

**Humble Beginnings and Bountiful Gifts**

Highlights of a Half-Century

St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church  
Diocese of the Rio Grande

1950-2001

## Preface

*The narrative that follows is a compilation of interviews, meeting minutes, official documents and historical data. Of all these resources, the memories of the parishioners are, by far, the greatest treasures. Documents provide accurate data, of course, but the vignettes that are stirred in discussing the past bring forth a warm and loving picture of St. Michael's. In many ways the parish, although a larger community 50 years later, has retained much of the special character described in the early days.*

*Our apologies are offered for any inaccuracy or omission of significant events or people in this account. Our gratitude goes to the many parishioners who worked hard to bring this project to completion.*

*May all our members, living and dead, be so blessed by the Spirit that they love and serve their Creator with faithfulness in heaven and on earth.*

The Collect for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels:

Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a  
wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals:  
Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve  
and worship you in heaven,  
so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church is now a landmark on Montañó Road in the North Valley of Albuquerque. Its New Mexican mission-style architecture catches the eye of many a passer-by and warms the hearts of the present day members. It is difficult now to imagine another time and place when St Michael's had its beginnings.

Like many a life story, the early days of the parish began with meager funds and rough-edge facilities. The story that unfolds tells us of a people who cared tremendously and put in their own hard labor to build the first church building. It has continued over the years to be a community of generous members sharing their gifts. A founding member, Myndert Gilbert, offered his perspective of the parish back in 1991:

“St. Michael and All Angels is a small church whose members know each other and work together in serving the Lord in gladness. It is known as a church of loving, caring, sharing, prayerful, spiritual, and hospitable

parishioners. There is a warmth and friendliness that is difficult to describe. Many visitors remark about this quality which exists at St. Michael's."

## GETTING ESTABLISHED

### **Albuquerque during St. Michael's Origins**

In the 1950's, Albuquerque was still a fledgling city. Many of the city's main arterial roads of today, including Montañó, were dirt roads in 1950. With a population of 96,815, it was considered small in comparison to most cities, but growing rapidly. Los Alamos National Laboratory's atomic research had put the region on the map. The University of New Mexico, already recognized for cultural diversity and the arts, now began to develop a reputation as a research institution attracting physicists, mathematicians, and engineers who were riding on the tail-wind of the atomic discoveries just a few years before. And of course New Mexico, the land of enchantment, called many to its spacious uncluttered beauty in the 1950's, just as it does today.

The expansion of the Sandia Base and Sandia National Laboratory (sister operation of Los Alamos) into peacetime research and development triggered the boom that sent Albuquerque's population into an upward swing, doubling and redoubling within a few decades...With the population growing, the freeway interconnections began to develop in 1956 and were completed in the sixties. Montañó, a dirt road, terminated at Guadalupe Trail Road. The city limits came to a halt at Griegos.

*Albuquerque: 100 Years in Pictures 1875-1975*  
(George Fitzpatrick and Harvey Caplin, 1975)

### **A new North Valley mission**

The Episcopal Church, well-established in New Mexico by 1950, had stretched to many areas of the state. Most of the Episcopalians living in the Valley area attended St. John's Cathedral in downtown Albuquerque. It was the Vestry at the Cathedral who raised the issue of the need for a North Valley Episcopal mission congregation with their dean, The Very Rev. Lloyd W. Clarke.

The North Valley was beginning to show signs of transforming from a somewhat rural farming community to a thriving section of the city. After some exploration and discussion, the Cathedral established the new mission under the direction of The Rt. Rev. James M. Stoney, Bishop of the Missionary District of New Mexico and Southwest Texas (later to become the Diocese of the Rio Grande).

The Cathedral was undergoing a major renovation at the time and their parishioners had pledged money to support the effort. When a small number of these Cathedral families/members made the decision to transfer membership to the new mission, they were obligated to maintain their pledge payments to the Cathedral. Thus, they carried a double burden for a few years, maintaining their Cathedral building pledge and committing financial support to the new church.

With little money to develop a new facility, a Planning Committee (Mrs. Eugene Bennett, Mrs. Joe Henry, and William Howden) temporarily settled in an old storefront Baptist church at 4522- North 4<sup>th</sup> Street (at Bellrose), then owned by Bill Kitsch. On August 6,

1950, the key committee members met with Mrs. Lee, Mrs. Rippy, Mr. Spawn, Dean Clarke and Canon Shook (also of the Cathedral) and delegated Joe Henry to negotiate a rental contract with Bill Kitsch. On September 24, 1950, the North Valley Episcopal Mission (as yet unnamed) held its first worship service in the storefront building with Meme Henry's dining room table serving as the altar. The date of this first service, as it turns out, was a propitious one, being very near the feast of St. Michael and All Angels, or Michaelmas.

On November 15, 1950 the small church community held a meeting after worship to choose a name for their mission. At the suggestion of Bishop Stoney, who was acting Vicar at the time, it was named St. Michael and All Angels. Stoney proposed this name because it was the name of the parish in Anniston, Alabama where on April 16, 1942, he was consecrated Bishop of the Missionary District of New Mexico and Southwest Texas. The Rev. Canon Kenneth Shook also officiated in the early services at St. Michael's. When neither the Bishop nor Canon Shook was available, Marshall Lamer, (later a Deacon) would conduct Morning Prayer. He was listed as the Lay Reader.

