

ST. MARK'S ABORNING

J. M. Stoney

Any history of St. Mark's-on-the-Mesa becomes first a living tribute to a man of unbounded determination and energy—the Reverend George Pascales LaBarre. In "Pete" LaBarre I found a true pioneer and one of the finest clergymen with whom I have been privileged to work. St. Mark's, in its early days, rode out many a rough sea because of Mr. LaBarre.

Contrary to a more or less popular belief, I did not originate the idea of St. Mark's. The vital need for breaking through the one parish system for Albuquerque was here prior to my coming. Because I believed a multi-parish network was necessary to serve, adequately, an expanding community, I fostered the idea for all I was worth. An opportunity arose in 1942.

In April of 1942 St. John's Cathedral lost a devoted member, Mrs. Margaret Medler. She had, for years, been a successful realtor; and upon probate of her Will it was found the bulk of her estate had been bequeathed to St. John's Cathedral with no conditions attached. When the Cathedral Chapter met to accept the legacy it was discovered the original estimate of \$75,000 was an underestimate. The Chapter resolved to apply the entire bequest to needed buildings. One-third of the legacy was allocated to construction of a new parish in the Heights and the remainder earmarked for rebuilding the Cathedral.

With the decision to build a new Church a reality, the first step was to plan for its congregation. Mr. A. H. Nicolai, a member of the Chapter, and I studied the field as carefully as we could. Our first proposal that we have a sort of "gentleman's agreement" making Yale Avenue the dividing line—thus keeping all communicants west of Yale for the Cathedral and encouraging those east of the line to go to the new church—met with cool reception. We were unsuccessful, too, with the plans formulated to canvass the people residing east of Yale Avenue.

The stalemate was broken by calling a meeting of all interested persons at the Monte Vista Christian Church. More than one hundred people attended and enthusiastically agreed to go ahead. The choice of St. Mark's-on-the-Mesa, recommended by Mrs. Lynn B. Mitchell, was adopted unanimously. Our spirits were high and St. Mark's seemed to be a reality, but there were obstacles ahead. A large segment of Cathedral people considered it foolish to build a Church so far out. The need for ministering to the students at the University proved to be the convincing argument.

Now came phase two of the planning. Where should we build the Church? Where should the student work be centered? Here, sterling service was rendered by two other members of the Cathedral Chapter—Messrs. Pierce Rodey and Hugh B. Woodward. With microscopic care we three combed the area for suitable sites. Our recommendations were the triangle on Dartmouth Drive, northeast, for the Church and the property at 454 Ash Street, northeast, for the Canterbury activities. As I recall, the cost of the two properties was \$29,000. The proposal was approved. However, the Cathedral Chapter inserted a proviso in the deed that should St. Mark's ever relinquish ministry to the students, the Ash Street property would revert to the Chapter.

At first it was thought the new venture should remain under the control of the Chapter and the Canon, the Rev. George Pascales (shortened to Pete) LaBarre was placed in charge. Primarily, Rev. Mr. LaBarre was to operate the new Church for the University students and such other people who cared to attend. The Ash Street house was in final stages of completion and the upper floor was planned as a residence for the LaBarres while the basement was completed for the student work. Helping considerably in readying the lower floor for the student work was a \$1500 gift from the Rev. George Wieland, Executive Secretary for Domestic Missions.

Meanwhile the "urgency" which was to characterize the Rev. Mr. LaBarre was being evidenced, in his desire to begin church services wherever it was possible to hold services. ~~For a while they were held in the Exeter Mortuary Chapel.~~ On February 3, 1948 ^{first official services were conducted in} the congregation moved to a vacant store at Central Avenue and Carlisle Boulevard—the section now known as the Nob Hill shopping center. ~~During the three~~ ^{For}

months that services were held in the store only major catastrophe befell the young church. We have often heard of the congregation bursting out the walls of a church; well, this one burst out the pane of glass in the store front. It was St. Mark's first major expense, as it cost \$75 to replace the glass.

