

Part III (*continued*)

Of course, coffee hour on Sunday after church provides a weekly opportunity for fellowship, and often this time is used for special celebrations as well. Sometimes this is a farewell party for parishioners moving away, like Rich and Juron Gray and their children in June 1989. Or it might be a birthday party, like the one celebrating Mabel Hoff's 90th birthday. The gesture clearly meant something to her as she later wrote, "I will always remember my 90th birthday party with the best friends one could ever have—and the one and only church where it was held! It was the surprise of my life and I enjoyed every minute of it! I have the beautiful card Keith Byrum painted—in my living room and you all seem very close—as I read your names inscribed on it." Other birthdays have been similarly celebrated. In 1988 Frances Harris was completely surprised as she walked into the parish hall and found everyone singing happy birthday. She sang along, too, not realizing until "Happy Birthday, dear Frances," that it was for her 80th birthday. The memory is poignant for many in the congregation because it was her last birthday. Her name is mentioned occasionally in these pages but not nearly as often as her devotion to Christ Church deserves. Besides sometimes serving in leadership roles, she was *always* there behind the scenes from the 1930's on. She was a regular at Valle Crucis, at study groups, at Friday Nighters and foyers, at Sunday morning worship services and at weekday services, too. And she could be counted on when there was work to be done. She has been sorely missed since her death in January 1989.

Christ Church held a very special celebration on October 18 and 19, 1980, commemorating the 40th anniversary of the consecration of the church and the 90th—really the 93rd or 94th as it turns out—anniversary of the first Prayer Book services in Stanly County. The festivities include a pig-pickin' on Saturday afternoon, Sunday dinner on the church grounds, and 'Reflections of the Past' by Ada Shaver. Although much of the tape made of Mrs. Shaver's reminiscences is nearly unintelligible today, it is clear from the laughter that she delighted her audience. She is currently the oldest member of Christ Church in age and in number of years as a member, but she no longer lives in Albemarle. She has moved to California to live with her grandson. One of the things people remember about her is how particular she was about the mantle in the parish hall. It was given by Wayne and Bebe Alexander, and Mrs. Shaver kept flowers on it much of the time. It made her mad to see it littered with things like Coke bottles and ashtrays. Well aware of her own formidable reputation in relation to that mantle, she raised a laugh from the congregation when she alluded to it in her reflections.

Christ Church parishioners have not just shared celebrations and good times; they have been there for one another in bad times as well. Examples of such caring are often very personal and usually do not make their way into the records, but occasionally they do. In December 1975, Steve Maya's trailer burned down. He lost nearly everything he had in that fire. In January he wrote this letter to his fellow parishioners:

Dear Friends,

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for all that you have done for me since my home was destroyed by fire on Dec. 2. You have prayed for me, visited me, clothed me, fed me, and helped me to get settled in my new home. You have shown that you really care. I am deeply touched. Thank you and God bless!

He added the following postscript: “God loves the man who literally gave me the coat off his back!”

Such concern for one another is vitally important, but in order to be the Body of Christ, a church must extend itself to meet the needs of the wider community as well. Christ Church has attempted to do that in a number of ways during Phil Byrum’s tenure. The fact that most people in Albemarle know something about Christ Church, even if they do not know how to pronounce “Episcopalian,” suggests a certain measure of success. One parishioner remembers the rector entering a downtown store one day and a customer remarking, “Well, here comes the village priest.” People tend to feel that Father Phil and Christ Church, in a way, belong to the whole community. Such a reputation has to be earned, and it has been, especially in the ‘70s and very early ‘80s. The parish seems to be resting on its laurels a bit of late, but perhaps the time, energy, and money poured into the parish house addition, the only major building project during Father Phil’s incumbency, help to explain that.

After Phil came in 1969 Christ Church continued the already established tradition of preparing a Thanksgiving Dinner for the Vocational Workshop. With a one-year interruption due to the parish house expansion, the custom has continued to the present, although in 1988 it was changed to a Valentine’s Party. The ECW is primarily responsible for this event but with support from the entire parish.



Kitchen Crew -Vocational Workshop Dinner
Left to right: Jean Ritchie, Betsy Ballenger, Helen Harris, Bette Hanham, Chris Johns

Outreach took a variety of other forms in the early '70s. The rector's report for 1970 contains the following:

I would commend the Churchwomen for their sponsorship of a Girl Scout troop for retarded girls. This is one of the things the women should be doing. This is one of the things the entire parish should be doing. This I say because none of us had children involved in the troop. It was something outside ourselves. There needs to be more and more of this type of outreach.