The first members of the Vestry included Mr. William Howden, Sr. Warden, and Mr. Joe Henry, Jr. Warden. Mrs. Elizabeth Bennett was Secretary and Mrs. Hazel Lewis the Treasurer. Other leaders included Mrs. Sanchez as Sunday School Superintendent; and the Sunday School teachers were Mrs. Sanchez, Mrs. Tillitson, Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Lewis.

### **A Family Village**

The migration from one section of town to another was a bit of an adventure for the children of the families. Ann Gilbert, (a present-day St. Michael's member) recalls her childhood days when she and her family attended services with her Aunt Meme and Uncle Henry and her cousins. But for Ann, "everyone in the parish was like family." She remembers her childhood at St. Michael's with much fondness. She likens it to the book *It Takes a Village to Raise A Child*: "All of the adults at St. Michael's looked after one another's children," she stated (*Ann Gilbert Interview: March 25, 2001*).

In many ways, St. Michael's parish *was* like a village. Joe Henry had a pharmacy at 4<sup>th</sup> and Aspen (a family business established by his father in 1929). Bob King was the proprietor of a hardware store on 4<sup>th</sup> St., called King's Lumber. Marjorie Gilbert (mother of Ann), said that "everyone pitched in whenever anything needed to be done. It was the way we were then" (*Marjorie Gilbert Interview: Feb. 4, 2001*). "It was a big job to fix up the back of the storefront church on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The building had a basement and the Sunday School was held downstairs. The floor upstairs was very rough so we rented three or four machines and all worked together to sand it" (*Elizabeth Bennett Interview: June 1991*).

Ann Gilbert remembers from her childhood that the entrance was on the side, and they never entered from the front. The baptistry on the main level had a depth to it, so that it extended down into the basement. One stood on a platform in the basement, therefore, to be baptized. The kids loved to play there.

Ruth Lewis (later Fluke) began attending St. Michael's as a child at the 4<sup>th</sup> St. location. So did her other 11 siblings, including Leonard, who as an adult was ordained a Deacon for St. Michael's. They lived with their mother (after their father died in an accident in the Jemez mountains) on Montaña across the road from what would become the eventual building site of the church. Ruth looks back now and has fond feelings for Dean Clarke who officiated at some of the early services. She remembers helping her mother and the Altar Guild make the altar cloths for the first services (*Ruth Fluke Interview: January 7, 2001*).

### **Building Membership**

Juanita Roper (formerly Waggoner, and now married to Ellis Roper), interviewed in May 1991, reported that the early members were ambitious in seeking new membership. She told the story of getting a list of Episcopalians in the North Valley from the Cathedral and how a group of women parishioners proceeded to call and visit those named on the list. "That's how we found Amy Passmore Hurt, the writer," Juanita said, "who became a stalwart of the church. It was a door to door effort by only four of us," she recalled.

### **The Journey to a Permanent Place**

On February 1, 1952, St. Michael's was released by the Cathedral and constituted itself an organized mission. In the Spring of 1952, Bishop Stoney appointed Juanita Waggoner, Robert King and Robeson Barker to a building committee with an immediate goal of locating a suitable property for a new church building. Shortly thereafter a permanent building committee consisted of the following members: Sam Hartnett, Jack Evans, Leo Seeley, Herbert Horton, Robert Dietz and Robeson Barker.

Already the mission church had been the recipient of numerous gifts from members and friends. An altar was donated by St. Andrew's church in Roswell. The late Fr. Howden (brother of William Howden and Mrs. Herbert Horton and grandson of Bishop Frederick Howden) had carved the altar. The Mesilla Park Episcopal Church provided the Bishop's Chair. Mr. And Mrs. Sam Hartnett gave a Flag in memory of her father and mother. Mr. Marshall Lamer offered the brass taper for lighting and extinguishing altar candles. Mr. & Mrs. Foster Fitzsimmons presented the Silver Chalice in memory of Miss Helen Lee. Betty Borrell donated a communion set for the sick (purchased in Europe). St. John's Cathedral gifted the mission with the pews that eventually were used in the nave of the new church.

The land for St. Michael's new church building was purchased via a donation from Betty Borrell. Juanita Roper stated that Mrs. Borrell owned land at Griegos and Edith, where the Gas Company is now located. Since this was not a suitable area for a new church (it was an industrial park area), Mrs. Borrell sold a portion of the property and donated the funds to purchase the site on Montaña, near 4<sup>th</sup> Street. (*Juanita Roper Interview: May, 1991*).

### **The First House of Worship**

Working within a limited budget, the Needs and Budget Committee recommended that two basic rectangular buildings be constructed. Mrs. Frederick O'Hara, an artist and sculptor, along with her husband a noted artist, developed a mission-style façade design

with Southwestern and Mexican influences. The design was approved and William Gregg was selected as the architect for the building.

