

Changing and Remaining

A History of All Saints' Church San Diego

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Chapter 16

Arriving at the Future

The drama of 1999-2002 emphasized the changes that had taken place in the All Saints' community since the days of Father Satrang.

For one thing, the community wasn't as large as people had thought. The parish's annual report to the diocese for 2001 revealed that it had only 195 members in good standing, down from 644, as estimated in the year before. (Some vestry members had speculated that there were 250; others realized that they had no idea.¹) That was a shock--but the change in numbers should not be misinterpreted. It hadn't happened because hundreds of people had suddenly left the parish; it happened because the rolls had finally been purged of people who had drifted away over the course of many years but whose absence had not been recorded or (perhaps) noticed. The phenomenon was probably similar to the one that was finally noticed by the rector and congregation in the early 1930s.

According to the parish records for 1991--to cite a typical year--there had been 19 baptisms and four confirmations in that year; seven people had transferred in from other Episcopal churches, 18 had transferred out, one had been identified as inactive, and five had died. These were extraordinarily small numbers for a parish that said it had started the year with 783 communicants. Any community would count itself fortunate if fewer than 1 % of its members died in a given year. Any urban church, such as All Saints', particularly a church with a good representation of very mobile military families, would count itself equally fortunate if fewer than 3 % of its members stopped attending in a given year. Clearly, no one was keeping track of the many people who had silently left, as people very often do from churches. Allegedly, just one person did that in 1991. From 1992 through 2000, nobody did, so far as the official reports were concerned. Apparently little effort was made to contact the disappearing members.²

A more realistic, though still an overstated, idea of membership is offered by an estimate unearthed from the parish data base (mid-2001): “235 active members; 209 in good standing.” A second way of looking at the size of the congregation is to consider attendance at scheduled services. It was 28,788 in 1986, Father McClaskey’s first full year as rector; 23,532 in 1991; 17,878 in 1996; and 14,160 in 2001. A third way of picturing the congregation is by considering pledges of financial support. For 1986, there were 305 pledges; for 1991, there were 247; for 1996, there were 143. In 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the controversy over Father McClaskey, the number had fallen to 99 (for 2002). Yet the proportion of communicants who pledged financial support had risen steeply. In 1986, soon after Father Satrang’s retirement, it had been 37%; and by 1991 it had sunk to 31%. But pledges for 2002 stood at 51%.³ Comparing the distribution of pledges for 1991 and 2002, one sees a reduction in the proportion of small pledges and an increase in the proportion of large ones, although “large” for All Saints’ still means “large” in middle class or working class terms.⁴ The community was smaller in population but larger in individual commitment.

In early 2002, Bishop Hughes appointed Father Douglas Woodridge as interim rector of All Saints’. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Woodridge had served as curate under Father Satrang; it was he who had blessed the baby elephant. He had then become the rector of St. Michael’s, Carlsbad. He had retired and moved to Oregon, but he was willing to come back to help All Saints’. An apartment was rented for him *in the neighborhood*. His mission was to help the congregation heal its wounds and “look to the future.” Woodridge served until Thanksgiving, 2002, when he returned to Oregon, after which several local priests provided ministry. The vestry told Woodridge that its own most important concerns were “healing,” “reconciliation,” “more communication” within the congregation, and “outreach to the surrounding community.” He advised vestry members to lead by example, “communicate with people” themselves, and “spend some time each day with God.”⁵

In 2002, Sunday attendance stayed up, and offerings were recovering nicely, but All Saints’ remained in a state of financial “austerity.”⁶ And it still had to find a permanent rector. During the past five decades, it had not been required to go through this process. In 1951, it had accepted, by acclamation, the services of young Father Satrang, who had shown up on its doorstep with little to recommend him, at the time, except his Anglo-Catholicism. In 1985, it had accepted, by acclamation, Father McClaskey, impressed by Satrang’s endorsement of his protege. Now it had

to deal with the complicated and interesting and ultimately educational process of a modern church “calling.”