And there was. At the time of its organization, the board of the local Mental Health Association had a majority of members from the parish. Lay Readers continued to hold services at the Stanly County Prison unit, though in February 1972, Joe Huneycutt and Poss Wilhelm were the only ones participating. In 1973 the rector, himself, completed a course for volunteer hospital chaplains open to all clergymen in the county. He then became part of a program to provide twenty-four hour coverage by trained chaplains at the Stanly County Hospital, a program in which he still participates.



A wonderful means of outreach presented itself to Christ Church in 1972 when Mrs. Gerry Palmer, a parishioner, proposed to the vestry that the parish house be used as a daycare center operated by the Department of Social Services. The vestry agreed, and in September a facility for twenty pre-school children moved in, using four classrooms and the kitchen from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Financially, the Day Care Center turned out to be an asset to Christ Church, but of course it involved much inconvenience. More importantly, though, it gave the parish a chance to get involved with the children, an involvement that was particularly evident at Christmas.

A letter to Father Phil from one of the staff in December 1972, best expresses this: "How wonderful it was! the party, the gifts, Santa [Jim McKeon], the fellowship and love you showered upon the children from the Day Care Center was certainly a beautiful expression of the real meaning of Christmas!"



A poignant expression of gratitude came from the father of one of the children after the party in 1977. When the staff explained to him where the presents his daughter had received came from he said, "I didn't think she was going to get anything this year, but it was the best Christmas she's ever had. I really appreciate what the church did for us." During the summer of 1978, the Day Care Center moved to a new facility that could house more children. During the Center's six years at Christ Church nearly 150 children had been served. No doubt things would be quieter and more orderly at the parish house, thereafter, but as Father Phil put it, it had been "a wonderful experience and opportunity" for the parish.

1973 found Father Phil, Jim Harris, and Marvin Aycock involved in an effort to create a half-way house for alcoholic men in Albemarle. This successful venture was supported by the parish with donations of needed furnishings, utensils, and other supplies.

In 1974 many in the parish became involved in the establishment and maintenance of a home for mentally retarded adult males. The vestry requested and received a \$3,000 grant from the diocese for that purpose. The new group home was named Chivington House for Marie and Jack Chivington, communicants of Christ Church who were active in the Stanly County Association for Retarded Citizens. Chivington House met the need of many handicapped persons in state institutions who qualified to be discharged but had no home to which they could return. Father Phil described the value of such a home in a 1975 article in the *North Carolina Churchmen*:



The men take great pride in their rooms and are responsible for maintaining them. It is important to note that the House is their home, a residence, and not a rest home or training center. They have chores to do, run errands, and live near enough to the downtown area to go to the movies and shopping on their own. Chivington House gives them the opportunity to function in society with dignity.

In the words of one of the early residents, Chivington House was "better than heaven," and it continues its invaluable service today.

Also in 1974, Christ Church began to plan for what became one of its biggest contributions to the community—the Food Pantry. The idea came from an adult Church School class and was endorsed by the vestry. The Pantry opened in January 1975. Parishioners and people from other churches and organizations contributed food and money, and the ECW made gallons of soup to be kept in the freezer. The food was available to anyone in need and distributed under the supervision of the rector—though he says it was largely Frances Harris who kept things going. Many organizations found this service invaluable. Staff at Social Services, the Health Department, the Employment Security Commission and several churches always knew they could refer hungry people to Father Phil at any time and be assured they would be fed with no hassle and no red tape. Even those too proud to ask for help sometimes awoke to find a bag of groceries on their porches.

The FPE Current, newsletter of the Federal Pacific Electric Company, did an article on the Food Pantry in 1984 and included a number of stories about individuals helped and their responses to that help. One told of a recovering alcoholic who was having difficulty finding a full-time job because of his past. He was at the end of his rope when he found his way to the Food Pantry and Father Phil. He “broke into tears when he saw the kindness and concern in the eyes of the Priest of the Episcopal Church.” Another story involved a parishioner who happened to get behind a couple using food stamps in the grocery store checkout lane. Later in the day she was rather surprised to see the same couple at the church. As the article put it, “Many would have thought they were at the church for their second handout of the day but such was not the case. Their reason for being at the church was to replenish food that had been given to them in their time of need.” An elderly woman whose government check arrived late one month responded similarly. Father Phil gave her food, never questioning her story. Two days later when the check came, she arrived at the church with a money contribution for the Pantry. Then there was the woman who came in desperate need of food and found a dime laying in the driveway. Hearing the organist practicing in the church, she took the dime inside and asked how she could place it in the offering.

