, and the new organ was fully paid for, so the committee felt able to "begin a concentrated drive to build a parish house." In a letter to Bishop Penick, B. S. Liles, senior warden, and J. R. Clark, church clerk, explained the situation:

Not only are our children growing away from church life because of lack of centralizing Sunday school and social church facilities, but there is a total lack of space and equipment for the rapidly increasing number of pre-school children now beginning to need attention. Furthermore, it is very difficult to mold cohesive adult groups for special church activities when we must meet in small groups in private homes, or must beg some other organization's meeting place and fit our needs into their schedules.

In response, Bishop Penick gave permission to proceed with plans for construction and sent a \$1,000 check to help out.

In July 1954, attention was somewhat diverted from building plans by discussion of buying the next-door Teeter property and using the already existing house, but that was soon dropped. In March 1955 the following prayer for aid in the construction of the parish house was composed and distributed to the congregation:

Our Father, from whom comes every good and gift, Merciful Absolver of our many sins and Foundation of our past accomplishments, Grant us from Thy boundless strength and wisdom the power and knowledge to bring into being a work dedicated to Thy name and majesty. We pray for Thy eternal love and guidance in building a parish house for Christ Church, which will contribute to the glory of Thy Kingdom, will bind Thy children closer to Thee, and will cement in us the ties of brotherhood. We ask above all that Thy will be done, in Christ's name.

Less than a month later Wayne Alexander presented a petition, signed by a majority of communicants, asking that the parish house be designated the Edward L. Gehring Parish House. Eddie Gehring had died in 1954, and the congregation felt that his "contributions toward the establishment and subsequent growth of the Church were so manifold as to be worthy of more than passing recognition...." The motion was passed by the mission committee unanimously. On 16 April 1956 Bishop Baker was present for the groundbreaking ceremony followed by a confirmation service in the church.



Parish House Groundbreaking – April 1956

Left to Right: Mrs. J. E. Johnson, Jr., Johnny Gehring, The Right Reverend Richard H. Baker, Johnny Turner (front row), The Rev. B. Daniel Sapp, J. Reid Clark, B. S. Liles, Allen Surratt