When completed, the doorframe and the outline of the church facade stood out (as in some distinctive Spanish Colonial structures) and were painted white to contrast with the rosy adobe color of the walls. As requested, there were two rectangular structures constructed in an L-shape. Karl Larsson, a respected Santa Fe artificer, designed and constructed the altar rail, creating angels and other figures in cast iron. The gate from this rail, featuring a central angel, now adorns the sign for All Angels Episcopal Day School at the entrance to the church's east parking lot. The church bell, arranged by Fr. Saunders for purchase from St. Peter's Church in Rincon for \$1.00, was cast in 1860 in Akron, Ohio (St. Peter's was an Episcopal mission (1919-1948) started by the indefatigable Preacher Lewis, a traveling missionary priest of the diocese. St. Peter's pews were given by Rabbi Zielonka of El Paso and his Jewish congregation).

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on August 3, 1952. Bishop Stoney presided over the service. Sixty-two persons were present and participated in Communion. Each person in attendance turned a shovel of dirt. As this took place, the man who sold the property to the church dropped a \$100 bill on to the shovel. Bishop Stoney, of course, retrieved it. Ann Gilbert remembers that she was the first person to turn over a shovel of earth, following Bishop Stoney. She was so full of emotion that she began to cry.

The church building went up very fast. People came after work and on weekends to do whatever they could. The parish was fortunate to have volunteers who had experience in construction. "The women fixed meals, brick layers donated services, people dug ditches, and mixed cement...everyone helped". The parish hall and sacristy were built in one unit and the classrooms and library were added later. The construction cost for the cinder block buildings totaled between \$25,000 and \$30,000 (*Juanita Roper Interview, 1991*). Deacon Leonard Lewis remembers, during construction, running down the dirt road of Montaña, through the alfalfa fields surrounding the new building, and helping to dig its foundations.

The library was built with funds raised by the Ladies' Auxiliary Thrift Shop operation. Juanita Roper remembered that it was the first wife of her husband Ellis who became president of the Auxiliary and the impetus behind the thrift shop. Initially the library was called the church parlor and was kept locked by the Auxiliary except for special occasions. When The Rev. Clint Smith became the Rector (1967-71), he took the lock off and buried it in the irrigation ditch, calling some of the parish children to witness his actions (*Fred Taylor Interview: June 1991*).

To picture the early configuration of buildings, imagine what is now the education building as the parish hall, the current parish hall as the nave for worship, and what is now the office as the rectory (home for the Vicar and his family). The present choir room was first used as a science room for the new Academy school, and then later as the parish office.

## **Finding a Vicar**

It was Bishop Stoney who selected The Rev. Paul Saunders as the first Vicar of St. Michael and All Angels. The two met after the war in Ohio where they both were teaching. At the time St. Michael's was established as a mission, Fr. Saunders was serving as the Rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Las Cruces. Paul Saunders graduated from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1945. After graduation, he was ordained at the First Baptist Church in Galesburg, Illinois and became the pastor of the Marley Community Church in Marley, Illinois. Saunders taught at Lewis College in Lockport, Illinois and his wife Helen served as the Librarian.

The couple moved to New Mexico in 1948, where Paul held a full-time faculty position at New Mexico State University (formerly NMA&M). After attending the Mesilla Park Episcopal Church, the couple was confirmed in the Episcopal Church in 1949. Initially, Paul was ordained as an Episcopal deacon in St. James at Mesilla Park. He was made a priest in February 1950 in La Union, New Mexico. Bishop Stoney invited Fr. Saunders to become to be the permanent Vicar of St. Michael and All Angels in late 1952, which he did in January of 1953 (*Helen Saunders Interview, 1991*).

Shortly after Paul and Helen Saunders arrived, a rectory was built to house their family next door to the church (now the parish office). Mrs. John Simms donated funds for surrounding landscaping. Later when The Rev. Kenneth Shook took on the position of Rector (1958-1966) the parish purchased a home for his family at Dietz Farms, which later became the rectory for his successor as well, Fr. Smith.

Paul Saunders made a significant impact on the parish in many ways. One of Paul's greatest strengths, Myndert Gilbert believed, was the number of parishioners he brought to the priesthood. He recalled that five men entered the seminary during the time that Paul was rector, including Alan Jenks, son of parishioner Mildred Jenks, Charles Olson, and Charles Dawson. (*Myndert Gilbert summary, 1991*). Helen Saunders reported in 1991 that both Charles Olson and Charles Dawson entered the seminary and were ordained under Paul's influence. It was also during Fr. Saunderson's tenure that the parish moved from mission to parish status as it became financially self-supporting, and his title thus changed from Vicar to Rector. Much later, Paul would return two separate times as a part-time assistant to St. Michael's, working with Peter Moore and then Brian Taylor. In the intervening decades between his times as Rector and assistant, however, he was never far away, but always visible as a friend to the parish and its members.

## **COMMON THEMES ACROSS THE DECADES**

Oleta Saunders, although not among the founders, has been a member of St. Michael's for most of the last 27 years. Oleta played the harpsichord at worship when she was a newcomer to St. Michael's in 1974 and later directed the choir. In recalling her years both as an active parishioner and wife of Fr. Paul Saunders, Oleta identified some dominant parish themes in an interview in December 2000:

“An interest in supporting education by hosting the Albuquerque Academy at its beginning and a succession of day schools for young children has been an integral part of the St. Michael's story. Along with Christian education for parishioners, an emphasis on the arts as

complementary to worship has marked each phase of development at St. Michael's. Members have always been encouraged in their commitment to spiritual growth, including service and a strong prayer life. And it's the willingness to take risks – to step out on issues and advocate for social justice that makes St. Michael's unique.”