In 1985 the Food Pantry was approved by the Metrolina Food Bank in Charlotte, which allowed it to buy groceries at greatly reduced costs, and several parishioners agreed to help with the monthly shopping. By 1986 so many churches and individuals had been drawn into this vital ministry that they were able to found the Stanly County Christian Ministries and move the main operation of the Food Pantry to a larger facility and more central location. While the Pantry was housed at Christ Church, it fed 7,520 people and received donations in food and cash worth \$29,119.54. Christ Church continues to keep a basket in the church for contributions to this ministry and to maintain a small supply of food in the parish house for emergencies when the SCCM office is closed.



Meals on Wheels

Frances Harris and Helen Comber pickup meals from hospital and make a delivery to Addie Belle Loftin.

The Meals on Wheels program invited Christ Church to participate in 1975. Helen Comber, who remains very active in the organization, asked fellow parishioners to act as drivers every Wednesday and to fill in when needed as well. Volunteers were forthcoming. Helen described, in a parish newsletter, the benefits of Meals on Wheels to recipients and drivers alike:

Recipients are elderly people who are unable to prepare meals for themselves because of physical handicaps. Some are unable to prepare special diets for themselves and their health has noticeably improved since coming into this program. Recipients are carefully selected, and approved by the Meals on Wheels board. It is a program that gives satisfaction to those participating and serves a real need to those on the receiving end. A fringe benefit is the pleasure these elderly folk have in the daily visits of the drivers.

Parishioners continue to take part in this ministry today.

1980 found a parish committee hard at work investigating the possibility of establishing a Share-A-Home in Albemarle. The community needed a place to accommodate elderly people who did not need or desire nursing home care but who, for one reason or another, could not manage an individual residence. While the idea originated at Christ Church, and Elbert Johns, a Christ Church communicant, acted as the project's first chairman, other churches, organizations, and individuals became involved. The Mecklenburg Presbytery helped with a start-up grant of \$3,000, as did the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, though none of the four original residents were Presbyterians or Episcopalians. The local ECW conducted a shower to help provide groceries and other items for the opening, and the United Thank Offering of the Episcopal

Churchwomen in the United States granted \$10,000 to help fund the home through its first year of operation—until it reached its full complement of nine residents. The Home was set up to be financially self-sustaining and does not receive county, state, or federal funds. In the summer of 1988, Share-A-Home moved from its original site to a bigger residence. The new house required much renovation, and this was speedily accomplished, thanks largely to the leadership of Helen Comber, the chairman at the time.



Share-A-Home

Share-A-Home was the last big community service project initiated at Christ Church, but other efforts at local outreach have been made. During the early '80s the adult Sunday School class sponsored a family at Christmas and sometimes helped them meet needs during the year, and in 1984 the junior high class took on a similar project. Other Sunday School Classes and the EYC have participated in outreach activities, and for many years ECW provided baskets of food or little necessities like toiletries to shut-ins in the community. These were at first given at Christmas but then became February "Cheer Baskets." In 1976 and 1977 ECW hosted a Valentine's spaghetti supper for the residents of Chivington House.

Individual parishioners also deserve mention for outstanding community service though probably many names that ought to be recognized have not found their way into the records. A 1977 newsletter notes that Jane Scheer was nominated

by the Stanly County Mental Health Center for the North Carolina Volunteer of the Year Award! She has been named a semi-finalist and is among a small group of volunteers to receive a special award at a reception and awards presentation in Raleigh on 28 April. Jane works with autistic children at Greenwood Center and North Albemarle School. Under the direction of Marie Smith, Jane works with these children in the area of language development.

