

ST. PAUL'S HISTORY

Episcopalians in Steamboat Springs were fulfilling their spiritual needs as far back as 1889 when a Bishop would arrive either on horseback or by wagon to hold services. Over the course of years they met in various locations including the Welcome Inn, the old courthouse, the Methodist Church, and later in the Masonic Hall. They were western town visionaries who were devoted to developing a community of believers, and went about preparing for what they believed would be population growth in their town and county. Although only a handful of registered Episcopalians resided in Steamboat Springs at the turn of the century, they were faithful to their cause, especially the pioneer women who started a cookbook that became a church tradition.

Their visioning process was correct, for in the 1890's extensive coal fields were discovered in Routt County, and the census began to grow. These pioneer visionaries working with their Bishop in 1897 purchased lots on the corner of 9th and Oak Streets. By 1910 the people of St. Paul's made the decision to build their own church. The cookbook including business advertisements generated enough funds to erect the original stone church built from donated stone carved out of the Emerald Mountain quarry. It was consecrated on December 7, 1913 by Bishop Benjamin Brewster of the Missionary District of Western Colorado. The building was smaller than the original design due to lack of sufficient funding. However, the church size was augmented in 1962 with a long extension accommodating a new chancel and sacristy plus a parish hall with a basement below and an apartment above. The completed church could accommodate 85 persons. The project cost \$35,000, all of which was raised by a concerted effort among the devoted parishioners whose lives became bound to their new church.

The original church was dedicated a mission and was served by vicars who were circuit riders providing services to not only St. Paul's but other communities from Grand Lake in the east to Craig in the west, and south to Kremmling, and north to Hahn's Peak. Thus, St. Paul's community was served by circuit riders from its origin in the 1890's to the 1970's. The lay men and women preserved the vitality of the mission between circuit rider visits by meeting for lay reader guided services.

By the turn of the century communicants at St. Paul's were few in number with only twelve members in all of Routt County. Within ten years, however, the number had increased nearly ten fold. Attendance waxed and waned for the next forty years. By the 1950's the number of communicants had decreased back to the original founding numbers, and the church had become a rundown shell. However, the Holy Spirit prevailed among the few steadfast parishioners. They were successful in bringing a young new priest, Father Justin Van Lopik, to help resurrect a

progressive momentum for the parish. Through his efforts and the dedication of the communicants, events began to improve, new members came on board, Sunday school was revitalized, money-making activities were created, and social activities flourished. Everyone devoted their energies to the welfare of the church, culminating in enlarging the building to accommodate the growing congregation. St. Paul's was off to a new beginning.

Thus, for nearly ninety years, St. Paul's was a mission served by the circuit priests, maintained by the devoted believers who were determined to preserve their God-centered community. They desired a resident priest who lived in Steamboat Springs and would be available for their spiritual needs and who would conduct weekly services.

The Reverend Leon Wilkins began his Colorado ministry in Rangely serving as a circuit priest and provided services in Rifle, Meeker, Craig, and Rangely. He was eventually instrumental in finding priests willing to serve in those communities. In 1971, he accepted the opportunity to be the vicar at St. Paul's and moved to the community. He still served as a circuit priest covering Craig and occasionally Yampa. Weekly, he would conduct 8:00 a.m. services at St. Paul's and would then drive to Craig for 10:30 a.m. service. Yampa would see him at least monthly. To quote Father Wilkins regarding his successful ministry at St. Paul's, "The church community wanted a priest who lived here."

Shortly after Father Wilkins' arrival, the mission was able to provide full financial support for their priest. Ultimately, in 1984, St. Paul's met the criteria and accomplished parish status within the Diocese of Colorado under the leadership of Bishop William Fry. Nancy B Kramer, as Senior Warden, led the congregation through the process. Father Wilkins became St. Paul's first rector where he served until his retirement in 1988. He and his wife, Mary, remain in Steamboat Springs. Father Leon continues to have a presence at St. Paul's as Rector Emeritus.

Father Wilkins was instrumental in starting the local Ministerial Association. This coalition of local churches provided resources for indigent travelers passing through Steamboat Springs to have access to gasoline and overnight housing. St. Paul's was a catalyst in the formation of this activity that became the precursor of Lift-Up.

