

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

A Short History

On November 30, 1902, St. Luke's Church was consecrated by the Rt. Rev. George Franklin Seymour (I Bishop of Springfield), who memorialized his action using these words:

And we do hereby pronounce and decree that the said St. Luke's Church in the City of Springfield is consecrated accordingly and thereby Separated henceforth from all unhallowed, worldly, and common uses, and dedicated to the worship and services of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost for reading and preaching His Holy Word, for celebrating His Holy Sacraments, for offering to his Glorious Majesty the sacrifices of prayer, praise, and Thanksgiving, for blessing His people in His Holy Name, and for performance of all other Holy Offices, agreeable to the terms of the Covenant of Grace and Salvation in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Inscribed in a document on the wall of St. Luke's parish hall, these words describe the continuing mission of St. Luke's.

Only six years after the consecration of the church building, the Rt. Rev. Edward William Osborne (II Bishop of Springfield) would wed together two separate church identities for all time. The first identity, known as St. Augustine's, was that of an African-American congregation, admitted as a mission in 1891, that could trace its roots in Springfield to 1876, just a little over a decade after the end of the Civil War. The second was that of a mission from St. Paul's Church (now the Cathedral) that was established near the old eastern coal shaft, which had been admitted as a mission in 1890.

St. Augustine's History

Shortly after the Civil War, the Diocese of Springfield began work among former slaves, now settled as free men and women in Central Illinois.

The first congregation was established in 1876 as Lincoln Memorial Chapel. Meeting at 412 South Second Street, Lincoln Memorial Chapel was one of five missions attached to St. Paul's Church and was placed under the charge of the Rev. A. J. Reed. Although it initially showed signs of promise, the life of the Chapel was short.

Bishop Seymour, consecrated in 1878, worked hard during his episcopate to start a

mission serving the African-American citizens of the Diocese. He first focused his attention toward Cairo, at the southernmost tip of the Diocese, because it had a large population of former slaves who had fled persecution in the South. St. Michael's Mission in Cairo lasted a number of years but ultimately was disbanded. Bishop Seymour attempted to attract African-American clergy to the Diocese, but they seldom lasted more than a year due to the hostile climate. Bishop Osborne continued the effort when he succeeded Bishop Seymour in 1906.

St. Augustine's (named for Augustine of Hippo, in North Africa) was admitted as a mission in union with the Synod of the Diocese of Springfield in 1891. Involved in the early years were a number of prominent African-American families, led by Augustus Harmon, who had come to Springfield from Cairo. The group sought assistance from Bishop Osborne (who was then Bishop Co-adjutor) in 1905. In 1907, the Rev. Henry B. Jefferson, who was in charge of the mission in Petersburg, was given charge of St. Augustine's. The Rev. Francis Joseph, who was serving at St. Luke's, was assigned to work with the St. Augustine's in early 1908. By February of that year St. Augustine's had grown to a sizable number.

On Whitsunday, 1908, Bishop Osborne ordained the Rev. Charles E. F. Boisson, of Haiti, in a service held at St. Luke's Church. Fr. Boisson, who was the first African-American ordained in the Diocese of Springfield, was placed in charge of St. Augustine's. This was shortly before the race riot, which occurred in August of 1908. This event was so disturbing to Fr. Boisson that he quickly left Springfield. Bishop Osborne noted that Fr. Boisson left "before his papers of transfer had arrived from Haiti." (He was apparently ordained in Springfield for the Bishop of Haiti.) During this period, St. Augustine's congregation was meeting in a house on South Grand Avenue, with occasional services for the congregation being held at St. Luke's.

St. Luke's as a mission of St. Paul's

The congregation of St. Luke's Mission had met in various places in the city following its admission in 1890. At the turn of the century, Mrs. Cassandra M. Hickox donated property at the corner of 11th and South Grand in memory of her husband, Volney Hickox. A portion of the property was sold, and the proceeds were used to begin the erection of a church building in August of 1900. St. Luke's Church was opened for services in January of 1901, and consecrated on St. Andrew's Day in 1902. The early congregation dwindled and, by 1907, the Church was seldom used for services and the mission was disbanded.

The New St. Luke's

By the end of 1908, Bishop Osborne decided to make the building formerly occupied by St. Luke's Mission available to the congregation of St. Augustine's on the condition that St. Augustine's take the name of the former mission. Thus, the African-American congregation changed its dedication from St. Augustine of Hippo to St. Luke the Evangelist. On December 27, 1908, Bishop Osborne celebrated the first service for the new St. Luke's Mission.