In 1978 Betty Watson established a scholarship for young men and women from Stanly County and from her home, Anderson County, South Carolina. In each county the scholarship is administered by the farm agent, the home agent, and the Episcopal rector. Students planning to major in agriculture, electrical engineering, and home economics are eligible to apply for the \$1,000 a year award. Betsy Ballenger has been very active in fighting drug abuse in the community. She was responsible for starting a Community Drug Education Program and a support group called Parents-in-Action. Other parishioners on the Board of Directors included Betsy's husband, Dr. Claude Ballenger, and Father Phil. Betsy served as head of the Stanly County Chamber of Commerce Task Force against Drug Abuse and was appointed by Governor Jim Hunt as a member of the Governor's Task Force on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among Teenagers. In recognition of her hard work in this area, she was one of five recipients of WBTV's Jefferson Award for 1983. Finally, Alva Hawkins deserves recognition; in 1984 the Stanly Memorial Hospital Auxiliary honored her for 3,000 hours of volunteer work.



Betsy Ballenger



Dr. Claude N. Ballenger, Jr., Jack Chivington

Christ Church does not have an outstanding record in outreach beyond the local community, but it has made efforts in that direction. Lenten offerings have provided one means of connecting with a wider world. Sometimes all or part of the offering has gone to the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief. Other offerings have been sent directly to such varied places as Nicaragua, Holy Trinity School in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, Thompson Children's Home in Charlotte, the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf, Venture in Mission, the Diocesan Camp and Conference Center, the Bishop of Belize, Brother Leo Anthony and the Anglican Franciscan Friars in New Zealand, and the Community of the Holy Spirit in New York City. The congregation has also responded generously at times to distant disasters. The parish has sent money to help with flood relief in South Dakota and Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It has come to the aid of hurricane victims in the

Northeastern United States and tornado victims in South Carolina. The children of the church have occasionally participated in outreach projects—as in 1976 when the fifth and sixth grade Sunday School class collected old eye glasses and sent them to New Eyes for the Needy, Inc., a non-profit, volunteer charity in Short Hills, New Jersey. This was successful enough that the second and third grade class continued the project in 1977.



Father Phil with Sister Anne and Sister Ann Marie of the Society of St. Margaret

The Episcopal Churchwomen have played a part in such outreach, too. In 1975 they sent a donation to Sister Anne Marie for the building fund of Holy Trinity School in Haiti. In December 1976, the Executive Board of ECW unanimously adopted a motion

that all members of the parish be urged to choose one day between 15-24 December to observe as a day of fasting—either individually or as a family group. It is hoped that the money saved on this fast day will be put in an envelope and marked HUNGER and put in the alms basin either at the Christmas Eve service or Christmas Day service. This offering will be forwarded to the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, marked HUNGER.

Other ECW projects have included sending health kits, school kits, and linens to migrant farm workers in North Carolina, collecting Campbell's Soup labels for the Indian School in Springfield, South Dakota, and collecting toys and clothing for destitute South Vietnamese children.

If Christ Church has not performed exceptionally in offering itself to the world beyond Albemarle, it has acquired a local reputation for a degree of openness and heterogeneity unusual in a small town. It recently received a tremendous compliment when an adult class in another congregation decided unanimously that Christ Church was the one church in the community that responded, in Christ's name, to anyone and everyone and welcomed them into its midst. When Father Phil first came to Christ Church, he left the doors of the church wide-open all of the time as a lovely symbol of that welcome extended to all. Unfortunately,



open doors also invited in small animals, so Phil reluctantly agreed to close them. There was some talk of putting in glass doors that might still invite passers-by inside, but fear of defacing a beautiful church put the project on hold. The doors are, however, never locked—a rarity these days. In fact, there is no key for the front door, so the church is yet a haven for many people who know it is always open for them.

Almost from its beginning, Christ Church has attracted a fairly cosmopolitan congregation. Companies like Collins and Aikman, Alcoa, and Wiscasset have brought people to the community from all over the country, particularly the Northeast, and many of them have found a home at Christ Church. This made for a transient element in

the congregation because such people are frequently transferred, but it has contributed to openness and tolerance as well. Faculty and students from Pfeiffer College and Stanly Technical College have also come and gone, contributing much to the life of the congregation. One small example of this openness to outsiders during Father Phil's tenure comes from an article in the Stanly News and Press about Lew and Joan Opie and their sons, an Australian family who spent about eight months in Stanly County. Mr. Opie was on assignment from Alcoa, and the family quickly became active in the community and in the church. In fact, their five-year old son Matthew was baptized at Christ Church. When interviewed, the Opies "characterized the church as remarkable, the congregation as warm and responsive, and the pastor as a tremendous man."