### **Worship and Spirituality**

St. Michael's has had its liturgical “low” periods (no vestments, Morning Prayer as the rule) and its “high” ones. The Rev. Peter Moore, Rector from 1971-82, was of the latter persuasion, and moved the parish skillfully through a period of intense and controversial liturgical renewal. As a leader in Associated Parishes (a national liturgical renewal group) he was well-qualified to do so. Educating the parish carefully through various Trial Use prayer books, he introduced such things into worship as an altar more centrally located among the people, contemporary language, new music, and a more participatory style.

“One could say that Fr. Moore's main legacy in the parish was the development of a worship style that is traditional and yet creative, grounded in our Anglican heritage, well-thought-out and executed, formal in its ceremony and yet at the same time informal in its atmosphere. This style remains to this day.” (*The Rev. Brian Taylor, current Rector*).

Many of the parish's leaders have stressed the development of the life of prayer in their parishioners. Fr. Saunders was a third order Franciscan, and Fr. Taylor has brought a Benedictine and contemplative influence into his preaching and teaching. Spiritual direction has been offered by many of St. Michael's members, both by clergy and trained laity. A pilgrimage to Medjugorje, the Yugoslav village where the Virgin Mary appeared regularly to children, was undertaken by 15 parishioners in 1990. The Contemplative Center was established in 2000, growing out of a 7-year ministry of a contemplative prayer group and retreats. The Center now has a \_-time Director, two weekly groups, 6 retreats a year, a spiritual formation training group for lay leaders, and 3 full-scale weekend conferences with outside speakers. Many parishioners live by a Rule of Life and some are associates of monastic orders.

### **Parish Investment in Education**

The Rev. Paul Saunders helped William Wilburn to establish the Albuquerque Academy for Boys in 1954, initially housed in the St. Michael's old parish hall. In 1955, Wilburn departed and Fr. Saunders became the Headmaster. Saunders resigned his position as parish Rector when he moved with the Academy to their second location, now occupied by Sandia Preparatory School (*Helen Saunders Interview, 1991*). Later the Academy moved again to its current site on Academy Boulevard. As the new Sandia Prep arose in the Academy's old location, Paul Saunders became its Headmaster.

In the late sixties, the parish sponsored the Tuller Day School, which was affiliated with an Episcopal lay religious order called the “Teachers of the Children of God” (mother house located in Tucson, Arizona). The school included a kindergarten and primary grades (1-3). It combined religious teaching with academics and was very successful (*Myndert and Marjorie Gilbert Interview, 1991*).

A variety of preschool programs rented space at St. Michael's, including a Montessori school in the mid-80's. In 1988, the parish itself started its own preschool, All Angels Episcopal Day School. Elizabeth Godden was the founding director, and All Angels continues today as one of the finest preschool programs in Albuquerque. It has received the highest level of accreditation from the state (Gold), and is also accredited by the National Association for Education of Young Children. The school now includes a kindergarten program, and has had since its inception a religious component, including daily worship in the church. Many families who have come first to All Angels have found their way into the broader life of the parish.

### **Liturgical Art**

Ann Espe Dietz was the benefactor of two of the parish's most cherished artistic works: the pipe organ and the stained glass windows. Ann's father, Teodor Nicolai Espe, was an instrumental part of the story of these gifts. After obtaining a degree in land surveying in Ames, Iowa, Espe ventured to New Mexico where he worked in the Land Office for some years. Later he established his own business, lived a frugal life and accumulated a sizable estate, which he left to his daughter Ann Dietz, upon his death in August 1938. Mrs. Dietz, against family pressures, chose to donate one-quarter of this inheritance to St. Michael's to fund the organ and windows.

The pipe organ, a 5-rank Reuter, was purchased at a cost of \$7,000, and was installed in June 1955 as a memorial to Teodor Espe. His daughter Ann Dietz directed the senior and junior choirs and played the organ for many years. The organ was dedicated with a concert by Wes Selby, later to become St. Michael's music director.

In 1953, Ann Dietz became a student in the Music Department. While attending an Art Department exhibit, she noticed two small stained-glass panels created by John Tatschl. She stated in a letter to Mrs. Kenneth Shook in 1958...“a fire was lighted inside of me that never went out” when she viewed those panels. Dean John Robb of the Fine Arts Department, hearing of Ann's interest in Tatschl's work, brought him into her classroom to meet her. Following this meeting, Ann encouraged Fr. Saunders to view Tatschl's work and inquire with the Vestry whether they would be interested in commissioning him to carry out some work for the parish.

The Vestry agreed and William Howden, Vestry member, offered to pay for the Resurrection window (placed above the altar) at a cost of \$250. Ann Dietz purchased the nine side windows for a total cost of \$4,500, but believed that the true value at commercial rates would have been \$20,000 (*Letter: Mrs. Robert E. Dietz III, April 7, 1958*).

