

OUR PAST

IN 1940 THE RT. REV. ARTHUR P. MCKINSTRY, 5TH EPISCOPAL BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF DELAWARE, SAW THE NEED FOR A SUMMER CHAPEL TO MINISTER TO THE NEEDS OF VACATIONING EPISCOPALIANS AND THEIR FRIENDS. UNDER BISHOP MCKINSTRY'S GUIDANCE, SIX LOTS WERE PURCHASED ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF BETHANY BEACH. A NOTED DELAWARE ARCHITECT, WILLIAM H. THOMPSON, WAS ENGAGED TO DRAW PLANS FOR A SMALL CHAPEL WITH ATTACHED LIVING QUARTERS. HIS ORIGINAL DRAWINGS FOR ST. MARTIN'S CHAPEL, AS IT WAS FIRST NAMED, CALLED FOR A LARGER CHURCH AND FACILITIES WHICH COULD BE ADDED LATER. THE REV. NELSON W. RIGHTMYER OF LEWES AND REHOBOTH WAS GIVEN THE CLERICAL OVERSIGHT MAINTAINING THE NEW CHAPEL. SERVICES WERE HELD DURING THE SUMMER ONLY, AND CLERGY WERE SENT DOWN FROM WILMINGTON BY THE BISHOP. AMONG THEM WAS JOHN E. HINES OF TEXAS, LATER A PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE CHURCH.

IN THE EARLY 1950'S THE REV. RICHARD S. BAILEY, THE NEW RECTOR OF ALL SAINTS', REHOBOTH WAS ASKED TO TAKE GENERAL CHARGE OF THE CHAPEL. HE ORGANIZED AN ALTAR GUILD AND TRAINED THEM IN ARRANGING FLOWERS AND IN PREPARING THE ALTAR. TRACY STOKES ALLMA OF REHOBOTH, A DESIGNER, WAS CALLED IN TO HELP BEAUTIFY THE CHAPEL'S INTERIOR. THE SHELL FONT AND BAPTISTERY WERE ADDED. FR. BAILEY HAD THE ASSISTANCE OF CAPT. AND MRS. JAMES RUTTER, WHO YEAR-ROUND RESIDENTS, HELPED IN THE PHYSICAL MAINTENANCE OF THE CHAPEL. CAPT. RUTTER ALSO HANDLED THE MONEY AND SENT THE ACCOUNTS TO THE DIOCESAN TREASURER IN WILMINGTON AFTER EACH SEASON.

AT THIS TIME, A SMALL MISSION WAS STARTED IN SELBYVILLE, DELAWARE. AS IT STARTED TO GROW IT RECEIVED BISHOP MCKINSTRY'S BACKING AND THE NEW CHURCH WAS BUILT, NAMED ST. MARTIN'S. SO FOR SEVERAL YEARS THERE WERE TWO ST. MARTIN'S IN CLOSE PROXIMITY. TO ELIMINATE CONFUSION, BISHOP MOSLEY CHANGED THE NAME OF ST. MARTIN'S CHAPEL TO ST. MARTHA'S CHAPEL. BY THE LATE 1960'S THE BEACH COMMUNITY WAS GROWING AND WITH THIS GROWTH CAME STRONG DEMANDS FROM LOCAL EPISCOPALIANS FOR YEAR ROUND SERVICES. IN RESPONSE FR. BAILEY ADDED A 9:30AM SERVICE FOR A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE SUMMER CLERGY ARRIVED AND ONE IN THE FALL AFTER SUMMER PEOPLE LEFT.

THE PRESSURE FOR YEAR-ROUND SERVICES CONTINUED UNABATED. HAPPILY FOR ALL, AN EVENT TOOK PLACE IN 1975 WHICH MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE LITTLE SUMMER CHAPEL TO HAVE A RESIDENT WINTER PASTOR. THE REV. NATHANIAL C. ACTON HAD RETIRED AS RECTOR OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, OVERBROOK, PA AND HAD BECOME A FULL-TIME RESIDENT OF BETHANY. THE STAGE WAS SET FOR THE BEGINNING OF YEAR-ROUND SERVICES IN OCTOBER, 1979. NAT ACTON HELPED GUIDE ST. MARTHA'S FROM 1975 TO A FEW MONTHS BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1989. THE CHURCH BEGAN TO FLOURISH AND

GROW AS NEVER BEFORE. SINCE PALM SUNDAY, 1980, ST. MARTHA'S HAD NOT MISSED HAVING A SUNDAY SERVICE.

IN THE EARLY 1980'S SERVICES WERE HELD ONE WINTER IN THE BETHANY BEACH FIREHALL WHILE THE CHURCH AND VICARAGE WERE BEING HEATED AND AIR-CONDITIONED. IN 1983 A NEW ORGAN WAS BOUGHT AND IN 1984 ST. MARTHA'S BECAME A MISSION OF THE DIOCESE OF DELAWARE WITH 61 COMMUNICANTS ON ITS ROLLS.

IN 1984 ANOTHER RETIRED PRIEST, THE REV. JACK F. HIRD FROM THE DIOCESE OF MARYLAND, CAME TO BETHANY BEACH AND JOINED FR. ACTON AS A CO-WINTER PASTOR. THANKS TO FR. HIRD, ST. MARTHA'S ECUMENICAL AWARENESS IN SOUTHEASTERN SUSSEX COUNTY WAS GREATLY EXPANDED. MEMBERS OF ST. MARTHA'S PARTICIPATED IN COMMUNITY SERVICES AT THANKSGIVING, LENT AND EASTER. THE CHURCH'S OUTREACH ALSO INCLUDES PREPARING GIFTS FOR PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES AT CHRISTMAS, VISITING A LOCAL NURSING HOME AND PROVIDING FOODSTUFFS FOR THE PYLE CENTER AND CASA SAN FRANCISCO. VARIOUS ACTIVITIES AND CHURCH GROUPS INVOLVED MORE AND MORE MEMBERS OF ST. MARTHA'S. FOREMOST WAS THE MISSION COMMITTEE GROUP OF ELECTED LAY-PEOPLE CHOSEN TO HELP THE VICAR IN RUNNING THE CHURCH. FIRST APPOINTED VICAR'S WARDEN WAS ROBERT MAXWELL.