Between Father Leon's retirement and Father Henderson's arrival in 1992, two priests occupied the pulpit. The Rev. Jerry Hannah served just over two years followed by The Rev. Ed Rouffy who served as an interim priest. There was a vacancy preceding Rev. Henderson's arrival.

Father Henderson graduated from Yale Seminary and his first position was serving as associate rector at St. Stephen's Parish in Edina, Minnesota from 1988-1992. Betty Ralston was Senior Warden at St. Paul's at the time and it was she who phoned Father Henderson, inquiring as to

whether he would consider relocating to Steamboat Springs. A hasty trip ensued with Bishop Winterrowd paying the air fare since St. Paul's did not have the necessary resources. St. Paul's budget at the time was \$62,000 per year.

Several years following Father Henderson's arrival, Betty Ralston was ordained to the diaconate, and became St. Paul's first Deacon, a position she held until retirement in 2009. Bain White terminated his career in military and civilian law enforcement and moved to Hayden in 1997. He was ordained to the diaconate in 2007. He joined Betty Ralston as the second deacon at St. Paul's and has continued his wonderful servant ministry since her retirement. He is a constant reminder of the need to serve others. He is currently in the discernment process to become a candidate for the priesthood.

Reminiscent of the early pioneer spirit that generated the resources to build the original stone church and have it later augmented in size; the parish community realized the need for a new church that would accommodate the expanding number of worshipers stemming from exponential population growth in Steamboat Springs and the Yampa Valley. Because Steamboat Springs is a resort town, there were increasing visitors as well. A successful building campaign generated enough funding to procure a bank loan that fulfilled the dream of a new church of larger scope and contemporary design. Three lots south of the stone church were purchased. The most southerly two lots were utilized to construct The Lowell Whiteman Primary School and a new parish hall. The latter was placed between the school and the future church building constructed shortly thereafter. All the buildings are interconnected and the church and school utilize the parish hall jointly. An excellent working relationship has ensued over the years between the church and school.

The completed church was consecrated by Bishop Winterrowd in August of 2002. Parishioners utilized their spiritual gifts to create many items enhancing worship. Master Carver, Joyce Tibbetts, carved several significant items. She carved the statues of the four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John which are free-standing within alcoves behind the altar, the statue of St. Paul is situated to the rear of the nave, and a beautiful processional cross also witnesses to her skills as does the crest carved into the Bishop's chair. Other parish artisans utilizing their time and talents to the contribution of the new church included:

- † The altar, lectern, ceiling chandeliers, chairs (Hans Berend)
- † Altar cross, outside cross, holder for Presence candle, and door to the ambry, and grill work behind the pews (Ray Selbe)
- † Baptismal font (Jimmy Lorenz)

- † Needle point kneelers (Molly Hibbard, Susan Larson, Linda Knox, and Fr. Leon Wilkins)
- † Altar frontal cloths (Marian Block and Nancy Westphale)
- † Ceiling chandeliers, Advent wreath holder, and wall sconces, and lectern (Von Wilson)
- † Communion railing (Preston Plum)
- † Church bells were installed in 2008 by the gracious donation from Shirley Shearman
- † Celtic cross for the Memorial Garden was donated by George and Alice Lund in memory of their son.

These artistic works and donations represent true spiritual dedication to the new church reflecting the devotion of the community to their sense of worship.

Father Henderson believed that St. Paul's held the reputation of welcoming everyone. He saw a priest's life as one involving the biggest moments in people's lives with much of the time not seen by the majority such as during pastoral care. He perceived much personal growth on his own part over the years by working with saintly people within the parish. He saw his ministry in terms of people, not the institution itself; and that bringing people into a closer relationship with Christ as the goal. He believed his most important contributions to the parish were to serve as a catalyst for the children and youth coming to know Christ and for supporting young families. In addition, he supported other activities involving adults such as the Alpha program and Foyers, small group dinners. Adult education classes were always stimulating and well attended.