Ann stated in her letter that the “windows are priceless.” She reported that “people from all over the world have visited the church to view these works of the Holy Spirit which tell the most tremendous, wonderful true story of all time.” Paul Saunders became a close friend of Tatschl during the period when the windows were being installed (1954-57). Paul's image, complete with a 1950's crewcut and clergy collar, is found in the face of an angel in the St. Michael window. Ann Dietz's likeness can be found in another and Tatschl's two sons are depicted in the Lazarus window. Latin verses are etched in the

glass in various places, e.g. “Ars Long, Vita Brev” (“Art lasts, Life is short”) (*Oleta Saunders Interview, 2000*).

In the second house of worship (completed in 1997), St. Michael’s existing art work was utilized. Tatchl’s original windows were relocated there, as were the organ, and the church bell. Also included was the dramatic carved wooden statue of St. Michael the warrior defeating Satan, donated in the 1980’s in memory of John Ault LeCompte, killed in Vietnam. In addition, local artisans were employed to enhance the worship in new ways.

Using alder wood, Chris Sandoval crafted, in a traditional Southwestern style, the altar, large cross behind the altar, pulpit, flower case, front doors, and offering table. Maximiliano Chavez made the pews, also in alder. Byron Wickstrom crafted our St. Michael bronze front door pulls and the Aumbry for the reserved sacrament (which was donated by St. Bede’s Episcopal Church in Santa Fe). Parishioner Steve Shelly made the stone baptismal font. Geoff Hall, son of assisting priest Fr. Samuel Hall, made the Northern New Mexican-style crucifix in the prayer chapel. Alcario Otero carved and painted the bulto of St. Mary the Virgin and Christ Child behind the altar. Once settled in the new house of worship, St. John’s Cathedral again came to St. Michael’s assistance with a donation of large wooden organ bass pipes. A handsome hand-made Mexican trastero was placed in the prayer chapel and is used as a columbarium for urns of departed members.

The design of the building (by architect Robert Habiger, assisted by John Barton) is Northern New Mexican in style, with metal roof, a high wood ceiling, stone and adobe accents, and high clear-glass windows for natural light. Habiger won the City of Albuquerque’s Environmental Planning Award of Excellence for his architectural design of the building.

Today, the tradition of arts at St. Michael’s continues with frequent concerts in the acoustically marvelous nave, by local groups such as De Profundis, Musica Antigua, and the Desert Chorale.

### **Social Diversity and Service**

“Consistent with the character of St. Michael’s, people of all income levels have always been respected and welcomed” (*Oleta Saunders Interview, December 29,2000*).

In recent years, a Diversity Committee has built upon St. Michael’s tradition of inclusiveness, working to bring a higher intentional awareness to the parish about cultural and racial diversity. Spanish has been frequently used in worship, and Navajo bishop Steven Plummer recently shared a weekend on the Blessing Way. Integrity, a gay and lesbian group of Episcopalians, has been actively and publicly supported by the parish since the group’s very inception in the 1970’s. Today St. Michael’s is well-known throughout Albuquerque as a welcoming, safe haven for homosexual Christians.

St. Michael's has frequently sponsored other religious groups in relationships of sharing. In the 1980's, a diocesan Urban Indian Ministry had its weekly Eucharist in the church. In the '90's, Na'halot Shalom Jewish congregation observed their Sabbath celebrations in the parish hall. A lively relationship with Zen Buddhist teachers marked the beginning years of St. Michael's Contemplative Center. St. Bishowy Coptic Orthodox Church has for years filled the church with incense, icons, and Egyptian chant during its once-a-month Saturday liturgy.

Over the years members have provided assistance to displaced families of Cuban, Polish, and Vietnamese origins. Elizabeth and John Klunzcyk & their family were among those families resettled by the parish. Elizabeth became the housekeeper for the church, and she and her daughter Anna still attend St. Michael's.

St. Michael's has established food coops, maintained a Ladies' Auxiliary Thrift Shop, was a founding member of St. Martin's Hospitality Center for the Homeless, and participated in Albuquerque Interfaith (a community organizing group). The parish has supported All Faiths Receiving Home, Habitat for Humanity, Haiti Projects, St. Anthony's Pharmacy (bringing medical supplies to third-world countries) Dismas House (a local halfway house for ex-offenders), and the Storehouse (which provides clothing and household items to poor families). It has consistently provided meeting space for Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, the Boy Scouts, and other community groups.

“Although the parish has never been blessed with an excessive amount of wealth, we have shared what we had” (*Myndert Gilbert Parish Summary, 1991*).

### **Community Building**

Helene Mitchell remembers times in the early days when parishioners went in caravan to the Sandia foothills for Eucharist and picnic celebrations. Marion Canterbury Milner (Susan Crandall's mother), now an Episcopal priest, organized a series of international dinners in the 1960's that were highly successful in bringing people together and raising funds. Ann Gilbert recalls dressing in costume and serving at the events. People came from all over town to attend. Oleta Saunders recalled the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Eucharist during the U.S. Bicentennial Year when the clergy, the choir and parishioners came dressed in costume complete with powdered wigs to celebrate historical liturgy and music from 1776. “Back then, the Women's Auxiliary, a non-liturgical group, kept up the buildings. There wasn't a janitorial service yet. The women polished floors and cleaned and it made for good fellowship, a time to share both problems and joys”, Marj Gilbert remembered. In more recent years, “Dinner for Eight” has been a popular program as parishioners gather once a month in groups for fellowship and supper.