BY 1990 MORE SPACE WAS NEEDED FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. ST. MARTHA'S UNDERTOOK ITS FIRST BUILDING EXPANSION SINCE ITS BIRTH 50 YEARS AGO. A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TITLED "SPACE VISION" WAS FORMED TO TAKE SERIOUS STEPS IN SPACE PLANNING. IT WAS AGREED THERE WAS AN IMMEDIATE NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT TO DO WITH THE SPACE IN THE EXISTING FACILITIES AND ON THE PROPERTY; ALSO, HOW THE COMPLEX SHOULD BE EXPANDED TO MEET PRESENT NEEDS AND ANTICIPATED GROWTH. MANY MEMBERS OF THE PARISH DEVOTED HOURS OF WORK AND THOUGHT ON HOW THE CHURCH COULD EXPAND. THE RESULT WAS PHASE 1, WHICH WAS CELEBRATED BY GROUND BREAKING ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND, AUGUST 3, 1990. IT WAS A GREAT WEEKEND, LED IN SPIRIT BY THE RT. REV. ARTHUR MCKINSTRY WHO BUILT THE ORIGINAL BUILDINGS FIFTY YEARS BEFORE AND WHO AT THE AGE OF NINETY-SIX INSISTED ON CONTRIBUTING A GENEROUS GIFT TOWARD THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW BUILDING. UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MISSION COMMITTEE, A FUND DRIVE OF \$30,000 TOWARD THE TOTAL COST OF \$85,000 WAS UNDERTAKEN. THE NEW WING OF POST AND BEAM CONSTRUCTION ON THE PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE SIDE OF THE CHURCH WAS BASICALLY A LARGE ROOM THAT HOUSED A KITCHEN AND SACRISTY - BUT DID DOUBLE-DUTY DURING SUNDAY SERVICES.

IN 1995 PLANS WERE DEVELOPED TO FURTHER EXPAND THE CHURCH BUILDING. THE PLANS CALLED FOR REORIENTING THE EXISTING SPACE INTO CRUCIFORM SHAPE WITH THE ALTAR RELOCATED TO THE "CROSSING" IN THE CENTER OF THE OLD CHAPEL. THE MAIN SEATING AREA WOULD BE IN THE CHAPEL ANNEX WITH ALL ITS PARTITIONS REMOVED. THE "TOP" OF THE CROSS WOULD BE OPENED OUT OF SPACE IN THE VICARAGE. THE CHOIR WAS SEATED IN THIS AREA WITH ADDITIONAL SEATING FOR THE CONGREGATION ON EITHER END OF THE ORIGINAL CHAPEL.

GROUND WAS BROKEN ON AUGUST 15, 1996 FOR THE ADDITIONS AND RECONFIGURATION OF THE CHURCH. BY THE END OF OCTOBER SOME OF THE OLD PINES WERE CUT DOWN AND PARTS OF THE BUILDING WERE TORN OUT TO MAKE WAY FOR THE NEW. DURING THE YEAR, ST. MARTHA'S WAS SERVED BY PASTORAL TEAM CONSISTING OF FOUR PRIESTS, THE REV. SIMON MEIN SERVED AS THE PRINCIPAL PASTOR, INVOLVING HIMSELF IN THE LITURGICAL AND PASTORAL NEEDS OF THE CHURCH. HE WAS ASSISTED BY THE REV. JIM LEWIS, THE REV. JACK HIRD, AND THE REV. ALBERT PETERS. JIM LEWIS AWAKENED OUR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PROVIDED ST. MARTHA'S WITH NEW WAYS TO REACH OUT AND SHARE WITH LESS FORTUNATE GROUPS IN SOUTHEASTERN SUSSEX COUNTY.

IN THE LAST 1990'S, THE CLERGY TEAM WAS NO LONGER MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION. THE PEOPLE NEEDED A SHEPHERD, SOMEONE TO PROVIDE THE CONTINUITY AND HELP ST. MARTHA'S MOVE TOWARD PARISH STATUS. A PART-TIME PRIEST WAS CALLED AND, WITH THE HELP FROM THE DIOCESE, ST. MARTHA'S ASSUMED FULL FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRIEST'S COMPENSATION GRADUALLY OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS. THE PART-TIME PRIEST RESIGNED IN THE LATE SPRING OF 2002.

ST. MARTHA'S WELCOMED THE REV. ANNE MONAHAN AS INTERIM VICAR IN 2002. SHE HELPED THE CONGREGATION GRAPPLE WITH MANY CHALLENGING DECISIONS. IN PREPARATION FOR CALLING A RECTOR, A SEARCH COMMITTEE AND TRANSITION TEAM WERE FORMED. A PARISH SURVEY WAS COMPLETED IN JANUARY 2003 FOLLOWED BY THE PREPARATION OF A PARISH PROFILE.

IN 2004 ST. MARTHA'S CALLED WILLIAM HUNT WICKHAM AS THEIR FIRST RECTOR. HE WAS INSTALLED BY BISHOP WAYNE P. WRIGHT IN AUGUST 2004.

ST. MARTHA'S ACHIEVED PARISH STATUS AT THE DIOCESAN CONVENTION 2005.