The congregation of St. Mark's roughed it in those early days. The furniture was what could be gathered together. The seating consisted of borrowed folding chairs and available window sills. This did all right except: once, when I was confirming the first class for St. Mark's, one of the ushers took the Bishop's Chair (a folding steel one) and gave it to a lady who was standing. A gallant Southern gesture, indeed, but hardly good liturgics.

While worshipping in the Nob Hill store the architect completed plans for the entire church plant. The Cathedral advanced \$56,000 (half as a gift and half as a loan) in order for construction to begin immediately on the first building, which is now the present parish house. The first ground-breaking service was held at 5:00 p.m. Friday, March 12, 1948. My diary recounts: "It was a cold, windy day and hardly more than fifty people were on hand." The parish house was not completed until April 3, 1949. During the interim period the congregation had grown to such proportions that it was necessary to hold Sunday services in the Jefferson Junior High School gymnasium, from April 9, 1948 until Passion Sunday, April 3, 1949. On that Sunday the first church service was held in what has become the parish house.

Recalling St. Mark's beginnings brings to mind the words of Lucio: "Our doubts are traitors, And make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt." ¹ What if we had listened to those who felt the "new church" was too far out?

St. Mark's was a comer from the start. Soon it proved to be the fastest growing parish in the Church. Conducting services in the Parish House presented many difficulties. Before St. Mark's knew it we had outgrown the building. Holding services was a series of constant changes. Early service demanded things be arranged for Holy Communion. After this, furniture was rearranged for breakfast, then again for Church School. A subsequent arrangement was required for the eleven o'clock service. Indeed,

it took stouthearted men to serve as ushers in those days, and yet there was no dearth of volunteers. St. Mark's was a happy, working parish. It still is.

While Church School was in progress, Mr. LaBarre sped to the "Sub" Building on the University campus and held a special service for students.

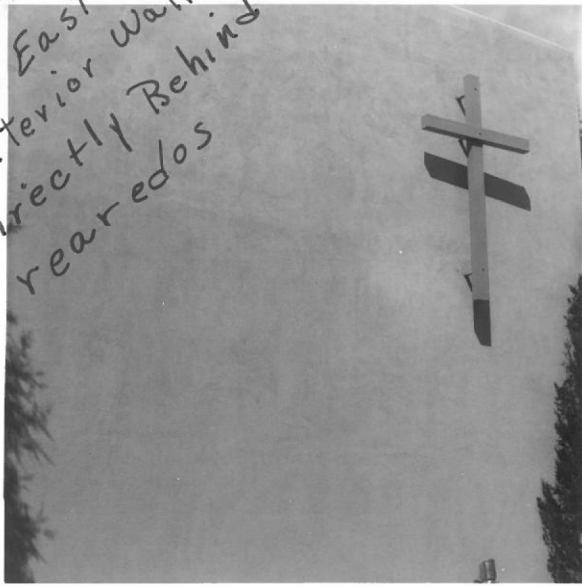
Those were busy days, happy days, and recalling them fills one with a nostalgia. One of my outstanding memories of those services is the ladies brewing coffee in the kitchen and the aroma pervading the sanctuary. It made it extremely difficult for me to focus my full attention to what I was doing.

With St. Mark's continuing to grow steadily it was soon evident the original plans had been based on too small a scale. New plans were drawn to encompass additional buildings. Architects for the revised plans were Ferguson & Stevens. Although a vibrant parish family, it seemed as if, suddenly, a new spark of enthusiasm was kindled. With a united front the old, the young and the very young pitched in to make the Church building a living thing. It was a gratifying experience to break ground for the Church on April 11, 1954. Thereafter, as the hole for the undercroft deepened; as forms for the concrete supports appeared; and throughout construction eager crowds "inspected" progress each Sunday. The comments of the "Sidewalk Superintendents" were many and varied.