### **Near Tragedy**

On Saturday, December 29, 1990, a fire broke out in St. Michael's parish hall. The blaze was set by an arsonist and remarkably the fire was contained before it consumed the main church. A ring of smoke was left circling the Aumbry for the reserved sacrament behind the altar, where the fire seemed to be miraculously halted. There were some significant

losses: the parish hall was gutted and had to be rebuilt, an early the altar cross was lost, some vestments and records were destroyed, and there was extensive smoke damage in All Angels Day School, which also doubled as Sunday School classrooms.

At the time of the fire, the Rector, Fr. Taylor, was away on Christmas holiday in California. As he rushed back to Albuquerque, a special meeting of the Vestry was called for Saturday morning, and Bishop Kelshaw attended. At that time it was decided that all parishioners should be contacted by the Vestry. They were told to wear their warmest clothes for Sunday worship, since there was neither heat nor electricity in the church. The Bishop and Fr. Brian led the congregation the next morning in worship, beginning with prayers in the burned section, moving into the dark, cold, church that reeked of smoke. But as parishioners finished their celebration of the Eucharist, everyone was treated to cookies and warm drinks right outside the door in the sunshine. Pat Broyles recalls that their hearts were filled with thankfulness that the fire stopped before entering their precious house of worship, and that they still had their community of brothers and sisters in Christ.

During the time of reconstruction, St. John's Cathedral downtown donated temporary space so that the day school could continue its program uninterrupted. St. Michael's parishioners, the Latter Day Saints Church down the road and the Na'halat Shalom Jewish congregation all helped to cleanup and repaint (*Marj Gilbert Interview, 2001*).

## **RECENT YEARS**

### **The Second House of Worship**

The mid-1980's were marked by a period of steady growth in the parish. By 1987, the Vestry determined that the parish was running out of space, and committed to a building program. In 1989, four acres were purchased on the southeast corner of Guadalupe Trail and Montañó, and architectural plans (Ed Mazria, Santa Fe) were drawn up for a whole new facility which was to include shared space with a residential hospice. Hospice of the Rio Grande, a separate entity from the parish, was formed with a governing board, a secretary, and eventually a salaried director to get it off the ground. The secretary and director were given office space at St. Michael's during this initial phase of their attempts to get started.

After several years of home-grown fundraising efforts, it was determined in 1992 that there was inadequate support for a completely new facility, the property was sold, and the hospice ended its association with the parish. In 1993, St. Michael's purchased the .8 acre lot adjacent to the west of the original land, and in 1995 retained an architect and a professional fundraiser to help complete the funding. The building was constructed in '96-97, and we moved in on Palm Sunday 1997.

The Friday before this happy event, a final worship service was held in the old building. Parishioners stood up and told stories of the past, and at the end of the liturgy a procession lead members to the new building, as they carried the St. Michael statue, urns of departed parishioners for the new columbarium, photographs of all the previous Rectors and Vicar, and the altar stone from the old altar, to be placed in the new one.

St. Michael's new house of worship was designed by the architect Robert Habiger, who worked very closely with a building committee of laity and clergy, headed by Kay Bratton. The committee contributed significantly to the design, furnishings, and overall feeling of the new house of worship. One day as Fr. Taylor and Kay Bratton looked over the almost-completed new worship building, they remarked to one another with great emotion that "very few people get the incredible privilege of building, in their lifetime, a church for the generations to come" (*Fr. Brian Taylor, 2001*).

Steve Shelly designed the landscaping, which parishioners happily dug and planted in a series of parish work days. Parishioners gave the lovely rose bushes next to the front doors of the church in memory of loved ones or in thanksgiving for God's blessings.

The Rev. Samuel L. Hall, formerly rector of St. Mark's on the Mesa in Albuquerque (who served St. Michael's on the staff as a part-time assistant from 1988-1989) helped pastor and guide the congregation with great wisdom and care through this time of transition and building. On November 3, 1999, the last payment was made on the construction loan, after having raised nearly \$1million within the congregation over a 10-year period.

### **Growth and Change**

Accompanying the physical transition to a new building was a transition in the parish's sense of identity as well. As quoted in the preface of this booklet, Myndert Gilbert described the parish in 1991 as a "small parish where members know each other," and most of the members saw the congregation as that. But changes were already underfoot even as he spoke those words. The services were crowded with new people, and as talk turned serious about building a new house of worship to seat not just 150 like the old one, but 350, some members became understandably nervous. Would St. Michael's lose its original identity as a small, friendly rural North Valley country church? What kind of place was St. Michael's becoming, and what sort of place did it feel *called* to become?

A Transition Committee was formed and worked for three years with the Vestry, lay leaders, committees, and the parish at large to try to address these questions. Steve Wilkes, a member who was a highly-skilled professional group facilitator, gathered members for many all-parish meetings during this period. Over time, a consensus was reached (not without some struggle) that the congregation felt called to grow from not only one *size* parish to another, but from one *style* of parish to another.

Since its birth, St. Michael's had been the size and the kind of community where everyone knew one another and worked together on all the ministries, with the one clergy person at the center of it all. The new vision that began to take hold was a parish where a multiple and varied staff would work with a larger number of lay leaders to develop a greater diversity of ministries. The creative possibilities of this model appealed to most of the parishioners, and this gave an added impetus to the building project. Change became an intentional process.