For all of this variety of backgrounds, however, Christ Church had reported itself 100% white in 1951 and continued so for sometime. The congregation, however, did respond to the national movement for integration in the late '60s and early '70s. This was difficult for some parishioners, but white and black both find a welcome at Christ Church today, with little dissent.

Maintaining unity in such a diverse congregation is not always easy, but it has, for the most part, been successfully done. Father Phil reflected on this achievement in a 1972 newsletter:

Recognizing our imperfections and weaknesses, I do see a wonderful unity existing in our parish—as it draws people from throughout this country (and beyond) together. And what an assortment is drawn. Our unity certainly does not mean that we agree on everything, nor should it mean that. But we do have, I believe, some clue as to what the source of our unity should be. The source of our unity and strength is, of course, God. Our corporate life centers around His altar, for it is there that we are—again and again—renewed and refreshed as we receive the Sacramental Body and Blood of His Son.

Worship services are the central element that bind the congregation together and make sense of its varied activities.

As in any Episcopal church, those services follow the Book of Common Prayer, and like other churches, Christ Church went through a period of some turmoil from 1967 to 1977 as trial liturgies were used in preparation for a new Prayer Book. Many people loved the 1928 Prayer Book and understandably found these changes distressing, but overall, Christ Church came through this period fairly gracefully. In 1971 Father Phil wrote in the newsletter, "While in many places many resent using the services, or have stopped attending worship altogether, our parish has responded well. We have been asked to 'try' these revisions, and that is what we are doing. I am grateful to you for your patience, and willingness to experiment, listen and learn." As this suggests, the new services were not simply imposed from above. Input from the laity was actively sought, both on a national and on a local level. At Christ Church a worship committee studied the services and encouraged questions and comments from the congregation. That, no doubt, helped people to understand and accept the new Prayer Book when it came out.

All in all, the '70s were rather difficult, if stimulating, years as many changes, both small and great, were made in the Church. Not only was the Book of Common Prayer revised, but also these were the years when the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopacy was being discussed, and when the national church took controversial stands on a number of social and political issues. On the lighter side, parishioners had to adjust to seeing bare-headed women wearing pants in church, though both of these innovations came about naturally at Christ Church.

Doris Gehring may have been one of the first to wear pants to a service. She says she was not trying to make any kind of a statement. It was a rainy Wednesday night, and she was just too tired to change out of her pantsuit before attending a Lenten service. Similarly, Anne Byrum may have been the first woman to come to church bare-headed. She simply forgot her head covering one Sunday, and rather than resort to putting a Kleenex on her head, as some had done before, she went without. No great fuss was made over these minor matters, but the bigger issues did deeply trouble some. Bart Burpeau poignantly expressed the frustration felt by many when, as senior warden, he wrote the following in the newsletter:

I know all too well the inner torment caused by changes within the Episcopal Church. I know the frustrations and disappointments of 'church politics' and I know the feelings of uselessness and unrest that I know each of you knows or has felt from time to time. I question the support by the Episcopal Church of questionable causes, the waste of monies contributed by hard-working parishioners and struggling parishioners, the lack of sensitivity to our religious heritage and a perceived sense of reality which few who toil in the real world understand. Yet, despite all these worldly concerns, each of us can come to Christ Church to be welcomed.

And that, of course, is what matters. With only a few defections, most parishioners, no matter where they stood on the divisive issues of the time, kept coming to Christ Church to be welcomed—and to welcome others.

Since Phil Byrum is known throughout the diocese as a liturgist, it is not surprising that Christ Church has lovely Sunday services—beautiful but never stiff and formal. In 1977, Helen Harris described the Parish Eucharist as a “joyful, warm, relaxed and family-oriented service” at which “the very young and those no longer so young share in the feeling of closeness at these corporate communions.” The service is appropriately solemn, but not artificially so, and parishioners are not afraid to laugh. One of Father Phil’s favorite stories is about Jean and Coy Ritchie’s grandson, Bryan, when he was three or four months old. Jean always sat in the back of the church and kept a bottle in his mouth to keep him quiet. One day when she brought him up to the altar at communion, just as Phil reached out to bless him, he belched a belch that reverberated through the church. The people at the communion rail and the choir simply dissolved, and Phil had to turn his face to the wall. Luckily, Jean thought it was funny, too. After that Phil told people they needn’t ever doubt of the power of *his* blessing.