Expertly assisted by Deacon Jenny Vervynck, a canon of the diocese, the parish performed a self-study and self-description that could be read by candidates for the job. According to the documents, the parish wanted to maintain its practice of “classical Christian spirituality,” while committing itself to reaching out to its neighborhood and becoming more of a “cross section of the community.”⁷

Even before Father McClaskey officially left the parish, the vestry had been trying to bring All Saints’ closer to Hillcrest and the adjacent neighborhoods, sending out special Easter invitations to all people with 92103 zipcodes.⁸ Now, outreach and evangelism committees designed advertisements to be inserted in the local papers, and a door-to-door canvass of the neighborhood to let people know about All Saints’. The parish began an annual custom of participating in the neighborhood’s City Fest event on Fifth Avenue. The committees’ target audiences included the gay community, single parents, and singles in general (“feed them and they will come”). The parish newsletter summarized the idea as “carrying out God’s command to connect the Holy Truth of God found at All Saints’ with the diverse communities under All Saints’ geographical and social influence.”⁹

The vestry had a new interpretation of “faith financing”: “We do believe in Faith Financing but the Finance Committee would have a lot more faith if the budget was at least a balanced one.” Yet the vestry wasn’t stingy: it interested itself very actively in maintaining the church’s property for succeeding generations, expending, for example, \$42,000 on a major repainting of the church and parish hall.¹⁰ The financial responsibilities of All Saints’ were eased when its mission of Christ the King became at last an independent parish, having achieved financial self-sufficiency in 2001. All Saints’ vestry gladly voted to transfer its property at 1460 Midway Drive, Alpine, to Christ the King.¹¹ All Saints’ began 2003 with 160 members in good standing, pledges that were higher than anticipated, and Sunday attendance still “holding steady.”¹²

After evaluating at least 16 candidates for the rectorship, the calling committee decided on Father Anthony Noble, an Australian Anglo-Catholic. Father Noble agreed to come, after experiencing three “signs” that he should accept the unexpected challenge in America.¹³ (On one occasion, when a person making an

announcement to the congregation used the expression "good luck," Father Noble made a counter-announcement: "We're Christians; we don't believe in *luck*." He began work at All Saints' on October 1, 2003.

Tony Noble was born in Salisbury, South Australia, in 1947. He was trained as an accountant and followed that profession both in Australia and, for a year during the mid-1970s, in England. He then (1976-1978) attended seminary at St. Barnabas Theological College in Adelaide, South Australia, and was ordained deacon (1979) and priest (1980). He worked in several parishes in the diocese of Adelaide, then became vicar of St. Mark's, Fitzroy, in the diocese of Melbourne (1985-2003)--an older, inner-city church. The ministry of St. Mark's included a center for the unemployed and street people, and under his leadership developed Australia's first parish ministry for people with AIDS (1986). He successfully completed a comprehensive restoration of the historic church building.¹⁴ St. Mark's was a smaller parish than All Saints', but under his leadership it did great things. Father Noble promised the congregation of All Saints', "As your priest I will be accessible--and hopefully one that you can easily relate to. We Aussies are casual and outgoing. You will already notice that I like to be called Father Tony--but I won't say *G'day*, even if you want me to!"¹⁵

"Father Tony" immediately became known as an outgoing, enthusiastic, and efficient manager and priest. Efficient management doesn't always correlate with enthusiasm, but in this case it did. To visitors from the neighborhood, with which he was immediately on congenial terms, he advertised the church not only as a defender of tradition but also as the place "where we have more fun than the other churches do." His Australian brashness seldom concealed itself, but that was part of the fun. Visiting England, he located a nineteenth-century brass tabernacle (the object on the altar in which the consecrated hosts are placed after mass), and arranged for it to be shipped to All Saints', which had been using a wooden one. The metal tabernacle was extraordinarily heavy and required special arrangements for transportation and installation. It arrived at the port of Long Beach, but the shipping company delayed sending it to San Diego. After several fruitless phone calls, Father Tony told the company, "I'm an *Australian*. We get things done!" The tabernacle immediately appeared at All Saints'.¹⁶