Another factor in the growth and change at St. Michael's was a crisis involving the funding of the new house of worship. In the summer of 1996, after the congregation had committed a significant amount of money to the project and agreements with the construction company had been reached, the bishop and diocesan Investment Board decided to withdraw a low-interest loan commitment in the amount of \$330,000. They took this action because of a planned public liturgy at St. Michael's that would welcome and affirm gay and lesbian Christians. The congregation struggled with this new turn of events, decided to have the event anyway, and obtained a substitute bank loan. The effect of this very public crisis was a heightened visibility for the parish, newfound respect from some quarters, and increased attendance.

The building of the Montañño bridge over the Rio Grande to the west side of the city also had an enormous impact on the parish's size and visibility. As the city changed, so did St. Michael and All Angels. The bridge project had been talked about publicly since the 1950's, and when it started becoming a reality, a firestorm of controversy erupted in Albuquerque, especially in the North Valley, whose residents cherished its quiet, rural atmosphere.

The bridge was built and completed during the construction of St. Michael's new house of worship. So when the parish opened its new doors, thousands of city residents were also daily passing by what was now no longer a sleepy country church, but a large facility very visibly situated on one of the major arterials of the city. As a result, St. Michael's continued to grow and now drew from many quarters of the city beyond the North Valley, especially the west side.

The parish eventually changed from a small, pastor-driven rural North Valley congregation to a large, visible, more urban church with a more dispersed congregation, three full-time clergy and several lay staff members, many more lay leaders, a large budget, and greatly increased programs and activities.

Not all of the older parishioners were entirely happy with the change. Helene Mitchell (*January 1, 2001*) remembers with a special fondness the intimacy of the original altar rail, where members knelt together to receive the Eucharist. For Helene, it was the kneeling that brought a special closeness "when you could feel a person on either side of you."

What Marj Gilbert misses the most is "the old church" itself. "It's all in what you get used to", she said. Her husband Myndert's funeral was one of the last services in the old church so it holds tender memories. "It's all those wonderful times in the old church...so the new church doesn't appeal quite as much" (*Marj Gilbert Interview: 2001*).

One of the results of growth was the increased attention given to children and youth ministry. As the Transition Committee did its work, those involved with these ministries realized that with the growing number of young families, the parish would have to seriously pursue the change from a lay-lead, volunteer program to a staff-directed one. Eventually, in 1999, The Rev. Karlyn Shepherd, Deacon, was hired part-time to develop a stronger Family Ministry program, which in turn resulted in a significant increase in the

number of young families. In 2001, Karly's position moved to full-time as she added the duties of Director of the Contemplative Center to her responsibilities.

Another woman, The Rev. Sandra S. Bess, began on an interim, part-time basis in late 1998, but was called to a full-time, permanent position at the same time as Deacon Karlyn in the fall of 1999 to complete the clergy staff. Bess's full-time position as Associate Rector includes a full range of clergy duties, but is especially centered around pastoral care, outreach, and training for and administration of parish programs. Mother Sandra gives much-needed attention to these programs, such as a Pastoral Care Guild, to organize programmatically what could be done previously in more informal ways when the parish was smaller. Together with Deacon Karly, Sandra provides a strong female balance to an otherwise historically male clergy leadership of the parish.

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With the passing of time, changes have certainly occurred in the congregation of St. Michael and All Angels. The first few dozen families in this small rural parish worked with an annual budget of some \$1,400 and a lot of sweat labor. 50 years later a much more visible community of 450 households is supported by diverse clergy and lay leaders and an annual budget of around \$\_ million.

And yet the most essential character of St. Michael and All Angels remains intact. Seeds planted and nurtured long ago have in our day born fruit: a food pantry that serves 100 families per week, a strong and creative liturgy, the Family Ministry Program, the Pastoral Care Guild, All Angels Day School, the Contemplative Center, and a continuing emphasis on music and the arts. The parish welcomes all, encouraging diversity and individuality, and taking risks when necessary in order to provide a church home to each and every faith seeker. Blessings upon blessings continually flow in this place.

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The Collect for a Parish:

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## **Clergy Leadership**

### **The Rt. Rev. James M. Stoney, Jr., Bishop of the Missionary District of New Mexico and Southwest Texas (1942-1956)**

Bishop Stoney fathered the mission and gave St. Michael's its name.

### **The Rev. Paul Saunders, Vicar (1952-56)**

Paul Saunders set the tone for St. Michael's and helped to develop a flourishing church community.

### **The Rt. Rev. James Kinsolving III, Bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande (1953-1972)**

### **The Rev. Almon Babbitt, Rector (1956-57)**

The Reverend Almon Babbitt followed Fr. Paul Saunders as Parish Rector.

### **The Rev. Kenneth Shook, Rector (1958-66)**

Fr. Kenneth Shook replaced Fr. Babbitt. Helene Mitchell, who joined St. Michael's in 1963 and became the first woman acolyte and first female chalice bearer in the parish, remembers each of the priests who served from the time she joined. "Fr. Shook was a very simple person, like a parson in a rural English church", Helene stated. During his tenure, the church followed the low worship ritual and Fr. Shook never wore the vestments we are familiar with today, but always dressed simply in cassock and surplice. During this time (until 1966) the Eucharist was alternated with Morning Prayer on Sundays (*Helene Mitchell Interview, 2001*).