The service is enhanced by the wonderful things parishioners have contributed to it. Sometimes homemade wine is used for communion, and during Lent in 1977, a group also made the bread. Parishioners often bring flowers from their own gardens to adorn the altar. In 1976 Elbert Johns made the Paschal Candle of beeswax from his own beehives, and in 1984 the junior high Sunday School class made it. Over the years, Rebecca Bradley has devoted her talents to creating wonderful handwork to embellish the altar and Father Phil’s vestments. Recently she sewed a beautiful banner designed for Christ Church by Cathy Melesh. Wally Bourne made the wooden cross used during Lent, and Father Phil has written lovely hymns sung by choir and congregation.



Making the Paschal Candle
Rebecca Martin, Joan Giglio, Elbert Johns



Rebecca Bradley

A number of dedicated people, besides the priest, have contributed over the years to the Sunday services. All cannot be mentioned, but certainly the altar guild, acolytes, choir, choir directors and organists have played major roles. Among the altar guild chairmen in the last twenty years have been Virginia Devitt, Doris Stickney, Libby Cooke, Marie Chivington, Dottie Gore, Geri Preslar, and Jane LaSalle. There have been any number of acolytes during this period. Until the mid-70s, they were all boys, but then Kathleen Ballenger (now Allen) and Carroll Smith (now Holbrook) asked Father Phil why they could not be acolytes, too. He replied, "Why not?" So they became the first girls to serve in that role at Christ Church.



Lisa Lowder, David Hoff, Mark Scrimgeour,
Dodd Lowder, Amy Aycock,



Jane Scheer

Christ Church has sometimes had an organist and a choir director, and sometimes one person has filled both positions. Among those who have served in one capacity or the other during Father Phil's tenure have been Marianne Moore, Vicki King, Pat McAden, Jane Blood, and Cindy Pribble, but special mention needs to be made of Jane Scheer for her nearly seventeen years of faithful service. For such a small church, Christ Church has been most fortunate in its music thanks to the unusual combination of a professional musician of Jane's quality working with a rector who is also a musician. Sometimes Christ Church has had a children's choir to enhance an occasional service, led at different times by Randall Hartsell, Lisa Lowder and Jackie Stuart, and Nancy Parry. Not everyone has always been happy with the music, however. Some parishioners remember Harvey Cox as a delightful character who used to slam his hymnbook together loudly whenever he did not like a hymn.

The congregation had to adapt to a new hymnal in the mid-80s, but that went smoothly enough, perhaps because Jane and Phil approached it with caution. Long before the new hymnals arrived, they carefully put a star in the bulletins beside the hymns that would be included in the new book to show people that most of the hymns they were accustomed to singing would still be there.



Rehearsing an Easter chancel drama (*left to right*) Dean Koulouris, Anna Catherine Ballenger, Joseph Giglio, Marie Smith, Jane Scheer, Melissa Ritchie

Besides its Sunday services, Christ Church has especially memorable Christmas Eve, Lenten, and Easter Services and has occasionally celebrated a special Epiphany service, the Feast of Lights, when the darkened church is filled with the light of many candles symbolizing the showing forth of Christ to the Gentile world. These beautiful seasonal services are among many parishioners' fondest memories of Christ Church. One member of the congregation was especially moved by a Maundy Thursday service when Father Phil washed the foot of Harlie Clark, a young black parishioner—a powerful symbol in a small Southern town. On a lighter note, some also remember the Easter service when Father Phil asked if anyone knew where the money from the mite boxes was going, and his son, Keith, a small boy then, piped up, "You're going to take it home." Keith was mortified at the laughter, but the congregation was delighted.

Besides these seasonal celebrations, there have been other special services during Father Phil's tenure. In 1969 the Charlotte News contained this item: "The Rev. Philip Byrum of Christ Episcopal Church in Albemarle officiated last Sunday at a Blessing of the Boats at Skidwood Beach, Norwood.... Mr. Byrum wrote a special liturgy for the occasion, the first Blessing of the Boats held in this area." Many parishioners also remember the baptisms of Vivian and Cleve Miller in Lake Tillery in 1973. These were the parish's first baptisms by immersion, but other river baptisms followed in subsequent years.



