

Brief Church History 1896 to 2008

In 1877 Libbie Manlove Stansbury, wife of Dr. Oscar Stansbury arrived in Chico and quickly became aware that there was no Episcopal Church in the town of over 3,000 people. Correcting that was her primary project. The first resident priest started serving in 1901. Soon there was a building on Fifth and Broadway.

1899. A lot for the future church building was purchased at 5th and Broadway for \$1700.

1901. Rev. Lewis Morris Wilkins became the first resident priest.

1905. The church was completed and ready for use.

1910. The Church of St. John the Evangelist was formally incorporated in Chico, California.

1911. The property was sold to the United States Government for a post office. The building was moved to be used as a rectory.

1912. A property at 3rd and Salem was purchased for a new church.

1929. The Great Depression began; soon the parish was unable to sustain the salary of a priest.

1935. Rev Robert Raymond Read began his ministry at St. John's.

1952. A Baldwin organ was purchased and installed.

1959. Four acres of Hackett property on Ceres Avenue were purchased for planned expansion.

1961. An approved mission was started. The name St. David's Episcopal Church was chosen. An arrangement was made for St. David's temporary home at the Grange Hall on Nord and Henshaw Avenues. The new mission has 68 members. Six and a half acres were purchased on Floral Avenue and added to the four acres on Ceres Avenue. The existing house on the property was repaired for the first Vicar of St. David's, The Rev Norman Boyd. Just before Christmas, The Rev. Robert C. Gould became the 10th rector of St. John's.

1963. Construction began on St. David's on the Floral Avenue property.

1970. The two churches were merged, and an interim priest was called. The Rev. W. Hamilton Aulenbach served. The treasuries and vestries were combined. The Salem Street church offered drop-in opportunities for college students.

1972. The Master Plan Committee decided to build a new church at Floral Avenue and to retain the Salem complex for multipurpose uses. The name of the new church was St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church.

1974. The Rev. Gary K. Sturni became rector in December of this year offering regular services at the Salem church.

1975. This year was consumed with repairs and remodeling at both sites. The Baldwin organ aged beyond repair.

1980. After much discussion and investigation a Planning Committee recommended the consolidation into on the Floral Avenue site, and to make every effort to preserve and continue the heritage by incorporating the aesthetics of the Salem church in the construction of a new church. Some members felt a bond with the Salem church and felt reticent about committing to moving forward with this plan.

1982. The Salem Church was officially registered on the National Historical Register of Historic Buildings. The Salem property was sold. The bell and interior contents were stored. The church was sold and deconsecrated to become a Chinese restaurant. So much controversy ensued, that closing of escrow took over a year.

1983. Garden Tour was initiated as a major fund raiser for Episcopal Church Women.

1984. The new St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church was dedicated. Fr. Sturni left the congregation.

1985. Rev Grosvenor Needham became interim priest.

1986. The Rev Harry R. Allagree became the rector. The Architectural Institute of America gave an award for the design of the church.

1987. Needlepoint kneelers from Salem church installed.

1988. Lay Eucharistic Ministers instituted.

1989. Wednesday morning Bible study reactivated.

1991. Front church sign and light installed. Office computers installed for secretary and rector.

1992. Stained glass window installed in the church.

1993. Ellen Locatelli (in 1997 she would become Ellen Braswell) led the Youth Group on an outreach trip to Mexico.

1994. The restaurant and nightclub failed after a few years in business at the Salem site. The property was purchased by members of a small Episcopal denomination that broke away from the main church in the 1970s. It is now St. Augustine of Canterbury Anglican Church.

1995. Parishioners helped plan interfaith Seder sponsored by the Jewish community.

1996. Celebration events were planned throughout the centennial year. In April Fr. Allagree resigned to answer a call in Ukiah. Fr. Nordon Winger served as interim rector. Garden Tour took place on May 4.

1997. Rev. Richard Yale became the rector. Dr. Dorothy Wilson introduced Godly Play for children's Sunday School classes in the spring.

1998. Fr. Richard accompanied the youth and supportive adults to Rancho Santa Marta in Baja, Mexico. This trip has happened every year since 1993. Dr. Jerome Berryman, founder of 'Godly Play', came to Chico to conduct a workshop. Over 100 people participated coming from as far away as the Bay Area. Carol Whitney introduced the Tables of Eight program. Senior potluck luncheons with speakers continued to be active. St. John's participated in temporary sheltering of homeless people in winter and in Habitat for Humanity.

1999. Health Ministry Task Force organized and was the umbrella for Care Group, Prayer Chain, and Home Visitors. A new logo designed by Alan RellaFord was adopted and used on printed material. The Bell Choir celebrated their 15th year performing.

2000. The Stations of the Cross designed and carved by Dr. Jerry Jarrett were blessed. The twelve wood icons were mounted around the perimeter of the sanctuary, each lighted from above with its own light fixture.

2001. The Prayer Garden was planned and built. The project was supported by a gift from a parishioner and memorial gifts from other parishioners. The terrorist attack on September 11 called the congregation to action. Deacon Ann Halapua led prayers in the sanctuary at noon. The congregation contributed funds to the Episcopal Relief and Development fund to help with recovery in the United States and around the world. The columbarium was placed within the Salem Altar in the back of the sanctuary.

2002. Jack and Dixie Hulley reactivated Vacation Bible School. Wonderful Wednesdays grew in importance with increasing participation.

2003. Men's ministry formed in February. Men and women's Bible Study Groups were active and used the Serendipity Bible program as their guide.

2004. Garden tours continue. In addition to the gardens, plant sales and a boutique raffle also enjoy success. Tom Knowles and Cecil Braswell became co-leaders of the acolytes.

2005. A playground was located between the sanctuary and parish hall. Hurricane Katrina hit in Mississippi. Some supplies and funds were sent to the six parishes that were destroyed.

2006. Barbara Janzen was hired as Director of Children's Music. She directed the Youth Choir for grades 2–8, and the Saints Choir for grades 7-12. The new playground was finished. The office manager, James Cornwell, managed the design of a website for the church to provide coverage on the internet.

2007. A pledge was received of \$1,000,000 for the construction of a new parish hall. The Dorothy Wilson estate established the Dorothy Wilson Children's Ministry Endowment such that the interest proceeds would support the children's ministry at St. John.

2008. A Women's Retreat was led by Carol Hunt at Northwood Commons. The 25th Garden Tour was another success. All Saints Day senior event was held on November 1. A new street sign was installed at the front of St. John's property. It is lighted in the evening. Planning for the new parish life center began.

This material was freely pulled from St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, Church History 1896 to 2009 authored by Doris Riggle. For more complete information, consult that publication.