Bishop Osborne was born in India and had done missionary work in Africa. He was dedicated to the alleviation of racial conflicts that were the legacy of slavery. He chaired a committee which, in 1913, established a trade school known as The Lincoln Industrial and Normal School for Colored Young Men and Women. The school originally was located in a building located at 12th and Cass, which was given to the committee by Bishop Osborne, and later moved to better quarters at 15th and Washington. The Bishop and committee were met with opposition from white neighbors who petitioned them to abandon the school idea, but they persisted in their efforts.

The Board of Control of the school was able to hire George Moreland, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, as principal. Mr. Moreland was highly recommended by Dr. Booker T. Washington, who had visited Springfield earlier in the year and had met with Bishop Osborne about the school.

On Monday in Easter Week, 1909, Bishop Osborne ordained Angus E. Ferguson as a deacon. Mr. Ferguson was shortly joined by the Rev. Robert Lee Wilson who was called from Cairo to be the first Vicar of the new St. Luke's Mission. Fr. Wilson began his ministry on August 4, 1909, and continued to serve the congregation until his death on May 1, 1914. Egbert A. Craig, a native of British Guiana, who was a lay reader and candidate for Holy Orders, worked with the congregation until 1916, when he left for seminary training in New York. The Rev. John Simons, a native of Jamaica, and the Rev. George Brown served St. Luke's for a year. Fr. Simons went on to a long tenure at St. Thomas's Church in Chicago.

Fr. Craig, returning from New York, was priested on the Eve of St. Luke's Day (October 17), 1917. He was in charge of St. Luke's from St. Luke's Day, 1917, until 1919.

In 1922, the Rev. Daniel Ernest Johnson, Sr., D.D., was called from Cairo to serve as Vicar of St. Luke's. The mission enjoyed great growth under his leadership. On April 28, 1928, Fr. Johnson, Sr., accepted a call to serve at St. Mary's Church, Hot Springs,

Arkansas. He was succeeded by his son, the Rev. Daniel Ernest Johnson, Jr., who brought many gifts, especially in the area of music, to St. Luke's and to the Springfield community. After more than twelve years of service, Fr. Johnson, Jr., accepted a call to serve a church in Texas on December 31, 1939.

St. Luke's was then placed under the Archdeacon, the Ven. William Reuben Thomas. During this period the rectory, located to the west of the church was sold to liquidate debts that had accumulated during the Great Depression.

In 1942, shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, the Rev. Norval Wilson Holland was appointed Vicar by The Rt. Rev. John Chanler White (IV Bishop of Springfield). Bishop White had been in charge of the original St. Luke's Mission in the 1890's, when he was the Archdeacon of Springfield. He also frequently officiated at services at St. Luke's during his episcopate when there was no regularly assigned clergyman in charge.

In 1946, the Rev. Gregory Arthur Rowley, who had served at Emmanuel Memorial, Champaign, was called as Vicar. Fr. Rowley discovered that the earlier records of the mission were missing, and set about reconstructing the records with information obtained from the members. The present records date from the beginning of his ministry at St. Luke's.

The Very Rev. David K. Montgomery, Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, did considerable work at St. Luke's beginning in 1946. With assistance from his curates, Fr. Montgomery tracked down persons with a connection to the Episcopal Church and invited them to St. Luke's, did additional work in evangelism to bring in new members and established regular services at St. Luke's. By 1952, St. Luke's achieved parish status, and called the Rev. Richard Babcock Adams, one of Fr. Montgomery's curates to serve as its first Rector. On February 6, 1955, the Rev. Victor E. Holly arrived to serve as Rector. Fr. Holly was the grandson of the Rt. Rev. James Theodore Holly, the first Bishop of Haiti. Bishop Holly was among the first Anglican Bishops of African descent. Shortly after Fr. Holly arrived, a new Rectory, located on 16th Street, was purchased by the parish.

St. Luke's had difficulty maintaining parish status and again became a mission after Fr. Holly's departure. The Rev. Thomas Gibson came as Vicar in 1960, serving until 1963. Fr. Gibson was the last African-American priest to serve at St. Luke's. He was succeeded by the Rev. William E. Krueger, who was Vicar until his retirement in 1985.

By the early 1980's, St. Luke's was experiencing difficulty with declining attendance and insufficient financial resources. Following the retirement of Fr. Krueger, direct diocesan financial assistance was suspended. the Rt. Rev. Donald M. Hultstrand (IX Bishop of Springfield) assigned the Rev. Gary Patience, Diocesan Mission Consultant, to review the situation at St. Luke's and determine the viability of the congregation. With new leadership and renewed dedication, the congregation began a period of increased activity.