The energetic new priest found it easy to restore the congregation's sense that All Saints' was a permanent institution. His unpretentiousness and exuberant sense of

humor made him very popular. “New” people began coming to All Saints', and “old” people stayed. All Saints' remained a bastion of theological tradition; indeed, Father Noble significantly increased Anglo-Catholic and especially Marian devotionism, organizing pilgrimages to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in England and adding the Angelus to the end of regular services. But there was no longer a perceived barrier between All Saints' and the surrounding community. At the same time, he was a convincing and trusted raiser of material support. In 2006, the church was forced to comply immediately with a municipal order to retrofit the Parish Hall for earthquake safety. Seventy thousand dollars were required to strengthen the structure with steel supports at roof level. Enthusiastic parishioners contributed the funds within six weeks.

One of the new rector's biggest tasks was finding a solution to the problem of the school. At the beginning of 2006, the preschool was doing very well; it had 39 students, the great majority of them newly enrolled, and was more than breaking even financially. The academic school was not. An effort was made to offer fewer classes by combining grades, but the situation remained unsustainable. Serious marketing efforts had attracted only four new students for the current school year; only 5% of the students who toured the school eventually enrolled in it; and the projected enrollment for 2006-2007 was only 49. Deficits were enormous; the most favorable projection for 2005-2007 was a deficit of \$200,000.¹⁷ These were heart-breaking figures for many people in the parish, especially those who had worked courageously to keep the school going. But there was only one choice available. Advised by the rector, the vestry decided that the school should close in June 2006. The preschool, which had become financially self-supporting, continued. It is now a significant source of church income. It uses the facilities that Father Satrang had constructed in faith many years before, though it gives them a somewhat different educational role.

It has been said that the parish, including members who had sent their own children to All Saints' School, finally realized that for many years the church had been “educating other people's children.” Most parents who sent their children to the school were “unchurched,” or members of other churches, and stayed that way.¹⁸ But to most people in the parish, closing the school was a heavy blow. For over half a century, the school had provided its students with a sound education--a caring, Christian education. The priests and people of All Saints' had worked self-sacrificially to keep the school running and to keep its quality high. In recent years

the Parents' Association had provided exceptionally energetic support. But a small private school could not compete with large, tax-funded institutions, or with private schools supported by rich people. All Saints' had maintained its school for more than half a century, but it could maintain it no more, without threatening its own existence. The school was closed. In former years this might have produced a rift in the congregation. In 2006, it did not. The church took new pride in its unity, and new interest in the intensification of its spiritual life.

One of its challenges was the strengthening of its music program. The spiritual life of a church almost always has something to do with the inspiration of music, and this has been particularly true of All Saints'. Two of its rectors, Father Murphy and Father Stevens, were directly involved with the church's music. No rector has been accused of slighting it. Like most leaders of All Saints', Father Satrang thought there was an urgency about good music in the church. In 1963 he put a notice in the service bulletin begging for eight or ten more volunteer choir members. All you needed, he said, was "a good average voice with some knowledge of music." But: "Please . . . There are so many lovely anthems that cannot be sung until the choir has grown." The bulletin from a Sunday service in late 1952 lists seven hymns and an anthem, besides the prelude and postlude.¹⁹ That's a lot of music; but music, of certain kinds, is a distinguishing characteristic of Episcopal worship, and the higher church a parish becomes, the more distinctive its music tends to be. All Saints' is very high church.

The organist and choirmaster under Father Noble was Robert MacLeod. In his late teens, MacLeod had visited an evensong at All Saints' and had loved the church ever since. He had served briefly as All Saints' organist in the early 1970s, and he had returned to the position, after work in other churches, in April 1997--a fine choice by Father McClaskey.²⁰ MacLeod wanted to give his beloved church the quality of music appropriate to its architecture and ritual.