Father Henderson tendered his resignation after sixteen years of ministry. During his tenure there was prosperity within the community, communicants grew in numbers, and there was a healthy budget each year providing dollars for many outreach activities, locally, nationally, and abroad. A youth director, Aaron Buttery, was hired in 2005 to start a new program for the young people. The new youth program drew youth from throughout the community, some of whom did not attend church anywhere.

Churches experience peaks and valleys of success and downturn. The latter hit St. Paul's beginning in 2008; reflecting changes in the American Episcopal Church, the economy in free fall, and unintended consequences of Father Henderson's resignation. Attempting to initiate a search for a rector under these circumstances proved to be difficult and a pessimistic feeling among parishioners and the vestry, in particular prevailed. Some vestry members resigned in frustration, while others were in a quandary about the best course of action.

Bishop Robert O'Neill visited with the vestry on three separate occasions, pastorally interacting, learning of the predicament the parish was in, and discussing alternative solutions within an environment of pain. The collective solution between the Bishop and vestry was to seek a Priest-in-Charge under a three-year contractual basis. The Rev. Scott Turner was selected by the bishop, interviewed and chosen by the vestry, and commenced his duties in May 2009. Dr. Jo Anne Grace, his wife, brought an admirable addition with her training and graduate work in the field of spiritual direction and pastoral care. Upon their arrival in Steamboat Springs, she was soon hired to be the Spiritual Care Coordinator for Hospice in Routt and Moffat Counties.

Ministerial goals of the Priest-in-Charge during the three-year contract are accomplished in two phases. First, assist the Parish to heal and unite to initiate a vision for the future. Second, after the contractual term, the goal will be for the parish to be well enough healed that the search for a new rector could commence.

During Father Turner's first year at St. Paul's there was much tension over the negative factors involving the national church, economy, and change from a rector to a priest-in-charge, which was a transition in leadership role and style. In particular, there was polarization among the vestry members. Little progress in spiritual growth and healing was made. After disagreements with the new leadership and his ability to secure a schooling position to further his youth ministry goals, the youth director resigned. And the choir director, Kathy South, had to leave Steamboat Springs with her family for economic reasons. Significant attrition in membership ensued because of the factors mentioned. Additional vestry members and disgruntled administrative staff resigned and attendance fell significantly.

The Holy Spirit has not given up at St. Paul's and there is, as of this writing, a renewed sense of optimism. A visioning team of dedicated communicants, catalyzed by Father Turner, has been working for the past year to process a vision for the future of St. Paul's. It is near completion and involved a detailed questionnaire reflecting the opinions of the majority of parish membership. There is a sense of well being. Elsie Wodnik was hired to replace long time Parish Administrator, Deb Reed. Henry Howard has come to the fore working with the youth to re-energize that program, primarily through music and individual talents of the youth involved. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program is alive and well. Adult education classes each Sunday are conducted by Father Turner and Jo Anne utilizing themes that energize and challenge the participants. Dr. Brian Harrington has graciously provided his talents as choir director. Men's and women's Bible studies continue weekly and services are regularly conducted at the Doak Care Center for the elderly.

The vestry is working harmoniously now and has adjusted the budget in order for the parish to remain in the black during the economic downturn. External outreach activities have been curtailed because of budgetary constraints, but vibrant outreach is realized within the community of St. Paul's and the local Yampa Valley Area.

Much can be learned from history. Such is the case of St. Paul's Parish. Throughout it's history there have been good and prosperous times, also, dismal and stagnant times. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit continues to prevail in this sacred place, nurturing it with love and direction. Newcomers are welcomed with sincere and caring joy, positive interaction is witnessed among members of the community, and spiritual gifts are being displayed continuously.

With the vision process complete, the vestry called The Rev. J. Scott Turner as Rector in July of 2011. St. Paul's is on the threshold of a new beginning, but it will require the input and participation of all parishioners to re-build the "community of St. Paul's." With the grace of God, the parish can again be a vital center of Christ's teaching and where the proclamation of the risen Lord dwells always.

Faith is to believe what you do not yet see;
the reward for this faith is to see what you believe.
Saint Augustine

Source Material:

The Church That Food Built by Mary Wilkins
Interviews with the Rev. Leon Wilkins
Interview with David Henderson

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