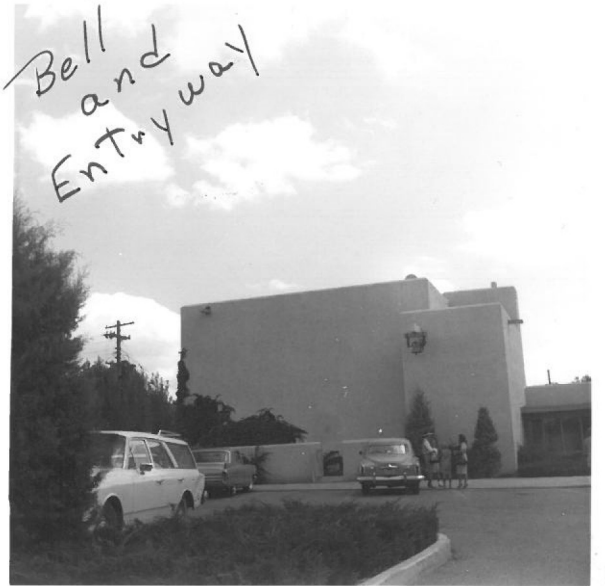
At last the pent-up desire burst its bonds. Although unfinished, and not yet accepted officially from the builder, Robert E. McKee Construction Company, the congregation could not hold back. First services in the new building were held on December 19, 1954.

These are my "memories" of St. Mark's. Fond recollections that are replete with rich experiences and productive of warm friendships. My fervent wish for St. Mark's is this: In its work to minister to people may every sunrise see the dawning of a new ambition and every sunset witness the fulfillment of its most cherished desire. For St. Mark's the future promises, brightly, that every morn shall be a new adventure in spiritual growth. May God so will it.

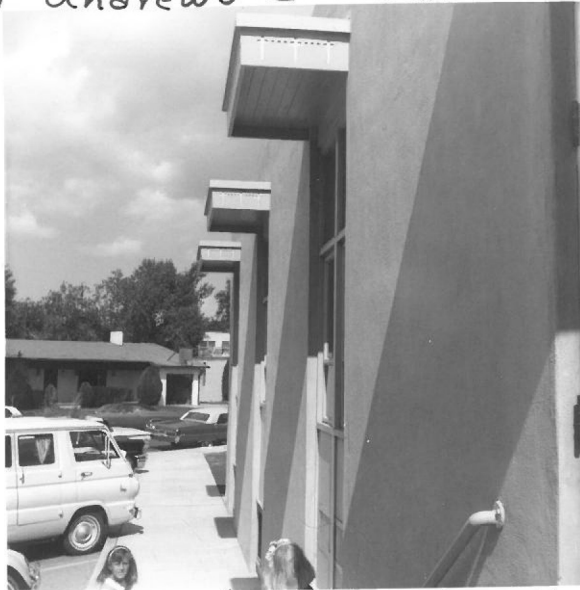
Cross
on East
Exterior Wall
Directly Behind
rearedos