High-church Episcopal music emphasizes complexity and sophistication. A dedicated volunteer choir can do impressive things, but a choir that includes professional voices can attempt much more. All Saints' had no professional singers until 2000, when a parishioner, the late Jack Merkel, provided money to employ one singer, a soprano.²¹ During the next several years, MacLeod won support from the congregation (and emphatically, Father Noble) to employ three more excellent professional singers. They, together with the many fine volunteer voices in the

choir, began to exploit the tradition of serious church music in ways that All Saints' had never heard before. The choir showed what even a small church can do when it values its musical traditions and is determined to make the most of them.

According to MacLeod, the 1973 organ is a good instrument, with a good "sweet" sound, although its power might be increased by the addition of pipes or contemporary electronic aids. Since the organ chamber is full, the second alternative is the one that recommends itself to the future. Nevertheless, the musical quality of the church has been greatly enhanced during the past few years--not only by the expert work of MacLeod and the choir, but by the simple expedient of removing the carpeting from the aisles of the nave and chancel, a project championed by Father Noble.

No one knows when carpeting was first installed at All Saints', though (as we have seen) it was a feature of the chapel in 1908 and the new church in 1912.²² Carpeting was an amenity that became predictable in American churches in the twentieth century. But it was a mixed blessing--carpets deadened the sound of the choir. So, by the end of 2010, the church had been freed from its carpeting, the floor and the pews had been refinished, and the choir had begun to project itself more forcefully down All Saints' long nave. The amazing reverberance of the original building was then revealed. Nobody had realized how many "s" sounds there were in the hymn book, or how splendidly the choir could project.

A comparison of All Saints' condition at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2011 shows solid progress. The number of communicants had fallen slightly, from 188 to 167 (after bottoming out at 157 at the end of 2004), but the church had reached a sustainable level, with new people coming in to replace the inevitable losses. Attendance at scheduled services was up--to 15,500 in 2010, compared with 14,160 in 2001. Income from unrestricted pledges had risen from \$92,000 to \$197,000, and receipts from the collection plate had risen from \$1700 to \$5800--great achievements, especially for a congregation that was hit very hard by the economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath, and had not fully recovered.²³

Careful management had been required to make the congregation's money go as far as possible, so it is good to note that in 2010, the parish recorded revenues of \$146,000 from its properties, mainly its preschool and the space in the former rectory on Seventh Avenue, now rented for other educational purposes. During the

2001-2011 period its total revenues had almost doubled, from \$284,000 to \$524,000. Since 2001, total expenditures had risen from \$344,000 to \$495,000, but the budget deficit for 2001 was \$60,000, while the budget surplus for 2010 was \$29,000.²⁴

It was easy to see what had happened. The parish had united to maintain itself--by individual contributions (often sacrificially made), by wise husbandry of resources bequeathed by earlier generations, and by the hard work of self-management. A high-church Episcopal parish requires the dedicated work of a very large proportion of its communicants--vestry members, acolytes, members of the altar guild, greeters, lectors, choir members, Sunday school teachers, volunteers for almost every conceivable project. The people of All Saints' kept doing the work, willingly and successfully. They showed that an Episcopal church is not a structure of authority but a structure of spontaneous order and commitment.

The parish therefore found itself in good shape when the next change occurred. Early in his tenure at All Saints', Tony Noble had recovered quickly from a bout with cancer, but in 2010 he took some time off to recuperate from stress; and, mindful of his health, on December 7 of that year he told the vestry that he would be retiring on March 6.²⁵ In his Advent sermon on December 12, he emphasized the theme of Christian joy and urged the congregation to join him in making the final three months of his work at All Saints' a period of celebration. At his retirement party on March 5, 2011, his ministry was celebrated by a throng of friends.

In spring 2011, Father Wayne Sanders, then in retirement, accepted All Saints' invitation to return to the parish as interim rector. As this book is written, the parish is preparing to search for its next spiritual leader, and it is looking forward to celebrating the centennial of its church in 2012. The mood is confident. The past century has demonstrated All Saints' ability to remain, and prevail.