### **The Rev. Clinton Smith, Rector (1967-71)**

Following Fr. Shook's death from cancer, Fr. Clinton Smith, a retired Colonel and Navy Chaplain became the Rector of St. Michael's. Fr. Smith had been serving at the Cathedral prior to coming to St. Michael's and he initiated a more high style of ritual at Sunday service (*H. Mitchell, 2001*).

### **The Rev. Peter Moore, Rector (1971-82)**

Fr. Peter Moore maintained high church liturgical practices. During the time Fr. Moore was serving as Pastor, Paul Saunders returned to the parish to serve as an associate priest. Paul had left the priesthood for a period of time and was reinstated in the 1970's (*H. Mitchell, 2001*).

### **The Rt. Rev. Richard M. Trelease, Bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande (1971-1989)**

### **The Rev. Brian Taylor, Rector (1983 - )**

Helene Mitchell recalls very clearly when Brian Taylor came to St. Michael's following the departure of Fr. Moore to Seattle. He had been serving on the staff of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. Marj Gilbert was on the search committee and remembers Brian as a people person, with a history of service to street people

and ministry in a hospital setting. She stated that “Brian and his family have always set such a good example. He is a real human being. He is compassionate and accepts life for what it is” (*Marj Gilbert Interview, 2001*).

“I’ll never forget Brian’s first sermon”, Helene Mitchell stated. “He looked like a teenager up there in the pulpit. But I was impressed.” When she had to retire from her acolyte position due to deteriorating health, Brian presented Helene with a Mexican Crucifix that she treasures. “The more I know of Brian”, she stated, “the more I love him dearly. He really made a difference in my life” (*H. Mitchell, 2001*).

### **The Rt. Rev. Terence Kelshaw, Bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande (1989-)**

#### **Assisting, Retired and Interim Clergy**

Assisting Fr. Moore at different times: The Rev’ds Jeffrey Sells, James Adams, and Paul Saunders. Also The Rev. Leonard Lewis, Deacon.

Interim Rector between Moore and Taylor: The Rev. James P. Morgan.

Assisting Fr. Taylor at different times: The Rev’ds Paul Saunders, Samuel L. Hall, William K. Woodard, Kenneth Clark, Charles Pedersen, and Sandra S. Bess. Also the Rev’ds Leonard Lewis, Alys Lisle, Gordon Macaulay and Karlyn Shepherd, all Deacons.

#### **Members who were nurtured towards Ordination**

Marshall Lamer

Charles Olson

Charles Dawson

Alan Jenks

George Udell

Steven Plummer (now bishop of Navajoland)

Marion Canterbury

Jeffrey Sells

Leonard Lewis

James Adams

Gloria Rehberg

Margaret Sterchi

Bob Counselman

Andrew Green

Alys Lisle

Julie Graham

William Woodard

Susan Esco

Susan Allison-Hatch

#### **Organists/Choir Directors/Music Directors**

Ann Dietz

Don Johnstone

Jim Bonnell  
 Greg Wilcoxson  
 Robert Counselman  
 Joyce Talmadge  
 Jim Bratcher  
 Robert Brown  
 Eleanor Brown  
 Debbie Mikulich  
 Kay McAbee  
 Wes Selby  
 Jim Bratcher

**Choir Directors**

Marion Canterbury Milner  
 George Myers  
 Oleta Saunders  
 David McGuire

**Early Member List (1950-51)**

Mr. & Mrs. W. C. Anderson	Mr. & Mrs Marshall Lamer
Dr. & Mrs. Stuart Andrews	Mr. & Mrs. David Lewis
Mr. & Mrs. Robeson Barker	Mr. & Mrs. E. E. Lewis
Eugene and Elizabeth Bennett	Mrs. Hazel Lewis
Mrs. Betty Borrell	Mr. & Mrs. Robert Lewis Mr. and Mrs. Chuck Littrell
Mr. & Mrs. Harrison Burrell	Mr. & Mrs. Grant McGregor
Mrs. Christine Bush	Mr. & Mrs. Roy Mitchell
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dedak	Mrs. Thomas Payne
Robert & Ann Dietz	Ronald & Peggy Pollard
Mr. & Mrs. Earl Fluke	Monte May Riley
Myndert and Marjorie Gilbert	Mrs. J. Robards
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Harding	Wayne and Jeanine Scott
Sam and Louise Hartnett	Mr. & Mrs. John Simms
Joe and Meme Henry	Mr. & Mrs. Harold Skogen
Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Horton	Mrs. Frances Smith
Mr. & Mrs. Max Howard	Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Sousea
Mr & Mrs. William Howden	Mrs. Betty Steele
Wesley and Amy Hurt	Mr. & Mrs. Max Stuart
Mildred Jenks	Mrs. Jean Talbot
Madelynne Kelley	John and Mary Tillitson
Robert and Laura King	Mr. & Mrs. Will Van Landingham
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Koch	Bill and Juanita Wagoner
Mrs. Emma Kreuger	Jane Woodard