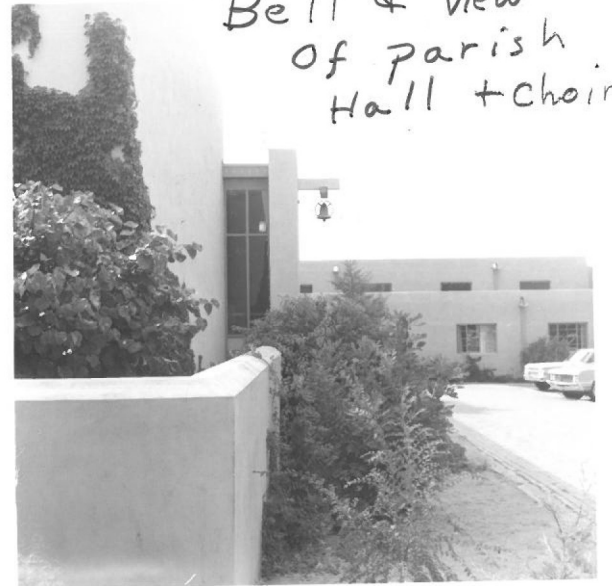
Bell
and
Entryway



St Andrews Crosses on



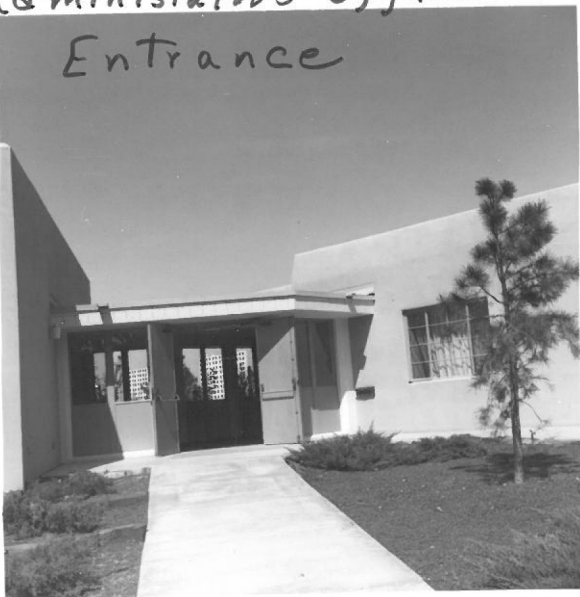
Bell & view
of parish
Hall + choir



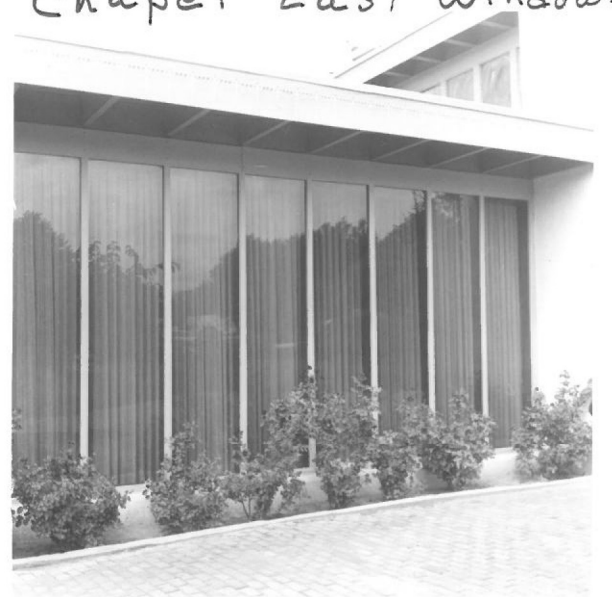
Exterior of Fellowship Hall

Administrative Office

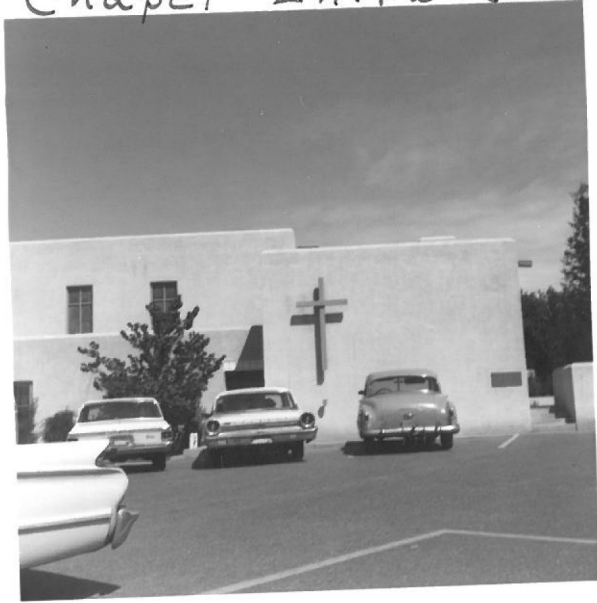
Entrance



Chapel East windows



Chapel Entrance



Fellowship Hall
South End of Building