Only stories that have an ending can have a climax. All Saints' has survived and prospered, often against great odds. That makes an interesting story, but it does not make a conclusion. This book now ends; the story of All Saints' continues. If the past has any predictive power, All Saints' will continue to enact a story of faith, hope, and love--and also of risk and daring, foolish mistakes and providential victories, fervent devotion and productive eccentricity, and the confidence that comes from staying true to oneself.

All Saints' has never been rich or powerful. Many times, it has appeared to be dying; several times, it has appeared to be dead. From its own point of view, however, that simply proves its vitality. St. Paul wrote about this seeming paradox.²⁶ He was describing himself and his friends in the early Christian church, but the description will do well enough for all such communities as All Saints'-- communities that continue "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things . . . as unknown, and yet well known; as dying--and, behold, we live."

- ¹ Parochial Report for 2001; V 4/10/2001; minutes, parish meeting, 6/11/2000.
- ² See the Annual Reports, presented at the Annual Meetings for the relevant years; and minutes, parish meeting, 6/11/2000.
- ³ The proportion for 1996 is impossible to calculate, because the stated number of communicants, 695, is exaggerated.
- ⁴ V 8/14/2001; Annual Reports for relevant years; “Analysis of All Saints’ Episcopal Church Stewardship Status” (pledges for 2002).
- ⁵ “From the Interim Rector,” *WF* 3/02; Interim Rector Letter of Agreement, 3/14/2002; V 3/12/2002, V 3/17/2002, V 11/12/2002.
- ⁶ V 9/10/2002; Budget Summary, All Saints’ Parish Semi-Annual Meeting, 6/23/2002. In August 2002, over 600 people attended mass, and August is ordinarily a bad month for church attendance.
- ⁷ Position Profile, 10/17/2002.
- ⁸ V 4/10/2001.
- ⁹ V 7/9/2002, V 9/10/2002; Outreach Committee outline; Bill Moreno, "Evangelism Mission of All Saints’ Church," *WF* 3/2002.
- ¹⁰ “Stewardship Report,” *WF* 3/2002; V 12/10/2002.
- ¹¹ V 3/11/2003, AM 1/ 27/2002; grant deed, recorded 12/30/2003.
- ¹² V 10/8/2002, V 12/10/2002.
- ¹³ “Are You Any Closer to Calling a Priest Yet???” , *WF* 4/03; Tony Noble, interview.
- ¹⁴ Tony Noble, interview and personal correspondence.
- ¹⁵ Tony Noble, column, *WF* 9-10/2003.
- ¹⁶ Tony Noble, interview.
- ¹⁷ Business Administrator’s Reports, 5/10/2005, 1/10/2006; V 2/8/2005.

¹⁸ AM 1/ 24/96. According to a friendly estimate in 1980, “of the 148 [students] presently enrolled--8 are from the Parish, 20 are Episcopalians and balance from all over. Most come because of the Day Care from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.”--the provision for students to stay and play or study after school (V 3/18/80).

¹⁹ Service bulletins, 9/1/63 and 11/30/52.

²⁰ V 4/8/97.

²¹ AM 1/ 21/2001, 1/ 27/2002.

²² In addition, it is recorded that in 1940 the parish received the gift of a carpet for the sanctuary, and in 1948 the gift of a “beautiful new carpet” for the aisles (rector’s Annual Report, AM 1/16/41; V 4/14/48).

²³ Annual Reports, AM 1/ 27 /2002, AM 1 / 30/ 2011; Parochial Report for 2004, 5/10/2005, vestry records. The number of communicants stated in the report for 2001 is probably somewhat too high, because this was the first report after the difficult attempt to remove from the statistics several hundred parishioners whose absence should have been noted before. And probably the report’s statement of the deficit for 2001 is somewhat too low, because of confusing accounting practices related to the parish school.

²⁴ See Annual Reports for the relevant years.

²⁵ Tony Noble to parishioners, 12/7/2010; “From the Rector,” service bulletin, 12 / 12/2010.

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:9-10.

Appendix