Harlie Clark, Sr. Barbara Clark, Fr. Phil, Eddie Ratiff

In a newsletter, Father Phil recorded January 25, 1976, as “one of the most memorable days in the history of our parish.” In an afternoon service, Bishop Fraser administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to twenty-two young people and adults, and received one adult from another Communion. That was the largest confirmation class the congregation had yet had and one of the largest Bishop Fraser had confirmed in five months. On 30 October 1977 Christ Church had the honor of having the Sacrament of Confirmation administered by the Most Reverend John E. Hines, retired Presiding Bishop. This was a time when the diocese was without a second bishop, and Bishop Hines was helping Bishop Fraser with his visitations. One parishioner, John Robinson, was unable to be confirmed in the church because he was paralyzed from the waist down, so Bishop Hines went to his home and confirmed him there. Mr. Robinson was thrilled to have had the bishop in his home, and the Bishop, upon returning to the car with Father Phil, said, “Philip, thank you for that privilege.” He must have meant it because when Father Phil met him again several years later, he immediately said he remembered Christ Church, and especially his visit to the Robinson home.



Confirmation 1976- front row, *(left to right)*: Douglas Wilhelm, Dodd Lowder, Lisa Lowder, Maureen McKeon, Melissa Ritchie; second row: Carol Sessions, Scott Sessions, Renea Rogers, The Right Rev. Thomas A. Fraser, Amy Aycock, Timothy Alls; back row: Harlie Clark, Sr., Father Phil, Barbara Clark

Services at Christ Church are not just held on Sundays and special occasions. There have always been occasional weekday services, but Father Phil was the first to hold them almost daily, starting in 1973. He says he did this mainly because there were people willing to come. Even when Phil is out of town, these daily

services usually continue with parishioners taking responsibility for Morning or Evening Prayer. Until recently they were held in the Oxford Chapel in the church. Frances Harris remembered reading Evening Prayer aloud all by herself one evening when nobody else showed up. At least she thought she was alone until she heard a peculiar noise, rather like a baby crying. She looked all around and finally saw one of Mrs. Teeter's cats sitting in Father Phil's chair and chiming in with the prayers.

Weekday services are no longer held in the church because one of the rooms in the parish house addition has been turned into a small chapel. Hard work, mainly by Father Phil and Marvin Aycock, and donations from parishioners have transformed an empty, institutional room into a lovely place for worship. It even has a beautiful stained glass window made and donated by parishioner Jeff Irvin. Besides the regular weekly services, a group meets there every Wednesday morning at 6:30 for Morning Prayer and Holy Eucharist, then retires to the kitchen for breakfast and Bible study. This began as a Lenten activity, but the small congregation asked that it be continued. The group has met faithfully for more than a year now, picking up newcomers now and then, and shows no signs of tiring of its early morning worship, study, and fellowship.

Worship, study, fellowship, love, and service—those who have looked have found them all at Christ Church over the last twenty years. Most have found disagreements, disappointments, and frustrations, too, of course, as the church has undergone changes, and people of diverse backgrounds, expectations, opinions, and talents have bumped up against one another. Under Phil Byrum's leadership, no effort has been made to wipe out or to ignore the differences. Rather parishioners have been encouraged to seek Christ in each other and in the sacraments and to find unity not in sameness but in a diversity necessary if the Church is to be the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have tried to describe the history of this parish as objectively as possible, but I have almost certainly failed. I have come to love Christ Church too much to see its weaknesses as clearly as its strengths, its failures as clearly as its successes. The picture painted by someone farther from the subject would surely be somewhat different.

But it does seem to me that a church which has commanded the love, loyalty, and service of so many special people for so long must have been doing something right. I have been struck over and over again by the sense of community many have found at Christ Church throughout its history—a rare and precious quality in a materialistic culture that increasingly encourages isolated individuals to forget their common past and to ignore their obligations to one another and to future generations in the elusive pursuit of personal satisfaction. I hope that this history might help, however feebly, to remind us that such community does not happen accidentally but requires constant nurturing. It takes the time, money, and talents of faithful people willing to cook, sew, sing, teach, baby-sit, sell, pray, wait tables, wash dishes, make posters, paint walls, lay floors, mow the lawn, keep the books, take out the garbage, visit each other, listen to each other, study together, laugh together, cry together, and worship together. Over the past hundred years, such people have been there, willing to be the Body of Christ in this place. May it always be so.



Church interior - early 1970's



Gracious God, you make all things new: Renew our faith, and hope, and love. Renew our wills, that we may serve you more gladly and watchfully than ever; renew our delight in your Word and your worship; renew our joy in you; renew our longing that all may know you; renew our desires and labors to serve others; so that we may walk in the light of your love and in the power of your Spirit, now and forever. Amen.