By 1987, it was clear that the congregation was viable and that strides were being made in its renewal. Bishop Hultstrand appointed the Rev. James Brooks-McDonald, who was also Curate at St. John's, Decatur, to serve as Vicar. Fr. Brooks-McDonald served on a 3/5 time basis, with St. Luke's bearing that portion of the cost of his support without diocesan assistance. Fr. Brooks-McDonald resigned in 1988 to accept a call to a parish in the Diocese of Albany. Following his departure, supply clergy, principally the Rev. Myron J. Manasterski, provided services until the calling of the Rev. Gary Patience as Vicar in 1991. Fr. Patience was employed on a full-time basis at the suggestion of Bishop Hultstrand, with diocesan assistance being provided. Fr. Patience left in early 1993 to accept a call to serve two churches in Western Louisiana.

Shawn Denney, who had served as Bishop's Warden since 1986 and was a licensed lay reader, was raised up by the mission for ordination for St. Luke's under Canon 9 of the Canons of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. He began working toward ordination in 1992, and functioned, in his role as Bishop's Warden, as the administrator of the mission following the departure of Fr. Patience. From 1993 until 1997, St. Luke's was served by supply clergy with Mr. Denney covering services as necessary as a Lay Reader. Supply was provided principally by the Rev. Eugene Stormer, but the Rev. Canon William Turner, the Rev. Mark Jurgensen, the Rev. Gerald Rehagen, Deacon Thomas Langford and the Rt. Rev. Stephen Kewasis Nyorsok, Bishop of Eldoret (now Kitale by translation) in Kenya, also provided significant assistance.

On June 1, 1997, Mr. Denney was ordained Deacon by the Rt. Rev. Peter H. Beckwith (X Bishop of Springfield) at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul and appointed to serve as Deacon-in-Charge of St. Luke's. Deacon Denney was priested on May 26, 1998, the Feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury, at St. Luke's. This was only the second ordination held at St. Luke's and the first in nearly eighty years. Fr. Denney was appointed Priest-in-Charge on his ordination to the priesthood and was appointed Vicar on January 1, 1999. Since 2003, Fr. Denney has also served as the Archdeacon of the Diocese of Springfield.

A full schedule of services is maintained, with regular celebrations of the Holy Eucharist on Saturdays, Sundays, Wednesdays and Holy Days. An active Church School has been established for many years with nearly 50 different children involved.

In the summer of 2003, St. Luke's began hosting a Vacation Bible School. In the intervening years, the program has expanded, with 78 different children participating in 2008. Out of this program, with the attraction of many more children to the congregation, the Church School has expanded and a program to provide a hot meal to those who attend has been established.

Attendance at St. Luke's has grown. Where fifteen to twenty was the norm for a Sunday in 1986, the average attendance on a weekend grew from the low 30's in the early 1990's to 39 in 1997 and 50 in 1998. Average attendance in 2008 was nearly 70. St. Luke's is an ethnically and economically diverse congregation, with a wide age range in its membership.

As part of a comprehensive plan developed in the late 1980's, the church proper has been extensively renovated. Pews have been replaced with moveable seating to allow the nave of the church to be used as a multi-purpose area. New carpeting was been installed and needlepoint cushions were added. In 1997, the old parish hall was renovated to provide for a new kitchen area, accessible rest rooms and a sacristy. Early in 1998, a new heating and air-conditioning system was installed. In late 1998 and early 1999, St. Luke's purchased two houses located on Loveland Avenue behind the church. One house was named Ivy House in memory of long time member Jeannette Ivy, and the other house was torn down with the lot being made suitable for parking. The Ivy House has been converted to Church School, office and meeting space.

During 2005-2006, St. Luke's engaged in a process of appreciative inquiry. The Vision Committee, responsible for coordinating this effort, sought input from all members of the Congregation as part of a process of seeing God's vision for our ministry and for possible expansion of our work. Out of that process a Building Committee has emerged to investigate expansion of facilities to house our expanding ministries.

St. Luke's continues to be involved in the community, supporting ministries to feed the hungry and work with young people. The reputation of St. Luke's as a center for music education, extending to the incumbency of Fr. Johnson, Jr., has been revived, with opportunities being provided under the auspices of the church for young people to develop musical skills.

The congregation experiences the joy of worshiping in a beautiful but simple building, hallowed by the prayers of generations of faithful church people. Their sacrifices, their faith and their stories are held in the hearts of their families and are recorded in the Book of Life as the real story of St. Luke's. The English cottage Gothic style church, virtually unchanged in nearly a century since its construction and the warmth of the people who worship there, never fail to touch those who visit St. Luke's.

This history was initially written by the Rev. Eugene Stormer. It was revised and updated in 1999 and 2009 by the Ven. Shawn W. Denney.